

NEW YORK STATE WATERFOWL COUNT, JANUARY 1996

Walton B. Sabin

652 Kenwood Ave, Slingerlands NY 12159-0044

ABSTRACT — The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs annual winter waterfowl count was held 13-21 Jan 96. The entire state was covered by 130 observers. Of the 41 species counted, 19 exceeded 1000 individuals. Of those 19, 10 declined and 9 increased since last year. The top 5 species were: Canada Goose, Mallard, Greater Scaup, American Black Duck, and Brant. The grand total of 247,116 individual birds was down 15.4% from 1995 and 2.0% below the 23-year average of 252,049.

INTRODUCTION

The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, Inc., held its 1996 winter Waterfowl Count from 13 through 21 January, with 14 January as the target date. All Regions completed their counts by January 21st.

THE WEATHER

The first half of January brought a continuation of the colder than normal temperatures that had prevailed during November and December. Temperatures for the first two weeks in January averaged 8 to 12 degrees below normal. Below zero was noted everywhere except extreme southeastern New York, where temperatures dropped only into the single digits. Snowfall was below normal across parts of northern and western New York. A large portion of the month's snow fell during a one week period from January 7 to 13. During this period, New York experienced the "Blizzard of '96" that left 10 to 20 inches of snow across most of New York State, except for southeastern New York and St. Lawrence County, which generally saw less than 3 inches. This was followed a few days later by the "Alberta Clipper", a fast moving storm that brought up to 3 inches of lighter, drier snow. Some parts of western and central New York, however, received from 4 to 10 inches.

Unfortunately for New Yorkers, all this snow, up to 3 feet or more in places, became a liability when unseasonably warm air accompanying heavy rains resulted in very severe and extensive flood damage. Fortunately, a major part of the waterfowl count was done before this sudden turn in the weather.

THE COUNT

The grand total of 247,116 (Table 1) was down 15.4% from 1995, and 2.0% below the 23-year (1973-1995) average of 252,049. Counts of all species listed in Table 2 showed losses versus gains over 1995 to be 10 to 9. It is heartening to note a positive reversal in Redhead numbers. The Department of Environmental Conservation aerial count echoed this as well.

Comparing 1996 to 1995 count figures (Table 2), the commoner species (excluding Common Eider and American Coot) showed a 9 - 8 split slightly in favor of decreases. Both Redhead and the scoters reversed themselves yet again, this year showing increases over 1995. When comparing 1996 count figures with the 23-year (1973-1995) average (Table 3), there is a 7-6 split in favor of increases. The overall total in Table 3 showed a 5.6% decrease in 1996 over the 23-year average, down slightly from 1995.

A new species of sea duck, the Common Eider, has been added to Table 2. In recent years, numbers of Common Eider have been quite small, less than the 1000 needed to get included. This year, a few more than 7000 were reported from the south fork of Long Island, reminiscent of the large numbers there years ago. Paxton et al. (1996) report that some unexplained change has resulted in a large number of Common Eider in late fall at Montauk Point and vicinity, and obviously attempting to winter there. Late November estimates were between 5 and 10 thousand.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service midwinter waterfowl inventory (Serle 1996) showed all geese in the Atlantic Flyway (Maine to Florida) decreased by 12.7% from 1995, mostly from 36.9% and 28.4% decreases in Snow Goose and Brant numbers, respectively. Canada Goose had a slight 3.9% increase. The dabbling ducks showed a continued decrease of 14.1% from 1995, after a 5.2% decrease recorded last year. All species were down, with the exception of Gadwall, which was up 52.7%. Diving ducks, including sea ducks, showed an overall decrease of 39.4% compared to 1995. A few bright spots here were 63.2%, 6.0%, 36.2%, 79.2% and 3.7% increases over 1995 for Redhead, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, scoters, and Oldsquaw, respectively. American Coot showed a 43.8% increase from 1995 and a 13.5% increase from the most recent 10-year average. Most American Coot again were wintering in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. In summary, waterfowl in the Atlantic Flyway was down 18.6% from 1995 and 2.7% below the 1986-1995 average.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation 1996 aerial survey was conducted from 30 December 1995 through 23 February 1996 (Cuzzolino 1996). Their survey was delayed this year due to the late western zone duck season, equipment breakdown and unfavorable flying conditions (many snow storms and too windy). The results are presented in Table 4. Table 5 compares the 1995 to 1996 aerial results. As in most years, the 1996 Department of Environmental Conservation aerial count did not, in a general sense, resemble the Federation's ground count.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the upwards of 130 observers who participated this year. A special thanks to the Regional Compilers who coordinated all those volunteers, and welcome to Bill Burch and Greg Hartenstein, the new compilers for Regions 1 and 2 respectively. The Regional Compilers were:

Region	Compiler	Region	Compiler
1	William Burch	6	Lee Chamberlaine
2	Gregory Hartenstein	7	John Peterson
3	Eric Donohue	8	Paul Grattan
4	Leslie Bemont	9	Michael Usai
5	Marge Rusk	10	Stephen Dempsey

NEXT YEAR

The 1997 Federation Waterfowl Count dates are from 11 through 19 January, with Sunday, 12 January as the target date.

Table 1. Regional totals for 1996 Waterfowl Count

Species / Region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Loon, Red-throated		3									
Common		1	5	1			1		6	17	26
Grebe, Pied-billed	7	2	34		1				2	132	140
Horned		3	17		2		1		5	75	121
Red-necked			1							395	423
Eared								2		8	11
Cormorant, Great									1		1
Double-crested	7				4				34	207	241
Swan, Tundra	18		33							153	164
Mute		18	2		2						51
Goose, Snow			2		1			15	354	962	1,353
Brant									1	510	514
Goose, Canada	1,193	429	14,252	519	2,205	100			3	12,788	12,791
Duck, Wood	5	3	1	2	1			303	6,719	32,442	58,162
Teal, Green-winged		2			7				2	19	33
Duck, American Black									1	159	169
Mallard	200	298	1,492	133	415	75	122	688	881	14,837	19,141
Mallard X Black Duck	6,484	6,418	5,333	819	4,491	72	1,539	1,146	7,873	11,353	45,528
Pintail, Northern	1	7	2	1			8	1		16	36
Shoveler, Northern		2	3		1			1	9	55	71
Gadwall										186	186
Wigeon, Eurasian	60	13	48		24	4			15	777	941
American	2	1	6							2	2
									48	427	484

SEPTEMBER 1996

Canvasback	6,349	21	569		1		1	1	525	2,117	9,584
Redhead	188	1,509	8,524	1	299	76			14	59	10,670
Duck, Ring-necked	8	2	39		10				146	325	530
Tufted		1								1	2
Scaup, Greater	2,391	1,889	386		238	20			1,497	17,242	23,663
Lesser	24	185	110		4			1	204	239	767
species		38	120	3			17			1,324	1,502
Eider, Common										7,071	7,071
Duck, Harlequin	1	3	1							5	10
Oldsquaw	3,434	83			31				14	1,824	5,386
Scoter, Black										209	209
Surf			2							3,526	3,528
White-winged	1	95								3,406	3,502
species										10	10
Goldeneye, Common	1,714	2,666	1,282	48	629	1,433	918	167	295	2,842	11,994
Barrow's										1	1
Bufflehead	416	177	450		186	40	3	1	410	6,785	8,468
Merganser, Hooded	53	10	41	19	16	4		10	64	675	892
Common	434	1,227	157	226	2,362	1,416	232	273	427	302	7,056
Red-breasted	376	240	19		31	6		1	138	5,420	6,231
Duck, Ruddy									45	2,737	2,782
Coot, American	165	21	1,123	55	3				114	464	1,945
duck, unidentified	405	17	41				55			206	724
TOTAL	23,936	15,384	34,095	1,827	10,964	3,246	2,897	2,610	19,847	132,310	247,116

Table 2. Comparison of 1996 count with 1995 count for all species totalling over 1,000 individuals in 1995 or 1996 or both.

Species	1995	1996	% change from 1995
Mute Swan	1,594	1,353	- 15.1
Brant	15,693	12,791	- 18.5
Canada Goose	95,631	58,162	- 39.2
American Black Duck	20,168	19,141	- 5.1
Mallard	44,927	45,528	1.3
Gadwall	1,468	941	- 35.9
American Wigeon	1,919	484	- 74.8
Canvasback	6,061	9,584	58.1
Redhead	2,743	10,670	296.3
scaup (both species)	47,431	25,932	- 45.3
Common Eider	485	7,071	1357.9
Oldsquaw	1,603	5,386	236.0
scoter (all species)	3,298	7,239	119.5
goldeneye (both species)	9,839	11,995	21.9
Bufflehead	7,843	8,468	8.0
Common Merganser	9,059	7,056	- 22.1
Red-breasted Merganser	5,956	6,231	4.6
Ruddy Duck	4,658	2,782	- 40.3
American Coot	4,171	1,945	- 53.4
Total	284,547	242,759	- 14.9

Table 3. Comparison of 1996 count with 1973-1995 average for all species consistently totalling over 1,000 individuals annually.

Species	1996	Average	% change
Brant	12,791	14,336	- 10.8
Canada Goose	58,162	57,017	2.0
American Black Duck	19,141	20,031	- 4.4
Mallard	45,528	29,812	52.7
Canvasback	9,584	10,504	- 8.8
Redhead	10,670	6,944	53.7
scaup (both species)	25,932	52,620	- 50.7
Oldsquaw	5,386	4,098	31.4
scoter (all species)	7,239	13,363	- 45.8
Common Goldeneye	11,994	11,901	0.8
Bufflehead	8,468	5,677	49.2
Common Merganser	7,056	12,041	- 41.4
Red-breasted Merganser	6,231	3,489	78.6
Total	228,182	241,706	- 5.6

Table 4. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Aerial Count, 30 December 1995 - 23 February 1996, for all species of about 1,000 individuals or more

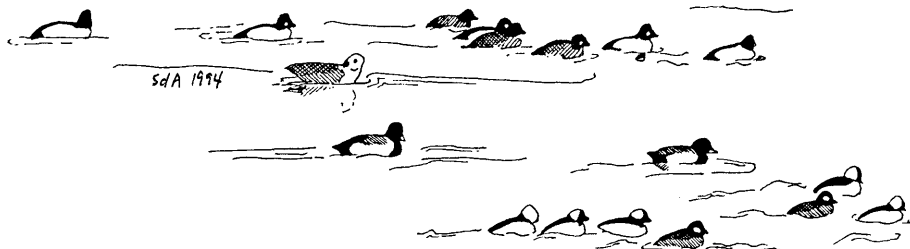
Species	Upstate	Long Island	Total
Mute Swan	50	788	838
Brant	0	13,941	13,941
Canada Goose	52,370	19,677	72,047
American Black Duck	5,801	13,576	19,377
Mallard	17,942	2,976	20,918
Canvasback	7,170	1,807	8,977
Redhead	9,815	0	9,815
scaup (both species)	9,279	18,349	27,628
scoter (all species)	18	4,371	4,389
Common Goldeneye	1,715	1,460	3,175
Bufflehead	218	1,630	1,848
merganser (all species)	11,164	5,296	16,460
Ruddy Duck	0	1,614	1,614
Total	115,542	85,485	201,027

Table 5. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation 1995 and 1996 Aerial Counts compared, with percent change from 1995 for all species with 1,000 individuals or more in 1995 or 1996 or both.

Species	1995	1996	% change
Mute Swan	1,276	838	- 34.3
Brant	22,659	13,941	- 38.5
Canada Goose	71,187	72,047	1.2
American Black Duck	17,513	19,377	10.6
Mallard	27,661	20,918	- 24.4
Canvasback	8,480	8,977	5.9
Redhead	1,200	9,815	717.9
scaup (both species)	37,439	27,628	- 26.2
scoter (all species)	336	4,389	1206.3
Common Goldeneye	5,711	3,175	- 44.4
Bufflehead	2,723	1,848	- 32.1
merganser (all species)	21,574	16,460	- 23.7
Ruddy Duck	686	1,614	135.3
Total	218,445	201,027	- 8.0

LITERATURE CITED

- Cozzolino S. 1996. 1996 New York State Midwinter Aerial Waterfowl Survey. NYS DEC, Latham. 8 p.
- Paxton RO, Boyle WJ, Jr, Cutler DA. 1996. Hudson-Delaware Region. *NAS Field Notes* Spr;50(1):25-31.
- Serle JR 1996. Results of the 1996 midwinter waterfowl survey in the Atlantic flyway states. US Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Migratory Bird Management, Laurel MD. Feb: 1-5.



HAIRY AND RED-BELLIED WOODPECKERS USE BARK CREVICE TO BREAK OPEN SEEDS

Kelly M. Erlwein

Sullivan County Community College
1000 Leroy Road, Loch Sheldrake NY 12759

The Hairy Woodpecker (*Picoides villosus*) is known to have a diet that consists of more than 75% insects, but will come to feeding stations for suet, fruits, nuts, and sunflower seeds (Terres, 1991). On several dates during a snowy March 1996 I observed a male Hairy Woodpecker at a hanging feeder containing black oil sunflower seeds. The bird removed a seed, flew to a nearby tree trunk (a distance of about 3 feet) and inserted the seed into a small niche in the bark. He then proceeded to pound open the shell and eat the contents. The bird returned to the feeder and the entire process was repeated up to 11 times in one feeding session. The Hairy Woodpecker frequented this particular feeder on the Sullivan County Community College campus in Loch Sheldrake, New York so

often that the crevice he used as his vise is clearly visible on the tree trunk. Similarly, a Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) was observed in early May at this feeder using the same technique and the same niche to hold its seed.

Seeds are mostly taken by the Hairy Woodpecker in the fall and winter months, while the Red-bellied Woodpecker is more likely to eat vegetable matter and is rather easily attracted to feeding stations (Bent 1964). Perrins (1985) noted that Great Spotted Woodpeckers (*Picoides major*) make so-called "anvils" into which they wedge cones in order to peck out the seeds. He suggested that the ability to manage seeds in anvils is a significant aid in regions of cold temperatures and resulting scarcity of insects. Kilham (1983) records that Red-headed Woodpeckers (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) have the expertise to place an insect in an anvil in order to peck it into manageable pieces, but that the Hairy Woodpecker possesses none of these talents. Winkler (1995) cites the fact that practically all woodpeckers carry items they cannot ingest easily to a crevice which allows the item to be held firm, where it is prepared for eating. Such sites are most often used only once, although some woodpeckers may use a site repeatedly. Perhaps the severe Sullivan County winter contributed to the birds' ingenuity in using a tree niche as a vise to enable them to obtain food.

LITERATURE CITED

- Bent AC, (Beal FEL, in part). 1964. Eastern Hairy Woodpecker. Redbellied Woodpecker. In: *Life Histories of North American Woodpeckers*. New York, Dover Publications, p 13-24, 237-245.
- Kilham, L. 1983. Hairy Woodpecker. Redbellied Woodpecker. In: *Woodpeckers of Eastern North America*. New York, Dover Publications, p 38, 129-149.
- Perrins C M, Middleton ALA. 1985. Woodpeckers. In: *The Encyclopedia of Birds*. New York, Equinox (Oxford), p 298.
- Terres JK. (1991 ed.) Woodpecker Family. Woodpecker, hairy. Woodpecker, red-bellied. In: *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds*. New York, Wings Books, p 1021, 1024-1025.
- Winkler H, Christie DA, Nurney D. 1995. Food and foraging. In: *Woodpeckers, A Guide to the Woodpeckers of the World*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin, p 24.