

REGION 4 - SUSQUEHANNA

MARY DOBINSKY

7 Spencer Drive, Oneonta NY 13820

It was a mild, wet winter with about average snowfall, minimum snow cover most of the season and no really major storms. At Cooperstown, where weather files date back to 1854, it was the seventh warmest winter of record, according to Harold Hollis, National Weather Service observer. He also noted it was among the ten wettest winters of record. December's average daily temperature of 33°F was more than seven degrees above normal and, for the first eighteen days of the month, mean temperatures never dropped below freezing. Precipitation for December measured 6.16 inches, three inches over average, and included nearly two inches of rain the first two days of the month. December rounded out a very wet 1996, shattering annual precipitation records across the Region. January's daily mean temperature of 21.4°F was just a degree warmer than normal. Precipitation totaled 3.37 inches, about an inch over average, but included 35.1 inches of snow, making it the peak snow month of the season. February was three degrees warmer than normal with two record high daily temperature readings. Thermometers rose to 62°F at Cooperstown 22 Feb, the highest February reading there in over a century. The 60°F reached 26 Feb was a record for the date. Precipitation for the month was an inch above average.

A nice open winter with plenty of bare fields, much open water, and abundant wild foods! The scene appeared ideal for steady flocks of different birds. But, as usual, the birds had their own reactions. Waterfowl were very enthusiastic about good areas of open water. Red-throated Loon and White-winged Scoter were reported for the first winter in at least 20 years. A probable record seventeen species of ducks were seen and, equally noteworthy, many remained through much of the season. Hawks were scarce despite open fields that should have indicated good hunting opportunities. Owls also were scarce. Could it have been a bad year for voles and mice? Big declines were noted on CBCs for Wild Turkey which were reported to have had weather related nesting failures last spring. The birds also had abundant wild foods in the woods so were not forced into the open.

Tallies were down on all four of the CBCs conducted this year both for number of species seen and total birds counted. Despite the negatives of the season, an interesting twist was the number of birds, not usually considered our half-hardies who chose to tough it out in Region 4. Rarest was an adult male Yellow-headed Blackbird at a feeder in South Kortright DELA most of January and February. Previous Regional reports of the handsome western bird have been in the spring. He is believed to have arrived with a flock of cowbirds and "was always with them," according to observers. Other unusual winter visitors

include a pair of Green-winged Teal in January and February at Rogers Environmental Education Center feeders, where "they fed on seed that dropped to the ground." If seen at all in the winter, the species usually exits the Region by mid January. A Common Yellowthroat wasn't so lucky. It had crashed into a window at the Center and was found dead 11 Jan. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was at an Oneonta feeder January and early February, and Eastern Towhee spent most of January at an Endicott feeder.

Rare and possibly Regional firsts were two **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** at the Lounsberry Rest Stop west of Owego 17 January. Eastern Bluebird, White-throated Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco overwintered in near record numbers, as did Purple Finch after early January. Many of the usual half-hardies such as American Robin, Northern Mockingbird and Northern Cardinal were scarce, as were such traditional winter residents as Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Northern Shrike, Pine Siskin, and Evening Grosbeak. Missed entirely were Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, White-winged Crossbill, and Common Redpoll.

Observers: Elliott Adams, Cutler & Jeannette Baldwin, Les Bemont, Bruce Bozdos, Broome Naturalists Club, Laura Carter, Mary Ann Cuff, John Davis, Mary Dobinsky, Sadie Dorber, Dolores Elliott, Sue Gaynor, Bob Grosek, Elva Hawken, Jim, Jared, Marion and Bill Karl, Sara Kinch, Gail Kirch, Eric Knight, Andy Mason, George & Evelyn Mead, Bob Miller, Robert Pantle, Todd Parsons, Marie Petuh, Phyllis & Bob Phillips, Halladay Pierce, Tom Salo, Joe Sedlacek, Julie Smith, Eric Sullivan, Tom & Norene Tasber, Jan Trzeciak, Bill Toner, Chris Vredenburg, Fred von Mechow, Nancy Weissflog, Don Windsor, Irene Wright.

Abbreviations: BCBC - BROO Christmas Bird Count, 29 Dec; CRes - Cannonsville Reservoir; CCBC- CHEN Christmas Bird Count, 21 Dec; DOCBC - Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count, 21 Dec; FHNC - Finch Hollow Nature Center; FMHW - Franklin Mt. Hawk Watch; FWC - Federation Waterfowl Count; JCTy - Johnson City; OtsL - Otsego Lake; REEC - Rogers Environmental Education Center; TCBC - TIOG Christmas Bird Count, 29 Dec; WPR - Whitney Point Reservoir.

LOONS-DUCKS: **Red-throated Loon:** WPR 16 Dec (ES), first in at least 20 years. **Pied-billed Grebe:** OtsL 28 Dec; Endicott 12 Jan, often missed. **Red-necked Grebe:** two on FWC, only fifth winter since 1981. **Great Blue Heron:** max 15 on four CBC's; five reports Jan; arr seven previously established rookery Owego 21 Feb, early. **Mute Swan:** CRes Jan, Feb; "pair commute between Greene area of Chenango R and Boland Pd when water is open."(BB). **Snow Goose:** BROO corn field with Canada Geese 27 Feb, only report. **Canada Goose:** max 5230 on FWC; 2230 on CBC's, high counts. **Wood Duck:** two BCBC; one other, average count. **Green-winged Teal:** two REEC

Jan, Feb, sixth report since 1984, first for Feb. **Am. Black Duck**: 17 on CBC's; 77 on FWC, very low counts. **Mallard**: max 862 FWC. **N. Pintail**: BCBC; three reports CRes Jan, Feb max five; three BROO reports Feb max two, very high count. **Redhead**: OtsL & Cooperstown Dam thru, max 50, very high count. **Ring-necked Duck**: max four FWC; two CHEN 23 Feb. **Canvasback**: three WPR 26 Dec. **Greater Scaup**: two FWC. **Lesser Scaup**: OTSE 12 Jan, 7 & 25 Feb; BROO 16 Feb. **White-winged Scoter**: six WPR 16 Dec (ES), first winter in at least 20 years. **Com. Goldeneye**: max 21 Susquehanna R TIOG 20 Jan; eight BCBC, average. **Bufflehead**: singles two sites average. **Hooded Merganser**: max 48 FWC, high count; three reports BROO late Feb max two, better than average. **Com. Merganser**: max 266 FWC; 60 WPR 16 Dec, good numbers. **Red-breasted Merganser**: max six Cooperstown Dam 11 Jan; four there Feb, good count.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: **Osprey**: arr OTSE 26 Feb, very early and only report. **Bald Eagle**: max 11 DELA 19 Jan (TIOG club trip); two CRes 1 Dec, FMHW 25 Dec, good count. **N. Harrier**: BROO 7 Dec & 10 Jan; CHEN late Dec, scarce second successive winter. **Sharp-shinned Hawk**: seven on CBC's; three reports/month, average. **Cooper's Hawk**: eight reports Jan; singles Dec, Jan, mostly at feeders. **N. Goshawk**: no report, first winter since 1989. **Red-shouldered Hawk**: BCBC third successive year, previously rare. **Red-tailed Hawk**: 48 on CBC's, lowest CBC total since 1990. **Rough-legged Hawk**: nine on CBC's mostly CHEN; 15 reports Feb; five in Mar, decline from high counts of previous three years. **Golden Eagle**: five FMHW 25 Dec, late migrants. **Am. Kestrel**: two on CBC's, scarce. **Ring-necked Pheasant**: two on CBC's; three singles Feb, average. **Ruffed Grouse**: max seven Vestal Center 10 Feb, "male displaying for two females whenever we walked in our OTSE woods" (P&BP). **Wild Turkey**: 119 on CBC's; 130 DELA 7 Feb, scarce. **Am. Coot**: OtsL all period, max 90 on 28 Dec; 26 BROO 11 Feb; Norwich after 29 Jan, rare in winter before 1995. **LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL**: two Susquehanna R west of Owego 17 Jan (BB,GK), first known Regional report. **Great Black-backed Gull**: max 60 Tioughnioga R 31 Jan; 20 there week of 9 Feb (BT), high count.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS: **Mourning Dove**: 1227 on CBC's, average. **E. Screech-Owl**: W. Burlington 3 Jan, only one. **Great Horned Owl**: six on CBC's, scarce. **Barred Owl**: TIOG Feb, only report. **N. Saw-whet Owl**: Candor heard several days late Feb (RP), often missed. **Belted Kingfisher**: only five on CBC's; but "better numbers" this winter reported by REEC staff. **Red-bellied Woodpecker**: eleven on CBC's; two sites OTSE, one BROO and several TIOG Feb, steady winter population. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**: Oneonta feeder 13 Jan - 16 Feb (same bird there November). **Downy**

Woodpecker: 149 on CBC's, low count. **Hairy Woodpecker:** 42 on CBC's. **N. Flicker:** singles on three CBC's; arr BROO 19 Feb. **Pileated Woodpecker:** six on CBC's, low count; good increase Feb.

FLYCATCHERS - STARLING: **Horned Lark:** eight on CCBC; one CORT 21 Feb; ten BROO 7 Feb, scarce. **Blue Jay:** 1044 on CBC's, best for CBC's of the 90's. **Fish Crow:** singles BROO and TIOG CBC's, second year since 1987. **Com. Raven:** n Cooperstown area 27 Dec & 3 Jan (JD). **Black-capped Chickadee:** 1772 on CBC's, decline. **Tufted Titmouse:** 127 on CBC's, low count. **Red-breasted Nuthatch:** scarce at feeders; a poor 27 on CBC's. **Brown Creeper:** "not even one report TIOG"; 21 on CBC's, scarce. **Carolina Wren:** three on BCBC, only report. **HOUSE WREN:** TIOG feeder Jan (G&EM), first winter since Jan 1983. **Winter Wren:** CHEN late Dec (REEC staff), only fifth winter since 1982. **Golden-crowned Kinglet:** 23 on CBC's, scarce all period. **E. Bluebird:** 26 BCBC; nine TCBC; eight DELA 25 Jan; occasional Endicott yard max five; seven reports Feb, max four, very high numbers. **Am. Robin:** only eight on CBC's; feeding in Mt. Ash tree Oneonta through period; max 15 n OTSE 16 Feb, average. **N. Mockingbird:** Binghamton yard 13 Jan, 12 Feb; JCty 2, 4 Jan; Walton 10 Feb, scarce. **Cedar Waxwing:** max 119 on CBC's; 114 FHNC 29 Jan, good counts after late Dec. **N. Shrike:** CHEN occasionally through Jan; BROO 15 Jan; DELA 21 Feb; OTSE yard 26-28 Feb, scarce.

VIREOS-WARBLED: **Com. Yellowthroat:** one REEC 11 Jan (FvM).

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: **N. Cardinal:** 115 on CBC's, lowest count in 16 years; scarce at feeders all period. **E. Towhee:** Endicott feeder 14-31 Jan (JS), often missed. **Am. Tree Sparrow:** 391 on CBC's; "several small flocks mixed with juncos flushed along the roads on my CBC route. It was like the 'old days' seeing so many in the wild." (EH). **Chipping Sparrow:** four TCBC, often missed. **Field Sparrow:** CCBC; Greene feeder after 9 Feb; REEC 11 Feb, early arrivals. **Song Sparrow:** 36 on CBC's. **White-throated Sparrow:** 49 on CBC's, high count; mid winter max 16 JCy 9 Feb. **Dark-eyed Junco:** 867 on CBC's, highest count in at least 15 years; mid winter max 40 CHEN 3 Feb. **Snow Bunting:** 47 CCBC, only Dec report; max 100 BROO 10 Jan; none Feb, scarce. **Red-winged Blackbird:** TCBC; arr OTSE, TIOG 21 Feb; max 600 BROO 25 Feb, early arrival. **YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD:** South Kortright from early Jan (mob), usually with flock of cowbirds, first Regional winter report, unusually long stopover. **Com. Grackle:** three singles Dec; arr 22 Feb. **Brown-headed Cowbird:** max 50 S. Kortright 21 Feb. **Purple Finch:** 40 on CBC's; increasing influx at feeders Jan & Feb; max 43 OTSE 17 Feb. **House Finch:** 777 on CBC's, big decline from counts of previous three years. **Pine Siskin:** max 16 Norwich 4 Dec "for about three minutes" (DW); four

DOCBC; none Jan, two singles CHEN Feb, scarce. **Am. Goldfinch:** 577 on CBC's, high count; mid winter max 60 Oneonta Jan, Feb, average. **Evening Grosbeak:** scarce.
