

NEW YORK STATE WATERFOWL COUNT, JANUARY 1998

Walton B. Sabin

652 Kenwood Ave, Slingerlands NY 12159-0044

ABSTRACT — The Federation of New York State Bird Club's annual midwinter waterfowl count was held 10-18 January 1998. The entire state was covered by about 130 observers. Of the 43 species counted, 21 exceeded 1,000 individuals, and 8 of these exceeded 10,000 each. Those top 8 species, in order of abundance, were: Canada Goose, Mallard, Brant, Greater Scaup, American Black Duck, Common Goldeneye, Canvasback, and Redhead. Of those 8, 3 decreased and 5 increased since 1997. The grand total of 338,063 individuals was down 1.4% from 1997, but 30.1% above the 25-year (1973-1997) average of 259,759.

INTRODUCTION

The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, Inc., held its 1998 midwinter Waterfowl Count from 10 through 18 January, with 11 January as the target date. Nine Regions completed their counts by 18 January. One party of 6 birders in Region 3 ran its count of Cayuga Lake on January 24, but it is included here because it represents 40.8% of the statewide total of Canada Geese and 64.1% of the statewide total of Tundra Swans. Excluding it for being 6 days late would be a greater distortion of reality than including it. Chances are good that those birds were there a week earlier.

THE WEATHER

Early January was remarkable for one thing primarily. It was much warmer than usual. Eight maximum daily temperatures were broken during the January 3 through 9 period in Binghamton, Central Park (NYC) and Rochester. Concomitant with this warm spell was a devastating ice storm resulting from freezing rain falling on below freezing ground, trees, buildings, power lines, roads, etc., in the St. Lawrence River valley and the Canadian border areas of Franklin and Clinton Counties. The icy conditions did cause some changes in the timing of coverage but no areas were not covered. The damage from this one storm, the worst in anyone's memory or weather records, amounted to many millions of dollars.

THE COUNT

The grand total of 338,063 (Table 1) was down 1.4% from 1997, but still 30.1% above the 25-year (1973-1997) average of 259,759. Counts of all species listed in Table 2 showed gains versus losses over 1997 to be 14 to 6.

Comparing 1998 to 1997 count figures (Table 2), the top 8 species showed a 5 to 3 split in favor of increases. Canada Goose, Mallard, and scaup ducks showed decreases and, except for Mallard, showed a reversal in trend from 1996-7. Apparently more Brant and Common Goldeneye than in 1997 decided to remain here rather than going farther south along the Atlantic coast. When comparing 1998 count figures with the 25-year (1973-1997) average (Table 3), there is a 9 to 4 split in favor of increases, a reversal from 1997 figures. The overall total in Table 3 had a similar percent increase over the long-term average, as in 1997. Canada Goose and Brant contributed substantially to this. However, it is cause for concern when noting scaup and scoter numbers falling off again, as in 1997. It is encouraging to note the continued increase in numbers of Canvasback, Redhead, and Bufflehead.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service midwinter waterfowl inventory report (Serie and Vecchio 1998) showed Brant and Snow Goose numbers in the Atlantic Flyway (Maine to Florida) increased respectively by 13.6% and 11.7% from 1997, with a 0.5% decrease in Canada Goose numbers. The dabbling ducks showed a continued decrease of 2.6% from 1997, after a 6.6% decrease the year before. American Black Duck, Mallard, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, and Wood Duck were all down, while Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, and Northern Pintail numbers were up. Diving ducks, including mergansers and sea ducks, showed an overall increase of 7.2% compared to 1997. Not so bright spots were 65.9%, 12.9% and 13.9% decreases over 1997 for Redhead, Canvasback, and Common Eider respectively. American Coot showed an 8.7% decrease from 1997. Most American Coot again were wintering in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. In summary, waterfowl in the Atlantic Flyway was up 2.7% from 1997, and 2.2% above the 10-year (1988-1997) average.

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. The Regional Compilers were:

Region Compiler

- 1 William Burch
- 2 Gregory Hartenstein
- 3 Eric Donohue
- 4 Leslie Bemont
- 5 Marge Rusk

Region Compiler

- 6 Lee Chamberlaine
- 7 John Peterson
- 8 Paul Grattan
- 9 Michael Usai
- 10 Stephen Dempsey

Table 1. Regional Totals for 1998 Waterfowl Count

[illegible]

Northern Pintail	4	1	2	-	-	1	-	-	4	79	91
Green-winged Teal	-	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	4	441	449
Canvasback	8,786	377	321	-	8	-	-	3,001	74	3,428	15,995
Redhead	278	4,672	5,287	-	402	500	-	-	-	43	11,182
Ring-necked Duck	32	32	13	-	1	-	3	2	157	460	700
Tufted Duck	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Scaup, Greater	1,266	6,798	44	-	305	7	18	5	3,324	11,103	22,870
Lesser	17	37	83	-	2	-	-	-	126	865	1,130
scaup sp.	125	-	125	-	-	-	15	-	-	-	265
Eider, King	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Common	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,884	1,884
Harlequin Duck	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	5
Scoter, Surf	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	278	282
White-winged	45	157	-	-	2	-	-	-	1	1,872	2,077
Black	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	430	432
scoter sp.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	732	732
Oldsquaw	1,344	150	47	-	10	5	-	-	26	3,090	4,672
Bufflehead	347	269	257	-	72	49	13	-	282	6,176	7,465
Goldeneye, Common	2,475	3,700	586	19	3,204	1,540	4,428	232	248	1,787	18,219
Barrow's	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Merganser, Hooded	20	6	5	7	8	2	13	6	78	1,073	1,218
Common	818	706	201	147	1,779	107	2,027	380	699	89	6,953
Red-breasted	84	292	8	-	55	3	-	-	109	6,613	7,164
Ruddy Duck	10	4	5	-	-	-	-	-	191	7,880	8,090
American Coot	89	1,209	1,495	76	10	-	-	-	235	1,292	4,406
UNKNOWN	1,154	*38	-	-	**1	-	-	-	***1	****3	1,197
TOTAL	25,299	24,902	75,016	4,479	12,881	3,354	8,542	12,026	24,237	147,327	338,063

*Includes 7 Trumpeter Swans **1 Yellow-Billed Loon ***1 Eared Grebe ****Includes 2 Greater White-fronted Geese

NEXT YEAR

The 1999 Federation Waterfowl Count dates are from 16 through 24 January, with Sunday, 17 January, as the target date.

LITERATURE CITED

Serie JR and A Vecchio 1998. Atlantic Flyway Midwinter Waterfowl Survey - 1998. Final Report. US Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Migratory Bird Management, Laurel, MD 20708. p. 1-4.

Table 2. Comparison of 1998 count with 1997 count for all species totaling over 1,000 individuals in 1997 or 1998, or both.

SPECIES	1997	1998	Percent Change from 1997
Canada Goose	137,646	129,141	- 6.2
Brant	12,936	31,592	147.0
Mute Swan	1,454	1,637	12.6
Gadwall	1,174	1,467	25.0
American Wigeon	1,612	1,621	0.6
American Black Duck	17,867	18,497	3.5
Mallard	45,110	33,809	- 25.1
Canvasback	11,216	15,995	42.6
Redhead	9,750	11,182	14.7
scaup (both species)	39,490	24,265	- 38.6
Common Eider	18,095	1,884	- 89.6
scoter (all species)	5,680	3,523	- 38.0
Oldsquaw	1,900	4,672	145.9
Bufflehead	6,339	7,465	17.8
goldeneye (both species)	10,988	18,220	65.8
Hooded Merganser	1,090	1,218	11.7
Common Merganser	9,138	6,953	- 23.9
Red-breasted Merganser	3,358	7,164	113.3
Ruddy Duck	2,026	8,090	299.3
American Coot	2,648	4,406	66.4
TOTAL	339,517	332,801	- 2.0

Table 3. Comparison of 1998 count with 1973-1997 average for all species consistently totaling over 1,000 individuals annually.

Species	Average	1998	Percent Change
Canada Goose	59,943	129,141	115.4
Brant	14,224	31,592	122.1
American Black Duck	19,941	18,497	- 7.2
Mallard	30,990	33,809	9.1
Canvasback	10,493	15,995	52.4
Redhead	7,194	11,182	55.4
scaup (both species)	51,079	24,265	- 52.5
scoter (all species)	12,843	3,523	- 72.6
Oldsquaw	4,072	4,672	1.5
Bufflehead	5,813	7,465	28.4
Common Goldeneye	11,872	18,220	53.5
Common Merganser	11,737	6,953	- 40.8
Red-breasted Merganser	3,594	7,164	99.3
TOTAL	243,450	312,478	28.4

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