

# **NEW YORK STATE FEDERATION WATERFOWL COUNT, JANUARY 2002**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs' annual midwinter waterfowl count, or "Federation Waterfowl Count" (FWC), was held 12-27 Jan 2002 with approximately 270 participants. Weather conditions were mild but generally unfavorable for complete counts due to extensive open water and strong winds. Nonetheless, a record total of 447,833 birds (46 species) was documented, 13% above the previous high (set in 2001), and 67% above the 1973-2000 average. The top ten species, accounting for 85% of the total, were: Canada Goose, Mallard, Greater Scaup, American Black Duck, Brant, Redhead, White-winged Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Canvasback, and Surf Scoter. Canada Goose accounted for most of the increase in total counts compared to previous years.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs has conducted an annual midwinter waterfowl count (FWC) every year since 1955 (Rising 1955) except for a brief hiatus in 1968-1972 (Jones 1980). Each January, members visit lakes, rivers and shorelines throughout New York State to count waterfowl (ducks, geese and swans) and associated water birds (e.g., loons, grebes, cormorants and coots). Whenever possible, counts are conducted during a nine day count period beginning on the first Saturday in January after New Year's Day, with a target date of the first Sunday in that period. Most counts are conducted during the first three days, but in some cases additional time is needed to complete the counts.

## **WEATHER CONDITIONS**

Official weather data for January 2002 were not available, but Regional compilers reported generally unfavorable conditions across the state. Temperatures were mild, with highs in the 30s to low 40s, with overcast skies and strong winds on the target date, especially on larger open water areas, such as the Great Lakes shorelines. The count period was preceded by a period of colder weather with little precipitation in January. Snow cover from storms in December was largely gone from most areas during the count period. As a result of this weather pattern, some smaller inland waters were frozen, but all larger lakes and coastal bays remained entirely open to waterfowl use.

## RESULTS

A total of 447,833 birds, comprising 46 species, was counted in 2002 (Table 1). This established a new record high count since the FWC began in 1955. The 2002 total was 13% above 2001 (Table 2) and 67% above the 28-year (1973-2000) average of 268,763 (Table 3). Less than 1% of the total count was recorded outside of the scheduled survey period.

Comparison of 2002 counts with 28-year (1973-2000) averages shows seven of 13 major species or taxa at least 10% above average, and only two species or taxa more than 10% below average (Table 3). Canada Goose (211,191) shattered the previous high of 163,000 (in 2000), and accounted for most of the increase in total counts compared to previous years. New high counts were established also for Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, White-fronted Goose, Tundra Swan, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler and Ring-necked Duck. Relatively high counts of these and many other species probably reflected the generally mild winter weather in 2001-2002. This contrasted with the year before, when cold weather coincided with record high counts of many diving duck species.

Total waterfowl numbers in the Atlantic Flyway (Maine to Florida) were down 2% from 2001, and were 6% above the 10-year (1991-2000) average (Serie and Raftovich 2002). Flyway counts of dabbling ducks were up 3% from a year ago, diving ducks declined 11%, and sea ducks increased 55%. Canada Goose counts in the flyway were unchanged from 2001 to 2002, whereas Brant and Snow Goose counts increased 25% and 35%, respectively. Annual changes in relative abundance in New York often do not mirror flyway trends because state counts reflect distributional shifts (in response to weather) as well as population changes.

Highlights of Regional reports included a pair of Harlequin Ducks at Buffalo (Region 1), a Barrow's Goldeneye on the St. Lawrence River near Ogdensburg (Region 6), the first-ever Brant on the FWC in Region 7 and a Great Cormorant on the Hudson River in Columbia County (Region 8).

## FUTURE COUNTS

The FWC is especially important now that the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has discontinued aerial surveys of waterfowl wintering in New York. DEC concluded that the FWC provides comparable or better data for monitoring long-term population trends (Swift and Hess 1999), so they now rely on the FWC as its standard survey. It is important that member clubs and individuals maintain complete and consistent coverage of areas surveyed in the past to ensure that results are comparable from year-to-year and over the long-term.

For the planners among you, future counts are scheduled as follows:  
 2003 - January 11-19 (target date - Sunday, January 12); and  
 2004 - January 10-18 (target date - Sunday, January 11).  
 2005 - January 9-17 (target date - Sunday, January 10);

For more information about the FWC, visit the Federation's web site at:  
[http://www.birds.cornell.edu/fnysbc/wfc\\_compilers.htm](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/fnysbc/wfc_compilers.htm).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank all of the approximately 270 observers who participated this year. A special thanks to the following Regional Compilers who coordinated all those volunteers:

| <u>Region</u> | <u>Compiler</u>         | <u>Region</u> | <u>Compiler</u>       |
|---------------|-------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1             | William Burch           | 6             | Jerry LeTendre        |
| 2             | Greg Hartenstein        | 7             | John M. C. Peterson   |
| 3             | Eric Donohue            | 8             | Bryan Swift           |
| 4             | Les Bemont & Gail Kirch | 9             | Michael Usai          |
| 5             | Marge Rusk              | 10            | Ronald & Jean Bourque |

Thanks also to Elizabeth Renar of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for help compiling all the Regional counts for this summary.

## LITERATURE CITED

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- Rising, G. R. 1955. The January waterfowl count. *Kingbird* 5:34-36.
- Serie, J. R. and R. V. Raftovich, Jr. 2002. Atlantic Flyway Midwinter Waterfowl Survey 2002 - Preliminary Report. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Migratory Bird Management, Laurel, MD. 3 p.
- Swift, B. L. and P. J. Hess. 1999. A comparison of winter waterfowl surveys in New York. *Northeast Wildlife* 54:85-92.

Table 1. Regional totals for January 2002 Federation Waterfowl Count.

| Species/Region        | 1     | 2     | 3       | 4     | 5      | 6     | 7     | 8     | 9      | 10     | Total   |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|---------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|---------|
| Loon, Red-throated    | 1     | 5     | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0     | 1     | 0     | 9      | 149    | 165     |
| Common                | 1     | 10    | 4       | 1     | 6      | 1     | 9     | 0     | 5      | 591    | 628     |
| Grebe, Pied-billed    | 15    | 1     | 27      | 2     | 7      | 3     | 0     | 1     | 5      | 149    | 210     |
| Horned                | 2     | 185   | 7       | 0     | 19     | 0     | 44    | 0     | 2      | 302    | 561     |
| Red-necked            | 1     | 1     | 0       | 0     | 1      | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 4      | 7       |
| Eared                 | 0     | 0     | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 0      | 0       |
| Cormorant, D.-crested | 107   | 2     | 2       | 0     | 37     | 4     | 0     | 1     | 6      | 112    | 271     |
| Great                 | 0     | 0     | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0     | 0     | 1     | 38     | 198    | 237     |
| Goose, White-fronted  | 0     | 0     | 1       | 0     | 0      | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 4      | 5       |
| Snow                  | 0     | 0     | 6       | 0     | 2      | 0     | 20    | 11    | 2      | 1,028  | 1,069   |
| Canada                | 2,939 | 5,113 | 117,355 | 1,432 | 14,602 | 3,828 | 1,712 | 9,050 | 28,840 | 26,320 | 211,191 |
| Brant                 | 0     | 0     | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0     | 1     | 0     | 1      | 18,099 | 18,101  |
| Swan, Mute            | 0     | 181   | 2       | 3     | 4      | 3     | 0     | 148   | 222    | 1,447  | 2,010   |
| Trumpeter             | 0     | 4     | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 0      | 4       |
| Tundra                | 258   | 0     | 508     | 0     | 21     | 109   | 0     | 0     | 0      | 0      | 896     |
| Wood Duck             | 7     | 1     | 1       | 0     | 0      | 1     | 0     | 2     | 22     | 59     | 93      |
| Gadwall               | 62    | 108   | 194     | 0     | 53     | 97    | 0     | 0     | 108    | 2,278  | 2,900   |
| Wigeon, Eurasian      | 0     | 0     | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 2      | 2       |
| American              | 17    | 2     | 45      | 0     | 23     | 5     | 0     | 0     | 286    | 1,619  | 1,997   |
| Am. Black Duck        | 79    | 439   | 2,377   | 59    | 433    | 242   | 252   | 1,007 | 1,297  | 12,040 | 18,225  |
| Mallard               | 5,267 | 6,175 | 10,119  | 643   | 5,099  | 1,130 | 1,999 | 2,927 | 3,171  | 11,069 | 47,599  |
| Mallard X Black       | 0     | 9     | 1       | 0     | 7      | 0     | 2     | 0     | 5      | 22     | 46      |
| Blue-winged Teal      | 0     | 0     | 0       | 0     | 0      | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1      | 1      | 2       |
| Northern Shoveler     | 0     | 2     | 2       | 0     | 0      | 0     | 0     | 0     | 112    | 681    | 797     |
| Northern Pintail      | 0     | 1     | 19      | 4     | 1      | 0     | 0     | 0     | 10     | 206    | 241     |

|                       |               |               |                |              |               |               |              |               |               |                |                |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Green-winged Teal     | 2             | 0             | 2              | 0            | 5             | 0             | 0            | 0             | 6             | 264            | 279            |
| Canvasback            | 6,863         | 61            | 1,248          | 0            | 0             | 3             | 0            | 150           | 629           | 1,399          | 10,353         |
| Redhead               | 312           | 7,818         | 6,033          | 0            | 227           | 20            | 0            | 0             | 0             | 18             | 14,428         |
| Ring-necked Duck      | 47            | 64            | 393            | 0            | 684           | 1             | 68           | 31            | 345           | 601            | 2,234          |
| Tufted Duck           | 0             | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0             | 0             | 0            | 0             | 0             | 1              | 1              |
| Scaup, Greater        | 13,444        | 808           | 50             | 0            | 395           | 148           | 50           | 0             | 828           | 8,743          | 24,466         |
| Lesser                | 23            | 338           | 3              | 0            | 25            | 1             | 17           | 0             | 412           | 2,462          | 3,281          |
| scaup sp.             | 0             | 450           | 149            | 0            | 0             | 0             | 1,100        | 0             | 0             | 107            | 1,806          |
| Eider, King           | 0             | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0             | 0             | 0            | 0             | 0             | 13             | 13             |
| Common                | 0             | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0             | 0             | 0            | 0             | 0             | 388            | 388            |
| Harlequin Duck        | 2             | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0             | 0             | 0            | 0             | 0             | 5              | 7              |
| Scoter, Surf          | 0             | 0             | 1              | 0            | 1             | 0             | 0            | 0             | 0             | 9,875          | 9,877          |
| White-winged          | 106           | 540           | 3              | 0            | 305           | 2             | 0            | 0             | 0             | 12,727         | 13,683         |
| Black                 | 5             | 1             | 0              | 0            | 4             | 0             | 0            | 0             | 0             | 2,596          | 2,606          |
| Scoter sp.            | 0             | 2             | 0              | 0            | 0             | 0             | 0            | 0             | 4             | 4,791          | 4,797          |
| Long-tailed Duck      | 2,195         | 1,130         | 2              | 0            | 738           | 244           | 1            | 0             | 91            | 1,139          | 5,540          |
| Bufflehead            | 3,347         | 373           | 188            | 0            | 142           | 236           | 121          | 5             | 443           | 4,191          | 9,046          |
| Goldeneye, Common     | 1,551         | 2,640         | 875            | 11           | 1,031         | 2,498         | 1,624        | 157           | 190           | 1,344          | 11,921         |
| Barrow's              | 0             | 0             | 0              | 0            | 0             | 1             | 0            | 0             | 0             | 1              | 2              |
| Merganser, Hooded     | 65            | 11            | 22             | 0            | 22            | 32            | 44           | 4             | 161           | 1,272          | 1,633          |
| Common                | 2,758         | 196           | 56             | 126          | 568           | 1,637         | 1,701        | 706           | 865           | 35             | 8,648          |
| Red-breasted          | 159           | 190           | 5              | 0            | 204           | 10            | 5            | 0             | 157           | 3,886          | 4,616          |
| Ruddy Duck            | 6             | 3             | 0              | 0            | 22            | 0             | 0            | 0             | 337           | 3,767          | 4,135          |
| American Coot         | 223           | 131           | 1,712          | 76           | 9             | 0             | 4            | 0             | 183           | 1,726          | 4,064          |
| Unidentified          | 1,372         | 2             | 55             | 67           | 0             | 228           | 0            | 0             | 30            | 1,002          | 2,756          |
| <b>TOTAL OF ABOVE</b> | <b>41,236</b> | <b>26,997</b> | <b>141,467</b> | <b>2,424</b> | <b>24,697</b> | <b>10,484</b> | <b>8,775</b> | <b>14,201</b> | <b>38,823</b> | <b>138,767</b> | <b>447,833</b> |

Table 2. Comparison of January 2001 and January 2002 counts for selected waterfowl species.

| Species                | 2001    | 2002    | % Change |
|------------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| Snow Goose             | 30      | 1,069   | 3463%    |
| Canada Goose           | 122,223 | 211,191 | 73%      |
| Brant                  | 8,038   | 18,101  | 125%     |
| Mute Swan              | 1,684   | 2,010   | 19%      |
| Gadwall                | 1,517   | 2,900   | 91%      |
| American Wigeon        | 1,727   | 1,997   | 16%      |
| American Black Duck    | 17,356  | 18,225  | 5%       |
| Mallard                | 47,122  | 47,599  | 1%       |
| Canvasback             | 24,584  | 10,353  | -58%     |
| Redhead                | 19,915  | 14,428  | -28%     |
| Ring-necked Duck       | 567     | 2,234   | 294%     |
| Greater Scaup          | 54,688  | 24,466  | -55%     |
| scoters (all species)  | 30,752  | 30,96   | 31%      |
| Long-tailed Duck       | 8,160   | 5,540   | -32%     |
| Bufflehead             | 10,025  | 9,046   | -10%     |
| Common Goldeneye       | 19,639  | 11,921  | -39%     |
| Hooded Merganser       | 1,424   | 1,633   | 15%      |
| Common Merganser       | 9,464   | 8,648   | -9%      |
| Red-breasted Merganser | 8,058   | 4,616   | -43%     |
| Ruddy Duck             | 2,490   | 4,135   | 66%      |
| American Coot          | 3,008   | 4,064   | 35%      |
| TOTAL of all species   | 397,764 | 447,871 | 13%      |

Table 3. Comparison of the January 2002 count with 1973-2000 average for all species averaging over 1,000 individuals annually.

| Species                | Average | 2002    | % Change |
|------------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| Canada Goose           | 69,459  | 211,191 | 204%     |
| Brant                  | 15,109  | 18,101  | 20%      |
| American Black Duck    | 19,826  | 18,225  | -8%      |
| Mallard                | 32,376  | 47,599  | 47%      |
| Canvasback             | 10,652  | 10,353  | -3%      |
| Redhead                | 7,437   | 14,428  | 94%      |
| scaup (both species)   | 50,222  | 29,553  | -41%     |
| scoters (all species)  | 12,373  | 30,963  | 150%     |
| Long-tailed Duck       | 4,386   | 5,540   | 26%      |
| Bufflehead             | 6,077   | 9,046   | 49%      |
| Common Goldeneye       | 12,292  | 11,921  | -3%      |
| Common Merganser       | 11,461  | 8,648   | -25%     |
| Red-breasted Merganser | 4,282   | 4,616   | 8%       |
| TOTAL of all species   | 268,763 | 447,871 | 67%      |