

REGION 8 – HUDSON-MOHAWK

Will Yandik

269 Schneider Road, Hudson NY 12534

wyandik@hotmail.com

The winter remained cold with persistent snow. As reported from Albany International Airport, December's mean temperature was 27°F, 1° below normal. There were 3.97" of precipitation, 1.21" above normal, with 33.2" of snow. January averaged 15.5°, 6.7° below normal, with only three days with temperatures above freezing. Precipitation was 3.45", 0.74" above normal, with 32.2" of snow. February was also cold, averaging 21.1°, 3.9° below normal, with precipitation measured at 2.15", 0.12" below normal; 16.7" of snow fell that month. A Christmas Day storm brought nearly three feet of snow to the Region, approaching a rate of 4" per hour. By early March, 96" of snow had fallen, approaching the Albany record of 112".

It is unclear what impact this weather had on the Region's birds. Persistent below-zero temperatures produced some winterkills, but many species previously thought to be vulnerable to cold appeared to be adapting. High numbers of Carolina Wrens were reported and continued beyond Christmas counts through January and February. Other 'southern species,' such as Tufted Titmouse, Northern Mockingbird and Red-bellied Woodpecker, maintained stable populations as well, perhaps bolstered by well-stocked feeders. Eastern Bluebirds were an exception; their numbers dropped slightly from the unusually large flocks of the two previous mild winters.

All but the fastest moving water remained frozen through mid March, forcing many waterfowl south. The Hudson River froze for the first time in several years, with navigation channels quickly refreezing through January, at times trapping barges for several days before they could be rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard's icebreaker fleet. The frozen upper Great Lakes forced a southward invasion of

Red-necked Grebes throughout the Northeast, a few appearing in our Region. No significant thaw occurred until late February when temperatures nosed above 40° for a few days. Clearly, the cold weather limited bird reports indirectly as many Regional birders preferred to stay inside and make their observations safely near the glow of their woodstoves (the editor included).

One good excuse to venture out into the cold was to see a well-publicized **Northern Hawk Owl** that wintered in Root, Montgomery County, from mid January into the spring season. Favoring a conspicuous hunting perch surrounded by open farmland and red maple swamp, the bird was observed and photographed by hundreds, including curious non-birders and local evening news camera troupes. Reports from such sources as the New York State listserve attracted out-of-state birders, with as many as 40 observers present on busy weekends. In addition to inflating several life lists, the owl sparked a debate about the ethics of feeding mice to wild avian predators. Several observers offered the owl live mice, including prey obtained from pet stores that are thought to supplement food with antibiotics and to harbor diseases potentially harmful to the owl. Controversy also arose when one photographer baited the owl with caged mice, deliberately stressing the bird for the purpose of obtaining dramatic photographs. Despite this disturbing publicity, the bird remained in Root through the season, apparently healthy, surviving largely on wild voles caught and cached in a Norway maple.

Fewer than 60 sightings of Northern Hawk Owl have been recorded in New York State. Previous irruptions occurred as recently as 1991-92, 1981-82 and 1961-62. Even during irruptive years, this species remains largely an upstate phenomenon; only two New York records exist south of the mid-Hudson Valley, both specimens collected on Long Island. Very few records exist in adjacent states: Massachusetts, 5; Connecticut, 5; Pennsylvania, 4; New Jersey, 2. This hawk owl is the fifth confirmed record for Region 8, following sightings in 1888 (Saratoga County), 1955 (Saratoga County), 1991 (Warren County) and 1992 (Washington County).

As experienced birders journeyed to Montgomery County to observe the hawk owl, they discovered several other uncommon species in the surrounding manured fields. Some of the season's best birds were reported in the hawk owl's vicinity, an area that traditionally receives little attention. Notable finds included many Rough-legged Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawk, Merlin, Northern Shrike, Snow Bunting and Lapland Longspur.

For the fifth winter in recent years, observers reported **Osprey** in our Region. Despite the absence of nesting records on the mid-Hudson, this species has been reported with increasing frequency on past Christmas counts. This year's mid January report from Ghent, Columbia County, represents an unusually late sighting, seemingly miraculous due to ever-present ice on ponds and lakes. Only a handful of Great Blue Herons, Belted Kingfishers and other fish-eaters managed to feed near fast-moving streams or heat sources adjacent to municipal sewage outfalls and industrial plants.

Other unusual lingerers included an Eastern Phoebe, reportedly surviving on

bittersweet and ornamental berries in a suburban yard. Marsh Wren, Field Sparrow and Savannah Sparrow showed up on Christmas counts; all are uncommon winter residents in the area. This season was another poor one for winter finches; only one report of Common Redpoll, a few Pine Siskins and scattered Purple Finches surfaced. There were no reports of either species of crossbill. A small feeder flock of Evening Grosbeaks in Fulton County was a scant glimpse of a species that has not been abundant in the Region for several years.

Observers discovered 113 species this season, nine fewer than the previous winter.

CONTRIBUTORS

Ken Able, Sue Adair, Alan Devoe Bird Club monthly sighting reports (ADBC), Paul Connor, Bill Cook, Kate Dunham, Jane Graves, Richard Guthrie, Hudson Mohawk Bird Club's Birdline of Eastern New York (BEN), Chuck & Ellen Kieweg, William Lee, Andrew Mason, Gail & Rich Nord, Tom Palmer, Barb Putnam, Alison Van Keuren, Carol & Owen Whitby, Will Yandik, Matt Young, Robert Yunick.

ABBREVIATIONS

CAT – T Catskill GREE; CF – Cocksackie Flats GREE; CL – Cheviot Landing COLU; COH – City of Cohoes ALBA; FR – Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Delmar ALBA; FtE – Fort Edward area WASH; GBL – Germantown Boat Launch COLU; GI – Green I ALBA; HR – Hudson Ri; JEF – T Jefferson SCHO; L7 – Vischer Ferry Power Station/Lock 7 SCHE; LIV – T Livingston COLU; MR – Mohawk Ri; NB – New Baltimore GREE; NL – Nassau L RENS; PCr – Papscanee Creek RENS; ROO – T Root MONT; SS – Stockport Station COLU; STO – T Stockport COLU.

LOONS – DUCKS

Com. Loon: JEF 2 Dec; CL 7 Dec; only reports.

Pied-billed Grebe: MR SCHE 27 Dec, only report.

Horned Grebe: max 6 MR 25 Feb.

Red-necked Grebe: max 5 MR 25 Feb; in small numbers during late Feb invasion.

Great Blue Heron: 2 NB 21 Dec; max 3 MR 12 Jan; 11 reports of singles.

Turkey Vulture: Guilderland ALBA 6 Feb, only report.

Snow Goose: max 200 Bells Pd LIV 2 Dec; scarce after Dec.

Canada Goose: max 2500 Bells Pd LIV 2 Dec, decreasing numbers as

season advanced.

Mute Swan: max 125 CL 7 Dec; 2 NL 2 Dec, only report away from HR.

Wood Duck: SS 21 Dec, only report.

Gadwall: max 6 GBL 7 Dec.

Am. Wigeon: SS 7 Dec, only report.

Am. Black Duck: max 280 SS 21 Dec.

Mallard: max 905 MR 12 Jan.

N. Pintail: SS 21 Dec; Roe Jan Kill COLU 12 Jan; only reports.

Green-winged Teal: SS 7 Dec; SARA 12 Jan.

Canvasback: max 300 CAT 12 Jan.

Redhead: GBL 7 Dec; 2 SS 17 Jan; only reports.

Ring-necked Duck: MR 12 Jan; scattered CBC reports.
Lesser Scaup: max 5 GBL 21 Dec.
White-winged Scoter: HR at GI 12 Jan, only report.
Black Scoter: Albany CBC 18 Dec, only report.
Long-tailed Duck: Albany CBC 18 Dec, only report.
Bufflehead: GBL 7 Dec; f L7 17 Dec; scarce.
Com. Goldeneye: max 100 GBL 7 Dec, concentrated at open water in rafts of 5-10.
Hooded Merganser: 6 CL 7 Dec; 7 HR at Northumberland 30 Dec; 2 FtE 5 Jan.
Com. Merganser: max 134 MR 12 Jan; concentrated at open water in rafts of 30-50.
Red-breasted Merganser: 3 Troy 25 Jan; Ghent COLU 20-22 Feb; only reports.
Ruddy Duck: max 33 Albany CBC 18 Dec.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Osprey: S RENS 21 Dec; Ghent COLU 25 Jan, very late.
Bald Eagle: 23 ad, 5 imm, mostly near HR.
N. Harrier: max 5 FtE 21 Dec; 41 reports of f/imm, 6 reports of m.
Sharp-shinned Hawk: 3 ROO 11 Dec; 48 other reports.
Cooper's Hawk: 2 MONT 12 Dec; 39 reports of singles.
N. Goshawk: ad MONT 2 Dec; ad SCHE 11 Dec; ad Argyle WASH 20 Dec; imm Troy 5 Jan; ad Berne ALBA 19 Feb.
Red-shouldered Hawk: Catskill CBC 17 Dec; ROO 25 Jan; only reports.
Rough-legged Hawk: max 7 ROO 31 Jan; above average numbers overall; most numerous in ROO, FtE, CF.
Merlin: PCr 30 Dec; FtE 2 Feb; LIV 3 Feb; ROO 12 Feb.
Ring-necked Pheasant: 4 reports of singles, all on late Dec CBCs.

Ruffed Grouse: 2 SCHE 21 Dec; FR 5 Jan; Schodack I 15 Jan.
Wild Turkey: max 60 MONT 7 Feb; reported in lower numbers in flocks of 6-12.
Am. Coot: HR 7 Dec, only report.
Ring-billed Gull: max 300+ COH 2 Dec; typical winter numbers.
Herring Gull: max 120+ CAT 17 Dec; typical winter numbers.
Iceland Gull: max 4 Cossackie GREE 17 Dec; COH 1 Jan; SARA 17 Jan; increasingly frequent winter visitor.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: STO 2 Jan; COH 12 Jan.
Glaucous Gull: 2 juv COH 5 Jan.
Great Black-backed Gull: max 26 SCHE 21 Dec.

DOVES – WOODPECKERS

E. Screech-Owl: 3 SS 21 Dec; 32 reports of singles; typical winter numbers on most CBCs.
Great Horned Owl: max 6 Schneider Rd LIV 10 Jan; 19 other reports in addition to CBCs.
Barred Owl: Saratoga CBC 14 Dec; S RENS CBC 21 Dec; Chatham CBC 21 Dec.
Short-eared Owl: CF 17 Dec; FtE 27 Dec; S RENS CBC 28 Dec; scarce at FtE this year due to low vole population.
N. Saw-whet Owl: dead specimen collected NB 29 Dec (RG); SARA 6 Jan.
N. HAWK OWL: ROO 18 Jan-thru (C&EK).
Belted Kingfisher: Saratoga Springs 13-14 Dec; 3 STO 21 Dec; 3 MR 12 Jan; scarce after HR and MR froze in Jan.
Red-bellied Woodpecker: max 9 SS 21 Dec; typical numbers on CBCs; remaining steady thru.
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Kinderhook COLU 28 Dec; East Glenville SCHE 18 Jan.
Pileated Woodpecker: 26 reports; typical numbers on CBCs.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

E. Phoebe: Austerlitz COLU 7-15 Dec, feeding on bittersweet and other berries.

N. Shrike: JEF 7 Dec; Saratoga Springs 13-14 Dec; SCHE 27 Dec; Gansevoort SARA 4 Jan; 2 ROO 25-31 Jan; Berne ALBA 2 Feb; Greenfield SARA 22 Feb; LIV 26 Feb.

Fish Crow: PCr 30 Dec; 3 GI 12 Jan; only reports.

Com. Raven: 12 reports of singles.

Horned Lark: max 220 LIV 1 Dec; 160 FtE 5 Jan; numerous and widespread in suitable habitat, larger flocks reported than in previous winters.

Tufted Titmouse: max 15 FtE 5 Jan; typical numbers on CBCs.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: 11 reports; continues scarce.

Brown Creeper: max 3 GI, consistent with seasonal averages.

Carolina Wren: max 5 CAT 17 Dec; 62 reported on all CBCs, 12 more than previous year; many populations stable through Jan and Feb.

Winter Wren: STO 21 Dec, only report.

Marsh Wren: Schenectady CBC 22 Dec, only report.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 8 CAT 17 Dec.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Schodack 27-28 Dec.

E. Bluebird: max 21 MONT 19 Dec; reported widely in modest flocks of 4-6.

Hermit Thrush: LIV 1 Dec; CAT 17 Dec; Northumberland SARA 30 Dec; Troy 5 Jan; Chatham COLU 3 Feb; consistent with previous winter averages.

N. Mockingbird: max 4 Niskayuna SCHE; 19 other reports.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 4 CAT 17 Dec; no change from previous winter.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 80 PCr 5 Jan.

Field Sparrow: RENS 6 Jan, only report.

Savannah Sparrow: PCr 30 Dec; Grangerville SARA 30 Dec.

Fox Sparrow: NB 20 Jan, only report.

Song Sparrow: max 13 FtE 21 Dec.

Swamp Sparrow: MR 21 Dec; STO 21 Dec; FR 5 Jan; consistent with previous winter averages.

White-throated Sparrow: commonly reported in flocks of 6-8.

White-crowned Sparrow: Schenectady 27 Dec, only report.

Dark-eyed Junco: commonly reported in flocks of 10-15.

Lapland Longspur: Northumberland SARA 14 Dec; ROO 3 Feb.

Snow Bunting: max 12 Albany CBC 18 Dec; 6 MONT 19 Feb; slightly below average.

N. Cardinal: max 14 WASH 30 Dec.

Red-winged Blackbird: max 70 Schodack I 11 Jan; in smaller numbers on CBCs.

E. Meadowlark: 2 Canajoharie MONT 14 Dec, only report.

Com. Grackle: scattered CBC reports; 2 RENS 15 Jan; 5 Albany 27 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 50 Guilderland ALBA 1 Jan.

Purple Finch: 6 JEF 2 Dec; Chatham COLU 17 Dec; Taghkanic COLU 28 Jan; scarce.

House Finch: max 76 Niskayuna SCHE 21 Dec.

Com. Redpoll: 11 Hudson Falls CBC 5 Jan, only report.

Pine Siskin: 10 Hudson Falls CBC 5 Jan; ROO 31 Jan; SARA 22 Feb; scarce.

Am. Goldfinch: max 33 SS 21 Dec; most in small flocks of 4-6.

Evening Grosbeak: 6 Northville FULT, only report; scarce.