

NEW YORK STATE FEDERATION WATERFOWL COUNT, JANUARY 2003

Bryan L. Swift

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

625 Broadway

Albany, NY 12233-4750

ABSTRACT

The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs' annual midwinter waterfowl count, or "Federation Waterfowl Count" (FWC), was held during Jan 11-20, 2003 with approximately 285 participants. Harsh winter weather prior to and during the count resulted in many areas being frozen over and difficult viewing conditions. A total of 320,665 birds (46 species) was observed, 28% fewer than the record high count in 2002, but still 19% above the 1973-2000 average. The top 10 species, accounting for 88% of the total, were: Canada Goose, Mallard, Greater Scaup, Redhead, Brant, Common Goldeneye, American Black Duck, Canvasback, Common Merganser, and Bufflehead. Most dabbling ducks and Canada Geese declined from 2002, whereas counts of most diving duck species increased.

INTRODUCTION

The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs has conducted an annual midwinter waterfowl count (FWC) almost every year since 1955 (Rising 1955) except for a brief hiatus in 1968-1972 (Jones 1980). Each January, participants 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 9-day count period beginning on the second Saturday after New Year's Day, with a target date of the first Sunday in that period. (Note: this was incorrectly listed as the first Saturday after New Year's Day in last year's report.) Most counts are conducted during the first 3 days of the period, but in some cases additional time is needed to complete the counts.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

Official weather data for January 2003 were not available, but Regional compilers reported severe winter weather conditions across the state. High temperatures were at or below freezing for several weeks before the count, and temperatures were generally lower during the count. Significant snowfalls occurred in early January, and additional light snow fell during the count in some areas. Snow cover and ice persisted through the count period, and strong winds (15-30 mph) were common, making waterfowl viewing difficult. As a result of

this weather pattern, most small inland waters and some larger lakes were completely frozen. Many larger lakes, rivers, and coastal bays had significant shoreline ice that limited waterfowl use.

RESULTS

A total of 320,665 birds, comprising 46 species, was counted in 2003 (Table 1). The 2003 total was 28% below 2002 (Table 2), but 19% above the 28-year (1973-2000) average of 268,763 birds (Table 3). Less than 2% of the total count was recorded outside of the scheduled survey period.

Comparison of 2003 counts with 28-year (1973-2000) averages shows 7 of 13 major species or taxa at least 10% above average, and five species or taxa more than 10% below average (Table 3). Canada Goose (111,988) declined 47% from the record high of 211,191 in 2002, and accounted for most of the decrease in total counts between years. All major dabbling ducks, sea ducks and swans declined from 2002, whereas most diving ducks increased. Counts of most other water birds declined also, except for Double-crested Cormorant. New high counts were not established for any species, unlike 2002 when records were established for seven species. Lower counts of most dabbling ducks and geese probably reflected the extensive ice cover over most shallow waters in the state. Nonetheless, the low Snow Goose count (11) was surprising given the tremendous abundance of this species in recent years.

Total waterfowl numbers in the Atlantic Flyway (Maine to Florida) were down 17% from 2002, and were 19% below the 10-year (1993-2002) average (Serie and Raftovich 2003). Flyway counts of dabbling ducks were down 16% from a year ago, diving ducks declined 24%, and sea ducks decreased 40%. Flyway counts of Snow Geese, Canada Geese and Brant were all within 10% of a year ago. 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 King Eider in Lake Ontario in Niagara County (Region 1), a single Ross's Goose at Fair Haven (Region 5), reports of Tufted Duck in three Regions, and Barrow's Goldeneye in four Regions (Table 1). Numbers of Long-tailed Ducks in Region 1 declined sharply from recent years, perhaps due to the recent outbreak of Type E botulism in that Region, which killed several thousand of this species in fall 2002. Numbers of Greater Scaup and Hooded Merganser in Region 7 were record highs for the FWC in that Region.

FUTURE COUNTS

The FWC is a valuable long-term population monitoring program for waterfowl and other water birds wintering in New York State. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has discontinued aerial surveys of waterfowl wintering in New York, so they now rely on the FWC as the 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. The next count is scheduled:

2005 - January 15-23 (target date - Sunday, January 16)

Please note that the dates for 2005 were listed incorrectly last year. For more information about the FWC, visit the Federation's web site at:

< www.fnysbc.org/projwaterfowl >

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

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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. 2003. Atlantic Flyway Midwinter Waterfowl Survey 2003 - Final Report. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Migratory Bird Management, Laurel, MD. 3 p.

Table 1
Regional totals for January 2003 Federation Waterfowl Count.

Species/Region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Goose, White-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6
Snow	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	5	11
Ross's	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Canada	3931	4172	21686	813	7753	463	942	17080	8929	46219	111,988
Brant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	75	15229	15,304
Swan, Mute	3	141	3	0	3	2	4	152	148	1293	1,749
Trumpeter	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Tundra	169	4	53	2	19	22	0	0	0	0	269
Wood Duck	5	5	2	0	6	0	0	0	2	23	43
Gadwall	66	59	64	0	45	14	0	0	76	789	1,113
Wigeon, Eurasian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
American	13	4	15	0	0	0	0	0	120	1567	1,719
Am. Black Duck	224	165	1739	127	334	382	230	484	1292	7438	12,415
Mallard	7128	4570	6741	876	3711	2394	2957	1626	3302	9520	42,825
Mallard X Black	0	38	3	1	8	2	0	0	5	26	83
Blue-winged Teal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Shoveler	0	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	464	472
Northern Pintail	1	7	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	282	296
Green-winged Teal	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	425	430
Canvasback	10406	17	208	0	2	0	0	304	84	841	11,862
Redhead	169	1225	19077	6	97	2	1	2	1	35	20,615
Ring-necked Duck	65	13	87	0	597	5	47	1	12	588	1,415
Tufted Duck	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
Scaup, Greater	15447	478	53	0	244	241	1001	0	5415	11958	34,837

Lesser	27	359	3	0	8	0	1	1	213	2257	2,869
not to species	0	301	61	0	200	0	0	0	0	735	1,297
Eider, King	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Common	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	9	0	235	245
Harlequin Duck	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	9
Scoter, Surf	1	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2416	2,424
White-winged	24	418	4	0	49	0	0	1	0	367	863
Black	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	576	580
not to species	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2324	2,324
Long-tailed Duck	392	171	26	0	208	146	0	0	58	1032	2,033
Bufflehead	3962	342	303	0	186	408	97	1	501	3379	9,179
Goldeneve,	2357	3337	834	163	587	2617	2838	244	79	1149	14,205
Barrow's	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	0	0	2	8
Merganser,	133	6	18	7	16	2	99	225	159	1180	1,845
Common	5162	886	163	240	393	681	1406	451	654	82	10,118
Red-breasted	1630	454	5	1	108	152	5	0	244	3108	5,707
Ruddy Duck	2	0	10	0	29	0	0	0	106	4852	4,999
Loon, Red-	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	8	109	121
Common	1	2	9	2	4	0	2	0	3	95	118
Grebe, Pied-billed	15	2	20	1	5	0	0	0	0	47	90
Horned	4	1	0	0	8	2	25	0	8	162	210
Red-necked	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	6	8
Eared	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Cormorant, D.-	85	5	0	0	16	0	0	0	1	202	309
Great	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39	106	145
American Coot	141	130	1244	50	6	0	1	0	65	324	1,961
Unidentified	528	46	100	0	0	577	0	0	6	275	1,532
TOTAL OF	52,095	17,378	52,537	2,290	14,650	8,118	9,664	20,583	21,608	121,72	320,66

Table 2
Comparison of January 2002 and January 2003 counts
for selected waterfowl species.

Species	2002	2003	% Change
Snow Goose	1,069	11	-99%
Canada Goose	211,191	111,988	-47%
Brant	18,101	15,304	-15%
Mute Swan	2,010	1,749	-13%
Gadwall	2,900	1,113	-62%
American Wigeon	1,997	1,719	-14%
American Black Duck	18,225	12,415	-32%
Mallard	47,599	42,825	-10%
Canvasback	10,353	11,862	15%
Redhead	14,428	20,615	43%
Ring-necked Duck	2,234	1,415	-37%
Greater Scaup	24,466	34,837	42%
scoters (all species)	30,963	6,191	-80%
Long-tailed Duck	5,540	2,033	-63%
Bufflehead	9,046	9,179	1%
Common Goldeneye	11,921	14,205	19%
Hooded Merganser	1,633	1,845	13%
Common Merganser	8,648	10,118	17%
Red-breasted Merganser	4,616	5,707	24%
Ruddy Duck	4,135	4,999	21%
Red-throated Loon	165	121	-27%
Common Loon	628	118	-81%
Horned Grebe	561	210	-63%
Double-crested Cormorant	271	309	14%
Great Cormorant	237	145	-39%
American Coot	4,064	1,961	-52%
TOTAL of all species	447,867	320,665	-28%

Table 3.
Comparison of the January 2003 count with 1973-2000 average
for all species averaging over 1,000 individuals annually.

Species	Average	2003	% Change
Canada Goose	69,459	111,988	61%
Brant	15,109	15,304	1%
American Black Duck	19,826	12,415	-37%
Mallard	32,376	42,825	32%
Canvasback	10,652	11,862	11%
Redhead	7,437	20,615	177%
scaup (both species)	50,222	39,003	-22%
scoters (all species)	12,373	6,191	-50%
Long-tailed Duck	4,386	2,033	-54%
Bufflehead	6,077	9,179	51%
Common Goldeneye	12,292	14,205	16%
Common Merganser	11,461	10,118	-12%
Red-breasted Merganser	4,282	5,707	33%
TOTAL of all species	268,763	320,665	19%

