

REGION 8 – HUDSON-MOHAWK

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Winter began stormy and later settled into a prolonged deep freeze. December exhibited average temperatures, with alternating bouts of heavy rain and snow during its first three weeks. Beginning in early January, the Region experienced a steady pattern of unusually cold arctic air masses. January's average temperature at Albany International Airport was only 14.6°F, 7.6° below average. Twenty-four days in January did not make it above freezing, whereas 11 days dropped below zero. The arctic highs created a fairly stable, albeit windy, local atmosphere with few storms. February's weather eventually moderated, closing with average temperatures and precipitation.

A break in the storms in late December allowed most local Christmas Bird Count participants to get out into the field to collect data, however the Region's January waterfowl counts were nearly a bust due to high winds and frozen water. Observers struggled to tally even Mallard and American Black Duck, with no reports of scoters, Redhead or Canvasback through the entire winter. The Hudson

River froze completely in early January and remained frozen until March. The handful of winter waterfowl records were observed, of course, near fast-flowing water or in urban areas where industrial activities warmed small pockets of water. The snow that accumulated in December remained on the ground until spring, melting and refreezing, forming a semi-permanent shell of crusty ice. Many raptors, especially Northern Harrier and Rough-legged Hawk, moved south after December. Perhaps related to the atypical cold in Canada, large numbers of winter irruptive species entered our area this year, including Northern Shrike, Bohemian Waxwing and both species of redpoll.

In addition to the usual lingering icterids and fall sparrows, a few surprises surfaced on area Christmas Bird Counts, including Merlin, Wilson's Snipe and a very late record of **American Bittern**, observed along the ice-ringed water of the Roe Jan Kill near the Hudson River in Columbia County. **Black Vulture**, although increasing in our Region, is rare in winter. Several appeared this season, all in Columbia County, including one on the Chatham CBC, one along Route 82 in Ancram and two that appeared regularly at Copake Lake in January.

Visiting the Region only briefly this winter, two Monk Parakeets lingered along the Claverack-Livingston border in Columbia County. A county record, the birds roosted near the feeders of Pam and George Starr from Christmas to New Year's Day. A small population of these parakeets has been observed in Albany County, apparently constructing a few nests in suburban areas. It's unclear, however, whether or not these birds have successfully bred. These recent birds likely wandered down the Hudson River from the Albany County population. Despite the fact that CBS News recently aired a segment describing the New York City population of Monk Parakeets, largely suggesting that the birds were a bane to humans and native species, many birders remain fascinated by the expansion of this unlikely New York breeder.

A surprisingly large number of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers wintered in the southern part of the Region, despite the cold. Rising, in *Bull's Birds of New York State* (1998), cited CBC data through the 1980s to suggest that fewer than 20 winter upstate each year, the largest numbers occurring in mild winters; however, informal local surveys I conducted at Clermont State Park and Mount Merino in Columbia County during the past five years suggest that mild winters are not the only requisite for large wintering populations. Particularly in sunny ravines adjacent to the Hudson, where there are patches of basswood, local populations of 8-10 can be counted each year in a very small area. A study of upstate CBC data from 1990 to the present shows an increase of sapsuckers from numbers close to 20 in the early 1990s to today's averages in the 50s. Of course, the appearance of a bird on a CBC does not automatically prove that it is wintering, but my late January observations do loosely suggest that sapsuckers are increasingly choosing to remain upstate. Hopefully, more winter sightings will be carefully noted and shared with this publication.

Following the ups and downs of winter Carolina Wren populations has become a kind of annual rite for many of my fellow editors over the years, and it appears that this season does present a change in numbers. After successfully weathering last year's tough winter, this season's population finally crashed. Volunteers uncovered only 20 birds on Regional CBCs, a decline of nearly two-thirds from last year. Five reports of single birds outside the CBCs represents a very low tally of a common Hudson Valley species. You can be sure, observers will closely watch for a rebound in the next few years.

As previously mentioned, this winter forced a strong push of select irruptive species. Observers recorded twice as many Northern Shrikes this year as last and **Bohemian Waxwing** numbers peaked in late February, the seasonal maximum of 175 occurring on Orebed Road, Rensselaer County, on a stretch of private land loaded with wild cherries, grapes, and crab apples. Several dozen feeder-watchers reported Common Redpolls, with flock sizes ranging from a few birds to the seasonal maximum of 100+ routinely observed in Saratoga County. In addition to these birds, I received five reports of **Hoary Redpolls**. Only two of those reports, however, had solid details, including one with excellent photographs of a bird observed at Copake Lake, Columbia County.

With the influx of waxwings and redpolls, many observers kept a close eye on their feeders, which led to Jocelyn Cole-Calkins's discovery of a **Varied Thrush** in Berne, Albany County. Lingering for five days in mid-January, the bird arrived each morning at the feeder with a flock of Blue Jays. Varied Thrush was first noticed in our region in 1966, with a dozen or so sightings recorded since then. This bird represented a second county record for Albany.

One hundred fourteen species were observed this season, one more than the previous winter.

CONTRIBUTORS

Alan Devoe Bird Club monthly sighting reports, Larry Alden, Jocelyn Cole-Calkins, Bill Cook, Kate Dunham, Larry Federman, Jane Graves, Richard Guthrie, Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club's Birdline of Eastern New York, Bill Lee, Berna Lincoln, Andrew Mason, Gail & Rich Nord, Jeff Novick, Tom Palmer, Barb Putnam, Mike Rutkowski, George & Pam Starr, Alison Van Keuren, Carol & Owen Whitby, Will Yandik, Robert Yunick.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANC – T Ancram COLU; CAT – T Catskill GREE; CF – Cossackie Flats GREE; COH – City of Cohoes ALBA; COX – T Cossackie GREE; FtE – T Fort Edwards WASH; GHE – T Ghent COLU; HR – Hudson Ri; LIV – T Livingston COLU; MR – Mohawk Ri; NBA – T New Baltimore GREE; STI – T Stillwater SARA.

WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES

Snow Goose: 2 LIV 5 Dec; 11 FtE 20 Dec; Stuyvesant COLU 11 Jan; STI 22 Jan.
Canada Goose: 1000+ NBA 27 Dec; max 2500 HR WASH 3 Jan; 950 ANC 28 Feb.
Brant: 3 Clermont COLU 5 Feb.
Wood Duck: MR SCHE 1 Feb; 2 STI 28 Feb.
Am. Black Duck: max 130 CAT 16 Dec.
Mallard: max 90 COX 12 Jan.
N. Pintail: 2 Hudson Falls CBC 20 Dec; COH 16 Feb; 3 ANC 18-28 Feb.
Green-winged Teal: ANC 18 Feb, only report.
Ring-necked Duck: 2 Chatham CBC 20 Dec; 6 STI 22 Jan.
Greater Scaup: 11 COH 18 Jan; STI 22 Jan.
Lesser Scaup: STI 22 Jan; 12 COH 16 Feb.
Bufflehead: 2 Queensbury WARR 13 Dec; Lock7 SCHE 12 Feb; STI 17 Feb; 3 LIV 20 Feb.
Com. Goldeneye: max 100 STI 16 Feb.
Barrow's Goldeneye: FtE 29 Feb (mob).
Hooded Merganser: 5 L George WARR 18 Jan; 36 STI 22 Jan.
Red-breasted Merganser: 3 Salem CBC 27 Dec; 2 HR SCHE 1 Feb; COH 16 Feb.
Ring-necked Pheasant: 3 CF 20-25 Feb, only report.
Com. Loon: Bolton Landing CBC 14 Dec, only report.
Double-crested Cormorant: CAT-COX CBC 16 Dec; 2 HR ALBA 29 Feb.
Great Cormorant: COX 21 Dec, only report.
AM. BITTERN: CAT-COX CBC Roe Jan Kill 16 Dec (LA & LF), very late.
Great Blue Heron: max 3 CF 12 Dec; scarce after Dec.
BLACK VULTURE: Chatham CBC 20 Dec; 2 Copake L COLU 8-22 Jan; Rt 82 ANC 27-29 Feb.
Turkey Vulture: arr Guilderland ALBA 11 Feb; ANC 20 Feb; Slingerlands ALBA 25 Feb.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: max 11 NBA 22 Dec, consistent numbers; 6-8 HR thru.
N. Harrier: max 12 CF 11 Jan; no Feb reports.
Sharp-shinned Hawk: max 4 CF 16 Dec; sightings nearly every day thru mid-Jan.
Cooper's Hawk: 48 reports of singles.
N. Goshawk: Berne ALBA 10 Jan; Austerlitz COLU 11 Jan; SCHE 15 Jan; Jefferson SCHO 24 Feb; only reports.
Red-shouldered Hawk: S RENS CBC 27 Dec; Ballston Spa SARA 6 Feb.
Rough-legged Hawk: max 18 FtE 11 Feb; infrequently reported in groups of 3-5 in suitable habitat.
Am. Kestrel: 2 NBA 21 Dec; LIV 21 Dec; Claverack COLU 4 Jan; Germantown COLU 18-20 Feb; scarce.
Merlin: Troy CBC 3 Jan, only report.
Am. Coot: 7 Saratoga Springs CBC 14 Dec, only report.
Wilson's Snipe: Chatham CBC 20 Dec, first count record.
Iceland Gull: 3 COX 20-29 Dec; COH 11 Jan; 2 Colonie ALBA 14 Feb; now a regular winter visitor.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: Colonie Landfill ALBA 8 Jan, only report.
Glaucous Gull: imm Colonie Landfill ALBA 14 Feb, only report.

PIGEONS – WOODPECKERS

Monk Parakeet: 2 Claverack-LIV border COLU 25 Dec-1 Jan (G&PS), county first.
E. Screech-Owl: 9 reports of singles outside CBCs.
Great Horned Owl: 11 reports of singles outside CBCs.
Barred Owl: Saratoga Springs 11 Feb; E Hoosick RENS 28 Feb; 4 other reports.
Long-eared Owl: Florida MONT 22 Jan-14 Feb (TP).
Short-eared Owl: 5 CF 16 Dec-8 Feb.
N. Saw-whet Owl: Troy CBC 3 Jan; Brunswick RENS 27 Feb; only reports.
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: E Glenville

SCHE 10 Jan; 2 Claverack COLU 12 Jan;
2 Copake COLU 26 Jan; 8 Clermont
COLU 16-21 Feb; 15 other reports.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: max 3 Amsterdam MONT 31
Dec; 4 reports Dec; 2 reports Jan; 8
reports Feb; modest irruption year.

Am. Crow: roost 3500+ Amsterdam
MONT thru; roost 4750+ SUNY ALBA
thru mid-Feb.

Fish Crow: COH 14 Feb; Waterford
SARA 19 Feb.

Com. Raven: 16 reports of singles;
numbers consistent with previous winter.

Horned Lark: max 40 Princetown MONT
17 Jan; average flock size 8-12.

Tufted Titmouse: max 8 GHE 20 Dec.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: max 5
Kaaterskill Falls GREE 26 Jan.

Carolina Wren: 5 reports of singles; 20
reported on all CBCs, a decline of nearly
66% from last year, clearly experienced
some population crash.

Winter Wren: 2 CAT-COX CBC 16 Dec,
only report.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: NBA 14 Dec;
Chatham CBC 20 Dec.

Hermit Thrush: CF 8 Feb, late.

VARIED THRUSH: Berne ALBA 10-15
Jan (JC, mob).

BOHEMIAN WAXWING: max 175
Orebed Rd E Hoosick RENS 21 Feb; 10
Gansevoort SARA 28-29 Feb; GHE 29
Feb.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: absent on most
CBCs; LIV 26 Jan; Feller Rd Taghkanic
COLU 15 Feb; CF 20 Feb; scarce.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

Chipping Sparrow: Chatham COLU 9
Dec; CAT-COX CBC 16 Dec.

Savannah Sparrow: LIV 15 Dec; max 4
CF 16 Dec; GHE 20 Dec; no reports

thereafter.

Fox Sparrow: max 3 GHE 20 Dec;

Taghkanic COLU 27-31 Jan.

Swamp Sparrow: 5 reports Dec; none
thereafter.

White-crowned Sparrow: Glens Falls
WARR 7-14 Dec; Guilderland ALBA 15
Dec; GHE 1-18 Jan; Valatie COLU 22
Feb; 3 Hoosick RENS 29 Feb; somewhat
numerous.

Lapland Longspur: Chatham CBC 20
Dec, single bird in flock of Snow
Buntings.

Snow Bunting: max 254 Stuyvesant
COLU 21 Dec; common in Dec, rapidly
dwindling thereafter.

N. Cardinal: max 14 E Greenbush RENS
16 Jan.

Red-winged Blackbird: a few scattered
reports thru Feb; first true migratory flock
250+ LIV 20 Feb.

E. Meadowlark: max 4 NBA 21 Dec.

Com. Grackle: 6 E Greenbush RENS 27
Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 6 Valatie
COLU 22 Feb.

Purple Finch: max 6 Stanton Rd ALBA
16 Dec; wintered locally in HR and MR
valleys.

House Finch: 'yellow' variant Guilderland
ALBA 31 Jan.

Red Crossbill: Johnstown-Gloversville
CBC 28 Dec, only report.

Com. Redpoll: max 100+ Ballston Spa
SARA 24 Jan; average flock sizes 20 in
Dec, 25 in Jan, 37 in Feb; irruptive year.

HOARY REDPOLL: Copake L COLU 8
Jan (ph); Gansevoort SARA 27 Dec-9 Jan
(mob); 3 other reports without
documentation.

Pine Siskin: 6 Saratoga SARA thru; 4
Jefferson SCHO 14 Jan; 7 other reports of
singles.

Evening Grosbeak: max 40 Jefferson
SCHO 30 Jan thru; 8 Bolton Landing CBC
14 Dec.