

## REGION 4—SUSQUEHANNA

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Winter got off to an early start with a snowier than normal December. Temperatures for December were slightly below normal, particularly through the first three weeks. When things started to warm and thaw, a high of 57° F occurred on the 28<sup>th</sup>. In January, northwestern sections of the Region, i.e. northern Cortland and Chenango counties, received regular small amounts of lake effect snow in addition to the widespread snow events, but generally speaking snowfall totals were slightly above average for the Region. Temperatures were near normal or slightly below normal for January. February was noted for a dearth of snow, and was therefore one of the driest on record. Temperatures were near normal or slightly above normal for February. Despite temperatures being near normal for the winter period, only three days for the entire winter were officially below zero at the Binghamton National Weather Service Station. Overall, it was closer to a “more traditional” kind of winter than the record breaking warmer and rainier winters we’ve become so used to over the last 10 years.

The cone crop was fair to good with considerable variation occurring within a small area. This was the most variation in the cone crop I’ve witnessed since I started tracking cone crops in 2000. Sometimes one conifer species on one ridge would produce a good cone crop, but a rather poor cone crop on the adjacent ridge. This was particularly true of the spruces. The white and red pine crop was more consistently good than other conifers in the Region, with only hemlock producing a consistently poor cone crop. Furthermore, almost all conifers in nearly all residential areas seemed to produce a consistently very good cone crop. This likely had something to do with the concept of resource allocation. Typical of residential areas where only a few conifer trees are usually planted per lawn, trees appeared to have enough resources to produce a consistently good cone crop, likely due to less competition. However, in forests and plantations where competition for resources would be greater, trees appeared to

not have the resources to consistently produce a good cone crop. In conclusion, the crop was fair to locally good in forest and plantation settings, but very good in residential areas. Other winter food crops like fruiting trees and shrubs, maples, ashes and birches, were average, with oaks producing a rather poor crop.

There were no big surprises during the annual mid winter waterfowl count, which was conducted a little later in January so that it wouldn't overlap with the hunting season. The only surprise for the count was the two Gadwalls on Cold Brook in Scott, Cortland County. Since most ponds and lakes were frozen, numbers were lower than in recent years. The seven **Greater White Fronted Geese** seen at Little York Lakes, Cortland County, were the best waterfowl find for the area. These birds, along with a **Cackling Goose**, were present the day before the 14<sup>th</sup> December Cortland Christmas Bird Count. Other good waterbird finds were the **Red-throated Loon** seen mid December in Endwell and then brought into a wildlife rehabilitator on 16 December, and the rare-in-winter **Double-crested Cormorant** seen at Chenango Valley State Park on 15 January.

Turkey Vultures are staying later and returning earlier. A presumed wintering Turkey Vulture was seen in Owego on 5 January. Cooper's Hawks continue to be reported more commonly in winter than historically. They now appear to be three times more common than Sharp-shinned Hawks. **Merlins** continue to overwinter in Binghamton and Cortland. Two **Golden Eagles** were seen on the Binghamton Christmas Bird Count and another bird was reported the day before the Cortland Christmas Bird Count. Both counts were on 14 December. It appears that almost every year now at least 2-3 are reported on area CBCs. Some birds are clearly migrants, but other birds appear to stop over for a time or try to overwinter.

An **American Woodcock** seen by Judy Read in Cuyler, Cortland County, on 8 December was certainly a nice find. Six species of owls were reported, highlighted by single Short-eared, Long-eared, and Snowy Owls. It's interesting to note that this was the only Snowy Owl reported in the area despite it being the largest invasion in approximately 10 years. Watch for the possibility of an "echo flight" of Snowy Owls developing next year. Read below for more information on the concept of echo flights.

Good songbird finds were an immature **Red-headed Woodpecker** in Garrettsville, Otsego County; a Gray Catbird on the Sherburne Christmas Bird Count; and an overwintering Ruby-crowned Kinglet on the Chagnum River, Broome County. But the best find has to be the **Pine Warbler** that overwintered at Tom Salo's feeder in S. Burlington, Otsego County, from 7 December to 5 February.

There was a massive and statewide invasion of both **Pine Siskins** and **White-winged Crossbills**. The White-winged Crossbill invasion was the best in the state since at least 1997-98, and the Pine Siskin invasion the best dating back to 1989-90. Several flocks of White-winged Crossbills numbered 20-100+. Breeding was thought to be rare because of less than optimal conifer species being available, poor condition of arriving birds, and the sometimes an effect of very large numbers inhibiting courtship behaviors. Pine Siskins moved through

the northeast, and NY, in huge numbers, through October and November with a bit of a lull occurring in December. However, by January almost all feeders statewide were inundated by flocks of 20-200. By March, this large invasion was so massive that it caused an Eastern North America shortage of Nyjer® (trademarked name for niger seed) seed (aka thistle seed, totally erroneous name). Additionally, this writer collected reports of **“Green Morph” Pine Siskins**. By early February I had received over 20 reports of mostly unconfirmed birds, but several were well documented. Lastly, Pine Siskin breeding behavior started to pick up by the last days of February.

Red Crossbills were scarce, but **Common Redpolls** waged a late, small, and widespread “echo flight” invasion. Echo flights are typically smaller and occur in a year after a larger invasion. It is thought that these “echo flights” have to do with a buildup of numbers for a species in a given year, due to very high nest success, followed by two successive years of food crops that cannot support this buildup in numbers. In this case we are dealing with cones crops, but the concept applies more generally to other irruptive species such as several species of northern hawks and owls, Northern Shrike, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Bohemian Waxwing, and possibly other species. There also appeared to be echo flights of Bohemian Waxwings and Evening and Pine Grosbeaks in the northern part of the state this season. A few Evening and Pine Grosbeaks did reach central NY, however. Rounding out the finches, a lone **Hoary Redpoll** was reported from Morgan Hill State Forest, Cortland County, in February.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BCBC – Binghamton Christmas Bird Count; CCBC – Cortland Christmas Bird Count; FMHW – Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch; OnCBC – Oneonta Christmas Bird Count; OwCBC – Owego Christmas Bird Count; SHCBC – Sherburne Christmas Bird Count; SkanL – Skaneateles Lake; TBC – Tioga Bird Club; NCBCWW – Naturalists' Club of Broome County Weed Walkers.

### WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES

#### **GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE:** 7

Little York Lakes CORT 13 Dec; high count and rare, *intro*.

**Snow Goose:** max 550 CCBC 14 Dec; regular early-mid Dec; first returning flock of 400+ 18 Feb TIOG.

**CACKLING GOOSE:** Little York Lakes CORT 13 Dec.

**Mute Swan:** 2 NYSOA Waterfowl Count mid-Jan.

**Wood Duck:** 1 BCBC 14 Dec.

**GADWALL:** 2 Cold Brook Rd Scott CORT mid Dec-early Jan.

**Am. Black Duck:** max 48 BCBC 14 Dec.

**N. Pintail:** 2 NYSOA Waterfowl Count mid-Jan.

**Redhead:** max 18 Hillcrest Pits 27 Dec; 16 SkanL CCBC 14 Dec.

**Ring-necked Duck:** max 43 Preble 17 Feb; 8 NYSOA Waterfowl Count mid-Jan; few reports from BROO, TIOG, CORT.

**Greater Scaup:** 1 BCBC 14 Dec, only report.

**Lesser Scaup:** 4 SkanL CCBC 14 Dec.

**Bufflehead:** 5 SkanL CCBC 14 Dec.

**Com. Goldeneye:** max 57 SkanL CCBC 14 Jan.

**Hooded Merganser:** max 55 NYSOA Waterfowl Count mid-Jan.

**Com. Merganser:** max 302 NYSOA Waterfowl Count mid-Jan.

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER:** 1 BCBC 14 DEC.

**Ring-necked Pheasant:** max 3 BCBC 14 Dec.

**Ruffed Grouse:** max 12 CCBC 14 Dec; higher than avg. numbers reported.

**Wild Turkey:** max 327 OnCBC 20 Dec; higher than avg. numbers reported.

**RED-THROATED LOON:** Murphy's Island Endwell mid Dec; 1 dropped off at rehabber TIOG 16 Dec, *intro*.

**Com. Loon:** a few SkanL CORT early Dec.

**Pied-billed Grebe:** 2 SkanL CCBC 14 Dec.

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT:** Chenango Valley State Park 15 Jan, *intro*.

**Great Blue Heron:** max 19 BCBC 14 Dec; several reports throughout area with typical decline in numbers during early Jan-late Feb.

**Turkey Vulture:** a few early Dec; one mid winter report Owego TIOG 5 Jan; first returning migrant Chenango Valley State Park 14 Feb.

### HAWKS - ALCIDS

**Bald Eagle:** 9 BCBC 14 Dec; 1 CCBC 14 Dec; larger numbers concentrated in Delaware River basin; reported from all counties; now regular in smaller numbers near medium sized rivers including along Tio R from E. Homer to Whitney Pt.

**N. Harrier:** max 3 CCBC 14 Dec.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk:** max 12 BCBC 14 Dec; few reports.

**Cooper's Hawk:** 16 BCBC 14 Dec; regular.

**N. Goshawk:** OTSE 21 Jan; Virgil CORT 8 Feb; only two report, scarce.

**Red-shouldered Hawk:** BCBC 14 Dec; one Merrill Creek Rd Marathon BROO 15 Feb, only reports, rare.

**Red-tailed Hawk:** 48 FMHW Dec totals; 12 FMHW Jan totals; max 69 CCBC 14 Dec.

**Rough-legged Hawk:** 13 OwCBC 28 Dec; higher numbers early, fewer reported after Dec.

**GOLDEN EAGLE:** 24 FMHW Dec totals; 2 BCBC 14 Dec & cw bird CCBC Dec 14; 8 other reports; a few seem to stopover or try to overwinter every year now esp. in OTSE and DELA, *intro*.

**Am. Kestrel:** max 4 OwCBC 28 Dec; scarce after Dec; overwintering birds declining for years despite generally warmer winters.

**Merlin:** Little York CCBC 14 Dec & BCBC 14 Dec; Binghamton and Cortland thru ; probably occurring in winter in other areas as increase in both winter and breeding numbers continues throughout southern half of state.

**Peregrine Falcon:** Binghamton thru, expected.

**Am. Coot:** max 93 NYSOA Waterfowl Count mid-Jan; Otsego Lake every winter.

**AMERICAN WOODCOCK:** Cuyler CORT 8 Dec, good details, *intro*.

**Ring-billed Gull:** max 231 CCBC 14 Dec, low.

**Herring Gull:** max 110 CCBC 14 Dec, low.

**LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL:** River Rd BROO 30 Dec.

**Great Black-backed Gull:** max 4 CCBC 18 Dec, low.

#### PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

**Mourning Dove:** max 592 BCBC 14 Dec.

**E. Screech-Owl:** several reports, good numbers.

**Great Horned Owl:** several reports and generally well distributed.

**SNOWY OWL:** Barden Rd TIOG 6 Jan, only report despite it being a large invasion year elsewhere.

**Barred Owl:** 2 SHCBC 20 Dec & 2 CCBC 14 Dec; few reports and obviously underreported.

**LONG-EARED OWL:** Scott CORT 14 Dec; only report; one other report right along CAYU and CORT line.

**SHORT-EARED OWL:** OnCBC 20 Dec.

**Belted Kingfisher:** max 6 BCBC 14 Dec; several reports with dip in numbers early Jan-late Feb.

**RED-HEADED WOODPECKER:** immature Garretttsville NY OTSE 1 Dec-29 Jan, *intro*.

**Red-bellied Woodpecker:** numerous reports along river valleys and towns at <1500'; increasing reports from 1500'-2000'; absent from OnCBC and still scarce in that area.

**YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER:** max 3 BCBC 14 Dec; 3 other reports.

**N. Flicker:** singles reported on all CBC's except higher elevation counts in Sherburne and Oneonta; lower numbers this year than last and still generally scarce.

#### FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

**N. Shrike:** few reports in Dec and generally scarce afterwards.

**Blue Jay:** max 394 BCBC 14 Dec.

**Fish Crow:** max 3 BCBC 14 Dec; at typical locations near waterways between Binghamton and Owego but still not found north to Cortland despite it being found in Ithaca and Syracuse.

**Com. Raven:** 2-7 reported on all area CBC's; 7 CCBC 14 Dec; max 15-20 CHEN dump thru; several widely scattered reports thru winter; winter numbers appear to be increasing given it appeared that many breeding birds formerly left area in winter.

**Horned Lark:** a few widely scattered reports in CORT, BROO, and TIOG; max 34 CCBC 14 Dec; missed on 3 of 5 area CBC's.

**Tufted Titmouse:** max 199 BCBC 14 Dec; high count of 37 set for higher elevation SHCBC 20 Dec; continues to increase along many river valleys and villages of Region <1500' and starting to increase even during winter up to 1800'.

**Red-breasted Nuthatch:** max 73 CCBC 14 Dec; good numbers in state forests with good conifer crops, but overall an average year and not an invasion year.

**Brown Creeper:** max 16 BCBC 14 Dec, high count; average numbers reported otherwise.

**Carolina Wren:** max 20 BCBC 14 Dec; continues to increase areawide.

**Golden-crowned Kinglet:** max 23 CCBC 14 Dec; average numbers reported, but missed from OnCBC.

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET:** BCBC 14 Dec; Chagnut River BROO thru much of period; probably the same bird as reported on BCBC, *intro*.

**E. Bluebird:** max 73 OwCBC 20 Dec; many reported thru period but generally more common along "southern tier" counties.

**HERMIT THRUSH:** 1 Aquaterra Park BROO 6 Dec.

**Am. Robin:** max 9 CCBC 14 Dec; very low numbers compared with recent years; numbers in general were much lower.

**GRAY CATBIRD:** SHCBC 20 Dec.

**N. Mockingbird:** max 5 OwCBC 18 Dec; also reported on CCBC and BCBC.

**Cedar Waxwing:** max 349 BCBC 14 Dec; missed on OnCBC 20 Dec.

#### WARBLERS

**PINE WARBLER:** S. Burlington OTSE 7 Dec-5 Feb (TS), rare, *intro*.

#### TANAGERS - WEAVERS

**Am. Tree Sparrow:** max 173 CCBC; numbers appeared to be unevenly distributed across area?

**FOX SPARROW:** 2 Hillcrest Pits 6 Jan.

**Song Sparrow:** max 34 BCBC 14 Dec; reported from all area CBC's.

**Swamp Sparrow:** max 4 SHCBC 20 Dec; Sherburne would be an unusual location for "max" to occur; at least a few overwinter in various marshes somewhere in Reg every year.

**White-throated Sparrow:** max 29 BCBC 14 Dec; reported from all CBC's.

**Snow Bunting:** max 350 CCBC 14 Dec; missed on OnCBC & OwCBC.

**Red-winged Blackbird:** 3 reported from CCBC & cw bird SHCBC; first returning migrants 12 Feb.

**Com. Grackle:** 3 BCBC, only CBC report; first returning migrants 18 Feb.

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** max 15 BCBC; reported from all area CBC's; most common winter blackbird; first returning migrants mid to late Feb.

**PINE GROSBEEK:** 12 On CBC 20 Dec; one

along Madison/Chenango line near Lincklaen; small “echo flight” occurred in NY after last year’s large widespread invasion, *intro*.

**Purple Finch:** max 41 OnCBC 20 Dec; largely scarce but becoming slightly more common and widespread mid-late Jan thru.

**House Finch:** small number in towns, hamlets, and farms; numbers haven’t rebounded to early 90’s highs.

**Red Crossbill:** Virgil CORT 21 Feb; 2 Pharsalia CHEN Jan, very scarce, which seems to be typical during Oct-Jan with birds then moving into area in Feb when breeding starts.

**WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL:** max 333 CCBC 14 Dec; widespread massive invasion not seen in central NY since at least the 97-98 flight; too numerous to report with several flocks of 25-100+ thru Reg, particularly in Dec; numbers declined in Jan and Feb, but several flocks still noted thru winter; numbers were too

high for much nesting to take place, *intro*.

**COM. REDPOLL:** max 17 Scott CORT 17 Feb; small, late, and widespread “echo flight” occurred throughout much of area from mid Jan thru; many area feeders reported a “handful” mid Jan thru, *intro*.

**HOARY REDPOLL:** Truxton CORT 6 Feb.

**PINE SISKIN:** max 432 BCBC 14 Dec; reported in moderate numbers from all CBC’s; massive and widespread invasion not seen in NY since the 1989-90; breeding behaviors began mid-late Feb, *intro*.

**“GREEN MORPH” PINE SISKIN:** at least 4 inds reported at Scott CORT; handful of others reported in region and by early Feb 20+ mostly unconfirmed statewide sightings, *intro*.

**Evening Grosbeak:** max 10 Lincklaen 5 Jan; Scott CORT 31 Jan; OnCBC 20 Dec.

**Am. Goldfinch:** max 476 BCBC 14 Dec; above average numbers thru, winter.