

REGION 8—HUDSON-MOHAWK

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Winter 2008-09 brought a devastating ice storm to eastern New York, above average snow conditions, seesawing temperatures, and wind. December began warmer than average with daytime highs below freezing not beginning until the middle of the month. On 11 December an ice storm raged through eastern New York to central New England leaving an inch or more of accumulated ice in many areas. The Taconic State Parkway closed for several days, some residents lost power for a week or more, and the local forests incurred damage that will be visible for many years to come. Early successional trees such as gray birch, poplar, and willow suffered greatly. Most maples, ash, white pine, and red oak experienced extensive crown damage, sufficient to invite future insect outbreaks in stressed trees. For the first time in decades, our area may experience localized forest fires due to an abundance of accumulated broken branches and slash on the forest floor. Many Region 8 residents nodded among neighbors at grocery stores and gas stations, remarking that January was “a real winter,” with temperatures at month’s end tallying 4° F below normal. February continued cold, 2.4° below normal, with mostly windy and partly cloudy days. Many non-flowing bodies of water remained solidly frozen well into mid March.

Despite the rough weather conditions some summer breeding birds lingered in the Region through the winter. Double-crested Cormorants tarried into December to be tallied by counters on both the Albany and Schenectady CBCs. The last Snow Geese were spotted on 20 December. Some waterfowl arrived early including Wood Duck and White-winged Scoter. Turkey Vultures arrived early this year as well, appearing first in Slingerlands, Albany County, on 12 February.

Paul Novak coordinated a winter raptor survey in two of our Region’s most productive grasslands, southern Montgomery County and the fragmented Cossackie flats of Greene County, as part of a statewide effort to document winter populations of Short-eared Owl. Due to thinner snow with less crust, the more southern Cossackie grasslands hosted a higher abundance of raptors including maxima of 9 Short-eared Owl and 18 Northern Harrier. Conducted by 8-10 Department of Environmental Conservation staff and other volunteers, the study attempted to minimize double counting of birds by mapping individuals at strategically placed locations before sunset. Recorded numbers may represent conservative estimates since radio-tagged individuals known to be present at sampling sites were not always observed by census takers. Agricultural areas throughout the Region experienced a modest irruption of Rough-legged Hawks, which appeared commonly on CBCs and remained through January. Volunteers on the Salem CBC found a Golden Eagle and a second appeared in Schoharie County in January.

The statewide irruption of Snowy Owls produced a number of interesting sightings throughout the Region. A clean white adult perched among the stone-carved gargoyles and parapets of the State Capitol in Albany. The bird lingered long-enough for several newspapers to publish photo essays about it and for office workers to gather outside and look up with open mouths and warm breath.

Killdeer tarried late and arrived early, including one spotted by Bill Cook on the Hudson River during the Chatham CBC on 20 December and early arrivals at Tomhannock Reservoir in Rensselaer County on 11 February and a second bird at Green Acres Airport in Livingston, Columbia County, a day later.

The Bolton Landing CBC reported **Gray Jay**, which is a bird that breeds near Region 8 but very rarely ventures over into our territory at any time of year. Another surprise sent from the Adirondacks is the bizarre report forwarded to me by Region 7 editor Mike Peterson of a heavy equipment operator who works for the City of Glens Falls who had been hired to move around piles of snow at the city dump. The worker witnessed “a hundred or more” Eastern Bluebirds land on his engine compartment and near his loader presumably to stay warm. Any report of “a hundred” is suspiciously imprecise, but the report clearly identifies bluebirds correctly and makes a convincing case of a very large single location maximum for the species whatever the true number may be.

Ice and stormy weather didn’t dampen reports of half hardies. Eastern Phoebe, Gray Catbird, **Brown Thrasher**, Hermit Thrush, and White-crowned Sparrow all appeared and in many cases continued to be reported into early February. The only warbler of the season, however, was a **Palm Warbler** observed on the Albany CBC.

Two species of orioles in winter is a very rare event in Region 8. Rich Guthrie and Bill Lee reviewed photos of a **Baltimore Oriole** that had been visiting a feeder in the Crescent area of Waterford, Saratoga County. A male **Bullock’s Oriole** generated even more excitement when it appeared in January near the home of Barbara Carr in Copake, Columbia County. A first for both Columbia County and Region 8, the oriole visited the Carrs’ home for more than two weeks feeding on suet and peanut butter and jelly.

Pine Siskins dominated feeder reports this year. They showed up in every county in the Region and remained well into spring. The White-winged Crossbills which crowded coastal barrier pines in New York and Southern New England this winter also made appearances in our Region, favoring red pine plantations, cemetery spruces, and exurban feeders. Finally, Bob Yunick reported banding a “Greater” Common Redpoll (*rostrata* race from Greenland) at his long-term banding station in Saratoga County.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

CBC – Christmas Bird Count; COX – T Cocksackie GREE; FtE – T Fort Edwards WASH.

WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES

Snow Goose: 40 Ft. Miller WASH 4 Dec; 5 Hudson Falls CBC 14 Dec; ALBA CBC 15 Dec; 6 Saratoga CBC 20 Dec; Schenectady CBC 20 Dec.

Wood Duck: Northumberland SARA 4 Jan; arr Troy RENS 23 Feb.

Am. Wigeon: ALBA CBC 15 Dec.

N. Pintail: Schenectady CBC 20 Dec; 2 S RENS CBC 27 Dec.

Canvasback: Ft. Plain CBC 2 Jan; Austerlitz COLU 27 Feb.

Redhead: max 3 Troy RENS 12 Feb.

Ring-necked Duck: max 33 ALBA CBC 15 Dec.

Greater Scaup: max 3 Troy CBC 3 Jan.

Lesser Scaup: max 3 ALBA CBC 15 Dec.

White-winged Scoter: COX boat launch 22 Feb.

Long-tailed Duck: Lock 7 SCHE Nov-18 Dec; Ft. Plain MONT 3 Dec; Bolton Landing CBC 14 Dec; Saratoga CBC 20 Dec; Troy CBC 3 Jan.

Bufflehead: max 36 Bolton Landing CBC 14 Dec.

Com. Goldeneye: max 202 Hudson Falls CBC 14 Dec.

Hooded Merganser: max 32 ALBA CBC 15 Dec.

Com. Merganser: max 195 Saratoga CBC 20 Dec.

Red-breasted Merganser: Troy CBC 3 Jan.

Rudy Duck: max 6 ALBA CBC 15 Dec.

Ruffed Grouse: Bolton Landing CBC 14 Dec; Hudson Falls CBC 14 Dec; 3 ALBA CBC 15 Dec; 4 Johnstown-Gloversville CBC 27 Dec; max 6 Berlin ALBA 27 Dec; Ft. Plain CBC 2 Jan.

Com. Loon: max 4 Bolton Landing CBC 14 Dec; 2 Cohoes ALBA 2 Jan.

Red-throated Loon: Tomhannock Res RENS 2 Dec.

Horned Grebe: L. George WARR 27-28 Dec.

Double-crested Cormorant: ALBA CBC 15 Dec; Schenectady CBC 20 Dec.

Great Blue Heron: max 7 Schenectady CBC 20 Dec.

Turkey Vulture: arr Slingerlands ALBA 12 Feb.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: max 13 Troy CBC 3 Jan.

N. Harrier: max 19 ALBA CBC 15 Dec; 18 COX flats 17 Feb.

Cooper's Hawk: max 10 Troy CBC 3 Jan.

N. Goshawk: Partridge Run WMA ALBA 14 Dec; Johnstown-Gloversville CBC 27 Dec; Five Rivers ALBA 1 Jan; 2 Troy CBC 3 Jan.

Red-shouldered Hawk: Schenectady CBC 20 Dec; Rensselaerville RENS 25 Dec; Johnstown-Gloversville CBC 27 Dec.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 16 Hudson Falls CBC 14 Dec; 2 ALBA CBC 15 DEC; 6

Chatham CBC 20 Dec; 15 Ft. Plain CBC 2 Jan; 9 southwest MONT 23 Feb.

Golden Eagle: Salem CBC 3 Jan; Sharon SCHO 5 Jan.

Am. Kestrel: Schenectady CBC 20 Dec; Troy CBC 3 Jan, 4 other reports.

Merlin: 2 S RENS CBC 27 Dec; Ft Plain CBC 2 Jan, numerous other reports.

Peregrine Falcon: Ft Plain CBC 2 Jan, several reports from expected locations.

Killdeer: Chatham CBC 20 DEC (BC); arr Tomhannock Res RENS 11 Feb (RY); Livingston COLU 12 Feb.

Iceland Gull: 4 Johnstown-Gloversville CBC 27 Dec; Cohoes ALBA 27 Dec; 2 S RENS CBC 27 Dec; max 7 COX boat launch 4 Jan.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: COX boat launch 22 Feb.

Glaucous Gull: Schenectady CBC 20 Dec; S RENS CBC 27 Dec; 2 Cohoes ALBA 27 Dec; 3 Troy CBC 3 Jan.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: 2 Ft. Edward WASH 6 Dec-31

Jan; Hudson Falls CBC 14 Dec; ALBA state Capitol 29-30 Dec; COX grasslands 5 Jan-22 Feb; Halfmoon SARA 24 Jan-15 Feb; Delmar ALBA 2 Feb.

Short-eared Owl: 10 Hudson Falls CBC 14 Dec; 4 FtE Jan thru; 3 Troy CBC 3 Jan; 9 COX grasslands 6 Jan; 2 Half Moon SARA 24 Jan; Kinderhook COLU 26 Jan; Delmar ALBA 2 Feb; 3 Minden MONT 12 Feb.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Ft. Plain CBC 2 Jan; 2 Berne ALBA 2 Feb; 2 Patridge Run WMA ALBA 2 Feb-thru; Greenfield Center 17 Feb.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: max 6 ALBA CBC 15 Dec.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

E. Phoebe: Claverack COLU Dec-2 Jan; Ft. Plain CBC 2 Jan; Ghent COLU 26 Feb.

N. Shrike: Rensselaerville RENS 14 Dec-thru; Ft. Plain CBC 2 Jan; Gansevoort SARA 8-30 Jan.

GRAY JAY: 2 Bolton Landing CBC 14 Dec.

Horned Lark: max 577 Ft. Plain CBC 2 Jan.

Carolina Wren: max 13 Troy CBC 3 Jan.

E. Bluebird: max 100+ Bolton Landing WARR 25 Feb, see intro.

Hermit Thrush: ALBA CBC 15 Dec; Chatham CBC 20 Dec; Johnstown-Gloversville CBC 27 Dec; 2 Ft Plain CBC 2 Jan.

Gray Catbird: 2 Chatham CBC 20 Dec; Saratoga CBC 20 Dec; Papscanee RENS 1 Jan; Ft. Plain CBC 2 Jan.

BROWN THRASHER: Knox ALBA 26 Dec; FtE 4 Feb, late.

WARBLERS

PALM WARBLER: ALBA CBC 15 Dec.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

Chipping Sparrow: last Five Rivers ALBA 5 Dec.

Savannah Sparrow: max 4 Chatham CBC 20 Dec; S RENS CBC 27 Dec.

Lincoln's Sparrow: Saratoga CBC 20 Dec.

Swamp Sparrow: Schenectady CBC 20 Dec; 2 S RENS CBC 27 Dec; Livingston COLU 31 Jan-15 Feb.

White-crowned Sparrow: 2 Papscanee RENS 27 Dec-thru; 3 Ft Plain CBC 2 Jan.

Lapland Longspur: Glen MONT 7 Dec; 2 Saratoga CBC 20 Dec; 4 Florida MONT 12 Feb; 3 Palatine MONT 22 Feb.

Snow Bunting: max 1027 ALBA CBC 15 Dec, high count.

Red-winged Blackbird: 3 CHA CBC 20 Dec; Schenectady CBC 20 Dec; 15 S RENS CBC 27 Dec; max 80 Livingston COLU 30 Dec.

E. Meadowlark: 2 ALBA CBC 15 Dec; max 6 COX grasslands 5 Jan.

Rusty Blackbird: Partridge Run WMA ALBA 14 Dec; Ft. Plain CBC 2 Jan; Claverack COLU 3 Feb.

Com. Grackle: max 70 Livingston COLU 3 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 63 Troy CBC 3 Jan.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE: Waterford SARA 7-9 Dec (*fide* BL, RG).

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE: Copake COLU 12-28 Jan (BCr), **1st for COLU and Region 8.**

Pine Grosbeak: 4 Saratoga SARA 4 Jan.

Purple Finch: max 18 Berne ALBA 15 Feb.

Red Crossbill: 9 Johnstown-Gloversville CBC 27 Dec; 4 Jenny L SARA 28 Dec.

White-winged Crossbill: 12 Bolton Landing CBC 14 Dec; S RENS CBC 27 Dec; 114 Johnstown-Gloversville CBC 27 Dec; max 126 Ft Plain CBC 2 Jan, numerous reports thru.

Com. Redpoll: 3 Johnstown-Gloversville CBC 27 Dec; 10 Burnt Hills ALBA 28 Jan; *rostrata* race banded Jenny L SARA 23 Feb.

Pine Siskin: 304 Bolton Landing CBC 14 Dec, max 360 Poestenkill RENS 4 Feb; abundant and widespread irruption thru.

Evening Grosbeak: Johnstown-Gloversville CBC 27 Dec..