

REGION 8—HUDSON-MOHAWK

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As winter 2012 drew to a close many residents looked back and wondered if it had ever arrived. At Albany International Airport, December ended 5.5° above average, with five days reaching 50° or higher. December precipitation was slightly higher than average, with 3.76" of rain and only a trace of snow. Most days in January felt like a "January thaw," the month ending 6° above average,

with 21 days with daytime high temperatures above freezing. January's precipitation included three snowstorms, dropping an inch or so each at Albany, but these storms transitioned to rain, leaving most of the Region's ground surfaces free of snow at month's end. February continued unusually warm, 6.2° above average, with only one day of the month showing a daytime high below freezing. A drying trend began in February that continued into early spring.

Area waterways seemed to be unusually turbid from last fall's flooding, and waterfowl were hard to find on the major rivers. Small unfrozen ponds and marshes, however, hosted several ducks that did not migrate south of the Region this winter. I cannot remember so many reports of Ring-necked Duck in midwinter, nor was it easy to parse out this year which Wood Ducks arrived early in late February from the scattered individuals that apparently never left. A **Greater White-fronted Goose** at Fort Miller, Washington County, was a nice surprise, as well as the Pied-billed Grebe found on the Albany CBC on 18 December.

With warm temperatures, vultures overwintered in the Region in large numbers. A rare find in midwinter in Region 8, Turkey Vultures could be found scattered throughout many towns. In January, Mona Bearor wrote that she enjoyed watching a single Turkey Vulture rock away to the west from the Hudson River feeder dam in South Glens Falls, Warren County. A small roost of Turkey Vultures remained permanently this winter in the former cement quarries of Hudson, Columbia County, along with a now year-round roost of Black Vultures. Black Vultures also seem to be creeping up the river and are regular now in Albany County. Another unusual mid-winter visitor was the **Great Egret** observed by Drew Hopkins in Greenport, Columbia County, in February.

Bill Lee, who often summarizes the sightings of select outings for the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club, reported that his group, when poking about the town of Easton, Washington County, spotted a Golden Eagle at close range perched just across the river. Although occasionally sighted in winter, Golden Eagles in Region 8 are often squinted at as they soar overhead at places like the Helderberg Escarpment or Taconic Hills. Bill's group found the Golden Eagle cooperatively perched low, and Gordie Ellmers snapped some first-rate photos of the bird.

For such an abnormally mild winter, there were comparatively few half hardies that appeared on regional CBCs. Chatham and Troy's CBCs found a Common Snipe, Catskill-Coxsackie CBC tallied a high count of 17 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Gray Catbirds appeared in December in Stuyvesant, Columbia County, and on the Troy CBC, and Catskill-Coxsackie's CBC rounded up an unusually high count of 14 Yellow-rumped Warblers. Finally, a **Baltimore Oriole** hung around Schenectady County until February. Many reporters groaned that feeder activity this winter was dismal, likely due to the wide open ground cover in fields and forests that kept birds dispersed.

The real Region 8 headliner of the season is the **Gray-crowned Rosy Finch** spotted by David Rankin on the Blackhead Mountain Trail in Greene County. David was enjoying a mild mid-winter hike when his companion asked, "What's this bird that just flew off the trail?" David was able to walk directly

under the bird as it perched in a dead Balsam Fir and he noted its unmistakable brownish pink hue, gray and black crown, and bright pink of the belly and wings. Found at 3800 feet near the peak of Black Dome Mountain, the bird remained still as David snapped several confirming photos of the bird.

Shai Mitra did some digging and found records of Gray-crowned Rosy Finch from the Midwest in the 80s (Michigan and Ohio), an Illinois sighting in 1990, an Ontario bird in January of 2005, and finally a streak of sightings in Michigan in the last decade. Accepted state and province records include one in Quebec and another in Gorham, Maine, from the 1930s. This Greene County bird may be a New York State first. There is a record of Gray-crowned Rosy Finch from near Rochester on 30 January 1923, published in Beardslee and Mitchell's "Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region." According to Mitra, the Rochester bird is a single-observer sight report, and it has spiraled down from so-called "hypothetical" status to complete omission from more recent publications of the book. If this Region 8 bird is not the first Gray-crowned Rosy Finch in the State, it is certainly the first likely to pass the verification standards put forth by the NYSARC.

Finally, a departing image of this very unusual winter is the large flocks of blackbirds that staged in the Region this season. A sensory experience usually reserved only for spring in our Region, this January one could wander down to the Hudson River at dusk and hear the deafening clicks and whistles and see the reeling of 10,000+ wings of Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and Brown-headed Cowbirds clustering their crowded black bodies, regrouping, and departing in long undulating flocks.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAT – T Catskill, GREE; CBC – Christmas Bird Count; COX – T Coxsackie, GREE; FtE – T Fort Edwards, WASH; TR – Tomhannock Res, RENS; VF – Vischer's Ferry, SARA.

WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES
GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE: Ft
Miller WASH 9 Feb.

Snow Goose: max 1500 Ft Miller WASH 6 Jan.
Brant: Stockport COLU 20 Feb.

Wood Duck: 6 CAT-COX CBC 14 Dec; SCHE CBC 17 Dec; SARA CBC 18 Dec; 2 Troy CBC 31 Dec; arr Livingston COLU 10 Feb.

Gadwall: 2 Troy CBC 31 Dec.

Am. Wigeon: max 8 Copake COLU 8 Jan.

N. Pintail: SARA CBC 18 Dec ; 2 Troy CBC 31 Dec.

Ring-necked Duck: 127 ALBA CBC 18 Dec; 221 SARA CBC 18 Dec; Ghent COLU Jan thru, unusual in winter.

Greater Scaup: Troy CBC 31 Dec.

Lesser Scaup: max 16 SARA CBC 18 Dec.

Surf Scoter: 2 L George WARR 5 Dec.

White-winged Scoter: 2 VF 2 Dec; SCHE CBC 17 Dec.

Long-tailed Duck: TR 1 Dec; Stillwater SARA 13 Jan.

Com. Goldeneye: max 70 FtE 12 Feb.

Barrow's Goldeneye: Ft. Miller WASH 31 Dec-31 Jan.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 3 TR 29 Dec; Troy CBC 31 Dec.

Rudy Duck: 11 CAT-COX CBC 14 Dec; 66 ALBA CBC 18 Dec.

Red-throated Loon: TR 1 Dec.

Com. Loon: max 8 TR 1 Dec.

Pied-billed Grebe: ALBA CBC 18 Dec.

Horned Grebe: TR 1 Dec.

Red-necked Grebe: TR 1 Dec.

GREAT EGRET: Greenport COLU 11 Feb (DH), unusual in winter.

Turkey Vulture: SCHE CBC 17 Dec; Valatie COLU 27 Jan; max 20 Hudson COLU 8 Feb.

Black Vulture: 5 Hudson Dec thru; 4 Albany CBC 18 Dec; 6 Glenmont ALBA 3 Feb.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

N. Goshawk: FtE 14 Dec; Ghent COLU 17 Dec.

Red-shouldered Hawk: Catskill GREE 12 Dec; ALBA CBC 18 Dec; Palenville GREE 29 Feb.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 2 FtE 12 Dec, scarce this winter.

Golden Eagle: Ft Miller WASH 26 Jan; Thatcher Park ALBA 12 Feb.

Am. Coot: max 45 Copake L COLU 14 Dec.

SANDHILL CRANE: Ft Plain CBC 30 Dec, unusual winter species.

Com. Snipe: Chatham CBC 17 Dec; Troy CBC 31 Dec.

Am. Woodcock: arr Greenport COLU 24 Feb, early, window kill now in Columbia-Greene Community College bird skin collection (BC).

Killdeer: arr Stockport COLU 24 Feb, early.

Iceland Gull: Cohoes ALBA 27-31 Dec.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

MONK PARAKEET: ALBA CBC 18 Dec.

Snowy Owl: Rotterdam ALBA 17 Dec;

Schenectady SCHE 27 Dec, injured.

Long-eared Owl: 2 Rensselaerville ALBA 8 Dec hr.

Short-eared Owl: max 8 FtE 1 Jan.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Scotia ALBA 10 Dec; CAT-COX CBC 14 Dec; 2 Ft Plain CBC 30 Dec; Berne ALBA 31 Jan.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: 17 CAT-COX CBC 14 Dec, high CBC count.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: Rensselaerville ALBA 3 Dec thru;

New Baltimore GREE 9 Dec; FtE 11 Dec thru; Chatham COLU 19 -20 Feb; Malta SARA 23 Feb.

Horned Lark: max 450 Clermont COLU 15 Jan.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: 2 Chatham CBC 17 Dec.

Hermit Thrush: last Vosburgh Marsh GREE 17 Jan.

Gray Catbird: Stuyvesant COLU 14 Dec; Troy CBC 31 Dec.

Am. Pipit: max 50 Papscafee RENS 9 Dec.

BOHEMIAN WAXWING: 16 Warrensburg WARR 19 Feb, among cedar waxwings.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: Knox ALBA 18 Feb.

Snow Bunting: max 120 Livingston COLU.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 14 CAT-COX CBC 14 Dec, high CBC count; 4 Albany CBC 18 Dec.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

Chipping Sparrow: CAT-COX CBC 14 Dec.

Field Sparrow: 2 Taghkanic COLU 4 Dec.

Fox Sparrow: max 5 CAT-COX CBC 14 Dec.

White-crowned Sparrow: Malta SARA 25 Dec, other scattered reports from feeders.

E. Meadowlark: arr Rensselaerville ALBA 19 Feb, early.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD:

Taghkanic COLU 8 Dec (HS).

Red-winged Blackbird: 40,000+ Chatham CBC 17 Dec; 10,000+ Livingston COLU 29 Jan, unusually large midwinter flocks.

Rusty Blackbird: 2 Delmar ALBA 1 Feb.

Com. Grackle: 30,000+ Chatham CBC 17 Dec; 700 Poestenkill RENS 5 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 650 Livingston COLU 4 Jan, large midwinter flock.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE: Schenectady SCHE 9 Jan; Niskayuna SCHE 16 Jan-29 Feb.

Pine Grosbeak: Ft Plain CBC 30 Dec.

GRAY-CROWNED ROSY-FINCH: Black Dome Mt GREE, 23 Dec, possible 1st NYS record, *intro*.

Red Crossbill: Chatham COLU 22 Jan; max 8
Burnt-Rossman SF SCHO 5 Feb.

White-winged Crossbill: 2 Five Rivers ALBA 4
Dec; 60 Bolton Landing CBC 17 Dec; 5 N River
WARR 20 Feb.

Com. Redpoll: 6 Bolton Landing CBC 17 Dec.

Pine Siskin: 4 CAT-COX CBC 14 Dec; max 40
Partridge Run ALBA 7 Jan; 21 Burnt-Rossman
SF SCHO 5 Feb; 150 N River WARR 20 Feb; 16
Stony Creek WARR 26 Feb.