

WINTER WATERFOWL COUNT, JANUARY 2013

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About 300 volunteers collected data for the New York State Ornithological Association's 2013 January Waterfowl Count. Ten Regional coordinators and numerous local coordinators recruited and organized the volunteers. Coverage of the state appears to have been very good, with all ten Regions reporting and volunteers logging 944.75 hours in the field, 19-27 January. Swift (2007) described the methodology of the count.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

I checked weather conditions at Buffalo, Ithaca, Ogdensburg, Kingston, and Islip. Throughout New York State, temperatures were above normal through the first three weeks of December. The next two weeks they were normal. They rose above normal in mid-January, returning to normal just before the count dates. The first weekend of the count, temperatures began above normal and above freezing, but became normal and below freezing by Sunday afternoon, 20 January. Temperatures remained below freezing for the rest of the count period. By Tuesday, they were below normal and stayed well below normal until Saturday afternoon, 26 January. Snow fell fairly often during the count period, but in very small amounts. Maximum accumulation was 1 inch. Except in the northern part of the state, most water bodies would have been open at the start of the count period. Widespread freezing of at least smaller bodies of water would have occurred during the count week after the first weekend.

RESULTS

Although the counts of 2009-2012 have yet to be compiled, the 264,756 birds counted in the January 2013 count were well below the overall 1973-2008 average of 295,163 and the average of 385,328 of the ten most recently compiled years, 1999-2008. Grouping into geese, swans, diving ducks, dabbling ducks, and other waterfowl provides a better idea of what is going on. The counts of geese, diving ducks, and dabbling ducks were all below both the 1973-2008 overall average and the 1999-2008 ten-year average. The swan count (2,923) was above both the overall average and the recent ten-year average. The

count of other waterfowl (3,525) collectively was higher than the overall average, but lower than the recent 10-year average.

Observers found 42 species of waterfowl. Counts for exactly half those species were below both the overall and the recent ten-year averages. The counts for eight species were less than the recent ten-year average, but greater than the overall average. Only one species, the very scarce in winter Blue-winged Teal had a count (2) that was less than the overall average, but greater than the recent ten-year average. Eleven species had counts greater than both averages. The scarce Red-necked Grebe's count of four was the only count that tied the overall average. It was less than the ten-year average of five. The count of unidentified scaup is large enough to warrant combining it with the counts of the two species of scaup to see how the whole scaup count fared. The Greater Scaup count (6,196) was much smaller than either average. The Lesser Scaup count was a little greater than either average. The total scaup count was much lower than either average.

LONG-TERM TRENDS

Bryan Swift (2008) identified some long-term trends. He noted that Tundra Swans had become an increasingly common wintering species in New York State since 1995, even though the eastern population was staying about the same. At that time, the maximum number tallied on a January Waterfowl Count of Tundra Swans was 1,773 in 2006. The 2013 count was 2,140, so this trend appears to have continued.

Swift also noted that the 2008 count of 25,718 Canvasbacks was a record high for the state. He pointed out, however, that the trend in Region 10 was downward. He believed this indicated that aquatic vegetation in Long Island coastal waters was disappearing. The 1973-2008 average in Region 10 was 3,803. The regional count hit a low in 2007 of 409, rebounding slightly in 2008 to 498. In 2013, Region 10 observers found 600, still well below the overall average. Statewide, observers found only 3,771 Canvasbacks in the 2013 count. That was the lowest count since resumption of the count in 1973.

Swift observed that scaup numbers, though fluctuating from year to year, were showing a long-term decline. He also noticed that the population was shifting from Long Island to the Great Lakes. He attributed this shift to the availability of the invasive zebra mussel as a food source for scaup in the Great Lakes. This shift was not so evident in 2013 with numbers far below the peak achieved in 2006-2008 in the Great Lakes regions. On the other hand, the 2013 count on Long Island of 6,898 was not so different from many of the counts conducted on Long Island between 2000 and 2008.

Swift identified the rising numbers of Hooded Mergansers on the count, particularly after 1985. By 1997, the statewide count was exceeding 1,000 birds every year through 2005. In 2006 and 2007, the counts were more than 2,000 in

Table 1. Regional totals for the 2013 January Waterfowl Count.

Species	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Goose, White-fronted	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Snow/Ross'	0	0	800	0	1	1	0	1	4	12	818
Canada/Cackling	5,065	4,376	17,545	2318	3548	6,131	190	4,225	22,454	18,823	84,675
Brant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	128	2,241	2,369
Swan, Mute	6	242	4	2	7	13	0	13	80	396	763
Trumpeter	0	2	14	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	20
Tundra	553	9	1,236	69	273	0	0	0	0	0	2,140
Wood Duck	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	8
Gadwall	44	2	348	3	5	205	32	0	12	825	1,476
Wigeon, Eurasian	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	9	14
American	8	0	17	1	0	2	0	0	6	381	415
Am. Black Duck	204	409	2,625	367	109	848	359	98	428	3,104	8,551
Mallard	3,576	6,319	12,619	1,544	2148	1,654	1,789	1,692	4,277	3,456	39,074
Mallard X Black	3	0	5	1	2	2	1	0	2	6	22
Blue-winged Teal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Northern Shoveler	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	108	115
Northern Pintail	0	0	13	2	1	9	1	0	11	86	123
Green-winged Teal	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	13	48	65
Canvasback	3,116	2	36	0	0	2	0	0	15	600	3,771
Redhead	677	7,083	11,148	41	28	3	0	0	2	6	18,988
Ring-necked Duck	228	483	1,618	221	220	47	176	5	208	812	4,018
Tufted Duck	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scaup, Greater	2,915	286	45	49	248	1	0	923	1,729	6,196	
Lesser	206	82	302	5	25	4	1,155	3	7	1,062	2,851
not to species	13	125	38	0	30	0	0	0	0	4,107	4,313

Species	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Eider, King	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	203	203
Harlequin Duck	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Scoter, Surf	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	67	409	485
White-winged	3,936	665	2	15	55	0	0	0	152	9,127	13,952
Black	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	7	1,491	1,501
not to species	75	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	283	360
Long-tailed Duck	3,965	1,873	1	44	3,157	20	0	0	382	1,011	10,453
Bufflehead	1,954	77	247	1	62	428	226	0	321	2,614	5,930
Goldeneye, Common	3,875	1,180	648	103	442	2,833	8,442	225	168	268	18,184
Barrow's	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	6
Merganser, Hooded	227	64	195	115	120	39	44	26	252	488	1,570
Common	1,276	527	488	1,031	1210	805	627	620	2,028	11	8,623
Red-breasted	3,704	4,857	15	100	1,273	0	0	0	67	1,291	11,307
Ruddy Duck	9	4	5	2	2	0	0	0	72	2,880	2,974
Loon, Red-throated	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	72	98
Common	5	9	8	5	6	2	1	0	24	118	178
Grebe, Pied-billed	9	0	24	3	0	0	1	0	15	24	76
Horned	6	86	6	0	1	1	22	0	5	78	204
Red-necked	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	4
Eared	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Comorant, D.-crested	105	13	2	23	0	0	0	0	249	16	408
Great	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	9	12	22
American Coot	412	159	1,197	61	211	0	0	0	165	330	2,535
Other/Unidentified	3,000	0	14	8	125	0	0	1	715	1,030	4,893
TOTAL OF ABOVE	39,178	28,951	51,265	5,824	8462	18,197	13,093	6,909	33,304	59,573	264,756

each year. The 2013 count of Hooded Mergansers was 1,570, perhaps indicating a leveling off of New York State’s wintering population of Hooded Mergansers.

In addition to Tundra Swans, other species that seem to have done well in 2013 were White-winged Scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Common Goldeneye, and Red-breasted Merganser. All five species’ 2013 counts easily exceeded their overall and recent ten-year averages.

FUTURE COUNTS

The success of the January Waterfowl Count to monitor winter populations of waterfowl in New York State relies on the work of volunteers. Continued success relies on the availability of new volunteers. Please consider helping with future counts by contacting your regional compiler. The compiler contact information is listed at <http://nybirds.org/ProjWaterfowl.htm> where you can also access the historical data.

For planning purposes, the January Waterfowl Count is conducted in a period that begins the Saturday before Dr. Martin Luther King Day (always the third Monday in January). The next two count periods will be:

2014 – January 18-26 (target date Sunday, January 19)

2015 – January 17-25 (target date Sunday, January 18)

Table 2. Comparison of 2013 January Waterfowl Counts to ten-year and long-term averages.

Species	2013	Avg '99-'08	% Diff.	Avg '73-'08	% Diff.
Goose, White-fronted	2	5	-59%	1	44%
Blue		0		0	
Snow	818	13,130	-94%	3,801	-78%
Ross's		0	-100%	0	
Canada	84,675	150,927	-44%	88,419	-4%
Brant	2,369	15,975	-85%	15,151	-84%
Swan, Mute	763	1,744	-56%	1,333	-43%
Trumpeter	20	8	153%	2	811%
Tundra	2,140	746	187%	230	831%
Wood Duck	8	44	-82%	38	-79%
Gadwall	1,476	1,585	-7%	1,053	40%
Wigeon, Eurasian	14	4	278%	3	409%
American	415	1,449	-71%	1,588	-74%
Am. Black Duck	8,551	13,971	-39%	18,243	-53%
Mallard	39,074	42,604	-8%	34,311	14%
Mallard X Black	22	94	-77%	63	-65%
Blue-winged Teal	2	1	122%	3	-37%

Species	2013	Avg '99-'08	% Diff.	Avg '73-'08	% Diff.
Northern Shoveler	115	488	-76%	287	-60%
Northern Pintail	123	167	-26%	202	-39%
Green-winged Teal	65	339	-81%	273	-76%
Canvasback	3,771	14,060	-73%	11,542	-67%
Redhead	18,988	13,144	44%	8,745	117%
Ring-necked Duck	4,018	1,168	244%	584	588%
Tufted Duck	0	1	-100%	1	-100%
Scaup, Greater	6,196	32,166	-81%	27,554	-78%
Lesser	2,851	2,749	4%	1,347	112%
not to species	4,313	1,271	239%	17,857	-76%
Eider, King	0	3	-100%	6	-100%
Common	203	980	-79%	1,087	-81%
Harlequin Duck	1	6	-83%	6	-82%
Scoter, Surf	485	6,047	-92%	3,107	-84%
White-winged	13,952	6,330	120%	7,274	92%
Black	1,501	3,370	-55%	1,341	12%
not to species	360	2,864	-87%	2,332	-85%
Long-tailed Duck	10,453	7,406	41%	4,903	113%
Bufflehead	5,930	8,049	-26%	6,464	-8%
Goldeneye, Common	18,184	14,892	22%	12,824	42%
Barrow's	6	3	76%	2	181%
Merganser, Hooded	1,570	1,710	-8%	831	89%
Common	8,623	9,281	-7%	10,969	-21%
Red-breasted	11,307	5,834	94%	4,669	142%
not to species		0		0	
Ruddy Duck	2,974	4,578	-35%	2,353	26%
Loon, Red-throated	98	247	-60%	91	8%
Common	178	299	-41%	195	-9%
Yellow-billed		0	-100%	0	-100%
not to species		0		0	-100%
Grebe, Pied-billed	76	105	-27%	82	-7%
Horned	204	398	-49%	368	-45%
Red-necked	4	5	-26%	4	-2%
Eared	0	1	-100%	0	
Cormorant, D.-crested	408	251	62%	150	171%
Great	22	159	-86%	167	-87%
not to species	0	0		1	-100%
American Coot	2,535	2,741	-7%	2,066	23%
unidentified	4,893	1,930	154%	1,241	294%
Total	264,756	385,328	-31%	295,163	-10%

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks go to everyone who participated in the 2013 January Waterfowl Count. The field observers endured some very cold temperatures during the count period. Regional and local compilers and coordinators deserve special thanks for making sure that the State had good coverage and for compiling the data in a timely manner.

Table 1. Regional Compilers for NYSOA's 2013 January Waterfowl Count.

Region	Compiler	Region	Compiler
1	Jim Landau	6	Jerry LeTendre
2	Cricket Fegan	7	Gary Lee
3	Thomas Bell	8	Bryan Swift
4	Gail Kirch	9	Tracey Shimer
5	Bill Purcell	10	Ronald Borque

LITERATURE CITED

Swift, B. L. 2007. January waterfowl counts, 2005-2007, and some observations on long-term trends. *The Kingbird* 57:198-213.

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