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REGION 8—HUDSON-MOHAWK

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Winter 2014-15 was among the coldest winters in the past century. December ended mild overall, 2° above average, and wet, 2.44" more than average. After New Year's Day, temperatures took a nosedive and stayed well below average until late March, as a stubborn and persistent high-pressure ridge over the West Coast funneled cold polar air from northern Canada into the Northeastern states. The pattern remained largely unchanged for months. January ended 3° below

average, but the real deep freeze occurred in February with a record 13.2° below average, tallying in as the second coldest February and fourth coldest month ever recorded at Albany. Only one day rose above freezing in February, and the season tallied 19 days with temperatures below zero. Ice-breaking boats worked round the clock to keep the Hudson River open for commercial traffic, and in some locations up to four feet of frost permeated the ground. Snow was also above average, with roughly 78" totaling at Albany for the season. Snow cover remained intact for the months of January and February and well into mid-March.

A Cackling Goose spotted in Delmar, Albany County, is the only waterfowl of note this season, and most other waterfowl observations came from December. After the deep freeze, ducks and other water birds moved out of the area by necessity, and those that might have lingered were not detected as apparently few birders had the energy to scan the margins of frozen water in sub-zero wind chills. In this context, the appearance of an Osprey in Whitehall, Washington County, rare during any winter month in Region 8—let alone a year with such extensive ice cover—is nothing short of miraculous.

After last winter's Snowy Owl irruption, this year produced only two individual sightings, one of which was found with a wing injury in Albany. Short-eared Owls were scarce. The second report of Boreal Owl in Saratoga County (the last one occurred there in the 1970s), and perhaps one of only a few in Region 8, occurred in February. The owl was photographed sitting on a backyard feeder in Gansevoort, Saratoga County.

Appearances of half-hardy species were respectable for the season, including a Wood Thrush that appeared near Five Rivers, Albany. Multiple observers gave convincing descriptions that rule out Hermit Thrush as the bird lingered briefly near the buildings before dashing into the woods. A Varied Thrush was discovered and photographed at a private feeder in Halfmoon, Saratoga County. Gray Catbird, Hermit Thrush, Eastern Towhee, and a Baltimore Oriole were found in the first half of winter, as well as seasonally temperamental sparrows such as Savannah, White-crowned, and Fox. Birders scanning exposed fields with large flock of Horned Lark and Snow Buntings successfully picked out several Lapland Longspurs.

With such cold, feeders were understandably important oases for birding—nearly all of this winter's interesting birds came from backyards and feeders. Finches were moderately common, with small but regular reports of Common Redpoll and Pine Siskin. There were no reports of crossbills. Saratoga County remains a yearly stronghold for feeder observations of Evening Grosbeak.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

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

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: max 1000 Saratoga L SARA 4 Dec.
Brant: 17 S RENS CBC 27 Dec.
CACKLING GOOSE (R8): Delmar 1 Dec.
Gadwall: Ghent 15 Jan.
N. Shoveler: Glens Falls WARR 14 Dec; Copake L COLU 21 Dec.
N. Pintail: max 3 Ft Miller WASH 13 Dec.
Canvasback: max 2 Saratoga L SARA 4 Dec.
Redhead: max 11 Saratoga L SARA 3 Dec.
Ring-necked Duck: Livingston COLU 11 Jan, unusual in Jan.
Lesser Scaup: max 100 Saratoga L SARA 4 Jan.
Greater Scaup: max 20 Saratoga L SARA 4 Jan.
Surf Scoter: Hudson Falls WASH 13 Dec.
White-winged Scoter: Cohoes ALBA 12 Jan; max 4 Stillwater SARA 22 Feb.
Com. Goldeneye: max 200 Stillwater SARA 5 Feb.
Barrow's Goldeneye: Cohoes ALBA 28 Feb-3 Mar.
Red-breasted Merganser: Schuylerville RENS 28 Feb; Green I SARA 28 Feb.
Ruddy Duck: last Copake L COLU 19 Dec.
Com. Loon: S Glens Falls WARR 14 Dec.
Red-necked Grebe: max 7 Saratoga L SARA 3 Dec.
Turkey Vulture: arr Germantown COLU 20 Feb.
Black Vulture: max 6 New Scotland ALBA 31 Jan.

HAWKS - LARIDS

OSPREY (R8): Whitehall WASH 14 Feb, unusual date.
Red-shouldered Hawk: Albany 10 Jan; Stuyvesant COLU 7 Feb; Athens GREE 17 Feb.
Rough-legged Hawk: max 4 FtE 22 Jan; Claverack COLU 16 Feb; 3 Kingsbury WASH 23 Feb.
Golden Eagle: L Taghkanic SP 23 Dec; Austerlitz COLU 5 Feb.
Am. Coot: last Copake L COLU 13 Dec.
Wilson's Snipe: 2 Ephratah FULT 13 Jan.
Iceland Gull: max 5 Cohoes ALBA 10 Jan.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: Cohoes ALBA 18 Jan; Crescent ALBA 13 Feb; Colonie landfill ALBA 19 Feb.
Glaucous Gull: 2 Cohoes ALBA 10 Jan; Crescent Power Plant ALBA 10-13 Jan.

PIGEONS - PARROTS

Snowy Owl: FtE Jan 7; Albany 4 Feb, injured.
Short-eared Owl: Ft. Plain SCHO 6 Jan.
BOREAL OWL: Gansevoort SARA 7 Feb.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: Ghent COLU 7 Jan; Schuylerville RENS 18 Feb.
Horned Lark: max 600 Schodack RENS 1 Feb.
Winter Wren: Troy CBC 3 Jan; last Cohoes ALBA 22 Jan.
Hermit Thrush: last Selkirk ALBA 23 Jan.
WOOD THRUSH (R8): Five Rivers ALBA 1 Jan.
VARIED THRUSH: Halfmoon SARA 14 Feb.
Gray Catbird: Kinderhook COLU 20 Dec; Troy CBC 3 Jan.

Am. Pipit: Saratoga Springs CBC 14 Dec;
Germantown COLU 18 Jan.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: 4 Ravena ALBA 14 Dec;
5 Stuyvesant COLU 2-14 Feb; FtE 5 Feb;
Charlton SARA 7 Feb

Snow Bunting: max 300 Northumberland
SARA 11 Feb.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

E. Towhee: Athens GREE 13 Feb.

Chipping Sparrow: Albany 23 Feb,
overwintering?.

LARK SPARROW: FtE 14-25 Dec.

Savannah Sparrow: max 6 Schodack RENS
31 Jan.

Fox Sparrow: E Greenwich WASH 18 Jan.

White-crowned Sparrow: Chatham CBC 20
Dec; Troy CBC 3 Jan; 5 Delmar ALBA 11 Jan;
Ghent COLU 19 Jan.

Rusty Blackbird: Sutyvesant COLU 20 Dec.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE (R8): Athens GREE
11 Dec.

Purple Finch: Austerlitz 10 Dec.

Com. Redpoll: arr Ghent COLU 8 Dec; max
24 Burnt Hills ALBA 14 Feb, moderately
uncommon.

Pine Siskin: Providence SARA 12 Dec;
Queensbury WARR 12 Dec; numerous reports
of small numbers thru.

Evening Grosbeak: 5 Stoney Creek SARA 29
Jan.