WINTER WATERFOWL COUNT, JANUARY 2018

Bill Ostrander
80 Westmont Avenue, Elmira, New York 14905
browncreeper9@gmail.com

At least 345 volunteers went into the field 11-26 January 2018 and conducted the New York State Ornithological Association's January Waterfowl Count. The volunteers logged 924 party-hours and counted 310,605 waterfowl. Swift (2007) described the methodology of the count.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

An examination of weather records from Buffalo, Ithaca, Plattsburgh, Poughkeepsie, and Islip showed that New York State experienced a prolonged spell of sub-freezing temperatures during the last week of December 2017 and the first week of January 2018 leading to the freezing of still water, slow-moving water and shallow moving water. Two or three days of warmer weather reaching into the 50s F immediately preceded the beginning of the official count period, 13-21 January. Snow and cold returned on 13 January, so the extent of frozen water continued to be the same through the count period. Other than the first day of the count, snow was not much of a factor in terms of limiting volunteer participation.

RESULTS

In this summary, I will compare the 2018 numbers with the average numbers from the decade, 2001-2010. The total number of waterfowl counted this year, 310,605, was more than 73,000 fewer than the average for the 2001-2010 decade. The difference was spread across all the major groupings of waterfowl—geese, swans, dabbling ducks, non-anseriformes waterfowl—except diving ducks which were counted in higher numbers in 2018. The pre-count freeze seems to have most affected the shallow water feeders, the geese, swans, dabbling ducks, and coots. Sometimes snow cover affects the geese, swans, and dabbling ducks which also forage in corn fields, but there was little snow cover in most of the state prior to and during the count.

eBird (2018) data show that both Snow and Canada Goose numbers dropped precipitously during December. There was an uptick in eBird's Canada Goose numbers the week of the count, but this may have been the effect of January Waterfowl Count volunteers submitting counts to eBird. Mute, Trumpeter, and Tundra Swan numbers were all less in 2018 than in the average 2001-2010 counts. The difference of more than 600 Mute Swans accounts for most of the swan decline.

Table 1. Regional totals for the 2018 January Waterfowl Count.

Species/Region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Goose, Gr. White-fr.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Snow	0	0	1,150	0	0	0	0	0	1	1,072	2,223
Ross's	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Canada	2,976	2,563	25,652	2,086	2,675	116	68	1,504	14,398	42,644	94,682
Cackling	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	9
Brant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,212	17,567	18,779
Swan, Mute	8	259	54	6	34	48	0	0	155	497	1,061
Trumpeter	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	7
Tundra	332	0	312	0	1	4	0	0	0	6	655
not to species	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wood Duck	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	57	61
Gadwall	12	6	50	4	2	0	2	0	241	1,118	1,435
Wigeon, Eurasian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
American	2	0	25	2	0	0	0	0	82	719	830
Am. Black Duck	83	100	598	199	90	23	130	74	772	5,941	8,010
Mallard	1,321	1,811	5,596	1,513	2,106	72	1,343	841	4,033	7,427	26,063
Mallard X Black	1	1	2	4	2	0	4	0	0	45	59
Blue-winged Teal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Northern Shoveler	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	339	339
Northern Pintail	4	2	7	1	1	0	0	2	8	96	121
Green-winged Teal	0	5	0	1	0	2	0	0	5	102	115
Canvasback	5,181	1	632	0	3	0	0	0	65	57	5,939
Redhead	598	34	30,928	45	1,157	4	0	1	11	25	32,803
Ring-necked Duck	20	0	3,732	3	12	0	6	0	36	154	3,963
Tufted Duck	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scaup, Greater	9,311	877	547	0	114	0	0	0	2,846	18,174	31,869

Species/Region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Lesser	916	30	1,545	0	16	0	1	0	139	860	3,507
not to species	6,120	50	498	0	30	50	2	0	0	8,393	15,143
Eider, King	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Common	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,206	4,206
Harlequin Duck	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	9
Scoter, Surf	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	868	871
White-winged	348	120	90	1	24	2	0	0	7	1,683	2,275
Black	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1,254	1,255
not to species	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,028	1,029
Long-tailed Duck	863	2,393	41	9	233	261	0	0	211	6,178	10,189
Bufflehead	1,956	16	243	3	40	29	81	0	637	4,581	7,586
Goldeneye, Co.	2,918	1,049	2,041	18	659	946	2,121	212	174	973	11,111
Barrow's	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	6	10
Merganser, Hooded	41	1	106	77	68	7	28	33	163	1,101	1,625
Common	396	1,269	2,005	199	1,663	552	165	38	668	175	7,130
Red-breasted	1,543	2,270	504	0	620	8	1	0	124	1,414	6,484
Ruddy Duck	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	18	894	922
Loon, Red-throated	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	10	30	44
Common	2	1	5	0	0	1	4	0	19	249	281
Grebe, Pied-billed	0	1	11	0	3	0	0	0	2	4	21
Horned	1	3	36	0	15	0	25	0	16	140	236
Red-necked	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	6	7
Eared	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cormorant, D.-cr.	2	6	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	63	76
Great	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	28	67	96
American Coot	4	6	625	1	1	0	0	0	4	212	853
Other/Unidentified	5,522	6	15	0	0	112	0	0	21	933	6,609
TOTALS	**40,485**	**12,885**	**77,064**	**4,173**	**9,584**	**2,239**	**3,982**	**2,705**	**26,110**	**131,378**	**310,605**

All dabbling duck species, except Wood Duck, contributed to the 2018 dabbler count being lower than the 2001-2010 average. All regularly occurring non-anseriformes species contributed to the lower 2018 count for that grouping. These include Red-throated and Common Loons, Pied-billed, Horned, and Red-necked Grebes, and Double-crested and Great Cormorants.

Volunteers found slightly more diving ducks in 2018 than the average for the 2001-2010 decade. Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, scaup, and Long-tailed Duck accounted for this increase. All other diving duck species numbers were lower in 2018 than the 2001-2010 average.

LONG-TERM TRENDS

Tundra Swan had a sharp decrease in numbers since the 2017 count, from 1443 to 655. This was the lowest count for this species since 2005. The drop may be part of a new downward trend for this species or simply the result of a cold period preceding the count.

The Canvasback count was only about half of the 2017 count, but still higher than the 2016 count. The count of 5939 was a little more than one-third of the 2001-2010 average.

By comparing the averages for the periods 1973-2000, 2001-2010, and 2013-2018, possible long-term trends in New York State's winter waterfowl populations can be identified. Long-term increases can be surmised in this way for Snow Goose, Brant, Trumpeter Swan, Tundra Swan, Gadwall, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, and Red-breasted Merganser. Long-term decreases can likewise be surmised for American Wigeon, American Black Duck, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, scaup, Common Merganser, and Great Cormorant.

FUTURE COUNTS

You can help with the 2019 count by contacting your Regional compiler. Compiler contact information (and also the historical data) is available online at:

http://nybirds.org/ProjWaterfowl.htm

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

2019 – January 19-27 (target date Sunday, January 20)
2020 – January 18-26 (target date Sunday, January 19)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to everyone who participated in the 2018 January Waterfowl Count. The many dedicated field observers volunteered many hours in the field. 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. The Regional compilers, this year, were:

Region	Compiler	Region	Compiler
1	Jim Landau	**6**	Jeff Bolsinger
2	Robert Spahn	**7**	Gary Lee
3	Thomas Bell	**8**	Bryan Swift
4	Gail Kirch	**9**	Bill Ostrander
5	Bill Purcell	**10**	Ronald Borque

LITERATURE CITED

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