

REGION 4—SUSQUEHANNA

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The mean temperature was slightly above normal for the 2017-18 winter season, while precipitation was average and snowfall was below normal. Data from the Binghamton National Weather Service station was used as a proxy for Region 4. However, there can be wide variation in snowfall totals throughout the Region, with higher elevations receiving more along with easterly locations during nor'easter storms. February in particular was unseasonably warm, with a high temperature of 69°F on the 21st and the fourth highest monthly average temperature on record. For the winter period, the mean temperature was 25.3°, 0.6° above normal. Total precipitation was 7.61", 0.02" above normal. Snowfall was 46.3", 10.8" below normal. Snowfall from the beginning of the season (1 July) to the end of February was 48.1", -15.8" below normal. Average snow depth was 2", 2" below normal. There were no large snow storms during the

winter period, with maximum 24 hour totals of 5.5" on 13 Jan and 7 Feb. Maximum snow depth was 10" for 9-10 Feb.

December started relatively warm and snow free, with the first trace of snow on 8 December. The middle of the month turned colder, with snow nearly every day from 10-18 December. Most ponds and lakes were frozen over by the middle of December. The end of the month was unseasonably cold with small amounts of snow 22-31 December, but with a maximum snow depth of only 4" on 31 December. It was the fifth driest December on record, with 1.41" of precipitation, 1.42" below normal. The mean temperature was 23.8°, 3.5° below normal. January started out very cold with winter lows of -7° on 1 and 7 January. There was at least a trace of snow most days from 1 to 9 January. A January thaw occurred on the 11-12th, with a high temperature of 60°. The warm-up was followed immediately by the first moderate storm of the season, with rain, freezing rain and then 5.5" of snow. This resulted in a Region-wide abundance of birds coming to feeders. Temperatures turned mainly warmer in the second half of the month, eroding much of the snow cover. January's mean temperature was 21.3°, 0.9° below normal. Snowfall was 14.9", 7.3" below normal. Early February saw average temperatures with snow most days, building to a maximum depth of 10" on 10 February. Temperatures were significantly above normal through the end of the month, with 20-21 February above 60° and four other days above 50°. The mean temperature for the month was 30.9°, 6.2° above normal. The month ended snow free. The first large flocks of early migrants arrived on 15-16 February.

One of the predictions for the 2017-18 winter was for a sizable irruption of Snowy Owls. While this was borne out by many reports across the State, Region 4 seemed to be an exception. There was only one documented report in the Laurens area of Otsego County on 9-10 December. There were rumors of other Snowy Owls in Region 4, but details such as date/time or photographs were not available. Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence for many of the sparsely birded areas of Region 4.

Another big story for this winter was the abundant food crop, particularly conifer cones. Some have described it, in general, as the best in decades across NYS. In my own observations, cones seemed particularly abundant on various spruce species, white pine, larch/tamarack, and Eastern hemlock. For deciduous trees, yellow and black birch and some ash and maple species had an excellent seed crop. The overall abundant natural food supply was probably connected with the observation of many winter bird feeders with bird numbers way down. This seems to have merit from observations that when a winter storm hit on 13 January with freezing rain and then 5+ inches of snow, suddenly large numbers of birds arrived at feeders across the Region. In particular, there was a Region-wide explosion of Pine Siskin reports on that date.

Some highlights from 2017 Christmas Bird Counts for circles predominately in Region 4 are:

Binghamton CBC 16 December. 58 species reported (58 avg). Unusual – Chipping Sparrow, Gray Catbird, and Tundra Swan. High counts for Bald Eagle (23), Common Grackle (7), Dark-eyed Junco (600), Fox Sparrow (6), and Hooded Merganser (194).

Oneonta CBC 16 December. 49 species reported (44 avg). Notable – Northern Goshawk, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Rusty Blackbird. High counts – Sharp-shinned Hawk (5) and Red-bellied Woodpecker (12).

Owego CBC 30 December. 50 species reported (49 avg). Unusual – Red-breasted Merganser and Red-shouldered Hawk.

Sherburne CBC 16 December. 49 species reported (50 avg). Unusual – Gray Catbird.

Upper Delaware CBC 31 December. New CBC coordinated by Pamela J. Peters. 48 species reported. Notable – American Wigeon, Bufflehead, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

The abundance of natural food and the extensive warm-ups in January and February, leaving no snow cover, make it difficult to evaluate the relative abundance of species that we consider winter migrants. It's easier to spot birds like Horned Lark when there is extensive snow cover and a nice spread of manure on a field. Other species did not have as great a need to visit bird feeders, when the natural food supply and temperate weather made it easy to forage. So on that note, American Tree Sparrow and Purple Finch were reported widely, but numbers seemed down. Snow Bunting and Horned Lark were reported in good numbers, with an impressive 750 buntings in Springfield Center, Otsego County on 3 February and 250 larks in Harford, Cortland County on 17 February. There were several reports of rare Lapland Longspur in the towns of Oxford, Chenango County; Hamden, Delaware County; and Cortlandville, Cortland County. Pine Siskins were reported in very good numbers across the Region. Common Redpolls were very scarce, with just a handful of sightings of very small numbers. Northern Shrikes were also scarce, with most reports in Broome, Chenango, and Tioga Counties. Rough-legged Hawks were fairly common in the western and central parts of the Region. There were no reports of Evening Grosbeak, Pine Grosbeak, or White-winged Crossbill. Red Crossbills were reported in small numbers, by Matt Young, in the conifer plantations of northern Chenango County. Matt conducts research on crossbill subspecies migration and other behaviors.

The unusual weather brought many unusual sightings over the winter period. Many waterfowl either lingered or made mid-winter appearances. Of note for mid-winter sightings were: Snow Goose in Chenango and Tioga Counties; Gadwall in Broome and Delaware Counties; American Wigeon in Chenango; N. Pintail in many locations; Green-winged Teal, likely overwintering in Chenango; Canvasback in Broome and with extended stay at Confluence Park, Owego, Tioga County from 26 January to 27 February; Greater Scaup in Broome and Delaware; Lesser Scaup in Broome and Otsego; Long-tailed Duck

in Broome; Red-breasted Merganser in Broome and Delaware; Red-throated Loon in Broome; Pied-billed Grebe in Delaware and Otsego; Horned and Red-necked Grebe in Delaware and Broome.

Overwintering half-hardies included: Winter Wren, Chipping Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Fox Sparrow. Other notable lingering birds were: Gray Catbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Eastern Phoebe, and White-crowned Sparrow. Additional unexpected mid-winter appearances included: Field Sparrow, American Woodcock, and Savannah Sparrow.

There were several rare species reported in the Region this period. A Ross's Goose was seen flying with Canadas at Carantouan Greenway, Wildwood Nature Reserve, Tioga County on 12 January. This is the second eBird record for the species in Tioga. A Greater White-fronted Goose was associating with Canadas around Whitney Point Reservoir, Broome County in early December. A single bird was also reported on 26 February in Candor, Tioga County. Cackling Goose was reported in several locations: at Stupke Pond, Cortland County on 5 December and 27 Feb; at Cannonsville Reservoir, Delaware on 17 December, and in the town of Virgil, Cortland on 12 December. Additional rare species include: Northern Goshawk (Delaware, Chenango, and Tioga Counties); Short-eared Owl at North Spencer Marsh and Nichols, Tioga; Northern Saw-whet Owl, Aquaterra Park, Broome, N. Spencer Marsh, Jam Pond, Chenango, and several locations in Delaware; and a Peregrine Falcon seen in Homer, Cortland County on 18 February (rare in the Region outside Binghamton).

Tom Salo again provided information relative to the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society (DOAS) camera trapping activities. Sites started operating in late December after the close of the southern zone muzzle-loading deer season. Bald Eagles were common at some sites, with a high of 20 individuals some days in Burlington. Common Raven were present in large numbers (>50) at Burlington and Middletown. **19 winter resident Golden Eagles were photographed at six sites from late December through February;** the number of individual Golden Eagles was the highest in nine years of camera trapping. Over that period we have averaged six sites per season in Delaware and Otsego Counties. Golden Eagles are regular in Otsego County, however, they appear in greater numbers at sites further south. The highest numbers of individuals have been at sites in SE Delaware County. The site in the Town of Middletown recorded nine of the 19 eagles this season. This quantity is based on a cursory examination of daily photos. With 500-600 photos per day, a more exact number will require the examination of tens of thousands of photographs. The first bird photographed at that site was a Golden Eagle on 21 December, 2017. This bird did not return. That is not uncommon; however, the timing raises the possibility that this individual was a late migrant as opposed to a winter resident. A site in the Town of Franklin, also Delaware County, had the second highest number—four.

Elsewhere, Golden Eagles made appearances at four Otsego County sites. Some of these birds fed for several days but none persisted longer than that. One of the GPS-tracked birds that had been trapped in SE Delaware County in 2017 returned directly to the site where it was trapped, and remained all winter. Another Golden Eagle was observed and photographed by Kyle Dudgeon harassing Bald Eagles at the site in Burlington. This bird was never photographed at the camera trap. In recent years we have observed several Golden Eagles very near the Burlington site that did not scavenge at the bait.

In total, 121 species were reported in Region 4 during the winter season.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALk – Allen L, OTSE; **AqPk** – Aquaterra P, BROO; **BCBC** – Binghamton CBC, BROO; **BPd** – Boland Pd; **BUNP** – Binghamton University Nature Preserve; **CaHo** – Cannon Hole, T Barton, TIOG; **CG** – Carantouan Greenway, T Barton, TIOG; **ChLk** – Chenango L, T New Berlin, CHEN; **ChRB** – Chenango Ri, Greater Binghamton, BROO; **CoPk** – Confluence P, Owego, TIOG; **CRes** – Cannonsville Res & outflow, DELA; **CVSP** – Chenango Valley SP, T Fenton, BROO; **DeIR** – Delaware Ri, Deposit, DELA; **Dpk** – Dorchester P, Whitney Pt, BROO; **FMT** – Franklin Mtn, T Davenport, DELA; **HCP** – Hillcrest Pits, Port Dickenson, BROO; **Lime** – Lime Hollow, T Cortlandville, CORT; **NSpM** – N Spencer Marsh, T Spencer, TIOG; **OnCBC** – Oneonta CBC, OTSE/DELA; **OtLk** – Otsego L, OTSE; **OwCBC** – Owego CBC, TIOG; **PRes** – Pepacton Res & outflow, DELA; **SCBC** – Sherburne CBC, CHEN (mostly); **SkLk** – Skaneateles L (SE), T Scott, CORT; **StPd** – Stupke Pd, T Cortlandville, CORT; **SusRB** – Susquehanna Ri, Greater Binghamton, BROO; **ULCP** – Upper Lisle County P, T Triangle, BROO; **WPRes** – Whitney Pt Res, BROO.

WATERFOWL - VULTURES

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

(R4): WPRes 1-8 Dec; Candor TIOG 26 Feb.

Snow Goose: max 800 Campville TIOG 24 Feb; last WPRes 14 Dec; early 14 Lime 8 Feb; major arr mult loc 21 Feb; a few sightings mid-winter CHEN, CORT, & TIOG.

ROSS'S GOOSE (R4): CG 12 Jan.

Cackling Goose: 2 StPd 5 Dec; T Virgil CORT 12 Dec; CRes 17 Dec; rare.

Canada Goose: max 3200 ULCP 12 Dec.

Tundra Swan: scarce CVSP 16 Dec; 6 Deposit DELA 25 Feb; 2 ULCP 28 Feb.

Wood Duck: last Lime 9 Dec; arr CRes 17 Feb, early.

Gadwall: max 17 ULCP 25 Feb; HCP 26 Dec-12 Jan; overwintered CRes; more frequent winter sightings.

Am. Wigeon: max 15 ULCP 28 Feb; rare mid-winter 2 T Sherburne CHEN 16 Jan; arr 2 CG 22 Feb.

Am. Black Duck: max 150 CRes mult dates.

Mallard: max 418 DeIR 6 Jan.

N. Shoveler: last Lime 5 Dec; arr 15 SusRB 26 Feb.

N. Pintail: max 28 ULCP 24 Feb; arr 2 CaHo 18 Feb; unusual # winter sightings.

Green-winged Teal: Blanding Rd wetlands T Sherburne CHEN, unusual, likely overwinter; HCP 26 Dec-1 Jan; 2 Lime 10 Feb; arr Barton TIOG 20 Feb.

Canvasback: HCP 10 Jan; 2 CaHo 25 Jan; CoPk 26 Jan-27 Feb; rare.

Redhead: max 46 OtLk 14 Feb; T Sherburne CHEN 25 Jan, rare; overwintered several locations.

Ring-necked Duck: max 100 ALk 8 Dec; unusual, overwintered sev loc.

Greater Scaup: DelR 26 Dec-14 Jan; CaHo 6 Jan; HCP 8-12 Jan; arr OtLk 20 Feb.
Lesser Scaup: ChRB 26 Dec-11 Feb, arr CaHo 19 Feb.
Surf Scoter: 2 WPres 2-6 Dec, rare.
White-winged Scoter: 2 ChRB 31 Dec-3 Jan, unexpected loc & date.
Black Scoter: SusRB 1 Dec, rare, late.
Long-tailed Duck: last 4 OtLk 1 Dec; SusRB 12-20 Jan, rare.
Bufflehead: max 90 OtLk 15 Dec; mid-winter sightings mult loc.
Com. Goldeneye: max 42 OtLk 15 Dec.
Hooded Merganser: max 60 HCP 26-27 Dec.
Com. Merganser: max 200 WPres 11 Dec.
Red-Breasted Merganser: scarce, scattered sightings in expected loc – reservoir outlets, main rivers.
Ruddy Duck: last WPres 18 Dec.
Ring-necked Pheasant: scarce, consistent sightings NSpM otherwise scattered.
Ruffed Grouse: max 7 Lime 5 Feb; widespread but limited sightings.
Wild Turkey: max 104 Springfield Center OTSE 3 Feb.
Red-throated Loon: PRes 10-17 Dec; OtLk 14 Dec; ChRB 11 Feb; rare.
Com. Loon: max 5 OtLk 9 Dec; 2-5 OtLk 9-21 Dec; WPres 6-11 Dec.
Pied-billed Grebe: OtLk 1 Dec, late; PRes 2 Dec, late; OtLk 10-15 Jan; PRes 1-13 Jan; SusRB 12 Feb; rare mid-winter.
Horned Grebe: PRes 1-7 Jan; ChRB 8 Jan.
Red-necked Grebe: CRes 17 Dec; PRes 7 Jan; 2 SusRB 12 Feb; rare.
Double-crested Cormorant: late 2 WRes 12 Dec, late; arr CoPk 25 Feb.
Great Blue Heron: a few overwintered.
Turkey Vulture: late 4 Vestal BROO 26 Dec, late; Lime 15 Feb, early.

HAWKS - LARIDS

Bald Eagle: 12 Burlington OTSE 17 Feb. max at site; max 23 BCBC 16 Dec; fairly common thru Region.
N. Harrier: fair # reports thru.
Sharp-shinned Hawk: few scattered thru.
Cooper's Hawk: max 12 BCBC; fairly common throughout.
N. Goshawk: FMt 1 Dec; CRes 1 Dec; Bowman Lake SP CHEN 24 Feb; T Spencer TIOG 28 Feb; rare.
Red-shouldered Hawk: scarce; a few scattered reports thru.
Red-tailed Hawk: max 31 OnCBC 16 Dec.

Rough-legged Hawk: fairly common, higher #s west & central in Region.
Golden Eagle: max 7 FMt 1 Dec; a few scattered sightings outside Catskills; summary of camera trapping data from Tom Salo, *intro*.
Am. Coot: max 66 OtLk 8 Feb; overwinter OtLk; rare elsewhere, CRes 17 Dec; SkLk 16 Dec
Killdeer: arr sev loc 21 Feb.
Am. Woodcock: T Nichols TIOG 15 Jan; T Owego TIOG 23 Jan; rare mid-winter; arr ULCP 28 Feb.
Bonaparte's Gull: WRes 2 Dec, late.
Ring-billed Gull: max 700 WRes 9 Dec.
Herring Gull: max 190 Plymouth Res. Chen 3 Dec.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: Lime 3 Jan & 19 Feb; 3 DPK 24 Feb; Cortland CORT 25 Feb; rare.
Greater Black-backed Gull: 9 Cortland Gravel Pits 16 Dec; Lime 3-4 Jan; West Rd CORT 2 Feb; Lime 10 & 19 Feb; 7 Cortland 25 Feb; rare.

PIGEONS - PARROTS

Mourning Dove: max 81 T Sherburne CHEN 16 Dec.
E. Screech-Owl: NSpM 10 Dec-3 Jan; T Sherburne 17 Feb thru; CVSP 30 Dec-15 Jan; T Colchester DELA 21-27 Jan; AqPk 21 Jan; underreported.
Great Horned Owl: few rep underreported.
Snowy Owl: T Laurens OTSE 9-10 Dec, only report.
Barred Owl: few rep, underreported.
Short-eared Owl: T Nichols TIOG 10 Dec; NSpM 21-26 Jan.
N. Saw-whet Owl: AqPk 4-7 Jan; T Hancock DELA 16 Jan; T German CHEN 20 Jan; NSpM 22-29 Jan; T Colchester DELA 27 Jan; rare.
Belted Kingfisher: max 6 BCBC 16 Dec; arr mult loc 20 Feb.
Red-bellied Woodpecker: max 15 OwCBC
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: rare overwintered T Scott CORT; Downsview 31 Dec-7 Jan; arr CaHo 20 Feb.
N. Flicker: scarce, a few scattered sightings throughout.
Am. Kestrel: uncommon, a few appeared to overwinter; T Bainbridge CHEN; T Spencer TIOG.
Merlin: scarce, a few reports throughout.
Peregrine Falcon: rare 2 Binghamton thru; T Sanford BROO 3 Feb; T Homer CORT 18 Feb.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

E. Phoebe: late ULCP 3 Dec.

N. Shrike: scarce, mostly BROO, CHEN, & TIOG.

Fish Crow: max 35 Vestal BROO 26 Dec; along ChRB & SusRB thru, becoming more common.

Com. Raven: max 42 OTSE, at eagle survey sites; fairly widespread thru.

Horned Lark: max 250 Harford CORT 17 Feb; most sightings BROO & CHEN.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: max 10 Preble CORT 1 Feb; widespread but few rep.

Brown Creeper: max 5 Aqpk 21 Jan.

Winter Wren: overwintered CVSP; BUNP 4 Jan; a few scattered sightings Feb; rare in winter.

Carolina Wren: fairly common; most sightings BROO & TIOG.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 15 T Cortlandville CORT.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: no reports.

E. Bluebird: max 12 Lime 9 Dec.

Hermit Thrush: Victory St. Marsh BROO 21 Jan, rare in winter; arr Lime 27 Feb.

Gray Catbird: BUNP 2 Dec; BCBC 16 Dec; SCBC 16 Dec; rare in winter.

N. Mockingbird: a few reports BROO & CORT.

Cedar Waxwing: max 160 ULCP 21 Jan; most in BROO & TIOG.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: 1-2 T Oxford CHEN 9 Jan & 22 Jan; 2 T Hamden DELA 21 Jan; 3 T Cortlandville CORT 24 Feb.

Snow Bunting: max 750 Springfield Center OTSE 3 Feb; fairly widespread.

Pine Warbler: ULCP 3 Dec, rare in winter.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: Downs ville DELA 2 Dec, rare in winter.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 46 ULCP 16 Feb; widespread.

Chipping Sparrow: Castle Creek BROO; Lisle BROO 15 Dec; 3 Spencer TIOG 2-3 Jan; rare in winter.

Field Sparrow: 2 T Barton TIOG 10 Feb, only rep.

Fox Sparrow: last Swift Rd T Chenango BROO 16 Dec; Sanford BROO 18 Jan-11 Feb; T Colchester DELA 22 Dec & 2 Feb; 2 NSpM 19 Feb; possibly overwintering birds rare.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 78 OwCBC 30 Dec, abundant.

White-crowned Sparrow: T Nichols TIOG 30 Dec, rare in winter.

White-throated Sparrow: max 12 T Greene Chen 2 Jan.

Savannah Sparrow: rare Murphys Pits T Vestal BROO 29 Jan, rare in winter.

Swamp Sparrow: scarce, a few overwintered at wetlands in BROO, CHEN, & TIOG.

N Cardinal: max 18 Vestal BROO 4 Feb.

Red-winged Blackbird: unusual overwinter Castle Creek BROO; a few scattered sightings Jan; arr 6 T Union BROO 16 Feb, early.

Brown-headed Cowbird: a few overwintered, sev loc; arr 17 Feb, early.

Rusty Blackbird: no reports.

Com. Grackle: unusual, a few scattered mid-winter reports; arr BPd 15 Feb.

House Finch: max 30 CoPk 30 Dec.

Purple Finch: max 10 ULCP 21 Jan; widespread in small #s.

Red Crossbill: scarce, reported in higher elevation conifer plantations by Matt Young, *intro*.

Com. Redpoll: max 6 Rosebloom OTSE 24-25 Dec; Lime 11 Jan; Downs ville DELA 13 Jan; 5 T Middlefield OTSE 4 Feb; T Cortlandville CORT 24 Feb.

Pine Siskin: fairly common; max 82 T Scott CORT 16 Dec.

Am. Goldfinch: max 110 T Oxford CHEN 17 Jan.

Evening Grosbeak: no reports.

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