

REGION 8—HUDSON-MOHAWK

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December 2017 was cold and dry. Temperatures were 3.7°F below average, and precipitation was one inch less than normal. There was a cold spell mid-month that began to freeze over major bodies of water, but the last six days of the year were frigid, averaging 18° below normal at Albany. Twelve inches of snow were recorded, mostly falling in small amounts, with snow depths of 3-4" at month's end. The first week of 2018 continued with the unrelenting cold conditions, 15° below normal and adding 5" of snow. The pendulum swung the other direction the following week, with the high temperature topping out at 63° on the 12th of January. Snow cover was absent for a few days mid-month, but a new storm brought 7" of snow to Albany. The last two weeks of January featured well-above normal temperatures, snow cover vanished, and the month ended up statistically near normal for both temperature and precipitation, despite the wild swings making up the numbers. February 2018 turned out much warmer and wetter than the long-term average, 6.5° above normal with about an inch more precipitation than usual. The last two weeks of the month were exceptionally mild, with a maximum of 73° on the 21st. 14" of snow fell during February, but at month's end the ground was bare once again.

The Regional trend of increasing numbers of unusual winter geese continued. On 6 December Rich Guthrie showed up at his location for the Winter Raptor Survey in Coxsackie, Greene County and found a **Pink-footed Goose** among a flock of Canada Geese in some corn stubble. On 21 February, Naomi Lloyd discovered two **Ross's Geese** swimming among Canada Geese on the Hudson River near Fort Miller, Washington County. Finally, between 13 February and 28 February as many as three **Greater White-fronted Geese** were reported from multiple locations between southern Rensselaer County and Ft. Miller in Washington County. It was not apparent if this represented one group of transient birds, or whether they were more widespread individuals. With the warm weather in the latter half of February, countless flocks of geese were seen overhead flying northward.

Waterfowl surveys were difficult after the big freeze in late December. For much of the next two months, there was very limited open water, and access to it, other than the traditional fast-moving water along the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers. Reports seem to indicate lower numbers and diversity than normal, although things improved markedly at the end of February.

Winter raptor numbers offered a mixed bag. Northern Harrier was common throughout the Region, with as many as five individuals reported from a single location. Mid-winter reports of Golden Eagle were confined to Columbia and Washington Counties. Bald Eagle reports were common, with some high group

numbers later in winter. Rough-legged Hawk numbers seemed higher than in recent seasons, with as many as eight observed at the Ft. Edward grasslands in Washington County.

It was another Snowy Owl irruption year. First reports occurred in early December, with birds being reported areawide by the end of the month. As many as four Snowy Owls were observed at one time from Albany International Airport in early January. A **Long-eared Owl** was a bonus prize for two birders staking-out the **Harris's Sparrow** near Altamont in late February. Short-eared Owls were alarmingly absent from most of the Region and occurred in small numbers where they were seen.

Northern Shrike and Lapland Longspur were seen in typical numbers and locations.

A marsh location in Stuyvesant, Columbia County likely harbored a very rare instance of Virginia Rail overwintering away from the coast. Observers had detected a bird on the local CBC in December 2016, and did so again in December 2017, with two individuals responding to playback simultaneously. In early February 2018, one rail was still detected. As Bill Cook summarizes it for the Alan DeVoe BC publication, *The Warbler*, "Chris Franks, Drew Hopkins and Timothy O'Connor suggest that Virginia Rail may be overwintering in the mid-Hudson River Valley which has not previously been documented. They have monitored a bird or two in a marsh in Stuyvesant in late December and early February. They point out that in John Bull's *Birds of New York State* mention is made that records from the Rochester area in late winter through early spring indicate that overwintering may be successful in upstate New York. This species is still considered rare in upstate New York during the winter."

An unusual winter report of 39 American Coot came from Larry Hall in late January, from the East Branch of the Sacandaga River in northwestern Warren County.

Winter gull diversity was augmented by the presence of Iceland, Glaucous, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. As many as five Iceland Gulls, all first-cycle birds, were observed along the Mohawk River in the Cohoes-to-Crescent corridor. Glaucous Gull was harder to find, but up to three individuals were reported, including some observations from Montgomery County. A report of three Lesser Black-backed Gulls was received from Tom Schmidt, observing from the Fulton County landfill. A single adult bird was detected from time to time along the Mohawk-Hudson corridor.

American Kestrels were reported in low numbers throughout the winter, mainly from the agricultural areas of Fulton, Montgomery, Schoharie, Saratoga, Washington, and Columbia Counties. Merlins were present as well, primarily along the Hudson River corridor and in the Mohawk Valley.

A **Harris's Sparrow** was discovered by Larry Alden on a morning walk near Altamont in Albany County as he participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count on 16 February. The sparrow was favoring a shrubby area adjacent to a

home with bird feeders, where it periodically foraged in the open. It lingered until at least the 24th of the month, allowing birders from across the state to observe this rarity.

Red Crossbills were much more abundant than usual during the winter of 2017-2018. Many of the reports were from northern Saratoga, Warren, and Washington Counties. A group of localized breeders continued to inhabit higher elevation forest land in Schoharie and Albany Counties, where the birds were photographed, recorded, and studied extensively. Matt Young from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology visited the flock in Burnt-Rossman Hills SF (Schoharie) and identified three type-calls (Types 1, 4, and 5) among those birds. The Rensselaerville SF (Albany) birds were identified as Type 1 (Appalachian). They were still present at the end of February.

Bob Yunick submitted his field notes for the Winter 2017-2018 period, from which I have excerpted some interesting observations below:

The following are observations from my feeding/banding operations in the Schenectady, NY area: 1) feeder in my yard (yard) at Sch'dy; 2) my Adirondack feeding/banding operation at Jenny Lake (JL) at 1250 ft elevation near Corinth in northern Saratoga Co, NY.

The weather without doubt took top billing followed by the scarcity of birds. A polar vortex in Dec brought lasting intense cold creating thick ice on the Mohawk followed by a great thaw on 1/12/18 causing both a 17-mi ice jam to form upstream from Tribe's Hill to Sch'dy, and extremely rapid flows and high water east of Sch'dy to produce a record low count of waterfowl on the WFC, 1/14/18, due to the lack of open water and where open the excessive current. Only 255 waterfowl were counted, a record low; including only 2 Canada Geese, fast moving water does not seem to suit their golf course style.

The scarcity of birds at feeders that became apparent in Oct-Nov continued unabated in Dec-Feb especially at JL where the cone crop was the largest in decades. Five banding sessions there were disappointing as follows. In each instance I erected 2 ½ mist nets, one at each of three sunflower seed feeders.

Date	Hrs nets in place	Catch
12/18	2 hr 5 min	zero, and not a bird seen
1/19	2 hr 15 min	1 Blue Jay and 33 D-e Juncos
1/26	1 hr 20 min	zero, again not a bird seen
2/17	2 hr	1 Red-b Woodpecker and 1 Blk-c Chickadee (first banded since 2 in Jul!) and 2 repeat juncos from 1/19.
2/24	2 hr 15 min	zero, and not a bird seen

Normally these feeders would have chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches frequently if not constantly present. The last Red-breasted Nuthatch captured was in Jun and none has been seen since then. One White-breasted Nuthatch was heard on 2/17. In 49 years of year-round banding at this site, I have never experienced a winter like this. Chickadees are an irruptive species and in non-irruptive years at JL my catch has been 20-35 for the year running 7/1 to 6/30 the following year. In years of irruption, annual catches on that same Jul to Jun schedule could exceed 300 (best was 388 in 1980-81). This year's total of 3 imm. banded so far since 7/1 without a single return bird from a previous year is unprecedented.

The **Jan junco phenomenon** is also unprecedented and caused me to wonder if juncos stage intra-seasonal migrations. Prior to the juncos captured on 1/19, the previous captures were a juv. on 8/5/17 and prior to that a last spring migrant on 4/24/17. When I arrived at JL on 1/19, the snow on the ground was swarming with juncos; I banded 33 and there were still others not banded when I left. What was extraordinary beside their sudden appearance in those numbers was the extent of their **fat deposits**. First, their age/sex distribution was as follows.

Age/Sex	SY	ASY	Total
M	13	12	25
F	2	6	8
Total	15	18	33

Their fat class scores (range of 0, none to 3, bulging) were as follows:
FC0 1; FC1 4; FC2 11; FC3 17.

Thirteen of these birds weighed over 25 g, the heaviest 29.2 g. Some of these heavy birds had difficulty flying. When flushed they flew low to the ground and only short distances. The following week on 1/26 I did not see a one. On 2/21 I caught 2 of those birds banded on 1/19, an SY/M and ASY/M carrying far less fat.

When banded	When recaptured	Change
ASY/M FC2 24.7g	FC1 18.3g	-6.4g or 25.9 %
SY/M FC3 26.5g	FC2 22.8g	-3.3g or 12.5 %

The questions remain: where did they come from and where did they go? The swarming of juncos at JL on 1/19 was not just a JL event. As I drove N from home in Sch'dy that day, at about half way as elevation began to increase I began seeing occasional groups of 1-3 juncos flush from the roadside. When I came to Corinth and began ascending West Mountain going from ~650ft to ~1400ft the number of flocks increased as did their size to 4-6 at a time. Prior to the arrival of these juncos, sunflower seed consumption was averaging below 10 g/day due to the scarcity of chickadees and nuthatches rising to 345 g/day when the juncos were present...

133 species were reported during the period.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

APBP – Albany Pine Bush Preserve, ALBA; **AR** – Alcove Res, ALBA; **BCM** – Black Creek Marsh, ALBA; **BCR** – Basic Creek Res, ALBA; **BMB** – Bog Meadow Brook Nature Trail, SARA; **CCGP** – Cocksackie Creek Grasslands Preserve, GREE; **CF** – Cohoes Flats, ALBA; **CL** – Collins L, SCHE; **CRM** – Cline Rd. Marsh, FULT; **FR** – Five Rivers EEC, ALBA; **FtEG** – Ft. Edward Grasslands, WASH; **FV** – Franklinton Vlaie, SCHO; **HP** – Huyck Preserve, ALBA; **OCA** – Ooms Conservation Area, COLU; **PRWMA** – Partridge Run WMA, ALBA; **SNHP** – Saratoga National Historical P, SARA; **TR** – Tomhannock Res, RENN; **VFNHP** – Vischer Ferry Nature & Historic Preserve, SARA; **WMP** – Wilson M. Powell Wildlife Sanctuary, COLU.

WATERFOWL - VULTURES

Snow Goose: max 2000 TR 14 Dec.
Greater White-fronted Goose: max 3 Schodack RENS 26 Feb.
Mute Swan: max 4 Germantown COLU 7 Dec.
Wood Duck: arr Crescent Power Plant ALBA 17 Feb.
Gadwall: arr Corning Riverfront Pres ALBA 17 Feb.
Am. Wigeon: arr VFNHP 21 Feb.
N. Pintail: arr Cohoes-Crescent Rd. ALBA 20 Feb.
Green-winged Teal: arr Schaghticoke RENS 21 Feb.
Canvasback: max 6 Schoharie Crossing SHS 22 Feb.
Redhead: max 30 Johnsbury WARR 26 Jan.
Ring-necked Duck: arr Ft Miller WASH 21 Feb.
Com. Goldeneye: max 251 Saratoga L SARA 14 Dec.
Hooded Merganser: max 210 Saratoga L SARA 19 Dec.
Com. Merganser: max 3000 TR 14 Dec.
Red-breasted Merganser: max 5 Saratoga L SARA 14 Dec.
Ruddy Duck: max 262 BCR 2 Dec.
Wild Turkey: max 90 Chatham COLU 21 Jan.
Horned Grebe: last Copake L COLU 11 Dec.

Red-necked Grebe: last Saratoga L SARA 9 Dec.
Double-crested Cormorant: last Saratoga CBC SARA 14 Dec.
Black Vulture: max 76 Guilderland ALBA 16 Feb.
Turkey Vulture: arr Hudson COLU 17 Feb.

HAWKS – LARIDS

Golden Eagle: 6 reports COLU, RENS, MONT, WASH.
N. Harrier: max 5 Duanesburg SCHO 19 Dec; FtEG 3 Feb.
Bald Eagle: max 45 South Bay WASH 28 Feb.
Rough-legged Hawk: max 8 FtEG 16 Feb.
Virginia Rail: 2 nr Stuyvesant COLU 16 Dec.
Am. Coot: max 39 Johnsbury WARR 26 Jan.
Killdeer: arr Schodack RENS 27 Feb.
Am. Woodcock: arr Livingston COLU 27 Feb.
Ring-billed Gull: max 700 TR 14 Dec.
Herring Gull: max 800 Crescent Pk SARA 24 Jan.
Iceland Gull: max 6 Fultonville MONT 26 Jan.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: max 3 Fulton Co Landfill FULT 2 Feb.
Glaucous Gull: max 3 Crescent Power Plant ALBA 3 Jan.
Great Black-backed Gull: max 200 Crescent Pk SARA 24 Jan.

PIGEONS – PARROTS

Snowy Owl: max 4 Albany Int Airport ALBA 3 Jan.

Long-eared Owl: nr Altamont ALBA 21 Feb.

Short-eared Owl: max 3 Minden MONT 17 Feb.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 8 reports areawide.

Horned Lark: max 350 T Northumberland SARA 8 Jan.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 24 Wilton Wildlife Pres SARA 24 Feb.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: last 3 Stockport Flats COLU 16 Dec.

E. Bluebird: max 25 Gansevoort SARA 17 Feb.

Gray Catbird: last Guilderland ALBA 28 Dec.

Am. Pipit: max 15 Livingston COLU 9 Dec.

Cedar Waxwing: max 94 AR 17 Dec.

LONGSPURS – WARBLERS

Snow Bunting: max 400 Ft Plain MONT 19 Feb.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: max 6 Stockport Flats COLU 16 Dec.

TOWHEES – WEAVERS

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 35 Lions Pk SCHE 1 Dec.

Field Sparrow: last Stockport COLU 19 Dec.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 80 T Wright SCHO 2 Jan.

HARRIS'S SPARROW: nr Altamont ALBA 16-24 Feb (LA).

White-throated Sparrow: max 51 Claverack COLU 22 Dec.

Savannah Sparrow: max 9 Germantown COLU 10 Jan.

Song Sparrow: max 21 Roeliff Jansen Pk COLU 28 Feb.

Swamp Sparrow: last Minden MONT 25 Jan.

E. Towhee: last Schaghticoke RENS 30 Dec.

E. Meadowlark: Kinderhook COLU 27 Dec, only report.

Rusty Blackbird: max 11 Brunswick RENS 6 Jan.

Com. Redpoll: nr Guilderland ALBA 3 Nov, only report.

Red Crossbill: max 13 Rensselaerville SF ALBA 30 Jan.

Pine Siskin: max 29 Rensselaerville SF ALBA 29 Jan.

Am. Goldfinch: max 115 Spring Run Trail SARA 21 Jan.

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