

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Crossbilling in Northern New York, 28-30 January 2022: A Banner Season for Crossbills

Matt—We covered Sabattis Bog, Long Lake, Newcomb, Minerva, and then drove down to Piseco and Lake Pleasant.

In the 20+ years I've been doing crossbill work in New York State, 2022 was the best overall crossbill year I've seen for both species at the same time. For White-winged Crossbills alone, the 2001-02 breeding event was just unbelievable. They were singing everywhere even if there were only 5-10 spruces in a boggy spot—but you could barely find a Red Crossbill during that event. 2022 was the second best year for white-wings I've seen.

We've had a number of good Red Crossbill years since then, like in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2017, but what we witnessed during this weekend was pretty special for any crossbill/finch fan. Lots of flight songs, pairing, singing and chasing were observed for both crossbill species. The Red Crossbills were pretty ubiquitous, while the White-winged Crossbills were in the best boreal forest pockets—but in smaller numbers elsewhere as well. Reds outnumbered the white-wings in most locations except in the best boreal pockets.

What's also interesting about this Red Crossbill event is it was basically almost entirely made up of only our northeastern call type, Type 10. Most good Red Crossbill years we have a mix of Type 3 and some Type 1 and 2 as well. I finally observed a Type 1 in the southern Adirondacks south of Hoffmeister as I was leaving the park. All told, we had close to 200 Red Crossbills and 110 White-winged Crossbills. We had almost 100 Pine Siskins as well.

There are Type 1 and some Type 10 in the southern part of the state too, and I'm interested to see if Type 10 has expanded its breeding range southward into

southern NY and PA where Type 1 is the more common type. There are some Type 10 in PA that sound like they could be breeding.

While warming weather and a late April snowstorm prevented these numbers from turning into a full-scale breeding event, birders participating in the New York Breeding Bird Atlas ultimately confirmed breeding for White-winged Crossbills at Sabattis Bog, at several sites in Newcomb, and Raquette Lake, while probable breeding behavior was recorded in two dozen additional atlas blocks. Atlassers have confirmed Red Crossbills in more than 40 atlas blocks so far across the Adirondacks and central New York, with probable breeding in dozens more.

Ryan—There were never not finches during our trip. Every time we opened the car door we heard a Purple Finch or one of the crossbills flying over. Effort consisted mostly of driving along the road and stopping to listen, getting out of the car to record flocks that seemed especially large or to photograph birds gritting on the road.

Each moment topped the last. Many of the highlights were on the first day. On Blue Ridge Road, a Golden Eagle circled us for several minutes, and many expletives were uttered. Immediately following, we caught up with a pure flock of Boreal Chickadees, all vocalizing, one bird sitting in the open and getting chased by a Black-capped while White-winged Crossbills chipped overhead. An hour later on Tahawus Road, we experienced boreal bird bacchanalia; crossbills doing song flights and feeding, siskins singing, and goldfinches flying all around, all while a goshawk called and then circled above us for a minute or more.

Most of the crossbills in the Adirondacks were rather skittish, but in Piseco on the southern edge of the park, we seemed to have found a communal hangout spot for the birds. Red Crossbills were singing, gritting, courting, and eating. Flocks flew in and out of the spot, making it hard to keep count. A crossbill almost landed on my head. Two of my photos are on page 161.

We also spent lots of time documenting the cone crop. Red, white, and black spruce all appeared to be good to very good, as did hemlock. Pines had few cones on them, and we noted some, but not a lot of catkins on the birches.

It was a great time, we encountered lots of great people and are happy that many got to experience the winter 2022 finch bounty.

Weather—Friday 1/28: Cloudy, wind NW 5mph, 20 degrees dropping to 15 in the afternoon. Saturday 1/29: Cloudy, clearing later in the day. 1 degree in the AM, rising to 7 degrees and back down to 1 in the afternoon. Wind N 10mph, turning NW later in the day. Sunday 1/30: Clear all day, wind NW 5mph. -16 degrees at daybreak, warming to the 10s as we drove south.

Matthew A. Young, Finch Research Network

PO Box 5431, Cortland, NY 13045; finchnetwork.org

Ryan F. Mandelbaum, Finch Research Network

359A 14th St., Brooklyn, NY 11215; ryan.f.mandelbaum.com

PHOTO GALLERY

Winter 2021-22



Top: White-winged Crossbill, Long Lake, *Hamilton*, 28 Jan 2022; bottom: Red Crossbills, Piseco Lake Inlet, *Hamilton*, 30 Jan 2022, both © Ryan Mandelbaum. See Notes and Observations pp. 134-135.