

JANUARY WATERFOWL COUNT 2023

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More than 382 volunteers went into the field 14-22 January 2023 and conducted the New York State Ornithological Association's January Waterfowl Count. The volunteers logged more than 964.32 party-hours and counted 454,300 waterfowl. The methodology of the count was described by B. L. Swift in 2007 (January waterfowl counts, 2005-2007, and some observations on long-term trends. *Kingbird* 57: 198-213).

WEATHER CONDITIONS

Daily high temperatures in January leading up to the count period were mostly above freezing throughout the state, but most lows were near or above 25° F, except in Regions 6 and 7 where temperatures dropped much lower. Plattsburgh recorded a low of 10° on 11 January. Jeff Bolsinger reported that temperatures the last few nights before the count dropped to single digits causing the Black River Bay-Chaumont Bay-Guffins Bay complex in Region 6 to ice up, driving out the large number of waterfowl that was there through the day before the count period. In contrast, Ellie George reported that Region 7 had more open water and more waterfowl than last year, despite the cold. She also reported that rivers were running high and fast so waterfowl on them was lower in number than last year. Rain just before the count period was widespread in the state so counts on rivers were probably low throughout the state. Snow cover was lacking throughout the state so field sources of food remained available through the count period and counters' travel was not limited by snow.

RESULTS

In this summary, I will compare the 2023 numbers with the average annual numbers from the decade, 2013-2022. The total number of waterfowl counted this year, 454,300, was 75,008 (20%) more than the average for the 2013-2022 decade. Scaup accounted for more than half the excess over the average.

Most species had higher counts than the 2013-2022 decade average. It seems likely that the unusually mild weather allowed these species to linger in the state in higher numbers. Species that had lower counts were Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose, Brant, Trumpeter Swan, Eurasian Wigeon, American Black Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, King Eider, Common Eider, Harlequin Duck, Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Black Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, and American Coot. It is interesting that all the sea ducks are on this list. Did the mild winter conditions allow these species to remain farther north? This might also be true for the other species in the list. The counts of 22 Cackling Geese, 704 Green-winged Teal, 4,406 Hooded Mergansers, and 537 Double-crested Cormorants were the highest ever for those species.

Table 1. Regional totals for the 2023 January Waterfowl Count.

Species/Region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Snow Goose	0	501	1,031	0	0	0	7	1	5,617	609	7,766
Ross's Goose	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gr. White-fr. Goose	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4
Pink-footed Goose	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	64	10,887	10,951
Cackling Goose	1	6	0	0	1	0	0	0	13	1	22
Canada Goose	11,103	21,832	17,328	4,926	9,930	12,460	951	14,471	31,882	44,739	169,622
Mute Swan	12	352	19	0	63	52	0	1	475	807	1,781
Trumpeter Swan	0	8	9	1	23	40	0	1	0	1	83
Tundra Swan	755	25	2,759	13	234	128	0	0	2	2	3,918
swan species	0	0	0	0	5	41	0	0	0	0	46
Wood Duck	1	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	23	60	89
Blue-winged Teal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Shoveler	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	600	637
Gadwall	54	41	76	13	12	27	6	0	165	1,569	1,963
Eurasian Wigeon	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Am. Wigeon	11	1	71	80	2	1	1	0	23	534	724
Mallard	3,242	1,730	8,978	1,614	3,099	2,046	1,896	855	3,356	7,760	34,576
Am. Black Duck	128	187	1,281	150	95	362	120	133	1,177	3,341	6,974
Mallard X Black Duck	2	5	3	3	0	3	2	0	2	32	52
Northern Pintail	4	1	67	0	32	9	1	15	10	74	213
Green-winged Teal	0	4	2	4	0	0	0	0	14	680	704
Canvasback	9,337	76	149	0	0	1	4	9	35	341	9,952
Redhead	1,433	11,497	25,070	273	1,031	297	10	0	15	80	39,706
Ring-necked Duck	25	68	283	115	33	0	4	19	1,949	644	3,140
Tufted Duck	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Greater Scaup	4,788	1,076	303	2	59	870	2,416	18	398	45,952	55,882

Species/Region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Lesser Scaup	302	249	193	2	75	30	622	14	38	4,235	5,760
scaup species	10,002	134	457	0	0	3,240	0	20	2	155	14,010
King Eider	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Common Eider	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	76	76
Harlequin Duck	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Surf Scoter	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	475	479
White-winged Scoter	408	246	0	0	32	81	0	0	3	989	1,759
Black Scoter	3	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	183	189
scoter species	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	415	415
Long-tailed Duck	2,127	2,389	3	4	216	499	0	1	212	2,239	7,690
Bufflehead	819	159	209	120	128	111	284	13	1,123	5,797	8,763
Com. Goldeneye	4,704	1,817	1,946	218	1,099	1,893	1,437	713	327	507	14,661
Barrow's Goldeneye	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	5
Hooded Merganser	177	229	176	354	320	41	74	199	1,286	1,550	4,406
Com. Merganser	901	969	384	674	4,203	617	222	1,534	9,027	12	18,543
Red-br. Merganser	4,060	7,662	216	16	533	236	5	0	208	1,916	14,852
Ruddy Duck	35	50	63	0	22	5	7	2	82	3,920	4,186
Pied-billed Grebe	0	4	6	0	1	0	0	0	8	25	44
Horned Grebe	41	25	6	1	8	1	9	0	55	143	289
Red-necked Grebe	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	6
Eared Grebe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Am. Coot	45	182	264	46	100	1	0	0	292	150	1,080
Red-throated Loon	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	167	204
Common Loon	2	3	12	5	6	7	5	1	62	405	508
Great Cormorant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	60	62	122
Dbl.-cr. Cormorant	43	18	0	0	49	1	0	0	0	426	537
Other/Unidentified	5,932	0	340	0	0	436	2	0	70	122	6,902
TOTALS	60,529	51,549	61,705	8,634	21,415	23,538	8,090	18,020	58,128	142,692	454,300

Beside the Mallard x American Black Duck hybrid, a Tufted Duck x scaup (sp.) and a Common x Barrow’s Goldeneye were reported, both in Region 7. Their numbers are included in the unidentified count for Region 7 in the chart.

LONG-TERM TRENDS

We have been watching for many years the long-term trend of increasing numbers of Tundra Swans wintering in New York State, the number peaking at 4065 in 2016. In 2023, the count was 3,918, the second highest count ever.

In last year’s report, possible long-term trends in New York State’s winter waterfowl populations were identified by comparing the averages for the periods 1973-2000, 2001-2010, and 2013-2022. Species listed as having possible long-term increases were Snow Goose, Canada Goose, Brant, Trumpeter Swan, Tundra Swan, Wood Duck, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Common Eider, Harlequin Duck, Long-tailed Duck, Hooded Merganser, and Red-breasted Merganser. Of these, the 2023 numbers continue these trends for Canada Goose, Tundra Swan, Wood Duck, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Redhead, Hooded Merganser, and Red-breasted Merganser. Long-term decreases were listed as American Wigeon, American Black Duck, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, scaup (sp.), White-winged Scoter, Common Merganser and Great Cormorant. The 2023 counts only continued the downward trend for American Black Duck.

FUTURE COUNTS

You can help with the 2024 count by contacting your Regional compiler. Compiler contacts, and also historical data, are available online at: <http://nybirds.org/ProjWaterfowl.htm>

For planning purposes, the next two count periods will be: 13-21 January 2024 (target date Sunday, 14 January) and 18-26 January 2025 (target date Sunday, 19 January).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to everyone who participated in the 2023 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	Debra Suggs	6	Jeff Bolsinger
2	Robert Spahn	7	Ellie George
3	Christina Hoh	8	Bryan Swift
4	Gail Kirch	9	Sean Camillieri
5	Bill Purcell	10	Clifford Hagen