

THE BIRD OBSERVER SUMMARY FOR FEBRUARY

February's birding activity came to a slower pace and fewer birds were reported. A total of 162 species was recorded during the month, about the same as in January. Counts of individuals decreased markedly from the preceding month for almost all species. This result could hardly be blamed on the weather. February continued January's fluctuating temperatures with alternate periods of quite mild and quite cold weather. However, the average temperature was near normal throughout the month. The mean was 30.1; the highest reading was 54 degrees on the 2nd and 3rd; the lowest was 3 degrees on the first. The snowfall was a scant 2.5 inches, 9.7 inches below normal, bringing this winter's total snowfall to only 10 inches, only one inch more than the record least seasonal amount recorded in the winter of 1936-37. If no more snow falls this season, the total will tie that of 1875-76 as the second least snowy in over 100 years of records.

By late month there had been little indication of the vanguard of early spring migrants which cheers "listers" during the February doldrums.

Loons, Grebes, Cormorant: The high count of Common Loon was only 17 at Manomet point on the 13th (BS), reports of Red-throated Loons were down, with 2 seen at P.I. on the 24th and 1 at Plymouth Beach on the 25th (BS). A record for Arctic Loon by three very qualified observers, Richard Bowen, Richard Kleber and Henry Parker, may be considered as "good" as such a record can be. They studied the bird for 15-20 minutes at the breakwater at the north end of P.I. on the 10th. The Bird Observer feels that all winter reports of Arctic Loon should be taken with a grain of salt, and that only well documented, breeding plumage birds be considered. The Western Grebe was reported on the 1st at P.I. (DA); one appeared at No. Scituate on the 5th & 6th (MM); and one was seen again at Magnolia on the 24th & 25th (RPE, M&AA, HD) - the same bird? Red-necked Grebes were down with a high of 8 at Manomet point on the 13th. The best count of Horned Grebes was 40 at P.I. on the 25th (JK). Eleven Pied-billed Grebes were recorded from Wareham on the 13th (RF). From 80-115 Great Cormorants spent the month at Hingham (MM).

Hérons: Great Blue Herons were widespread with the majority of reports from Cape Cod, 27 at Strong I., Chatham (MG). There were 20 Black-crowned Night Herons wintering at Fort Hill, Eastham (WP, RP). The Common Egret continued at E. Orleans, being present since the Christmas count (WB). An American Bittern was observed at Cackle Cove, Chatham on the 20th & 25th (BN, MG).

Waterfowl: The variety of waterfowl remained high, but counts dropped for almost all species. Two Whistling Swans were reported during the month, one on the 5th at Wareham (RM) and one on the 24th at Westport (VL). Brant were low with reports from only 8 localities, the highest at Squantum 58 on the 4th (NO). Snow Geese were reported throughout the month at Orleans (1) and Squantum (v.o.). Black Ducks reached a maximum on the 4th at Plymouth Beach 2000 (BS); Gadwalls were found at Chatham on the 5th (BN) and 2 at Hatchville on the 25th (RP). A total of 12 Pintails was reported from Chatham on the 14th (BN). A Common Teal made a brief appearance at the Mystic Lakes in Winchester on the 12th (HP, MMc). Green-winged Teals were reported from 6 places, and a wintering (?) Blue-winged Teal was well observed in Sandwich on the 21st (RP). The drake European Widgeon continued throughout the month at Little Harbor, Cohasset. There were few reports of American Widgeon, the highest at Belmont (25) on the 17th (RHS, PM). A Shoveler was seen in Worcester on the 10th (BB). Four Wood Ducks were reported, from Chatham (2) and Sandwich (2) (LM, RF). Redheads were reported from Plymouth (1-BS), 16 at Falmouth on the 3rd (M&AA), and 3 at Wareham on the 10th (HD). Eighty was the high count of Ring-necked Ducks at Chatham on the 10th (VL). Canvasbacks totaled 100 on the 25th at Falmouth (RP). On the 24th, 10 Lesser Scaup were well studied and photographed at Newburyport (BS). The Harlequin Ducks continued at Magnolia, with a maximum of 8 (PHP). Common Eiders totaled 3400 at Plymouth (BS), 3000 at P.I. (JK), 1000 at Marshfield (MM), and a thousand at Nantucket (ES). A King Eider continued at Provincetown (v.o.). Other King Eiders were seen at P.I. on the 7-17th (DA), Boston Harbor on the 3rd (BS), Plymouth from the 3rd-5th (RF) and in Cohasset on the 4th (NO). Ruddy Ducks at Falmouth continued with the max. of 12 on the 2nd (v.o.). Hooded Mergansers were reported from only two places, with 8 at Cohasset (v.o.). The high count of Common Mergansers was 40 in Marion on the 19th (HD).

Raptors: Single Goshawks were reported from 7 scattered localities; 3 reports of Sharp-shinned were all from the Cape; a Cooper's Hawk was seen at Brewster on the 10th (WRP), and another Cooper's was killed flying against a window in Ipswich on the 17th (ML). There were only three reported Red-shouldered Hawks during the month, on the 10th & 25th at Newburyport (Chase Shawmut) (v.o.), on the 22nd & 28th from S. Dartmouth (PR), and one from E. Middleboro on the 24th (JN); Rough-legged Hawks were way down this winter with only 8 individuals reported. The highlight of the month was an adult Golden Eagle at Westport on the 3rd and seen until the 19th (PR) (v.o.). Five Marsh Hawks on the Cape were the only ones reported, 3 at Barnstable on the 3rd (RF) and 2 at Chatham on the 5th (LM). A Pigeon Hawk was seen off and on again at Sandwich from the 4th-10th (RP). Ruffed Grouse were way down with only 2 reported from Marshfield throughout (EE).

Rails, Shorebirds: Wintering Virginia Rails were single birds at Wellfleet on the 1st (BN), on the 11th at Medford (HP), and at Hatchville on the 25th (RP). Nine species of shorebirds were reported during the month: a Killdeer at Gloucester on the 17th (EP* BBC); 21 Black-bellied Plovers at Chatham on the 24th (BN); the high count of Ruddy Turnstones was 38 at Cohasset on the 17th (RHS & PM); a Woodcock at Falmouth on the 3rd (M&AA); two Common Snipe at Plymouth (v.o.), 1 at Woburn on the 18th (DW), and 1 at Wellfleet on the 25th (RP); two Knots at Cohasset on the 17th (PM, RHS). Purple Sandpipers were reported from many places with the high count of 300-400 throughout the month at N. Scituate (MM). Only 15 Dunlin were at Cohasset on the 21st (RPE), and the high count of Sanderlings was 150 at Plymouth Beach on the 4th (BS).

Gulls, Alcids: Numbers of Glaucous Gulls were down with only four individuals reported, all on the north shore. Iceland Gulls numbered 30 at the north end of P.I. (PMI), and 2 were at Provincetown on the 13th (RF). Black-headed Gulls were observed at 6 localities, the highest count of 24 at Squantum on the 18th (MG). Kittiwakes were observed at Salisbury on the 3rd, 1 (PMI) and 1 on the 10th (HPK); another was seen at Woods Hole on the 18th (D&HB). Alcids were few with 1 Razorbill at P.I. from the 8-12th (v.o.). A Common Murre was picked up oiled at Brewster by William Sheldon on the 24th, and joined the Common Puffin at WBWS to recuperate before they are released. Single Thick-billed Murres were reported from 5 localities, including a bird found in a residential section of Quincy on the 9th and released in Wollaston Bay (RL); only 1 Dovekie was reported from Gloucester on the 3rd (PHP-BBC); 2 Black Guillemots continued at Andrews Pt., Rockport.

Owls: The Barn Owl continued at Long I. in Boston Harbor throughout the month (v.o.). Two cooperative Screech Owls remained at Lanesville and at Milton, and Great Horned Owls were reported from Belmont throughout, on the 25th from Chatham (MG), and on the 24th from MtA (AA); Snowy Owls were seen throughout the month at Salisbury, P.I., and 2, including a very white bird, at Squantum (v.o.). The Great Gray Owl continued to make news at Gill and the New York Times. The Hawk Owls at Gilford, N.H. and Brewer, Me. delighted bird photographers. Barred Owls were reported from 5 places: Belmont throughout (v.o.), Lincoln, Danvers (C&TB), 2 at Middleboro (DB) and 1 at Newton on the 23rd (DWood); Long-eared Owls were observed at Middleboro on the 9th (GS) and on the 11th at Long I. (JJC); Short-eared Owls were seen throughout the month at Squantum with a max. of 3 on the 12th (WC), also at Bridgewater, Salisbury and at Chatham; 2 Saw-whet Owls were at Nantucket on the 17th (RV).

Phoebe, Jay and Crows: A Phoebe showed up on the 15th at Middleboro and remained through the end of the month (DB). The Gray Jay continued at Pelham. 600 Common Crows were at Bridgewater (DB), but only a max. of 40 could be found at W. Roxbury and Jamaica Plain (FA); another was found at Braintree on the 5th (RF). A max. of 4 Boreal Chickadees continued at Ashley Ponds in Holyoke (v.o.).

Mimids, Thrushes, Kinglet: Only 2 reports of Catbirds were received, 1 throughout at Worcester (BB) and 1 at Squantum on the 17th (PM); a Brown Thrasher visited a feeder throughout in Ipswich (fide ML) and 1 at Manomet on the 13th (BS); 30 Robins were at Cohasset on the 5th (MM); Hermit Thrushes were reported on the 5th at Cohasset (MM), the 7th at Vineyard Haven (MH), and on the 10th at N. Chatham (LM); a max. of 15 Bluebirds were at Chatham on the 17th (RP), and 3 were at Harwich on the 20th (BN). There were 2 reports of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, with 1 at Brewster on the 10th (WRP) and 1 at Hatchville on the 25th (RP).

Pipit, Waxwings, Shrikes: A Water Pipit was found at Corn Hill, Truro, on the 10th and is still present (RF); 2 Bohemian Waxwings were found at Plymouth on the 3rd and were seen off and on up to the 18th, another was at Sandwich on the 4th (RP), and over 100 Cedar Waxwings were at Plymouth on the 10th (RF). Northern Shrikes were reported from many localities, a total of 16 in all. A Loggerhead Shrike was reported from P.I. on the 24th (RPE, M&AA)

Warblers: Four species of warblers were observed during the month; the Orange-crowned continued at a feeder in Eastham (v.o.); an amazing count of 500+ Myrtle Warblers was made at Nantucket on the 16th (ES), 2 Pine Warblers were seen at Nantucket (RV), and 1 was seen throughout the month at Chatham (v.o.); Palm Warblers were at Gloucester on the 3rd-1 (PP-BBC) and 1 at Middleboro on the 28th (RM).

Blackbirds, Tanager, Fringillids: An unreported wintering flock of 50 Redwings was at West Roxbury on the 17th (PM, RHS); a Baltimore Oriole visited a feeder in Norwell on the 6th (BL); and a Rusty Blackbird was at GWNWR on the 17th (AA); the Western Tanager continued at Annisquam (v.o.), but was reported less frequently than in Jan. The Plymouth Painted Bunting was observed up to the 11th but not since (v.o.); a Dickcissel visited the feeder at WBWS in Wellfleet on the 10th (RF); Evening Grosbeaks totaled 100 at Plymouth on the 3rd (RF); 17 Purple Finches were banded at Manomet; and 50 House Finches were at Falmouth on the 10th (AAC). Reports of Pine Grosbeaks were way down, but continued in good numbers at various places, with 100 at Boxford (AP). Only 1 Pine Siskin was reported from our area, at Lincoln on the 5th (WH), while there were many reports from the Conn. Valley and the Berkshires. Twelve Red Crossbills were at Brookline on the 18th (AA), 1 at Belmont on the 24th (HTW), and 2-3 at Brewster on the 25th (MG). A Towhee continued throughout the month at Hardwick (BB), and 2 were seen at Falmouth on the 3rd (M&AA); 2 Ipswich Sparrows were in Scituate at Humarock on the 3rd (M&AA), and 2 were photographed at Duxbury (BS); Savannah Sparrows totaled 10 at Fort Hill on the 10th (RF). A wintering Grasshopper Sparrow was at WBWS on the 5th (WB); 7 Sharp-tailed Sparrows and 1 Seaside Sparrow were reported on the 5th from the Scituate Sewage Plant (GLS), and 3 Chipping Sparrows were observed at Middleboro on the 15th (DB). A Clay-colored Sparrow was reported from Westport on the 24th (VL); 2 White-crowned Sparrows visited a feeder throughout the month in Ipswich (fide ML); Fox Sparrow reports were way down with only 3 reports; and Lapland Longspurs continued at Salisbury Beach with high counts of 50+ on the 24th and 13 Snow Buntings there on the 10th.

Contributors: Andrew Agush, Donald Alexander, Margaret and Arthur Argue, Fred Atwood, Wallace Bailey, Doris and Harold Baines, Charlotte and Thomas Banes, Bradford Blodget, Richard Bowen, Dorothy Briggs, John Clancy, Anne A. Clarke, William Cornwall, Herman D'Entremont, William Drummond, Edward Elrick, Ruth P. Emery, Richard Forster, Richard Frothingham (RFR), Murray Gardler, Marion Hancock, Winthrop Harrington, Sibley Higginbotham, James Hinds, Rodney Jenkins, Juliet Kellogg, Joseph Kenneally, Richard Kleber, Marie Ladd, Ruth Langley, Vernon Laux, Philip Martin, Louise Mayo, Reginald Maxim, Martha McClellan, Paul Miliotis (PMi), Michael Moore, Blair Nikula, Neil Osborne, Addie Palmer, Henry Parker, Philip H. Parsons, Harold Payson, Robert Pease, Wayne R. Petersen, Evelyn Pyburn, Phyllis Regan, Elizabeth Simonds, Bruce Sorrie, Gerald L. Soucy, Robert H. Stymeist, Richard Veit, Dorothy Weaver and Henry T. Wiggin.

PREVIEWS

April is a time when we welcome signs of spring and the gradual return of our summer birds. Our yards once again are full of songsters such as chipping sparrows, song sparrows and house wrens; towhees and catbirds stake out their claims before the onrush of May's warblers, thrushes and vireos. Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge is a good place to visit in April to see a wide variety of woodland sparrows in great numbers. A trip to Westport along the river and beach will yield nesting ospreys, singing Carolina wrens, migrating broad-winged hawks, early snowy egrets, laughing gulls and herons.