

SUMMARY FOR FEBRUARY, 1977

February brought a return to seasonable temperatures, fairly sunny skies and lower than usual precipitation. The temperature averaged 30.7°, .3° above the normal, making this the first warmer-than-average month since last September. The remarkably long seige of generally well below normal temperatures which began in mid-October was not relieved until the second week of February, when, between the 10th and 14th, the temperature averaged 9° above normal. The high mark was 48° on the 12th and 25th; the low, 9° on the 17th. The five month period, Oct. - Feb., was the coldest such period since that of 1934 - 1935. Precipitation totalled 2.40", 1.14" below normal; the most for a 24 hour period was 1.05" on the 24th-25th. Snowfall amounted to 5.9", the most in any storm being 3.8" on the 20th-21st. This snow brought the seasonal total to 47.3", 13.9" over average and already 5.2" over the whole-year average. A snow cover of 1" or more covered Boston continuously for 62 days Dec. 26 - Feb. 25, a new record stretch in the entire 42 years of airport records.

GREBES THROUGH HERONS

Most outstanding this February was the beginning of a tremendous influx of Red-necked Grebes that became apparent on the coast during the third week and continued into April, during which time approximately 400 birds were counted, mostly in localized compact flocks, from Plum Island to Provincetown. More specifically, the counts were as follows:

February:		#	
6,12	Cape Ann, Provincetown	22,10	RSH;BN,CAG
19,20	Salisbury-P.I., Provincetown	15, 80+	WRP,RRV++
22,26	Hull-Manomet, Brant Rock	67,67	WRP,RPE;HWH
27,28	Hull-Cohasset, Gloucester	<u>110,75+</u>	RRV,MHM

Although incursions of Red-necked Grebes in past winters have been attributed to the freezing over of the Great Lakes, where they winter in large numbers, it would seem presumptuous to infer that this year's flight occurred for that reason in the light of the fact that the birds did not arrive en masse until the third week of February, when they typically begin their northward movement anyway. Perhaps migrating birds from further south were diverted from their normal inland route and consequentially southern New England received the bulk of the migrant population. Pied-billed Grebes totalled 7 for the month, all reports coming from the south shore towns of Lakeville, Bridgewater, Scituate and Plymouth. The only Northern Fulmars noted inshore were 5 off 1st Encounter Beach Feb. 11 (BN,CAG), but on Georges Bank, a Greater Shearwater carefully studied Feb. 8 in Great South Channel (SE of Nantucket) was particularly unusual, although of much more frequent occurrence there in winter than the Sooty Shearwater noted in January. Both species are almost certainly overlooked. The total of 5 Black-Crowned Night Herons reported is of negligible value, as numerous individuals assumedly go unreported, but the American Bittern seen on Nantucket Feb. 20 (CJ) may well have been the sole individual of that species surviving to that date.

WATERFOWL

The "Richardson's" Goose of January continued at Town Cove, Orleans throughout the month, and although the individual Snow Geese reported from W. Falmouth throughout the month (AAC) and Marion Feb. 26 (GM) may well have survived the winter locally, 6 birds seen at Plum Island Feb. 21 (DG) were certainly representative of arrivals from a more southerly location. The only counts for Brant received were 1000 at Bourne Feb. 12 (EPG) and 700 at Squantum throughout the month (v.o.). Any data concerning estimates of this species' winter population would be of interest to the compilers for documentation of the species' current increase which is readily apparent from CBC data, the only data source now available. Other waterfowl tended to either hold their own or decrease through the remainder of the winter's low temperatures and heavy snow cover; of 28 Gadwall recorded, the northernmost was one in Newburyport Harbor Feb. 11-19 (RRV#), and the larger flocks were 10 in Salem Feb. 20 (MK) and 12 in Plymouth Feb. 4 (WRP), and the total of 17 Pintail reported this month was down from the 35 reported in January. A count of 30 American Wigeon at Orleans Feb. 20 indicated that they wintered there (BN,CAG), and single Northern Shovelers were noted in Lakeville Feb. 14 (RS), Manchester Feb. 19 (in salt water)(HWF), and Beverly Feb. 20 (JN). Of 8 Wood Ducks reported in February, 2 in Newburyport Harbor Feb. 27 were unusual for that locality (HWF#). Eight male Redheads in Bourne Feb. 12 (EPG), 5 in Lakeville Feb. 20 (WRP) and one in Plymouth Feb. 22 (WRP) all probably wintered locally, although 32 Ring-necked Ducks in Falmouth Feb. 12 (EPG), 60 in Wareham the same day (EPG) and 1-2 in Newburyport Feb. 19-27 (WRP) may have included recent arrivals from proximate southerly localities or simply birds previously driven to salt water by the interior freeze-up. An impressive count of Canvasback was 1660 in Somerset Feb. 27 (WRP), and wintering Common Goldeneyes numbered 2500+ in Newburyport Harbor, where they were counted on the 19th (RSH#). A male Barrow's Goldeneye was found at Revere Feb. 6 (SZ), one male in Quincy Feb. 4-19 (GAW), four amongst the Commons in Newburyport Harbor Feb. 19-26 (WRP,RRV#) and 5 males in Plymouth Harbor Feb. 26 represent the highest count ever for the south shore (WRP,KSA). The overall total of 11 Barrow's Goldeneyes for the area was near average for February. The Harlequin Duck flock at Magnolia numbered 5-13 and was present there throughout the month (v.o.), and the three at E. Orleans continued there as well; King Eiders were seen at Nahant Feb. 11 (a female)(SZ) and Marblehead Feb. 20 (a male) (MK). Ten Hooded Mergansers were reported, all from the southeast coastal plain except one at Salem Feb. 20 (MK); Common Mergansers numbered 50 in Hingham Feb. 19 (NO,SO) and 100+ in Somerset Feb. 20 (WRP).

RAPTORS

Seven single Goshawks occurred at scattered localities and the 2 Cooper's Hawks reported both were birds seen in January; an immature seen frequently in the Eastham-Orleans area (CAG,v.o.) and one in Littleton (VS). Quite unusual for recent years were Red-shouldered Hawks at Cape Ann Feb. 13 (JFK), at Newburyport Feb. 21 (WRP) and in W. Roxbury Feb. 1 (WWB), while one in Bridgewater Feb. 19-23 was

somewhat more commonplace (GRF#). Rough-legged Hawks totalled 17 in February (cf. 8,10,12,13), while seemingly a high total, recent winter reports are blatantly incomplete, in particular lacking totals from Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, areas that may represent the species' center of abundance in Massachusetts. The white phased Gyrfalcon from January continued in the Plum Island area throughout the month, and Merlins were seen at Manomet Feb. 8 (MBO staff), at Orleans Feb. 12 (WRP), unusually far north in Essex Feb. 20 (JN), on Nantucket the same day (JN) and in Provincetown Feb. 26 (CAG,BN).

GALLINULE THROUGH ALCIDS

The Common Gallinule on Nantucket was still alive and well there until at least Feb. 19 (CJ), in a location where they regularly survive milder winters. Three Killdeer were present in Plymouth Feb. 26, late for so many unless the birds were early migrants, and one was observed in Halifax the next day as well (WRP). Other wintering shorebird species, all typical, included 40 Ruddy Turnstones in No. Scituate Feb. 5 (WRP), a total of 32 Common Snipe from scattered localities, 30-40 Red Knots in No. Scituate Feb. 5-19 (WRP,GAW) and 800+ Purple Sandpipers at the same locality Feb. 21 (MFL,MJL,RRV). Glaucous Gulls totalled 12 in the area, compatible with the January total, though Iceland Gulls as usual reached peak winter concentrations of 75 at Cape Ann Feb. 6 (RSH) and 90 at Plum Island Feb. 19 (WRP), and on the outer Cape, 10+ were seen off Race Pt., Provincetown Feb. 20 (RRV). Becoming at least somewhat less surprising, if not actually regular, in recent years, an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull of the graellsii race was observed flying in to roost for the night with Herring Gulls at Town Cove, Orleans Feb. 25 (KPA). Two adult Black-headed Gulls were seen regularly in Newburyport Harbor throughout the month (RRV#) and a group of 1-4 were more or less regularly present in the Revere area throughout the month (SZ), while the only report of Little Gull received was of an adult in Gloucester Harbor Feb. 6 (AWN). Black-legged Kittiwake counts of note were 100+ in Gloucester Feb. 6 (WRP) and 300 off North Beach, Orleans Feb. 20 (WRP). The alcid flight of early winter dwindled following the third week of January, and most counts in February involved tight flocks of essentially stationary birds, mostly Razorbills, seen sitting on the water. Such flocks of auks numbered 250+ off Orleans Feb. 12 (WRP) and 125+ off Provincetown Feb. 20 (RRV,HM,ROP). Confirming our suspicions of their relative abundance on the offshore banks, three Common Murres were identified on the Nantucket shoals Feb. 12 (MBO staff), and, in addition, one un-oiled individual was seen from shore at Provincetown Feb. 20-26 (RRV,PP,BN#). The massive concentrations of Thick-billed Murres encountered early in the winter moved elsewhere this month; five remained in the vicinity of the entrance to the Cape Cod Canal in Bourne until at least Feb. 26 (WRP), and 50+ were seen off Provincetown the same day (BN,CAG). Black Guillemots continue, apparently regularly, to occur further south than our previous conception of their "normal" winter range; two were observed at No. Scituate Feb. 5 (WRP) and 7-8 were seen off Race Pt., Provincetown Feb. 20 (RRV,PP,ROP,HM).

OWLS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

A few Screech Owls, apparently succumbing to starvation, flew into dwellings in the Norwell-Scituate area Feb. 2 (BAL). Two Snowy Owls occurred during the month, one at Salisbury (v.o.) and one at Squantum Feb. 25 (NO,SO); three Barred Owls continued to cause excitement as they roosted in exposed perches in deciduous trees around the Harvard University campus in Cambridge (v.o.), and one was located in Melrose Feb. 13 (CJ). The Long-eared Owl continued in Hingham, as did two Short-eared Owls in Eastham (v.o.). Breeding Saw-whet Owls were heard calling in Brewster Feb. 12 (WRP) and Middleboro Feb. 26 (KSA). The Red-bellied Woodpeckers of January at Adamsville and Gloucester continued at their respective localities throughout the month, and an adult Red-headed Woodpecker came to a feeder briefly in Middleboro Feb. 5 (H&G Griswold).

HORNED LARK THROUGH THRUSHES

A total of 190 Horned Larks were observed at the Cumberland Farms in Bridgewater on the 6th (BBC-D.Davis). The wintering population is variable, but is above average here this winter, with 200 reported during January. The Common Crow roost at Bellview Hill, W. Roxbury continued with an average number of 1500 present throughout the winter (RMB#). Another roost near Shopper's World, Framingham totalled over 500 (EWT). Only 2-3 Fish Crows were reported during the month (WRP) (cf. 185,5,74) for the last three years. Has this species moved westward or has it left our area? We need more reports of this recent first-time breeder.

The annual Cardinal, Tufted Titmouse and Mockingbird census was held on Feb. 13 and 14. The results were Cardinal 8382, an increase of 3635, Tufted Titmouse 8311, an increase of 3102, and Mockingbird 2199, an increase of 1001. For a full report send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Massachusetts Audubon Society, Natural History Dept., Lincoln, MA, 01773.

Four Winter Wrens were reported during the month, one each from Lancaster (HM), Melrose (CJ), Manomet (MBO) and Concord (BBC-J.Hinds) (cf. 5,6,2 for the last three years). Only three Carolina Wrens were reported during the month as compared with 11 in 1974, 11 in 1975, and 5 in 1976. Cold winters are extremely hard on Carolina Wrens, which traditionally increase during cycles of mild seasons, only to be eliminated by cold and snowy winters. More reports during the spring months will be needed to determine what effect the winter of 1977 had on the population of this species.

A Catbird was observed at Milton on Feb. 2 (M.MacDonald) and only four Brown Thrashers were recorded. The counts of American Robin continued unusually high, although down from December and January. A total of 81 were seen on the 14th at Falmouth (AAC). The severity of this winter undoubtedly had its toll of the number of passerines that usually winter in Massachusetts. Single Hermit Thrushes were reported from six locations, as compared with 24 individuals in early January 1977. Four Bluebirds were seen in Bedford Feb. 1-3 (L.Brooks).

WAXWINGS THROUGH SPARROWS

Cedar Waxwings were reported from just two localities and in very small numbers, 15 in Lancaster on the 12th (HM) and 14 at Plymouth on the 26th (PS). Last winter 163 were reported. Cedar Waxwings are erratic winter visitors throughout, and their numbers fluctuate from year to year, even from month to month, continually scattering and regrouping in different areas. They often congregate where there is an abundant supply of berries, however a heavy winter snow storm earlier this year ruined what crop there was. Nine Northern Shrikes were reported, scattered throughout eastern Massachusetts with 2 - one adult and one immature - at Plum Island (v.o.) (cf. 16,8,7,6 for the last four years). Ten Meadowlarks were found on the 10th in Scituate (Mrs. Crocker).

Twenty-two Redwinged Blackbirds were reported on the 12th in Hingham (NO) and 60 were at Norwell on the 18th (BAL). The first general arrival in small numbers were reported on the 25th from many localities in the Route 128 area. Larger numbers arrived on the 27th in southeastern Massachusetts with 1200+ in Middleboro and Bridgewater (WRP). A Rusty Blackbird was seen on the 27th in Clinton (HM) (cf. 1,24,14,0 for the last four years). A roost of 400+ Common Grackles were present all winter in Orleans (v.o.). The first migrants were single birds in Wellesley on the 24th (LJR) and in Acton on the 25th (HF). A general arrival in small numbers occurred on the 26th. A Dickcissel was reported from Manchester on the 19th (HF) (cf. 1,7,0,0 for the same period, the last four years). Very few reports of Evening Grosbeak were received, with a maximum count of only 30 at Falmouth (AAC). Definitely above average numbers of Purple Finch were reported with a maximum of 55 throughout the month in Lancaster (HM), 75 in Lexington (PR) and 31 in Reading (BBC-A.Blaisdell). There were 89 other individuals reported from many localities, (cf. 30,19,23 for February during the last three years). House Finches still continue to increase and 180 were reported from Westport (JJC).

Five Pine Grosbeaks were seen during the month; 2 at Milton on the 2nd (M.MacDonald), on the 4th, 1 in Watertown (RHS), 1 on the 6th in Wellfleet (CAG), and 1 on the 14th in Brookline (HTW). Only 1 Pine Siskin was reported during the entire month at Norwell on the 7th (BAL) (cf. 311,6,278 for the last three years).

A Chipping Sparrow continued at Lancaster through Feb. 14. This bird has been around since December 1976. Chipping Sparrows have been recorded only on two occasions since 1973 during February (3 in Middleboro on 1/15/73 and 1 in Barnstable on 2/2/75). White-crowned Sparrows were reported from 3 localities, an adult present all month in Lancaster (HM), another adult at Broadmoor Sanctuary, Natick (EWT), and an immature in Brookline on the 26th (HC). The McCown's Longspur was seen again at Bridgewater on Feb. 3 only (C.Sharf). It had disappeared on the 26th of January before being rediscovered.

With the month of May upon us, the compilers hope that all of you take notes on migration and try to compile more data on arrivals, departures and peak movements. Have a happy Spring!!

RRV,RHS

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Kenneth P. Able, Virginia Albee, Kathleen S. Anderson, Wallace W. Bailey, James H. Borton, James W. Berry, Dorothy Briggs, Lorraine Brooks, Jeffrey Bryant, Libby Burbank, Richard M. Butler, Persis W. Campbell, John J. Clancy, Anne A. Clarke, Ronald Clayton, Hamilton Coolidge, Mrs. Edward Crocker, Davis and Viola Crompton, Dorothy M. David, Mrs. John Downey, Ruth P. Emery, Harold W. Ferris, Gerald R. Flaherty, Richard A. Forster, Thomas Gagnon, Elizabeth P. Garrey, Ida Giriunas, Carl A. Goodrich, Donald Grover, John Grugan, Richard & Dora Hale, H. Warren Harrington, Richard S. Heil, John W. Hinds, Carl & Barbara Holdridge, Craig Jackson, Mark Kasprzyk, Joseph F. Kenneally, Marcia J. Litchfield, Myron & Beverly Litchfield, Mrs. William Logan, Clarence and Janet Luck, Marion MacDonald, Martha H. McClellan, Hugh McGuinness, Harold Merriman, George Mock, Mrs. William Nichols, Albert W. Nickerson, Blair Nikula, John Nove, Neil & Sharon Osborne, Robert O. Paxton, Ethel C. Pearson, Wayne R. Petersen, Peter M. Polshek, Robert Rafferty, Parker C. Reed, Leif J. Robinson, Craig S. Sharf, Gordon Seavey, Philip N. Shapiro, R. Spaulding, Virginia Sprong, Peter Stowe, Robert H. Stymeist, Eliot W. Taylor, Richard R. Veit, Richard K. Walton, Henry T. Wiggin, George A. Wilson, Scheil Zende, Brookline Bird Club (BBC), Christmas Bird Count (CBC), Manomet Bird Observatory (MBO), various observers (v.o.).

ADDENDA

Black Skimmer:

9/19/76	Revere	4 imm.	S.Zendeh
9/19/76	Plymouth Beach	1	MBO staff