

New England Region

PETER HUNT

The winter of 1996–1997 began with two strong coastal storms in early December, and ended with near-record warmth in late February. Over the period as a whole, temperatures averaged four to five degrees above normal, making the winter among the ten warmest in over 100 years of record keeping. The high temperatures, particularly in December when they averaged six to nine degrees above normal, were responsible for large numbers of lingering half-hardies. Several species in this group were reported both in northern New England and well into January and February closer to the coast. Inland lakes and rivers were slow to freeze, resulting in several records of inland waterfowl into January. Precipitation averaged slightly greater than normal, but because of the high temperatures, snow accumulations remained relatively low in the north. In terms of avian activity, many observers remarked on the season's overall "dullness," largely because of the almost complete lack of winter finches and other northern invaders. At the same time, it was a better-than-average year for Northern Hawk Owls, Boreal Owls, and, to a lesser extent, Gyrfal-

cons and Snowy Owls. Notable rarities were concentrated near the coast, and included two Eared Grebes, several Tufted Ducks, Northern Lapwing, Ivory Gull, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Harris's Sparrow.

Abbreviations: M.V. (*Martha's Vineyard*)

Loons to Herons

Red-throated Loons were inland in Vermont on the Ferrisburg CBC Dec. 21 (*fide* JN) and at Grande Isle Jan. 4 (DH). This season's Pacific Loons came from Sachuest Pt., RI, from Jan. 9 to 20 (BG, m.ob.), and Boston Harbor, MA Feb. 9 (B. Zuzavich *et al.*, *fide* MR). The mild December may have been responsible for inland records of Pied-billed Grebe in the north, with one each for Naples, *Cumberland*, ME Jan. 19 (G. Carson), Burlington, VT, throughout December (DH), and Tilton, *Belknap*, NH Feb. 13 (*fide* A.S.N.H.). The maximum count of Horned Grebes inland was 160 at Charlotte, *Addison*, VT Jan. 4 (TM). Two–three Red-necked Grebes were present both in w. Massachusetts and on L. Champlain in December. An **Eared Grebe** was present throughout the season at E. Gloucester, MA (JS *et al.*, *fide* MR), while a second was reported from Sabin's Pt., RI Feb. 5–28 (D. Finzia *et al.*, *fide* DE). The early December coastal storm forced only a few pelagic birds to shore at traditional Massachusetts seabird spots, such as Rockport and First Encounter Beach. Counts of tubenoses at the latter totaled four N. Fulmars and three unidentified shearwaters Dec. 8 (BN). Later in the winter, pelagic trips to Cox's Ledge, RI, turned up six N. Fulmars Feb. 2 and five Feb. 16 (BG). Up to five Great Cormorants were inland in Holyoke, *Hampshire*, MA, and \geq two were along the Merrimack R. in New Hampshire. The highest coastal count was an impressive 300 at Rockport, MA Jan. 4 (P. & F. Vale). A Double-crested Cormorant inland at Quabbin Res., MA Jan. 4 (*fide* SK) was quite late, but less unusual considering the late freeze. Noteworthy herons included the 2nd and 3rd winter records of **Least Bittern** for Massachusetts: one on the Newburyport, MA

CBC Dec. 29 (*fide* JB) and another found in Cotuit, *Barnstable*, MA Jan. 12 and sent to a rehabilitator (*fide* MR). A Little Blue Heron lingered until the CBC period in New Haven, CT (*fide* GH).

Waterfowl

Tundra Swans made a good showing this winter, with three at a traditional spot in Naples, ME (m.ob.), four at 3 locations in Rhode Island (*fide* DE), and single birds at Nantucket, MA Jan. 16 and Newton, *Middlesex*, MA Feb. 28. Greater White-fronted Geese were also well represented. Connecticut hosted four throughout the season at Wallingford, plus single birds at Southbury, *Fairfield*, and N. Branford, *New Haven* (*fide* GH). In Massachusetts, two birds remained at Ipswich, *Essex*, from November through January (m.ob.), and single birds were at Wellesley, *Norfolk*, through January and February (m.ob.), New Bedford Jan. 20, and Newbury Feb. 10. Single Greater White-fronted Geese were reported from 4 locations in Rhode Island from Jan. 23–Feb. 6 (*fide* DE), but it is unclear how many individual birds were involved. Eur. Green-winged Teal were at White Brook, RI Dec. 23 (J. Murphy) and Seekonk, *Bristol*, MA Dec. 22–Jan. 1 (M. Boucher, R. Bowen, v.o.). A total of \geq 16 Eurasian Wigeon is comparable to recent years; this season's birds included two in New Hampshire, two–three in Rhode Island, four in Connecticut, and \geq eight in e. Massachusetts. Numbers of other dabblers were unremarkable, if not actually lower than usual, a somewhat surprising find considering the mild winter. It was perhaps not unusual, therefore, to have only one Blue-winged Teal reported, from M.V., Jan 5 (AK). Bay ducks, on the other hand, were reported in good numbers. High counts for Canvasback included 506 on Cape Cod, MA (C.C.B.C.), 732 in Rhode Island (*fide* DE), and 17 on L. Champlain, VT (TM). Redheads were similarly common, with 18 at Trustum Pd., RI, through February (m.ob.), five on L. Champlain, VT (TM), 35 on Nantucket, MA Dec. 1, and 64 in Falmouth, MA Feb. 1 (m.ob.). **Tufted Ducks** were reported for 4 of the 6 states, with a total of six for the season. Heading the list was the first Tufted Duck for Maine, found at Chickawaukie Pond, Rockland, *Knox*, Dec. 24–30 (ph., D. Reimer, m.ob.). Others were at Old Saybrook, CT, in late February (ph., GH, m.ob.), Sabin's Pt., RI, from late January through February (*fide* DE), New Bedford, MA Dec. 27–28 (v.o.), Nantucket, MA Jan. 13–Feb. 17 (m.ob.), and Plymouth, MA Feb. 1–14 (WP). No excep-



tional numbers of Com. Eiders were reported, but the species appears to be increasing in Connecticut, where \geq dozen wintered along the e. coast (*fide* GH). King Eider numbers appeared to be down in Maine (*fide* JD), but two in New Hampshire were more than usual; perhaps they didn't notice the border as we do. Harlequin Ducks were found in about average numbers at traditional locations: 20 at Ogunquit, ME, 31 at Rockport, MA (G. d'Entremont), 18 at Nantucket, MA (E. Ray), and \leq 108 at Sachuest Pt., RI. More unusual was a pair at Charlotte, VT Dec. 15 (\dagger TM). A count of 800 Com. Goldeneye at S. Hero, *Grand Isle*, VT Feb. 1 (TM) was higher than usual for L. Champlain. Numbers of Barrow's Goldeneyes were above average, including five–seven in Vermont (TM), four in New Hampshire (*fide* AD), \geq three in Rhode Island, and three–five in Connecticut (*fide* GH). Numbers at Belfast, ME, may have reached 40, but most counts were in the 20s (*fide* JD). Like other diving ducks, Ruddy Ducks seemed more common than in recent years, with high counts of 180 on Cape Cod, MA Dec. 7–8 (C.C.B.C.) and 49 in Medford, MA (MR). More unusual were 3 reports from the Connecticut R. in w. Massachusetts from Dec. 28–Jan. 10 (*fide* SK).

Raptors to Cranes

Western Connecticut continues to be the best place in the Region for wintering Black Vultures. This season \leq eight visited a deer carcass in New Milford, *Litchfield* (C. Wood), and a single bird frequented a Turkey Vulture roost near Danbury (m.ob.). The species is slowly inching its way east, however, as evidenced by the following reports from Massachusetts: Singles at Sandwich, *Barnstable*, Jan. 6 (M. LaBossiere, B. Boucher) and Chatham Feb. 1 (W. Baily *et al.*), and two birds that occurred with Turkey Vultures in the Westport/Dartmouth, *Bristol*, area from late January through February (m.ob.). Turkey Vultures began migrating N into n. New England with the mid-February warm spell. Totals for wintering Bald Eagles included 43 in New Hampshire, 47 in w. Massachusetts, and a record 13 in Vermont. Rough-legged Hawks were less common than usual in most of the Region, with the possible exception of the Champlain Valley of Vermont (TM). Golden Eagles were reported from the traditional wintering areas in Canaan, *Litchfield*, CT (GH, C. Wood) and Quabbin Res., MA. Scattered reports of wintering Merlins were received from all states except New Hampshire, reflecting this



Gyrfalcon in Lowell, Massachusetts, February 1, 1997. Photograph/Linda Hunnewell.

species' increasing presence as a winterer in the Region. Gyrfalcons were more common than usual, including four (one white morph) from the Champlain Valley of Vermont (\dagger JN, \dagger S. Morrill, \dagger DH, *fide* JN), one in Grantham, *Sullivan*, NH Dec. 27 (\dagger J. Bell), a dark individual in Lowell, MA Feb. 1 (ph., L. Hunnewell), a white morph in Agawam, *Hampden*, MA Dec. 21 (R. Stone, *fide* SK), and another white bird in s. Maine in January (m.ob.). A possible 2nd Gyrfalcon for Maine spent the season in Islesboro, *Waldo* (*fide* WT). A Virginia Rail inland at Lonsdale, *Providence*, RI Feb. 26 (R. Enser) was unusual for such a late date. The *Sandhill Crane* that appeared in Southampton, MA, in November lingered until Dec. 5 (*fide* SK).

Shorebirds to Alcids

Perhaps the star of the season was the ad. *Northern Lapwing*, the first for Massachusetts and 3rd for New England, that frequented Chilmark, M.V., from Dec. 26–30 (AK, m.ob.). A *Willet* first discovered on the New Haven, CT CBC in late December remained through the season, providing the first overwintering record for this species in the Region (*fide* GH). While the lateness of the record suggests the possibility of the western race of this species, the two are not distinguishable in basic plumage. Among the more unusual lingering shorebirds in December were an Am. Oystercatcher on M.V., Dec. 27 (AK), a Spotted Sandpiper in Chatham, MA Dec. 3 (R. Clem), and a W. Sandpiper in Eastham, *Barnstable*, MA Dec. 22 (WP). Red Knots were found in low numbers this winter, with two in Provincetown, Ma Jan. 4 and three in N. Scituate, *Plymouth*, MA Feb. 9. By the beginning of February, Am. Woodcock were displaying in Rhode Island, and the continued

warmth pushed them into New Hampshire and s. Maine by the month's end. The Dec. 8 nor'easter pushed one phalarope sp., 10 Pomarine Jaegers, 30 jaeger sp., >200 Black-legged Kittiwakes, and 40 large alcids close to shore at First Encounter Beach, Eastham, MA (BN *et al.*). At the same time, one Parasitic Jaeger, 200 Black-legged Kittiwakes, and five Dovekies were reported from Rockport, MA (JS). Little and Black-headed gulls were also relatively scarce. One of the latter species was in Springfield, MA, from Feb. 6–25 (*fide* SK), for a relatively rare inland record. The *Mew Gull* that has been frequenting Lewis L., Winthrop, MA for the past several years returned once again, and was seen regularly from late December through February (m.ob.). This was probably the same individual that was reported irregularly from S. Boston Dec. 30 and Jan. 3 & 28. The season's only *Thayer's Gull* was at the waterfront in Burlington, VT Dec. 3 & 5 (\dagger DH), and—if accepted by the Vermont Bird Records Committee—would constitute a first state record. Iceland and Glaucous gulls were recorded from all states in average or below-average numbers. Lesser Black-backed Gulls included two from Maine (*fide* JD & WT), \geq five from Massachusetts, two in Rhode Island (RBA), and perhaps \leq five in Connecticut. Rivaling the lapwing for bird of the season, and certainly more cooperative, was an imm. *Ivory Gull* in Portland, ME (ph., L. Brinker, m.ob.). The bird first appeared Jan. 25, and delighted observers from far and wide through Feb. 22. Kudos to the employees of the fishing cooperative it frequented for their hospitality and helpfulness during its stay. Numbers of alcids were generally low, even at traditional e. Massachusetts hotspots. Dovekies and both Com. and Thick-billed murres were recorded on February pelagic trips out of



At Portland, Maine, this immature Ivory Gull remained in the vicinity of a fishing cooperative for almost a month in late January and February 1997, to be seen by many visiting birders. Photograph/Ron Lockwood.

Rhode Island (BG). Two oiled Com. Murres were found on Cape Cod, MA, in early February (*fide* BN). A single Atlantic Puffin was seen from Chatham, Cape Cod, Dec. 22 (VL *et al.*).

Owls to Woodpeckers

There were only two Barn Owls reported: one from M.V., MA Jan. 1 (RS), and another in Middleton, RI Jan. 14 (R. Bowen). Snowy Owls were more common than the last few years, with six in Vermont, two inland in New Hampshire, 25 in Maine, ≥ 14 in e. Massachusetts, and one each in Rhode Island and Connecticut. The true stars of the season in the owl department, however, were Vermont's Northern Hawk Owls, most of which had arrived by the end of November. Of the four documented individuals (\dagger , ph., m.ob.), birds in Cornwall, Bridport (both Addison), and Waterbury, Washington, remained throughout the period, with the latter still being recorded into early April. A 4th owl, in Craftsbury, Orleans, was only present from Jan. 1–12. It was thus possible, in early January, to see four Northern Hawk Owls within 2–3 hours in n.w. Vermont, a feat that is unlikely to be possible again any time soon. Unconfirmed hawk owls were reported from Arlington and Sharon, VT (*fide* JN), and Franconia, NH (*fide* A.S.N.H.), and given the invasion, some or all of these reports may have been valid. Not to be outdone, Maine hosted two; a regularly seen individual at Newburgh, Penobscot, from Feb. 15 through March (J. Smith, m.ob.), and one at Petit Manaan N.W.R., Washington, in mid-January (*fide* C. Duncan, *fide* JD). Numbers of Short-eared Owls seemed somewhat low, with four in n.w. Vermont, four in Maine, one in Greenfield, MA, and \leq four at Cumberland Farms, Middleboro, Plymouth, MA. While the hawk owls were entertaining birders in n. New England, a Boreal Owl in Boston, MA, was probably seen by more people than any other member of its species in history. The owl in question was first detected in November, and by mid-December had taken up residence in a yew bush along Commonwealth Ave., where it remained until mid-February (m.ob.). Another Boreal Owl was photographed by a hunter in Salisbury, Litchfield, CT in mid-February (*fide* GH), and a possible 3rd was heard calling in Sandwich, Carroll, NH Dec. 21 (\dagger T. Vazzano, awaiting decision by the New Hampshire Rare Birds Committee). Red-headed Woodpeckers occurred in good numbers, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, although down from the previous winter, showed no sign of relinquishing their recent gains in n. New England.



This male Cape May Warbler spent the entire winter on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, visiting a feeder to feast on strawberry jam. Photograph/Vernon Laux.

Flycatchers to Warblers

Despite the mild December, no E. Phoebees were reported for the season. Connecticut's 2nd Ash-throated Flycatcher, first discovered in Old Lyme in November, barely made it into the winter season Dec. 1 (*fide* GH). A Sedge Wren in Hadley, Hampshire, MA Dec. 22, although seen by an experienced observer, was not relocated (P. Champlin, *fide* SK). A Townsend's Solitaire was at W. Barnstable, MA, from Dec. 29 to the end of February (VL, m.ob.). Eastern Bluebirds were well reported from s. New Hampshire south, with a noticeable northward push at the end of February. Hermit Thrushes and Gray Catbirds both took advantage of the mild winter to linger farther north (into Vermont and New Hampshire) and later (into February) than in most winters (*fide* AD, JN, SK, GH). After last year's invasion, Bohemian Waxwings were almost unreported. The only flocks of any size were in the n. parts of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine, with scattered single birds straggling to e. Massachusetts (*fide* MR). Similarly, numbers of N. Shrikes were down to normal or below normal in all 6 states. Solitary Vireos turned up in 4 states in December. Most noteworthy was one in N. Westminster, Windham, VT Dec. 21 (\dagger D. Crook), with others in Little Compton, Newport, RI Dec. 1 (ph., JDn), Old Lyme, CT Dec. 3–5, and Southbridge, Worcester, MA Dec. 14 (S. & L. Hennin).

Twelve species of warblers were reported in the Region. Lingering late was a Magnolia Warbler on Plum I., MA Dec. 11 (B. Gette), providing a new late record for the state. Another in Biddeford, ME Dec. 1 was without details (*fide* JD). Perhaps most unusual in this group was an ad. σ Cape May Warbler that visited a feeder on M.V. throughout the winter, where it subsisted largely on strawberry jam (ph., *fide* VL). Other more ex-

pected lingerers included single Black-throated Blue Warblers on M.V., Jan. 1 (RS) and in Little Compton, RI Jan 5 (JDn), a Black-and-white Warbler in Falmouth, Cumberland, ME Dec. 14–26 (m.ob.), and an Ovenbird at a feeder in W. Swansea, Cheshire, NH Dec. 17–Jan. 20 (ph., R. Brusie). A σ Black-throated Gray Warbler was discovered Dec. 14 on M.V. (M. Sibert, m.ob). Observers seeking the island's N. Lapwing turned up a Black-throated Gray Dec. 28, but there were no further sightings of the male. It is thus unclear whether one–two individuals were involved, especially considering the similarity of the sexes in this warbler. Despite the warm winter, reports of the usual "winter warblers" (*i.e.*, Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, Pine, Palm, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow-breasted Chat) were not notable, a surprising pattern in light of the predominance of other half-hardies in the Region this season.

Tanagers to Finches

A f Western Tanager visited a feeder in Granby, Hartford, CT through the winter (ph., m.ob.). Dickcissels seemed more abundant than usual, including nine in Massachusetts, three in New Hampshire, and two in Maine. Like Hermit Thrushes and Gray Catbirds, E. Towhees lingered north and late, presumably due to the mild winter. A Spotted Towhee from Marblehead, MA Feb. 6 (L. Healy) was without details. Clay-colored Sparrows spent all or part of the winter at feeders in Northampton and Rockport, MA (*fide* SK, MR). Now that birders are distinguishing between 2 species of sharp-tailed sparrows, we should get a clearer picture of which populations winter in New England. Despite the potential for such ground-breaking research, only a single Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow (the expected species) was reported for the entire season,

from Plum I., MA Dec. 11 (C. Ralph). A **Golden-crowned Sparrow**, reported from Natick, *Middlesex*, MA Feb. 6 (G. Long) is awaiting decision by the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee. A more cooperative vagrant sparrow was the **Harris' Sparrow**, first discovered at a feeder in Salisbury, MA Jan. 18, and seen regularly until Feb. 17 (†JB, m.ob.). "Pink-sided" Dark-eyed Juncos were reported from Rochester, *Strafford*, NH Dec. 15 (R. Bickford) and Medford, MA through February (D. Oliver, m.ob.). Lapland Longspurs seemed to be around in better-than-normal numbers, especially in the L. Champlain Valley of Vermont (*vide* JN). Two Yellow-headed Blackbirds appeared in Connecticut (*vide* GH). One traveled with a huge mixed-blackbird flock in E. Hartford and Manchester throughout the winter, while the 2nd frequented a feeder in Waterford, *New London* (S. Barnum). Again, presumably due to mild temperatures, Baltimore Orioles were reported in higher-than-usual numbers, including one each in New Hampshire, Maine, and Rhode Island, and 10 in Massachusetts. Some of these were reported as Bullock's Orioles, but at least one was later shown to be a Baltimore, and as a result most questionable birds are probably best identified as "Northern" Oriole until more reliable identification criteria are discovered.

It was a poor winter for northern finches. Pine Grosbeaks, crossbills, Pine Siskins, and Evening Grosbeaks were virtually non-existent s. of the northernmost parts of New England. Common Redpolls were absent almost entirely away from n. Maine, with a few in Vermont (*vide* JN), and one–two records each for the 3 southern states. The only exception appears to be Purple Finch, which was found in good numbers in the north, and staged a minor incursion into Connecticut and Rhode Island in February (*vide* GH, DE).

Corrigenda

The dates for the Sandhill Crane on Nantucket, MA in the winter of 1995–1996 should be Dec. 25–Jan 6.

Subregional editors (boldface), contributors (italics), and observers: Audubon Society of New Hampshire (A.S.N.H.), *Jim Berry*, Cape Cod Bird Club (C.C.B.C.), **Alan Delorey**, J. Dennis (JDe), **Jody Despres**, **David Emerson**, Barbara Gearhart, **Greg Hanisek**, *David Hoag*, Allan Keith, **Seth Kellogg**, Vernon Laux, *Ted Murin*, **Julia Nicholson**, Blair Nikula, Wayne Petersen, **Marjorie Rimes**, J. Soucy, Robert Stymeist, **William Townsend**.

—Peter Hunt, P.O. Box 289, Enfield, NH 03748.

Hudson-Delaware Region

WILLIAM J. BOYLE, JR., ROBERT O. PAXTON, AND DAVID A. CUTLER

In dramatic contrast to last winter—slightly colder than normal and the snowiest on record over most of the Region—the winter of 1996–1997 was exceptionally warm and nearly devoid of snowfall. Not that it was dry, however, it was just that the above-normal precipitation fell mainly as rain, except in the heart of the Adirondacks. December and February were the warmer months, averaging six and seven degrees above normal, respectively, at Ithaca, with similar comparisons for the southern parts of the Region. The temperature hit a record 73° F. at Rochester February 21, and Buffalo recorded its first 70° F. day in February on the same date. Buffalo also experienced the greatest one-day drop in temperature, as the thermometer fell to 25° F. February 22.

Ornithologically it was an unexciting season, with no significant influx of northern or irruptive species. The unseasonable weather, coming after an unusually warm autumn, did result in the presence of a number of species attempting to winter north of their normal range, not always successfully. The premier rarity of the season was unquestionably the Northern Lapwing in New Jersey, but other highlights included White-winged Dove, Bell's Vireo, and Le Conte's Sparrow in New Jersey and a variety of uncommon gulls—Franklin's, Laughing, Mew, and California—in upstate New York.

Abbreviations: Avalon (*see watch n. of Cape May, NJ*); Braddock Bay (*Braddock Bay S.P. and vicinity, Monroe, NY*); Bombay Hook (*Bombay Hook N.W.R., near Smyrna, DE*); Brig (*Brigantine Unit, Forsythe N.W.R., Atlantic, NJ*);

Cape Henlopen (*Cape Henlopen S.P., Sussex, DE*); Hamlin Beach (*Hamlin Beach S.P. and adjacent lakeshore, Monroe, NY*); Indian River (*Indian R. Inlet, Sussex, DE*); Jamaica Bay (*Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens, NYC*); LI (*Long Island, NY*); Middle Creek (*Middle Creek W.M.A., Lebanon-Lancaster, PA*); Sandy Hook (*Sandy Hook Unit, Gateway National Recreation Area, Monmouth, NJ*); N.J.B.R.C. (*New Jersey Bird Records Committee*).

Loons to Storks

The indefatigable observers at the Avalon Sea Watch maintained their vigil through January, surpassing one-million birds for the fall-winter season Dec. 12. As in previous years, the Red-throated Loon flight continued strongly through mid-December. Four reports of Pacific Loon was unprecedented; most unusual was a bird seen sporadically from Dec. 31+ at Indian River (S. Fintel *et al.*). In New Jersey, a Pacific Loon was reported from Shark R. Inlet on the Long Branch CBC Jan. 4; it was seen there a few times thereafter (R. Dunlap, T. Proctor). Other sightings were at Barnegat Light Jan. 13 and Manasquan Inlet Jan. 23 (both B&NM); all of these reports must be reviewed by the respective state committees.

Modest numbers of Red-necked Grebes appeared along the coast and at Hamlin Beach; inland reports included five at Saratoga L., Dec. 7 (WGE, NLM), one at Riverton, *Burlington*, NJ Jan. 17 (E. Bruder), and another at Vischer Ferry, *Saratoga*, NY Feb. 16 (RPY). This season's Eared

