

appalachian region



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The winter weather, generally, was milder than usual in the Appalachian Region. The drought of the previous summer and fall persisted in the north, but observers to the south experienced a wetter than usual December–January period. There was a pattern of repeated freezing over and then thawing at most of the northern lakes and rivers. In mid-January a heavy storm over the lower Great Lakes triggered a late southward flight of migrant waterfowl across nearby inland areas. In *Venango*, Pennsylvania, a score of different waterbird species was found on the Allegheny River January 9 (JSt), and a similar heavy fall-out of waterfowl and gulls occurred on the Ohio River at Parkersburg, West Virginia, at about the same time (JE). A mild second half of February permitted Tundra Swans and many species of ducks and geese to begin drifting northward a bit earlier than usual. Many observers commented both on the unusual abundance and northern occurrence of semi-hardy passerines like Eastern Phoebe, Gray Catbird, American Pipit, Eastern Towhee, and Field and Fox sparrows. Notably scarce, or missing, were Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-throated Sparrow, House Finch, and the various irruptive northern finches.

Abbreviations: M.L.W.A. (*Mosquito L. Wildlife Area, Trumbull, OH*); P.I.S.P. (*Pesque Isle State*



Eared Grebes are known to exhibit sunbathing behavior, apparently documented by this photograph, taken January 28, 1999, at State College, Pennsylvania. Photograph/Rick Wiltraut

Park, Erie, PA); P.N.R. (*Powdermill Nature Reserve, Rector, Westmoreland Co., PA*); R.C.L.B. (*Robert C. Byrd Locks, Ohio R., Mason Co., WV*); S.H.L. (*South Holston L., Washington Co., VA/Sullivan Co., TN*).

LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

At P.I.S.P. a record 33 Red-throated Loons were counted passing by Sunset Pt. Dec. 6–30 during a systematic waterbird count (JM), but apparently none was observed elsewhere in the Region. There were reports of late or wintering Com. Loons from nearly throughout the area, including a high count of 170 at Douglas L., TN, Dec. 12 (RK, DEd). Horned Grebes also were widely reported, especially in December, with 70+ at Douglas L. Dec. 26 (DEd). Two Red-necked Grebes were listed on the P.I.S.P. waterbird count Dec. 8–9, one on the Allegheny R., *Armstrong, PA*, Jan. 23 (DD), and one at Cherokee L., TN, Dec. 18–Jan. 24 (DEd). An Eared Grebe was at Centre Furnace Pond, near State College, PA, Jan. 24–Feb. 19 (SRe, m.ob., ph.). Several were seen in e. Tennessee, including three on Douglas L. Dec. 26, one at Cherokee L. Feb. 20 (DEd), and one at S.H.L. Jan. 15 (RK), which has hosted Eared Grebes each of the last 5 years. In the north, late Double-crested Cormorants were at Conneaut L., PA, Dec. 30 (RFL, RCL), on the Allegheny R. *Westmoreland, PA*, Jan. 16 (PH, DH), and the Ohio R. at Parkersburg, WV, Dec. 30 (DEs, JE). At least 15 cormorants wintered

at Kingsport, TN (RK). A Great Egret was at Douglas L., TN, Dec. 12 (RK); another at *Augusta, VA*, Feb. 2 provided just the 2nd local winter record (YL). A total of 246 Black Vultures Dec. 19 on the *Augusta* CBC represented a new high for that area, as did 981 Turkey Vultures (YL). Unprecedented was the record of a Turkey Vulture Dec. 25–26 at *Warren, PA*, where the species has been previously unknown in winter (DCh, AC). Two (migrant?) Turkey Vultures had reached *Indiana, PA*, by Jan. 31 (DC). An early bird was at *Waynesburg, PA*, Feb. 2 (AD); another was at *L. Arthur, PA*, Feb. 3 (DY).

WATERFOWL

Even toward the north many lakes and rivers remained ice free much of the season; thus, an exceptional diversity of waterfowl was recorded. In Tennessee, single Greater White-fronted Geese were at *Kingston* Dec. 6 (DT), *Jefferson* Dec. 18 (DEd), *Meigs* Jan. 1 (DT), and *Anderson* Feb. 4 (AH); north-bound migrants had arrived in Pennsylvania at *Somerset* by Feb. 5–6 (SB, RMr), at *Geneva Marsh, Crawford*, Feb. 7 (RFL), and *Ligonier, Westmoreland*, Feb. 22 (RCL). A **Ross's Goose** at *Staunton, VA*, Jan. 25–Feb. 3 (AL, m.ob.) furnished a 2nd county record; another was at *Saltville, VA*, between late December and early February (PM, ph.). In Pennsylvania, over 13,000 Canada Geese wintered in the *Pymatuning L.* area (RFL, RH), about average for recent years. Five Brant were observed flying over *Gull Pt., P.I.S.P.*, Feb. 5 (RFL), the season's only report. Among the more unusual wintering ducks were a male Eur. Wigeon at R.C.B.L. Jan. 1–17 (WA, m.ob.), a Blue-winged Teal at *Bluestone L., Summers, WV*, Jan. 30 (JPh), and two Blue-wings at *Anderson, TN*, Jan. 1 (NM). A flock of 180 Redheads was still in the *Pymatuning L., PA*, area Dec. 14 (RFL), and 100+ were on the *Allegheny R.*, at *Warren, PA*, Jan. 16 (*vide* DW). There were 100 Canvasbacks on the *Ohio R., Washington, OH*, Jan. 29 (BH).

The waterfowl find of the season was a female **Harlequin Duck** at P.I.S.P. Dec. 1–7 (ph. JM, GC). Thirteen Surf Scoters were listed during the waterbird count at P.I.S.P. Dec. 4–Jan. 2 (JM); six were at R.C.B.L. Jan. 2–9 (WA, MG), and another on Feb. 27 in

the same area (WA). A White-winged Scoter on the Allegheny, R., *Venango*, PA, Jan 16–19 represented a first county record (JSt) Better counts of Black Scoters included up to four at Cherokee L., TN, Dec. 25–Jan. 10 (DEd); up to five at P.I.S.P. Dec. 3–Jan. 2 (JM); and three at Pymatuning L., PA, Feb. 20 (RFL). A raft of 800 Common Goldeneyes settled on the upper lake at Pymatuning Dec. 12 (RFL). The Linesville CBC, *Crawford*, PA, recorded a high of 779 Hooded Mergansers Dec. 20 (RH); another large count of 175 birds was at Prince Gallitzin S.P., PA, Dec. 15 (JSa). There was a remarkable fallout of 1000+ Ruddy Ducks at L. Arthur, PA, Dec. 19 (GW).

RAPTORS THROUGH GULLS

An Osprey, flying above a completely frozen-over Donegal L., was a surprise during the Rector, PA, CBC Jan. 3 (DS, *vide* RSM); another was at Cherokee Dam, TN, Dec 12–Jan. 16 (DEd), where one has been found each winter during the last 4–5 years. Bald Eagle numbers continue to increase throughout the Region. There were far too many reports to list individually, but high counts included 20 (11 adults, 9 immatures) Jan 1 in the Hiwassee R. area, TN, and eight each at Pymatuning L., PA, Dec. 26 (RFL, RCL), and at M.L.W.A. Jan. 31 (D&JH). Northern Goshawks were reported only from Pennsylvania, with single birds at Conneaut Marsh Dec. 25 (RFL, RCL), *Indiana* Dec 26 and Jan. 11 (MH, BM), Mt. Davis Jan 26 (JT), and P.I.S.P. Feb. 6 (RFL). Observers throughout the Region commented on an unusual abundance of Red-tailed Hawks, and a well-described, very dark bird at Stewarts Draft, *Augusta*, VA, Dec 25–30 was believed (SRo) to be a “Western” Red-tail (*B. j. calurus*.) Although Rough-legged Hawks were rather uncommon in at least one of their usual winter strongholds, Pymatuning L., PA (RFL, RCL), they were widely reported from throughout the Region. Three or four Golden Eagles were at Burke’s Garden, VA, in February (WC); at Tussey Mt., PA, the first north-bound bird was tallied Feb. 18 (DB) Rare so far north, three Merlins wintered in urban Pittsburgh at the same site where four–five spent last winter, an unprecedented event at that time (PH, m.ob.). An ad male Merlin was at M.L.W.A. Jan. 16 (D&JH).

A remarkable 2500 Am. Coots stopped on L. Arthur, PA, Dec. 5 (GW). Five Sandhill Cranes (from the recently established Pennsylvania breeding population) were staging for migration at Slippery Rock Dec. 10

(GW); the Hiwassee, TN, CBC listed a record 6309 cranes Dec. 24 (*vide* KC). Two Least Sandpipers were in the Hiwassee R. area Jan. 1 (JHn, DJ). A Purple Sandpiper was a good find at P.I.S.P. Dec. 1 (JHo, JF). Three late Dunlins were at P.I.S.P. Dec. 1 (JM), and five at Douglas L., TN, Dec. 26 (DEd). Ten dowitchers (sp.?) but probably Short-billed) were listed on the Hiwassee CBC Jan. 1, for the 2nd such report in the last 10 years (NB, DGA). Most exceptional was a very late **Red Phalarope** observed at L. Arthur Dec. 31–Jan. 1 (DY, JH).

An ad. **Parasitic Jaeger** allowed detailed study during the P.I.S.P. waterbird count Dec. 13 (JM). The winter’s only Little Gull was at P.I.S.P. Dec. 6 (WS), but perhaps the larid of the season was an ad. **Black-headed Gull** at L. Arthur Dec. 5–28 (RSr, m.ob.). Three Thayer’s Gulls were identified at P.I.S.P. Feb. 4–28, and six Iceland Gulls were there during the same period (JM). Three Lesser Black-backed Gulls were at P.I.S.P. Jan. 1–Feb. 1 (JM). Two Glaucous Gulls on the Ohio R. at Parkersbug Jan. 10–15 (v.t., GH, JB, m.ob.) furnished a new West Virginia state record; 11 were recorded Dec. 31–Feb. 28 at P.I.S.P. (JM), where small numbers now appear regularly every winter. A Great Black-backed Gull at Parkersburg Jan. 13–23 (JB, BH, m.ob.) was well out of range and may be the first confirmed in West Virginia.

OWLS THROUGH HORNED LARK

There were 3 records of Long-eared Owls from Pennsylvania: singles Dec. 26 in *Indiana* (DD, DY), Dec. 29 in *Allegheny* (CT), and Oil Creek S.P. Jan. 10 (GE, RSt). A Long-eared in *Sequatchie* Feb. 24–28 was the first found in s.e. Tennessee in several years (KC, m.ob.). Short-eared Owls were listed at numerous localities from Pennsylvania s. to Virginia; high counts included 11 Jan. 1 in Lander, *Warren*, PA (BW, DW), nine Jan. 1 in *Venango*, PA (CG, RSt), and 12 during January at Imperial, PA (PH, m.ob.). Northern Saw-whet Owls were recorded near P.N.R. Dec. 7 (RCL), Meadville, PA, Dec. 24 (KM, RCL), and L. Arthur, PA, Feb. 18 (DD).

The Rufous Hummingbird that successfully wintered at a Delmont, PA, feeder (JMa) in 1997–1998 returned this season but failed to survive severe weather conditions the night of Jan. 5–6 (*vide* RSM). A female captured in *Knox*, TN, Dec. 3 had been banded in Louisiana in January 1996 (*vide* RK), and a male banded at Graysville, *Rhea*, TN, Jan. 7 was still present at the end of the period (CS, PM). There were more

than usual numbers of wintering Red-headed Woodpeckers, from *Muskingum*, OH (GG, DG), and *Cambria*, PA (JSa), s. to *Augusta*, VA (YL). The only Loggerhead Shrike reports were of five or six birds in n.e. Tennessee (RK). Northern Shrikes, however, staged their heaviest invasion in years (with about 30 records received), reaching as far south as *Mahoning*, OH, Dec. 21 (NB), P.N.R. Dec. 2 (RCL, RSM), and all season at *Huntingdon*, PA (GG). Late Blue-headed Vireos were still at Rowlesburg, WV, Dec. 5 (GF) and Pipestem S.P., WV, Dec. 15 (JPh) A Fish Crow at Indiana City, *Indiana*, PA, Feb. 15 was well w. of its usual range in Pennsylvania (SG). Horned Larks were common nearly throughout the Region with a maximum count of 500 at Kahle L., *Venango*, PA, Jan. 14 (GE, RSt).

GNATCATCHER THROUGH FINCHES

A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was at Brainerd Levee, *Hamilton*, TN, Dec. 14 (KC). The **Varied Thrush** found at Pleasant Gap, *Centre*, PA, Jan. 10–15 (S&DZ) provided a new county record. An Orange-crowned Warbler was a good winter find for *Knox*, TN, Jan. 4 (CW, BS), as was one at Amnicola Marsh, *Hamilton*, Feb. 18 (LW). A Pine Warbler at a feeding station just s. of *Indiana*, PA, Dec. 16–Jan. 11 was well n. of its usual winter range (BM). A **Prairie Warbler** Jan. 16. at Cherokee Dam provided just the 2nd winter record for Tennessee (DEd, DT); there were 20 Palm Warblers, including one “Yellow” Palm, at Cherokee Feb. 13 (DEd). Most exceptional so far north was an **American Redstart** at *Warren*, PA, Nov. 25–Jan 17 (JD, RS). Late Common Yellowthroats were listed on the Butler, PA, CBC Dec. 19, at Mt. Davis, PA, Dec. 21 (JT), and in *Sullivan*, TN, Feb. 3 (ME).

A Savannah Sparrow near Springboro, PA, Jan. 11 (HC) represented perhaps just the 2nd *Crawford* winter record. The only Le Conte’s Sparrow was found in *Knox*, TN, Jan. 10–11 (FB, RH, DM). A Lincoln’s Sparrow at Parkersburg, WV, Jan. 2 was a rare find so far north (JE). There was a major flight of Lapland Longspurs into the Region with observations of small flocks nearly throughout—highest counts involved 50+ at Stewarts Draft, *Augusta*, VA, Dec. 8 (AL) and 70+ at R.C.B.L. Jan. 16–17 (WA, m.ob.). Snow Buntings also were widespread, staging their best flight in many years; best count was 1000+ Jan. 16 in n. *Lawrence* and neighboring *Mercer*, PA (CG), two birds made it as far south as Hump Mt., NC, Dec. 3 (ES), and one was at Middlebrook, VA, Jan. 13 (YL). A **Dickcissel** at a

feeding station at Delmont, *Westmoreland*, Dec. 1 and again Jan. 16 (KB) represented one of very few Pennsylvania winter records. Extremely rare so far north, a Baltimore Oriole visited a feeding station at Dunn's Eddy, *Warren*, PA, Dec. 4–16 (D&KB).

Following last winter's major invasion, northern finches were notably scarce: The only Red Crossbills were reported from Meadville, PA, where a flock of 50 was seen Feb. 19 (IF). Although Pine Siskins were widely reported, numbers were usually small. Over most of the Region, Evening Grosbeaks put in little more than a token appearance; a few birds were found as far south as Elizabethton, TN, Dec. 21 (HPL); 50 at McConnell's Mill S.P., PA, Dec. 19 (DB) represented the season's high count.

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western great lakes region



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It was another mild winter throughout the Region. The first two weeks of December were particularly warm, and water remained open well into the month. As a result, many water-related birds lingered well into December. In addition, other species remained, resulting in many record-late dates. Winter finally did arrive in the latter half of December and continued into January, resulting in near normal weather in Minnesota. But overall it remained mild in both Michigan and Wisconsin. All three states had a mild February. The mild weather also resulted in overwintering by many "half-hardy" species, such as American Robin, in large numbers. In contrast, typical winter visitors, such as finches and northern owls, were scarce to nonexistent in much of the Region.

LOONS THROUGH HERONS

Red-throated Loons are becoming regular in Michigan along the s. end of L. Michigan; this season reports included individuals in *Berrien* and *Muskegon*, the latest individual Dec. 30 (JW, JH) in *Muskegon*. Record late in Minnesota inland counties were Horned Grebes Dec. 16 in *Mille Lacs Lake* (KB) in the north and Dec. 22 in *Hennepin* (SC) in the south. Exceptional in Wisconsin was an Eared Grebe to Dec. 14 in *Milwaukee* (BD, DG, MK et al.). Michigan had another good winter for Red-necked Grebe with reports from 4 counties, the latest Dec. 30 in *Muskegon* (JH). A W. Grebe Dec. 13 in *Rice* (JL) provided Minnesota's 6th winter record; Wisconsin had a W. Grebe Dec. 20 in the Saxon harbor (JE). A Double-crested

Cormorant in *Otter Tail* (DM, SM) provided n. Minnesota's first overwintering record. Very unusual in Michigan, a Great Egret lingered to Dec. 19 in *Macomb* (MM), and less unusual were lingering Black-crowned Night-Herons Dec. 26 in *Holland*, *Ottawa* (JP), and to Jan. 17 in *Monroe* (SSa).

VULTURES THROUGH WATERFOWL

Turkey Vultures stayed well into December in Michigan and arrived back early, the first Jan. 26 in *Monroe* (PC). Wisconsin also had an early migrant Feb. 13 in *Dane* (CH). Michigan and Wisconsin reported higher-than-usual numbers of Greater White-fronted Goose, and all 3 states reported early arrivals; in Michigan the species was reported from *Allegan*, *Berrien*, *Branch*, *Saginaw* and *Washtenaw*, with highs of 19 Dec. 2 in *Allegan* (RBr) and 14 Feb. 9 in *Saginaw* (MW); Minnesota had its 3rd earliest arrival with seven in *Big Stone* Feb. 28 (DM, SM), only 4 days short of a record; Wisconsin had a record arrival with three White-fronteds in *Columbia* Feb. 10 (DT); this was followed by an impressive migration, with flocks of 10–80 recorded in the s. portions of the state. Once rare in the Region, Ross's Goose is now regularly reported from all 3 states. In Michigan, an individual was recorded Feb. 13 at Marysville, *St. Clair* (BW, BWi), and one–three were seen between Feb. 17–28 at Shiawassee N.W.R., *Saginaw* (MW, DP, BG), all are pending MBRC approval. In Minnesota, an individual was present to Dec. 19 in *Faribault*, while Wisconsin had two–three individuals between *Goose Pond*, *Columbia*, and ponds in *Middleton*, *Dane*, from Dec. 1–16.

Mute Swans appear to be increasing in Minnesota where 5 reports were received this winter, including birds in *Rice*, *Waseca*, *Winona*, and *Wright*. Trumpeter Swans are also increasing in Minnesota with maximum of 360 Dec. 23 wintering on the Mississippi R. at Monticello (ML) and an additional 166 counted Dec. 27 on the *Otter Tail* R. (DM, SM). Wisconsin had a flock of 25 Trumpeter Swans overwinter in *Polk*. Also in that state were impressive numbers of Tundra Swans in December, including a