

appalachia



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By Appalachian standards it was a mild winter, with a warmer-than-usual December, a few weeks of cold, old-fashioned winter in late January, and spring-like conditions by the last week of February. At Erie, Presque Isle Bay remained open until mid-January and was free of ice again by 25 February, allowing a wide variety of waterfowl to linger there. Open water at many inland rivers, lakes, and reservoirs also provided habitat for a variety of wintering waterbirds. Many raptors, including Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, and American Kestrel, likely benefited from low snow accumulations in the north that made small-mammal prey more accessible. No doubt because of these same mild weather conditions, many backyard feeder-watchers viewed the season as "dull" or, at least, "less than spectacular."

A scattering of hummingbirds attempted to winter in the southern part of the Region. As Kevin Calhoun noted, it was undoubtedly the first time ever that three different hummingbird species wintered at a single feeding station in Tennessee—or, this editor would add, anywhere else in the Appalachians! Northern Shrikes wintered in record-high numbers in western Pennsylvania, where a survey by Paul Hess account-

ed for a minimum of 68 birds scattered over 26 counties. Only rather moderate numbers of northern finches invaded the area, but, as noted below, the flight did take several species deep into the southern mountains. During the last week of February, with warm spring-like conditions, there were strong northward flights of ducks, Turkey Vultures, American Woodcocks, Eastern Phoebes, and Fox Sparrows throughout the Region.

Abbreviations: M.L.W.A. (*Mosquito Lake Wildlife Area, Trumbull, OH*); P.N.R. (*Powdermill Nature Reserve, Rector, Westmoreland, PA*); P.I.S.P. (*Presque Isle State Park, Erie, PA*).

LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

Fourteen Red-throated Loons were listed during a systematic waterbird count at Sunset Pt., P.I.S.P., through 1 Jan (JM); the only report s. of L. Erie came from Meander Cr. Res., *Mahoning, OH*, 18 Dec (*fide* CBA). Common Loons, recorded mostly as singles, were found nearly throughout the Region where there was suitable open water, with a high count of 28 at Douglas L., TN, 12 Dec (RKn, DE). The 46 Pied-billed Grebes listed on the *Garrett, MD*, CBC, 20 Dec, represented a new high count for that area (FP). Six hundred Horned Grebes were counted just offshore along a 5-mi stretch of beach at P.I.S.P. 18 Dec (JM); a high count of 76 was at Douglas L., TN, 12 Dec (RKn, DE), and seven were at L. Julian, *Buncombe, NC*, 20 Dec (WF). The season's only Red-necked Grebe was found off P.I.S.P. 7 Dec (JM). Now found regularly in the Region, up to six Eared Grebes wintered on S. Holston L., TN (RKn, WC), and as many as four were at P.I.S.P. 11–19 Dec (JD, LR, JM). A very late American White Pelican was an unusual find at Booker T. Washington S.P., TN, 18 Dec (JCh, BJ, HW); another was observed in *Mahoning, OH*, 19–21 Dec (*fide* DJH). Ten Double-crested Cormorants were flying down the Allegheny R. at Warren, PA, as late as 6 Jan (DW), and about 15 stayed to winter at Kingsport, TN (RKn).

An Am. Bittern was a rare winter find near Brevard, NC, 22 Dec (NS); even more surprising was one near Oakland, MD, 13 Jan (*fide* FP). Six Great Egrets, first seen 12 Dec at Hiwassee W.R., TN (LW, BJ, JCh), remained through the season. A Green Heron flushed from the edge of Keystone L. during the Bushy Run CBC, *Westmoreland, PA*, 26 Dec (*fide* DBy) was certainly late for

that locality, but was the bird at Herrington Manor S.P., MD, 26 Feb (FP) wintering or an exceptionally early spring migrant? The only reports of wintering Black-crowned Night-Herons were of ≤ 10 at Kingsport, TN (RKn). In recent years there has been a trend for Turkey Vultures to attempt wintering farther n. in the Region; one at Erie 6 Jan (BS) represented the first winter record for that area, one was in *Indiana, PA*, 27 Dec (RMH), and two were in *Trumbull, OH*, 9 Jan (DJH).

WATERFOWL

Reports of a Ross's Goose from three *Westmoreland/Indiana, PA*, sites 26 Dec–28 Feb may all have been of the same individual (*fide* PH), but another was at Blythe Ferry W.M.A., *Meigs, TN*, 6 Feb (*fide* KC). At Pymatuning L., PA, Canada Geese peaked at over 11,200 birds 19 Dec (RH); 3000 were at M.L.W.A., OH, 30 Jan (DJH). An unmarked Trumpeter Swan, first seen at L. Arthur, PA, in July, remained until mid-January freeze-up (PH); five wing-tagged adults were at P.I.S.P. 31 Dec–16 Jan (JM, JSt). Late southward flights of Tundra Swans included 300 on 18 Dec over *Allegheny/Butler, PA*, (PH) and 100 at Tidioute, PA, 31 Dec (JK); 150 wintered on Erie Bay (JM), and an early northbound flock of 30 was over Ligonier, PA, 23 Feb (BSH).

Over 700 Am. Black Ducks were at M.L.W.A., 19 Dec (CBA), while high counts of Mallards included nearly 3200 at Pymatuning L. 1 Jan (RFL), and 2000 at Quemahoning L., *Somerset, PA*, 25 Dec (TM). Two Blue-winged Teal at P.I.S.P. 18 Dec were especially late so far north (AnT), and late N. Shovelers included five at Silver L., Dayton, VA, 26 Dec (JBa) and 19 at Pymatuning L. 11 Dec (RFL). A female **King Eider** 18 Dec (†JM) was one of the highlights of the P.I.S.P. waterbird count. In Tennessee an imm. male **Harlequin Duck** on the S. Holston R. 1 Jan–early Feb (AH, JBr, m.ob.) represented just the 3rd state record. In w. Pennsylvania, away from L. Erie (where they are regular), single Surf Scoters were on the Ohio R. at Montgomery Dam, *Beaver, 18 Dec* (KB, BH), Kahle L., *Venango, 24 Dec* (JSt), and on the Allegheny R. near Pittsburgh 31 Jan (PH, SK); two were at L. Julian, NC, 20 Dec (WF, DBI) and two at Hiwassee W.R., TN, 12 Dec (RHo, DM). Two Black Scoters were at P.I.S.P. 8 Dec, with one there on the 28th (JM); two at Hiwassee 12 Dec were a rare find (RHo, DM). Exceptional Ruddy Duck counts included 1707 at L. Arthur, PA, 18 Dec (GW) and 944 in *Garrett, MD*, 18 Dec (FP).



The thousands of Common Redpolls that pushed southward during fall 1999 and continued into winter 1999/2000 were accompanied by a few Hoary Redpolls, such as this female at Presque Isle State Park, Pennsylvania, 10 Feb 2000. Photograph by Jerry McWilliams.

RAPTORS THROUGH TERMS

A late Osprey was at Cherokee L., TN, 12 Dec (RKn, DE), but one along the Allegheny R., at Warren, PA, 18 Feb (TG) was likely an exceptionally early spring migrant. Wintering N. Goshawks apparently were mostly confined to nw. Pennsylvania, but one was seen as far s. as Green Ridge State Forest, MD, 20 Feb (JBC). Rough-legged Hawks invaded the Region in the best numbers in several years: over 80 were reported, including 11 in nw. Warren, PA, 19 Dec (DW, TG), ten at Belleville, Mifflin, PA, 16 Jan (GG), and six in Allegany, MD, in mid-winter (GB, Rki). In e. Tennessee, reports came from Washington 5 Feb, Johnson 8–26 Feb (*fide* RKn), and Bledsoe 12 Dec and 10 Jan (*fide* KC). Wintering Golden Eagles included one at Acme, Westmoreland, PA, 6 Feb (JG), and another in Cedar Cr. Valley, Shenandoah, VA, 26 Dec (DDv). At least ten Merlins were reported from w. PA, with scattered birds seen elsewhere in the Region. The raptor of the season was a white-morph **Gyr Falcon** at the Stone Mt. hawkwatch, Huntingdon, PA, 7 Dec (+DBr). Single Peregrine Falcons were at P.I.S.P. 3 Jan (LM), Parkersburg, WV, in mid-Jan (*fide* JE), and Watauga L., TN, 9 Jan (HPL). Up to five wintered in Pittsburgh (PH) and a pair had returned to their nest site at Chickamauga Dam, TN, by 10 Jan (HS).

Early in the season, large rafts of Am. Coots settled on Regional lakes, including 3500 on Conneaut L., PA, 18 Dec (RCL, RFL), 2191 on L. Arthur 19 Dec (GW), and 475 at L. Moomaw, Bath, VA, 1 Jan (YL). On Erie Bay many coots did not survive to the end of February, when about three

dozen were found dead on the ice surrounding open patches of water (JM). A record count of 10,891 Sandhill Cranes was made at Hiwassee W.R., TN, 12 Jan (*fide* KC); one in Mercer, PA, 1 Jan was unexpectedly late so far north (NT). A record-late Lesser Yellowlegs was at Pymatuning L., Ashtabula, OH, 19 Dec (RCL, RFL); an early northbound migrant had reached Brainerd Levee, TN, 25 Feb (JHe). Among other interesting winter shorebirds were 31 Least Sandpipers and a Dunlin at Candies Cr. W.M.A., Bradley, TN, 10 Jan (KC). The only Purple Sandpiper was at P.I.S.P. 4–11 Dec (JHo, LC).

Single imm. dark-morph **Pomarine Jaegers** were spotted off P.I.S.P. 2 & 28 Dec and 2 Jan, with a probable fourth bird 30 Dec; a probable Parasitic Jaeger was there 30 Dec, all exciting results of McWilliams' systematic waterbird counts. An imm. Little Gull at Pymatuning L., 19 Dec represented the first Crawford, PA, record for the species (RCL, RFL), and one was at P.I.S.P. 8 Jan (JM). High counts of Bonaparte's Gulls included 608 at M.L.W.A 19 Dec (CBa), and 750 at Douglas L., TN, 12 Dec (RKn, DE). A Herring Gull near Brevard, NC, 27 Feb was just the 3rd for *Transylvania* (NS). The only Iceland Gull report was from P.I.S.P. 11 Feb (JM). A Lesser Black-backed Gull along the Monongahela and Ohio Rivers, Allegheny, PA, 28 Dec was an exciting find (ph. WDS), as were two at P.I.S.P. 30 Jan (JM). Five Glaucous Gulls were listed at Erie 31 Dec to 4 Feb (JM, DS). Single Great Black-backed Gulls at Pittsburgh 1 Jan (PH) and 6 Feb (JHo) were rare finds for that area, as was an imm. Black-legged Kittiwake along the Ohio R. at Montgomery Dam 14 Dec (SK). A Com. Tern was still at P.I.S.P. 10 Dec (JM), and a remarkably late Forster's Tern was at Nickajack L., Marion, TN, 27 Dec (JHe).

DOVES THROUGH HUMMINGBIRDS

The Eur. Collared-Dove population continued to increase in Hamilton, TN, with a high count of 61 on 30 Jan (DG); five were at Pikeville, a new location in Bledsoe, TN, 5 Feb (DV). Barn Owls, seldom reported in recent years, were located in at least three sites in ne. Tennessee (RKn). The lone report of Snowy Owl came from P.I.S.P. 29–30 Dec (JM). Long-eared Owls were more widely reported than usual in w. Pennsylvania, led by a total of 23 at three separate roosts in Juniata, PA (AdT), 9 birds in Somerset, PA (SB, DDa), and 4 in Venango (JSt); one or two in Shady Valley, TN, 22–26 Jan, represented the 3rd local record (RKn). Short-eared Owls were in

good numbers in, ne. Ohio, Pennsylvania, and w. Maryland, with more than 70 reported; ≤ 3 were regular at Hooper Lane, Henderson, NC, after 26 Dec (WF) Northern Reports of N. Saw-whet Owls came from 13 sites in w. Pennsylvania, with ≤ 7 at Moraine, S.P. (DDa). Southward, ten were found in Big S. Fork National Recreation Area, TN/KY (SJS); singles were at Bristol 26 Dec, and Roan Mt., TN, 11 Feb (*fide* RKn); and ≤ 3 were near Clayton, Rabun, GA, 8 Jan–3 Mar (JSe).

Incredibly, three species of hummingbirds wintered at a feeding station operated by Gil Brewster at East Brainerd, Hamilton, TN, and all were captured and banded (CSL, PM). An imm. male **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** trapped there 12 Dec was seen occasionally thereafter through the end of the period; an ad. female **Rufous Hummingbird**, also captured 12 Dec, was not seen subsequently; and an imm. male **Black-chinned Hummingbird** banded 4 Dec remained through Feb (*fide* KC). Elsewhere, an imm. male Rufous Hummingbird banded 4 Dec (CS, PM) at Signal Mt., TN, stayed throughout the period; a banded female was in Sullivan, TN, into Feb (*fide* WC). At Brevard, NC, two *Selasphorus* hummingbirds frequented a feeder mid-Oct–3 Jan, when one disappeared; the second bird was banded as a Rufous 5 Jan (SC) and remained through Feb (*fide* NS).

SHRIKES THROUGH FINCHES

The only reports of Loggerhead Shrike were of a few scattered birds wintering in ne. Tennessee (RKn). Northern Shrikes, however, staged their greatest invasion on record. In ne. Ohio, five were seen in Trumbull (DJH) and one in Ashtabula (CBa), while in w. Pennsylvania a fantastic 68 shrikes were reported from 26 counties (*fide* PH, RCL). At least two Northern crossed the Mason-Dixon line into Maryland, with one seen during the Garrett CBC (FP, CSk) and another at Dan's Mt., Allegany, 31 Dec–4 Jan (RKi). Near Clintonville, PA, Jerry Stanley witnessed a protracted chase and the eventual capture of a bat by a Northern Shrike on 24 Feb!

Blue-headed Vireos wintered in good numbers in the s. third of the Region, and one was listed as far north as Pipestem, WV, 16 Jan (JPh). Two early Tree Swallows had reached Staunton, VA, by 29 Feb (YL). In mid-Dec two Black-capped Chickadees were banded in Sullivan, TN, where they are rare, with one remaining into March (RL) Following last fall's heavy southward chickadee migration, significant northward movement could be detected at the P.N.R

banding station by early Feb (RCL, RM). Two Sedge Wrens and a Marsh Wren were good finds on the Hiwassee W.R. CBC 1 Jan, and a Marsh Wren was at Brainerd Levee, TN, 18 Dec (KC). A **Townsend's Solitaire** was briefly observed but well-described near Slickville, *Westmoreland*, 15 Jan—a first w. Pennsylvania winter report (†MM). American Robins were unusually abundant in the north; high counts included 17,500 at a *Washington*, PA, state game lands 29 Jan (KB, BH), over 10,000 at a roost in Fairview, PA, in early Feb (JM), and 5863 at Raccoon Cr. S.P., PA, 28 Dec (*fide* PH) An unusually high Am. Pipit count was of 374 birds on the *Henderson*, NC, CBC 19 Dec (WF). Orange-crowned Warblers, four in all, were found at three sites in *Hamilton* and *Marion*, TN, between 18 Dec and 31 Jan (*fide* KC). Several Pine Warblers were seen in *Transylvania*, NC, in February (NS), and one was in *Carter*, TN, 20 Jan (FA). In e. Tennessee, ten Palm Warblers were listed between 18 Dec–1 Jan (RKn, KC), and one was near Pisgah Forest, NC, 15 Jan (NS). A mid-winter report of Com Yellowthroat came from *Carter*, TN, 9 Jan (*fide* RKn).

A **Spotted Towhee** found at Joe Corsales' bird feeder at Export, *Westmoreland*, PA, during the Bushy Run CBC 19 Dec, represented just the 4th Pennsylvania record; it remained through the end of the period, allowing many birders to add this rarity to their lists (DBY, m.ob.). Eastern Towhees wintered in above-average numbers nearly throughout the Region. A Savannah Sparrow at Coneautville, PA, 22–26 Jan was a rare midwinter find so far north (*fide* JM) and 18 at Swoope, *Augusta*, VA, 13 Feb represented a new high winter count there (YL). A late Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow was a rare find in *Hawkins*, TN, 18 Dec (RKn). Usually scarce in Pennsylvania, White-crowned Sparrows wintered in record numbers, with 91 on the Bushy Run CBC (DBY); a Gambel's White-crowned was at a feeder near Shelocta, *Indiana*, PA, 6–27 Dec (RMH). Snow Buntings were fairly common in the north, with ≤200 in late Jan at Neshannock Falls, *Lawrence*, PA (BD); the most southerly report was of two in *Garrett*, MD, 5 Feb (JBC). A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak visited a feeder at Little River, NC, 14 Feb (*fide* NS). A Brewer's Blackbird appeared at Amnicola Marsh, *Hamilton*, TN, 14 Jan (CBI); three were at Brainerd Levee 10 Feb (KC), with another on the 19th (JHe). In Pennsylvania, Baltimore Orioles briefly appeared at feeders in Harborcreek 15 Jan (SP), and Sayre 17 Jan (RS).

After a heavy flight of Purple Finches through Pennsylvania during the fall, they were unaccountably scarce at P.N.R. by early winter (RM, RCL), but they were numerous in *Transylvania*, NC (NS) and in "substantial numbers" in Pipestem, WV (JPh). Small numbers of Red Crossbills invaded the Region, reaching as far s. as Cades Cove, TN (SJS), and *Henderson*, NC (*fide* WF). White-winged Crossbills were only slightly more numerous, with a high count of ten in Franklin, PA (JSt) and a few wandering s. to Roan Mt. and Signal Mt., TN (*fide* KC, RKn). Flocks of 100 or more Com. Redpolls were occasionally observed, especially in *Erie*, *Crawford*, and *Lawrence*, PA, and single birds reached as far s. as Shady Valley, TN, 25 Jan–23 Feb (JSh) and *Augusta*, VA, 8–19 Feb (YL). A female **Hoary Redpoll** (ph. JM) was a rare find at P.I.S.P. 10 Feb. Following a fairly heavy autumn flight, Pine Siskins were uncommon or absent over much of sw. Pennsylvania, including P.N.R., by mid-winter (PH, RCL), but were plentiful in *Transylvania*, NC (NS), *Augusta*, VA (YL), and, locally, in se. Tennessee (KC). Evening Grosbeaks were rather widespread in the Region but nowhere common—the highest count was of just over 125 at Roan Mt. 15 Jan (*fide* RKn).

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