

# Eastern Highlands & Upper Ohio River Valley



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**H**arsh winter conditions came early and, except for a brief period in early January, snow cover was above average and persistent. Inland, most lakes and reservoirs remained ice-covered, thus many of the more uncommon waterbird sightings came from the area's swifter rivers. Winter raptors such as Short-eared Owls and Rough-legged Hawks were a major feature of the season—well documented in Pennsylvania by a statewide winter raptor survey (>100 routes) coordinated by Greg Grove. More than the usual number of wintering warblers and sparrows were reported, but the winter finch show was minor, for the second year in a row.

After a five-year stint as editor, this is my last Regional report for *North American Birds*, as I move on to new projects and semi-retirement. This comparatively brief foray

into editorship has given me a new perspective on, and a greatly increased admiration for, the steady, significant contributions of my friend and colleague, Dr. George Hall, who wrote these seasonal reports for more than 40 years. So, it is with a bit of reluctance but also relief that I pass editorship of this Region to the exceptionally capable hands and pens of Nick Pulcinella and Vic Fazio. It has been an enjoyable and an educational experience, and my sincere thanks go to many old and new friends for their patience, for their contributions, and for their assistance over these years. Good birding!

**Abbreviations:** O.N.W.R. (Ottawa N.W.R., Ottawa/Lucas, OH); P.I.S.P. (Presque Isle S.P., Erie, PA).

### LOONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

Scattered inland records of Red-throated Loons included a bird at Dayton, OH 4–6 Dec (C. Mathena), one at L. Cary, Wyoming, PA 14 Dec (BR) and 2 at Nockamixon S.P., Bucks, PA 27 Jan (BE). Four Common Loons in the mountainous Pipestem S.P. area of West Virginia 4 Jan provided an exceptional mid-winter count for that area (JPh). The Camp Dennison gravel pits, Hamilton, OH held 80 Pied-billed Grebes 12 Dec (E. Kitchen), and 40 remained there 17 Jan (B. Lacker). Pennsylvania's larger, swifter rivers

such as the Ohio, Allegheny, and Susquehanna attracted a scattering of mid-winter Red-necked Grebes, topped by 4 on the Schuylkill R. at Valley Forge 31 Jan (ph. JFr). Great Blue Herons remained in good numbers into winter, with, for example, 88 remaining at O.N.W.R. 7 Dec (EP); 2 survived a long freeze at L. Ontelaunee, Berks, PA by approaching ice fishermen who occasionally threw them small fish (RKe). A late Green Heron remained at L. Somerset, Somerset, PA 6 Dec (A. Marich), and another was seen at Raccoon Cr. Twp., Beaver, PA 1–2 Jan (E. Richards, MV). An early Black-crowned Night-Heron had returned to Hummelstown, Dauphin, PA by 20 Feb (TJ).

Vultures continued to expand their wintering range within the Region. Flocks of up to 25 Turkey Vultures were seen all season in the Ligonier Valley, Westmoreland, PA, where the species previously was all but unknown in winter (RCL, RM), and up to 27 were seen in Dec at Sewickley, Allegheny, PA (fide PH). About 500 Turkey Vultures roosted at Strouds Run S.P., Athens, OH this season (E. McElroy), and 32 Black Vultures at a Knox, OH roost were indicative of the gradual northward extension of wintering range (J. Larson).

Forty-eight wintering Snow Geese were listed on an O.N.W.R. census 1 Feb (EP), and 100 migrants were considered noteworthy over Vandalia, Montgomery, OH on the 18th (fide Dayton Rare Bird Alert); an estimated 90,000 Snows were at Middlecreek W.A., Lancaster, PA 22 Feb, where the population reached an all-time high of 150,000–170,000 by 2 Mar (Pennsylvania Game Commission survey, fide DH). Single Ross's Geese were found at three sites in Ohio and four localities in Pennsylvania, and 3 birds were at Middlecreek, PA 27 Feb (DH, C. Berthoud). Two Richardson's Canada Geese, flocking with larger Canadas, were a rare find locally in Wood, WV 1–12 Feb (JE, D. Esker, J. Benedetti). A flock of 35 Brant was headed s. over Hawk Mt. Sanctuary, Berks, PA 2 Dec (DB), one was on L. Caroline, Bucks, PA 15 Jan (DF), and another frequented farm ponds near Loundonville, Ashland/Holmes, OH 17 Jan–11 Feb (BG, J. Herman). A Pink-footed Goose was discovered at Coatesville Res., Chester, PA by Grier Saunders and Holly Merker 9 Jan. It was relocated the next day at nearby Chambers L. in the same county by Larry Lewis. The bird remained in the area for 10 days, frequenting one of those two water bodies. What was most likely the same individual frequented Greenfield Estates, Lancaster, PA 29 Feb+ (DH, J. Karnicky). The 36 Trumpeter Swans listed on the C.B.C. at O.N.W.R. was evidence of the success of Ohio's introduction efforts; Trumpeters are increasingly showing up in Pennsylvania, where an unmarked bird appeared at Pymatuning L., Crawford 1–3 Jan (RCL, RFL).

Twenty Wood Ducks at Winesburg,

Holmes, OH 3 Jan made a good winter count for that area (SS), as did 68 Northern Shovelers that passed the season at the Camp Dennison gravel pits, Holmes, OH (R. Foppe). Up to 20 Northern Pintails were unexpected in the mts. at Indian L., Somerset, PA 5–11 Jan (JPa), and a Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal created much birder excitement near Bellville, Mifflin, PA 27 Feb+ (J. Zook, m. ob.). At Nockamixon S.P., PA, American Black Ducks peaked at 200 on 21 Dec, a good count for that area (BE). The 1000+ Canvasbacks on an O.N.W.R. census 4 Jan (EP) were apparently short-term stopovers on their flight southward, while 3500 northbound Redheads put down at Metzger Marsh W.A., Lucas, OH 29 Feb (T. Kemp). The season's only Harlequin Duck report came from the Eastlake Power Plant, Lake, OH 31 Jan–2 Feb (LR, JPo). In a heavy flight, 2842 Common Mergansers and 11,040 Red-breasted Mergansers passed Lakeshore Reservation, Lake, OH 22 Feb (JPo).

## RAPTORS THROUGH GULLS

In a post-season count at Hawk Mt. Sanctuary, PA, volunteers listed 18 migrating Bald Eagles 16 Dec–31 Jan (DB). A mid-Jan Ohio Dept. of Wildlife winter eagle survey reported a record 352 Balds (271 ads., 81 imms.) from 57 counties—including 67 in Sandusky alone. Good numbers of Northern Harriers were reported from throughout the Region, topped by a gathering of 28 over Miami–Whitewater Wetlands, OH on the evening of 14 Feb (PW). The most noteworthy result in the 4th year of a 100+ route Pennsylvania Winter Raptor Survey (GG) was the large number of Rough-legged Hawks scattered across the state—a total of 341 birds. High Ohio counts of the species included 30 near The Wilds, *Muskingum* 19 & 26 Feb (LR). Wintering Golden Eagles were widely reported in small numbers, and an early migrant was spotted moving n. along Laurel Ridge, Somerset, PA 20 Feb (ML). Heavy, persistent snow cover undoubtedly contributed to the smaller-than-usual number of American Kestrels observed during the Penn-

sylvania raptor survey (268), less than half of the 2001 and 2002 counts (GG). Undoubtedly the raptor of the season was the Prairie Falcon found near The Wilds 15 Feb+ (M. Flynn, m. ob.), for Ohio's 2nd record.



This Pink-footed Goose was photographed Chambers Lake, Chester County, Pennsylvania 17 January 2004; the bird had originally been found 9 January at nearby Coatesville Reservoir in the same county. Possibly the same bird was reported at season's end in Lancaster County. Pink-footed Goose is recorded infrequently in the Northeast, with the southernmost records coming from Delaware and Pennsylvania; most North American records are recent, perhaps reflecting the increasing population in Iceland in the past two decades. *Digitized photograph by Dirk Robinson.*

Several Virginia Rails lingered in the Region through the C.B.C. period, including an amazing 7 at Quakertown Swamp, Bucks, PA 3 Jan (DF, CR) and one apparently wintering



Sea ducks such as this male Surf Scoter are rare but regular during the winter on ice-free inland water bodies in much of the Northeast. This photograph—taken along the Beaver River on 2 February 2004 near Big Rock Park, Beaver County, Pennsylvania—shows the prey item nicely: a crayfish. *Photograph by Scott Kinsey.*

bird at Spring Valley Wildlife Area, Greene/Warren, OH 8 Feb (R. Kolde). A rather late imm. Common Moorhen was still at O.N.W.R. 7 Dec (EP). At Least 18 Sandhill

Cranes wintered in ne. Lawrence, PA—presumably from a recently established local breeding area (PH, m. ob.); elsewhere, early migrants appeared at Murrysville, Westmoreland, PA 22 Feb (TK), at Waterford, Erie, PA 24 Feb (JSC), and Montoursville, Lycoming, PA 27 Feb (SP).

A Semipalmated Plover listed on an O.N.W.R. bird census 7 Dec (EP) represented a new late date for Ohio. Early migrant Wilson's Snipe included 25 at Blue Marsh L., Berks, PA 17 Feb (RKe) and one 19 Feb at Fairview, Erie, PA (JMc). Three Purple Sandpipers stopped over at Conneaut, OH 8 Dec, and one was at Headland Beach S.P. 8–12 Dec (*vide* RH); more unusual was a mid-winter bird at Eastlake, OH 25 Jan (CH, J. Kuenzli). Four late Dunlin remained at Conneaut through 29 Dec (CH).

The lone winter jaeger record was of a Pomarine Jaeger on the Elyria-Lorraine, OH C.B.C. 20 Dec, where the season's only Franklin's Gull was also spotted. A lingering Laughing Gull at Akron, OH barely made this winter's report, last seen 1 Dec (G. Bennett). The Bonaparte's Gull count reached 2500 at Cleveland 13 Jan, and 20,000 Ring-billed and 10,000 Herring Gulls had gathered there Christmas Day (LR). However, the highlight among the larid flocks at Cleveland was a California Gull, in third-winter plumage, found 8 Jan (LR). In Pennsylvania, single Herring Gull x Glaucous Gull hybrids were reported from P.I.S.P. 1 Feb (BC) and at the Penn–Warner tract, Bucks 15 Jan (DF); and five different such hybrids were photographed along Ohio's L. Erie front, including 3 at Cleveland (JPo). Also along the L. Erie shore, up to a maximum of 3 Iceland Gulls were listed in *Ashtabula* and *Cuyahoga*, OH, while 7 reports came from P.I.S.P. or Erie, PA 28 Dec+ (JMc, BC). Two Great Black-backed Gulls were great finds on the Ohio R. near Pittsburgh 21 Jan+ (GMa MV), as were 2 on the Ohio in *Cabell*, West Virginia 24 Feb (W. Argabrite). An imm. Black-legged Kittiwake was seen off Lakeshore Res. 3 Dec (JPo).

## OWLS THROUGH THRUSHES

On 3 Jan, for the 3rd time in recent years in

Somerset, PA, a Barn Owl was found dead due to a farm machinery accident—this time in a silo unloader (*fide* JPa). Do such events play a significant roll in the scarcity of Barn Owls in some areas? In Ohio, where the species seems to be faring better, a high count of 11 came from the Ragersville C.B.C., and a pair was nesting in *Tuscarawas* by 11 Feb (GMi). A single Snowy Owl was reported from Coshocton, OH 23 Jan (ph.

Pennsylvania raptor survey routes (GG).

A decade ago, it would have been hard to imagine a time when wintering Rufous Hummingbirds would become so numerous in the Region as not to merit individual listing. This season, however, Ohio birders reported 7 Rufous Hummingbirds, plus another 2 hummers identified as Rufous/Allen's (*fide* RH), and at least 4 Rufous were listed from across Pennsylvania. A wintering Log-

Red-breasted Nuthatches invaded the Region in moderate numbers at best, but a flock of 10 was a good find in n. *Washington*, PA 20 Feb (SC). A Varied Thrush appeared near French Creek S.P., *Berks*, PA 6–7 Dec following a heavy snowfall (RKe, C. Hurner), for a 3rd county record.

### WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Except for the widespread, often locally common Yellow-rumped Warbler, any wintering parulid is a good find in this Region. Discoveries this season included single Orange-crowned Warblers in the Columbus, OH area 8–15 Dec (RR), in *Tuscarawas*, OH early Dec–11 Feb (BG, ES, m. ob.), and at Camp Hill, *Cumberland*, PA 14 Feb (D. & P. Williams). But was the Orange-crowned in Forest Hills, *Allegheny*, PA 7 Mar (A. Bledsoe) a wintering bird or an early migrant? Even more unusual were an imm. male Yellow Warbler present near Ragersville, OH early Nov–26 Dec (ph. ES, BG, m. ob.) and a Cape May Warbler at Silver L. Nature Center, *Bucks*, PA 21 Feb–1 Mar (M. Jeitner, B. Mercer, D. Filler). An Audubon's Warbler that appeared at a Parma Heights, *Cuyahoga* feeder 19–24 Jan (ph. S. Zadar) apparently furnished the first mid-winter record of the race for Ohio. Palm Warblers, a winter rarity anywhere in the Region, appeared on C.B.C. lists from Pipestem S.P., WV 20 Dec (JPh), from Lower Makefield Twp., *Bucks*, PA 20 Dec (C. Crinkleton, E. Ryan), and Ragersville, OH 26 Dec (BG, ES). The lone winter report of Ovenbird came from *Huntingdon*, PA 21 Dec (R. Creswell).

Eastern Towhees were reported in better than usual numbers, topped, perhaps, by a mid-winter count of 11 at Findlay Twp., *Allegheny*, PA 22 Jan (DW). A Lark Sparrow was a great find at Rumpke Park on the w. *Hamilton*, OH C.B.C. 21 Dec (ph. W. Wauligman), for perhaps just the 5th state winter record, and a Grasshopper Sparrow was exceptional at Headlands Beach S.P., OH 27 Dec (K. Metcalf). Ohio's first winter Henslow's Sparrow was reported on the Cincinnati C.B.C. 28 Dec (J. Bens, R. Atwater). A Harris's Sparrow that appeared at Upper Mount Bethel Twp., *Northampton*, PA 31 Jan+ attracted much birder attention (*fide* D. DeReamus), as did another at Sugar Grove, *Warren*, PA 12 Dec+ (S. Stolenson, ph. JMc). Good numbers of wintering Lapland Longspurs were reported across much of Pennsylvania and Ohio, and large flocks of spring migrants were funneling through w. Ohio by season's end, including 1500 in Lucas 29 Feb (T. Kemp) and 1000+ at Wyandot 7 Feb (R. Counts). The high count for Snow Bunting this season was of 700 in Holmes, OH 18–20 Jan (B. Jackson). An ad. female Indigo Bunting was described from Resthaven W.A., *Erie*, OH 1 Jan (VF). Rare in



Winter 2003–2004 was not notable for irruptions of White-winged Crossbills, and this bird at a Saylorburg, Monroe County, Pennsylvania feeder on 18 January 2004 was one of only a few reported in the Region over the season. Photograph by Rick Wiltraut.

Coshocton Times), while in Pennsylvania, singles were seen at Conneaut L., *Crawford* 1 Jan (RFL), McKean, *Erie* 17 Feb (L. McWilliams), and *Franklin* in mid-Jan+ (DH, m. ob.). Bill Whan was aware of at least 89 Long-eared Owls scattered over 14 counties in Ohio, an unusually high number, with 20 at Maumee Bay S.P. (G. Links) the largest concentration; in Pennsylvania, as many as 12 were at Nockamixon S.P. throughout the period (AM, DF, BE). Short-eared Owls, too, were unusually common and widespread, with as many as 31 at and near The Wilds, OH 23 Feb (RR) and at least 10 in n. *Washington*, PA 20 Feb (SC). Twenty-six Short-eareds were listed on the diurnal

gerhead Shrike was a rare find at Killdeer Plains W.A., OH 13–18 Dec (TS, RR). At least a dozen Northern Shrikes were seen in Ohio, including birds as far s. as *Muskingum* (D. & J. Hoffman) and *Montgomery* (TS), and in a rather heavy invasion, numerous Northern Shrikes were listed across Pennsylvania.

Among the more exceptional C.B.C. finds was that of a White-eyed Vireo at Huntsdale Fish Hatchery, *Cumberland*, PA 4 Jan (Rko, TJ, J. Renninger), for the latest state record. Good Horned Lark counts included 400 near New Castle, *Lawrence*, PA in Jan (B. Dean), while Ohio counts included 555 (in 21 flocks) in *Butler* 1 Feb (PW) and 500 at Funk Bottoms W.A., *Wayne* 28 Feb (SS).

winter, single Dickcissels were at Holmes, OH through mid-Jan (M. Weaver, GMi) and at an Athens, OH feeder 4 Feb (S. Schafer).

Two Yellow-headed Blackbirds were seen in a massive flock of icterids in s. Lancaster, PA 21 Feb (ph. GMa). At least 8 Brewer's Blackbirds were reported from Ohio, including 2 at Columbiana 13 Feb (CH); in Pennsylvania, singles were at Pittsburgh 27 Dec (R. Byrom), at Bedminister, Bucks 7 Dec (B. Tompkins), and at Perkasio 16 Dec (H. Rufe). In Bucks, PA, a Baltimore Oriole was found at Doylestown 10 Dec (fide BE), and 2 were at Peace Valley Park, PA 11 Jan (K. Rieker, I. Baldock).

It was, generally, a slow season for n. finches. The sole report of Pine Grosbeak was of 4 from LaPorte, Sullivan, PA 29 Dec (R. Kovel). Ohio's only Red Crossbill was at Whitehouse, Lucas 3 Dec (M. Anderson), while a few sporadic sightings were made in Wyoming, PA over the season (BR), and one was near Hamburg, Berks, PA 8 Dec (K. Grim). A male White-winged Crossbill was in Richmond, OH 7–22 Dec, with a female at the same site 7 Dec–13 Jan (JH); one was at a feeder at Saylorburg, Monroe, PA 11 Jan (RW), and a few sightings were made in Wyoming, PA (BR). Common Redpolls were widespread, usually in small numbers, but in e. Pennsylvania, high counts included 160 at Hawk Mt. Sanctuary 29 Feb (DB) and 250 near the Tussey Mt. hawkwatch on the same date (B. Fowles). Pine Siskins were also widely reported, peaking at 150 at a feeder near Berlin, Somerset, PA 1 Feb (JPa). Evening Grosbeaks were essentially missing (or badly underreported), with one at Eckville, Berks, PA 1 Feb (RKe) and just 3 birds reported from Ohio (fide RH). A European Goldfinch was at a Holmes, OH feeder 12 Feb (GMi), where it apparently had been present for several weeks.

**Contributors and cited observers:** David Barber, Nick Bolgiano, Steve Carbol, Ben Coulter, Jean Stull Cunningham, David Dister, Jeanette Esker, Bill Etter, Devich Farbotnik, Victor Fazio, John Freiberg (JFr), Larry Gara, Bruce Glick, Greg Grove, Robert Harlan (Ohio coordinator), John Herman, Paul Hess, Deuane Hoffman, Craig Holt, Tom Johnson, Rudy Keller (RKe), Ramsay Koury (Rko), Tom Kuehl, Mike Lanzone, Robert C. Leberman (RCL), Ronald F. Leberman (RFL), Geoff Malosh (GMa), Mark McConaughy, Jerry McWilliams (JMc), Greg Miller (GMi), August Mirabella, Robert Mulvihill, Jeff Payne (JPa), Jim Phillips (JPh), Steve Pinkerton, Ed Pierce, John Pogacnik (JPo), Bill Reid, Frank Renfrow, Larry Rosche, Robert Royse, Cameron Rutt, Ed Schlabach, Richard Shelling, Su Snyder, M. L. Stephenson, Mark Vaas, Paul Wharton, Dave Wilton, Rick Wiltraut, Leroy Yoder. ☉



Orange-crowned Warbler, a rare winter visitor in central Ohio, was seen on several occasions in the Eastern Highlands & Upper Ohio River Valley region this season. This bird frequented a feeding station north of Sugarcreek, Tuscarawas County, Ohio from early December 2003 through 11 February 2004 (here 31 January). Photograph by Bruce Glick.



Almost unheard of in Ohio in winter, this Yellow Warbler delighted birders at a feeder near Walnut Creek, Holmes County from early November through 27 December 2003 (here 6 December). Photograph by Bruce Glick.



In a bitter winter such as that of 2003–2004, the successful overwintering of species that depend on insects and nectar is unexpected. This Cape May Warbler attended feeders at the Silver Lake Nature Center, Bucks County, Pennsylvania from 21 (here 27) February 2004 into the spring season. Photograph by Terylyn Van Kirk.