

# THE CLEVELAND BIRD CALENDAR

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### SUMMARY OF WEATHER CONDITIONS

From U. S. Weather Bureau Reports (Cleveland Hopkins Airport)

- December - An average temperature of 38° made this the warmest December since 1931. Except for three to four inches on the 9th there was no appreciable snowfall until the 29th, when in the Heights and other portions of the area to the east seven to nine inches fell.
- January - With four sub-zero days including a record low of -7° for the 17th, this was the coldest January since 1948. The ground was largely snow-covered from the 7th to the 21st, the heaviest fall occurring between the 9th and 13th, notably in the east and southeast where some points reported up to 19 inches on the ground.
- February - Snowfall of 3.1 inches was the smallest amount for this month since 1938. Temperatures were moderate, and there was no severe cold.

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All records, observations, and comments should be sent to Donald L. Newman, 14174 Superior Road, Cleveland 18, Ohio.

## COMMENT ON THE SEASON

(Before attempting to sketch a picture of the winter birdlife of the Cleveland region, the editor must express his gratitude and deep indebtedness to William and Nancy Klamm for permitting him to use their carefully kept and highly detailed personal records reflecting their twice weekly observations along the lakefront. Unless otherwise noted, all of the waterfowl records cited below are attributable to these two able and diligent observers, and they, too, are the source of information on the ice conditions.)

During the first half of December the waterfowl population of the Cleveland lakefront, which is always the dominant area of interest during the winter months, consisted principally of Greater and Lesser Scaup and of Ruddy Ducks. The Ruddies - not nearly as numerous as in December 1955 when as many as 3,200 were observed - congregated on the lake west of the mouth of the Cuyahoga River, chiefly off Perkins Beach and off the point at the Lakeshore Hotel. A flock of about 1,000 was seen on the 15th, and that date marked the highest count (1,231) for the entire season. By the 22nd their numbers had decreased precipitately, and only 150 were observed. For the next three weeks several hundred of the Ruddy Ducks were present, but after January 12 only a few dozen were seen.

The Scaup Ducks, like the Ruddies, were concentrated west of the mouth of the Cuyahoga River during December, in a vast raft or series of rafts estimated to contain 5,000 birds. By January 5 and 6, on both of which days the wind was from the north or northwest, many of the Scaup had moved east of the river mouth and some 4,000 idled in the water on the leeward side of the breakwall. Beginning with the last week of January and continuing through February, these birds, though in diminished numbers, were almost entirely confined to the areas of open water inside the breakwall to the east of the river mouth or near the warm water outlet at the Municipal Light Plant. Their numbers fluctuated with the amount of open water. On February 10, with the lake open, 3,600 were recorded on the east side, but as the ice moved back in during the next two weeks, the count of the Scaup Ducks declined so that by February 24, when the entire lakefront was ice-covered from one-quarter to three miles out, only 541 were recorded in the open water near the light plant and the Illuminating Company generating station. The lake west of the river mouth was largely ice covered from mid-January to the end of February, but whenever a shift in the wind caused portions of the ice to break up and move out, small flocks of the Scaup as well as of the other ducks soon occupied these open areas.

Careful and regular study of the flocks of Scaup Ducks during January and February disclosed that the Greater Scaup comprised from about 20% to 38% of the total number. This is a most significant finding because hitherto it had not been thought that the Greater Scaup wintered in the Cleveland region in any considerable numbers.

While the Greater and Lesser Scaup were the two dominant species of wintering waterfowl, the Canvasback occurred here in unprecedented numbers and for a time constituted a sizable proportion of the lakefront population. Only from one to 17 birds were recorded in December, but they gradually increased through January and by February 3 the count reached a high of 1,456. On that date a group of about 500 occupied newly opened water opposite Gordon Park and some 827 were concentrated along the east break-wall near the river mouth. Their numbers declined sharply thereafter, however, and by February 24, with the lake ice-covered, only 45 were observed. The Canvasback was also exceptionally numerous at Lorain Harbor, where on February 19 there was a flock

## COMMENT ON THE SEASON (Cont'd.)

estimated at 1,000 (Johnson) and on the 23rd some 700 birds (Davies).

The occurrence of the Canvasback in our region in such phenomenal numbers may compel us to reconsider its status as defined in the Birds of Cleveland, which states that "a few winter here if the weather is not too severe" and cites a record of 200 birds on December 26, 1948 as the largest number observed during the winter. The greatest number recorded last year was 431 on January 9.

The other species comprising the lakefront duck population were several hundred American Goldeneye, a lesser number of Redhead and Bufflehead, and, after the first week in January, from 50, to 150 each of the Mallard and Black Duck. A few Mergansers of all three species occurred regularly, and at least one White-winged Scoter wintered here, though as many as four were observed on February 2 and 3. Three of the rarer American Scoter were recorded on December 2, and two on January 12. Both a male and a female Oldsquaw were seen occasionally but always separately.

Lorain Harbor was apparently the concentration point for Gulls this winter, and on December 16 an estimated 25,000 Ring-billed crowded the water and the air (See Davies' account under Field Notes), while on January 6 the harbor was filled with 2,000 Herring Gulls, 20,000 Ring-billed, and 5,000 Bonaparte's (Davies). Along the Cleveland lakefront the Gulls were present in fair numbers, the highest counts occurring on January 5 and 6 when 2,000 Herring, 6,850 Ring-billed, and 4,700 Bonaparte's were recorded (Davies). In addition there were reports of from one to five Great Black-backed Gulls during January and a single record of one bird in February.

In contrast to last winter when it occurred abundantly in the eastern part of our region, the Robin this winter was reported in only scattered numbers of from one to five birds, with the exception of a flock of 50 on January 13, at Meadowbrook Lake, near Akron (Wiley). The Cedar Waxwing, too, was much less abundant than in the winter of 1955-56, there being just 16 records of from three to 60 birds as compared to 66 records in the previous winter when bands of as many as 110 and 125 were observed.

Seemingly more numerous this winter was the Golden-crowned Kinglet, for which there were 39 records of from one to 20 birds reported from 11 different localities and well distributed throughout all three months. For the previous winter there were only nine records, six of them in December 1955.

Feeding stations attracted an assortment of hardy over-wintering birds, as the following records indicate: a Flicker on January 28 and 30 on the south side of Cleveland where it pecked at chunks of bread lying on the ground (Koerper); an immature male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker near the Hach Sanctuary on January 1 (Skaggs); a Catbird which was a regular visitor in Aurora (Hamann); a Brown Thrasher which was the lord and master of a feeder in the Shaker Lakes area, even contending successfully against the Blue Jays (Weber); and four Meadowlarks which came frequently to a home in Brecksville (Hostetler).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the winter months, however, was the almost total absence of northern visitors, for we had no reports of the Rough-legged Hawk, Snowy Owl, Evening and Pine Grosbeak, Redpoll, and White-winged and Red Crossbill, some of

## COMMENT ON THE SEASON (Cont'd.)

which species are usually reported each year. For the Pine Siskin there was just one record of a solitary bird on February 12 at Painesville (Booth). The lack of reports of the Evening Grosbeak is especially notable because this species has been observed each winter since 1949, though of course sometimes in very small numbers, the last incursion having been in 1951-52. There were just four reports of the Red-breasted Nuthatch, which has been scarce the past two years and was not observed at all last autumn. Three of these reports involved single birds observed only once while the other record was of two birds which were nearly daily visitors to a feeding station on a farm just south of Mogadore Lake (Staiger).

The first influx of spring migrants was observed on February 23 and the several days thereafter, when flocks of Crows, Robins, Redwings, and Bronzed Grackles appeared, a few Meadowlarks returned, and Song Sparrows in many parts of the region dispelled the chill, grey gloom with their warm, ringing phrases. Killdeer, too, arrived at that time in small numbers, while at 8:30 a.m. on February 25 a Woodcock - quite certainly a new arrival - was found injured just five blocks from the main business section of Lorain (Lebold). And thus the winter slowly drew to a close.

## NOTEWORTHY RECORDS

Red-throated Loon - Observed first on December 30 at Clifton Beach (Davies), presumably this same bird was again seen on January 5 at Gordon Park (Klamm). This is the first January record for the Cleveland region and the first report of this species since December 7, 1947.

Franklin's Gull - One at White City on December 16 (Carrothers).

Long-eared Owl - Shortly after noon on January 5 this Crow-sized bird was discovered in a Norway spruce which was one of a cluster of trees on a hillside near Chippewa Lake. When the bird was approached, "he elongated himself to an extreme erecting his two-inch 'ears' while watching my advance, but as I came within 15 feet of the tree he took flight and disappeared up the valley" (Koppelberger). The Owl was not present the next day or on later visits to the area, nor were any pellets found beneath the tree.

A second record of this Owl (which was just recently submitted) is that of one which spent nearly all of the daylight hours on November 30, 1956 perched in an evergreen tree along South Park Boulevard at the Lower Shaker Lake, where its presence was disclosed by the clamor of a band of Crows. It dozed off and on during the day and was seemingly not discovered by any of the small birds that often flit through the evergreens. No pellets were found (Weber).

Short-eared Owl - As the work on the construction of the Nike site and the extension of the runways at the Lakefront Airport has progressed, the weed-grown, rubble-strewn fill which in former years was the winter home of a dozen or more of these owls has grown ever smaller. Consequently, the lakefront dump produced just three records of this species - all in the month of January, three on the 27th being the largest number reported. There were no other records from anywhere within the region.

#### NOTEWORTHY RECORDS (Cont'd.)

Phoebe - An extraordinarily belated straggler was seen at Squire's Castle in the Chagrin River Valley on December 27 (Perrier and Carrothers). The previous late date was November 30, 1933.

Mockingbird - Except for a few days absence during two brief warm spells in February, this rare visitor was a daily resident throughout the winter, beginning November 3, 1956, of the thickly planted grounds of a home in Broadview Heights.

When first observed he was trying to eat pokeberries but on succeeding days he turned to rose hips and to dogwood berries, soon consuming all of the fruit on two small trees. Still later, as the weather grew colder and wild fruit was less plentiful, he turned to suet, then apples especially supplied for him, and finally peanut butter, which had been smeared on a tree trunk for the truly arboreal birds. This sticky food he secured by poising on fluttering wings while he quickly snatched a bit in his bill and immediately flew to a nearby limb for a moment's pause in order to swallow the oily mass. Thereafter the peanut butter was placed in a feeding tray so that he might have easier access to it.

This Mockingbird, whose tail feathers twice froze together during severe weather, spent most of each day perched in the center of a large, old rose bush or high in an adjacent pear tree. He sang occasionally but never at great length (Smith). Not only is this the first autumn and winter record of this species since 1949, it is also the first account of a bird which actually spent the entire winter in the Cleveland region.

Northern Shrike - There was just one record of this irregular winter visitor - a bird perched on top a hickory tree along King's Highway near Chardon on February 20 (Kula).

Cape May Warbler - From December 13 to January 18 this warbler, which winters in the West Indies, was a daily visitor to the feeding station at the home of James Lister in Brecksville, where it fed on peanut butter almost exclusively. Though nondescript, the bird was identified by its yellow rump, the short black streaks on the breast, and a suggestion of the yellow patch on the neck behind the ear (Hostetler and Wallin). In connection with this record it is interesting to note that in his Life Histories of North American Wood Warblers, A. C. Bent states that "the Cape May Warbler sometimes lingers very late in fall migration" and cites two records of this species having been collected at Washington, D. C., on December 16.

Myrtle Warbler - A band of ten on December 15, and of 15 on December 22 was feeding on the berries of poison ivy growing among the weeds and over the box elder trees along Canal Road in the river valley east of Brecksville (Gaede). While this species winters here occasionally, it is unusual to encounter such a large number together, generally only one or two being found at a time.

Rusty Blackbird - The first report of this species in the region during January is that of a bird observed on the 15th in Lakewood (Davies).

Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow - An immature bird of this western race appeared at a feeding station in Willoughby Hills on December 9 and again on December 25 and 26, when it was trapped and banded, after which it did not reappear (Skaggs).

## NOTEWORTHY RECORDS (Cont'd.)

From Neighboring Localities:

Purple Sandpiper - One was sighted by Dr. Emerson Kemsies on the breakwall at Walnut Beach, Ashtabula, on December 24 (Savage). This species has not been reported from the Cleveland region since December 3, 1954.

Long-eared Owl - On December 9 in Trumbull Township, Ashtabula County, one flew from a large hemlock to a beech tree right out in the open and remained in this exposed position for some time despite the invective of a band of Tufted Titmice, Chickadees, and Blue Jays which soon assembled (Klein). A second record is of a bird seen by Dr. Emerson Kemsies at Plymouth Marsh, Ashtabula County, on December 24 (Savage).

## FIELD NOTES

Wintering Waterfowl in the Rocky River Reservation. Seemingly the coldness of the winter has something to do with the number of waterfowl present in the Rocky River Valley of the Metropolitan Park System. Like the winter of 1953-54, the present winter was characterized by moderate temperatures in December and only light snowfall, a much colder January with considerably more snow and temperatures near or below zero, and a quite mild February. Similarly, there was more ice in the river and it remained for longer periods than in either of the past two winters. Thus as in the winter of 1953-54 there was a fairly large population of resident or semi-resident waterfowl - indeed far more ducks on the river than I have ever noted before.

A flock of 25 to 30 Mallards was present from the beginning of the period through mid-January when their numbers noticeably decreased following the "big freeze-up" - four days of sub-zero temperatures. Goldeneye, from two to as many as 40, were present all through the period, while one to three Pintail were observed until February 2. Five Green-winged Teal on December 17 established a new late date of occurrence for this species in the Cleveland region, and these birds had lingered in the river valley during the first half of the month. Bufflehead, Canvasback, and Lesser Scaup were seen at various times though never consistently, and Black Ducks were observed quite frequently.

By comparison the winters of 1954-55 and 1955-56 saw relatively few ducks in the river valley. -  
ALLEN E. VALENTINE

Gulls Gather at Lorain Harbor. The 16th of December 1956 was gull day. As my family and I headed toward Sandusky, we encountered numerous small groups of Ring-billed Gulls moving westward along the lake shore. When we crossed the Black River at Lorain, gulls were everywhere - on the water, fluttering back and forth in the air, and sitting on the breakwalls. Just west of the harbor about 8,000 gulls (mostly Ring-billed) were sitting on the sand facing into the wind which was coming from the northwest. Beyond Lorain the gulls were moving eastward toward the Lorain Harbor.

That afternoon on our return there seemed to be even larger numbers of gulls wheeling around in the air along the Black River. When we went down to the harbor, we found gulls dominating everything - they were on the waters of the lake and of the river, occupied all available pilings, and were milling back and forth in the air. Very few

## FIELD NOTES (Cont'd.)

birds appeared to be feeding. Most were calling as they ceaselessly fluttered to and fro. This tumult of wings and voices had lasted for at least five hours on that dull, dreary December day. - OWEN DAVIES

Pheasant in the Treetop. On a day in late January when the ground had been snow covered for some time and a wet snow had newly fallen, we saw two female Ring-necked Pheasants fly toward some shrubs and small trees on the southwest corner of Cedar and Richmond Roads in Beachwood. One landed near the low-growing vegetation and quickly gained cover. To our surprise the other bird deliberately landed about 12 feet from the ground in a berry-bearing tree, perched there, and calmly and methodically ate the berries. We did not expect the tree to support the Pheasant's weight and momentarily anticipated an ignominious return to earth. But she held on for perhaps 20 minutes by which time we were compelled to move on lest we be charged with obstructing the highway, and so we left the Pheasant still unconcernedly feeding in the treetop. - BERTRAM & MARGARET RAYNES

### ADDITIONAL NOTES ON FOOD OF COMMON BIRDS - VIII

Ralph W. Dexter  
Kent State University, Kent, Ohio

Since the last report in this series (Cleveland BIRD CALENDAR 52 (1):8-9. 1956), 53 stomachs from 29 species of birds and 30 Barn Owl pellets have been analyzed. The results are tabulated below. Ten stomachs were empty (Oldsquaw, Screech Owl, Catbird, Robin (3), Wood Thrush, Cedar Waxwing (2), and Indigo Bunting). Thanks are given to Dr. Clinton H. Hobbs of Kent State University for identification of fruits and seeds and to those persons who kindly contributed specimens to this study, especially Laurence G. Isard who furnished about one quarter of the birds. With the exception of the owl pellets and the Barred Owl, all specimens were obtained in 1956.

Mallard - (1) Shot October 15 near Sandy Lake in Portage County. Contents: 1 dragonfly nymph, numerous seeds (fescue or reed canary grass? and white vervain?), fragments of plant materials and arthropods. (2) Shot October 26 at Muddy Brook Lake west of Hudson. Contents: 2 water snails (Aplexa hypnorum), 1 fingernail claim [sic] (Sphaerium sp.), 1 dragonfly nymph, duckweed (common, seeds of lady's thumb (Polygonum persicaria), some unidentified seeds and insect fragments. (3) Shot November 1 at Muddy Brook Lake. Contents: duckweed (abundant), seeds of smartweed (Polygonum pennsylvanicum), and lady's thumb (P. persicaria).

Redhead - Shot November 23 at Muddy Brook Lake near Hudson. Contents: abundant duckweed.

Lesser Scaup Duck - (1) Shot December 22 on Lake Erie at Cleveland. Contents: 2 water snails (Amnicola sp.), 1 seed of smartweed (P. pennsylvanicum). (2) Same date, same place. Contents: 1 seed of smartweed (P. pennsylvanicum) and fragment of a water snail.

(3) Same date, same place. Contents: 20 seeds of wild oat grass (Danthonia spicata?).

Bufflehead - Shot December 18 on Lake Erie at Cleveland. Contents: fragments of a water snail.

Oldsquaw - Shot December 19 on Lake Erie at Cleveland. Contents: 20 amphipods (Gammarus fasciatus).

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON FOOD OF COMMON BIRDS - VIII (Contd.)

Hooded Merganser - Shot December 15 in Hudson Township, Portage County. Contents: 1 frog (Rana pipiens).

American Merganser - Shot December 13 on Lake Erie at Fairport Harbor. Contents: bones and otoliths of small fishes.

Red-breasted Merganser - (1) Shot December 17 on Lake Erie at-Cleveland. Contents: 1 crayfish. (2) Same date and place. Contents: 1 minnow.

Marsh Hawk - Shot April 28 at Hudson. Contents: 1 field mouse (Microtus pennsylvanicus).

Ring-necked Pheasant - (1) Found dead April 26 at Nelson Ledges. Contents: 8 seeds of wild cherry (Prunus serotina), fragments of grass blades and plant fibers. (2) Found dead May 14 near Cairo in Stark County. Contents: 3 sowbugs, (Tracheoniscus rathkei), 1 caterpillar, 1 scarab beetle, 3 aphids, 1 spider, 1 millepede, 2 land snails (Discus sp.), seeds of smartweed (P. pennsylvanicum), seeds of chickweed (Stellaria sp.), and kernels of corn.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo - Found dead June 2 near Kent. Contents: large mass of tent caterpillars and their webbing.

Barn Owl - 30 pellets collected in silo at Gilcrest Farm near Hartville on December 4, 1955. Contents: 60 field mice (M. pennsylvanicus), 5 short-tailed shrews (Blarina brevicauda), 4 white-footed deer mice (Peromyscus leucopus), 1 smoky shrew (Sorex fumeus), 1 rat (Norway rat?). Each pellet averaged 2.3 skulls.

Great Horned Owl - Collecting data not known. Contents: bones and fur of a rabbit.

Barred Owl - Trapped at pheasant farm near Medina on February 9, 1957. Contents: 1 short-tailed shrew (B. brevicauda).

Long-eared Owl - Shot November 30 near Warrensville Heights. Contents: 4 field mice (M. pennsylvanicus).

Chimney Swift - Died in trap at Kent on May 20. Contents: insect fragments.

American Crow - (1) Shot April 19 at Randolph. Contents: mass of corn kernels with few insect fragments. (2) Shot September 27 in Franklin Township, Portage County. Contents: kernels of corn. (3) Same date and place. Contents: kernels of corn and 1 grasshopper.

Black-capped Chickadee - Found dead at Lake Mogadore in Portage County on April 5. Contents: several insect fragments and an abundance of insect eggs.

Catbird - Found dead May 14 on Kent State University campus. Contents: 1 millipede, fragments of beetles and other insects.

Eastern Robin - (1) Found dead April 8 at Warrensville Heights. Contents: 1 caterpillar, 1 beetle, blades of grass and fragments of plant tissues. (2) Found dead May 21 on Kent



ADDITIONAL NOTES ON FOOD OF COMMON BIRDS - VIII (Cont'd.)

State University campus. Contents: insect fragments. (3) Found dead on Kent State University campus. Contents: 1 beetle.

Wood Thrush - (1) Found dead May 9 on Kent State University campus. Contents: 1 earthworm, several fragments of arthropods. (2) Found dead May 21 on Kent State University campus. Contents: 1 scarab beetle.

Hermit Thrush - Found dead October 13 on Kelley's Island. Contents: 2 land snails (Vallonia pulchella and Paravitrea sp.), 7 curculio beetles, 10 ants, 2 carabid beetles, 1 caterpillar, 1 millipede.

Olive-backed Thrush - Hit window September 15 at Cuyahoga Falls. Contents: 3 fruits and seeds of wild cherry (P. serotina).

Yellow Warbler - (1) Found dead May 9 near Brady Lake. Contents: remains of beetles and flies and unidentified fragments. (2) Found dead May 21 near Ravenna. Contents: 1 aquatic sowbug (Asellus sp.), 1 grub, beetle fragments including weevils, fragments of ants including winged ants. (3) Found dead in fall at Brimfield. Contents: numerous insect fragments.

Black-throated Blue Warbler - Found dead May 13 near Mantua. Contents: several insect fragments.

Blackburnian Warbler - Found dead May 24 on Kent State University campus. Contents: mass of insect fragments including small beetles, weevils, and ants.

Bay-breasted Warbler - Found dead in fall at Brimfield. Contents: 1 tachinid fly, other insect fragments including beetles.

Ovenbird - (1) Found dead May 4 near Brimfield. Contents: several anthribid weevils, remains of beetles and a millipede. (2) Same date and place. Contents: 1 curculio, 2 caterpillars, insect fragments including beetles.

English Sparrow - Found dead in fall near Brimfield. Contents: 5 grains of wheat, 5 seeds of Sudan grass (?), 2 seeds of chickweed (Stellaria sp.), and insect fragments.

Bobolink - Found dead June 10 west of Kent. Contents: 2 caterpillars, 1 carabid beetle, other insect fragments.

Addenda: Seeds from the Ruffed Grouse reported earlier (Cleveland BIRD CALENDAR 49 (1):10. 1953) have been determined to be those of black gum (Nyssa sylvatica), and seeds from the Cardinal reported two years ago (51(2):9. 1955) include some which appear to be poppy and horsenettle.