



CLEVELAND REGION

The Cleveland Bird Calendar

Published by

The Cleveland Museum of Natural History

and

The Kirtland Bird Club

THE CLEVELAND REGION

The Circle Has A Radius of 30 Miles Based on Cleveland Public Square



CLEVELAND METROPOLITAN
PARK SYSTEM



PORTAGE ESCARPMENT
(800-foot Contour Line)

THE CLEVELAND BIRD CALENDAR

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SUMMARY OF WEATHER CONDITIONS

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

December - Temperatures were well below normal from the 13th to the 23rd, and the monthly average of 21.9° was 7.5° below normal. Snow covered the ground from the 9th to month's end, with heaviest fall occurring in the middle ten days.

January - Moderate temperatures prevailed, particularly during the last half. Heavy snow fell on the 1st, 12th, and 13th, but little thereafter.

February - Total snowfall of 15.7 inches, most of which occurred in the last half, was about six inches above normal. Temperatures averaged somewhat below normal, though there were no zero or near-zero spells.

* * * * *

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COMMENT ON THE SEASON

Two phenomena highlighted the winter season: (1) the quite massive invasion of Evening Grosbeaks and Red Crossbills; (2) the exceptional number of occurrences of accidentals (Falcated Teal, Rock Wren, Western Tanager, Dickcissel, Lark Sparrow) and of extremely rare but occasional visitors (Harlequin Duck, Goshawk, Purple Sandpiper, Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker). These and other aspects of the season will be discussed below.

Lake Erie Waterfowl. A single Common Loon at Headlands State Park on December 7 (Booth) was the only record for this species, which has seemingly become scarce in the Cleveland region in recent years. Nor was there even one record for the Double-crested Cormorant, which is now truly a rarity in the region. A dozen or more Horned Grebes were recorded along the Cleveland lakefront on December 7 and 8, but they soon departed; and in the final two months of winter just one bird was observed on January 13.

During about the first ten days of December, the number of ducks on Lake Erie at Cleveland was quite small, and no migratory movements were noted. The advent of truly wintry weather on the 13th and the icing over of inland lakes produced a marked influx of ducks on the week end of December 14-15. Not only were the diving ducks more numerous -- notably the Redhead, Canvasback, Scaup, Common Goldeneye, and Red-breasted Merganser -- but such dabblers as the American Widgeon, Pintail, and Green-winged Teal also appeared. At that time, too -- December 14 -- three vees of Canada Geese totaling 175 birds passed over Perkins Beach, turning inland at that point and proceeding on a southeasterly course. On the afternoon of December 15 at Mentor a band of 27 Whistling Swans, in close formation, calling continuously, flew by headed almost due east (Hammond).

By December 22 the lake was extensively ice covered, with the result that ducks were concentrated in the remaining pot holes and small fissures. The population diminished during the rest of December, but seemingly remained quite stable in January and February. All three species of scoters were observed in December: five White-winged on the 5th and 29th; a single Surf regularly from the 1st to the 22nd; and a single female Common on the 9th at White City (Carrothers). For the sixth consecutive winter the number of Ruddy Ducks was disturbingly low; a mere 52 birds counted along the Cleveland lakefront on December 14 was the maximum reported.

Throughout the winter large numbers of Herring and Ring-billed Gulls congregated at the harbor in Lorain, where an estimated 25,300 of the latter were recorded on the Christmas Bird Count of the Elyria Audubon Society conducted on December 29. The Great Black-backed Gull was quite abundant at both Cleveland and Lorain from about December 20 to January 20; as many as eleven birds were counted at Cleveland on December 22. In February there were just two records for this gull. (The preceding commentary is based principal) upon records and information submitted by William and Nancy Klamm.)

Northern Finches. The early arrival of Evening Grosbeaks in mid-October 1963 and the appearance of Red Crossbills in mid-November were true precursors of an invasion of these and, to some extent, other northern fringillids during the winter.

A few scattered bands of Evening Grosbeaks were reported in the first ten days of December, after which their numbers increased and distribution broadened. As has been true in other invasion years, they occurred chiefly and more numerous in the eastern and southern portions of the region than in the western portion. In each of the 27 localities from which they were reported, they were observed at feeding stations rather than in the wild. There were many records in January when the birds had developed the feeding station habit. High counts that month included 70 or more on the 19th at the Trail-side Museum feeder in North Chagrin Reservation (Rooks), 62 on the 24th at Bath in Summit County (Glassner), and about 50 on the 28th at Waite Hill (Flanigan).

In February, particularly after the 10th, there were fewer reports of the Evening Grosbeak, and the size of the flocks diminished, though a band of 54 was counted at Gates Mills on February 26 (Kremm). The largest flock reported in the entire winter consisted of 110 birds at the feeding station of Dr. R. C. McKay in Brecksville (fide Dexter). In many of the flocks the females and immatures equaled and often exceeded the number of males.

With but one exception all of the reports of the Red Crossbill came from Lake and Geauga Counties; that is, from an area lying within the watershed of the Chagrin River. And, with the one exception, all of the birds were observed at feeding stations partaking of sunflower seeds almost exclusively.

In December two male Red Crossbills at Mentor on the 22nd were the first birds observed, and they were regular visitors the rest of the month. They appeared occasionally in early January - sometimes accompanied by a female -- and these, or two other, males were seen again in February (Hammond). The flock which was present for the longest time occurred in Waite Hill, beginning with a dozen birds on December 31 (Flanigan). They remained during the rest of the winter, though their numbers fluctuated considerably, reaching a high count of 29 on January 26 and of 19 on February 23 (Klamm). A second, and the only other, sizable flock occurred in Willoughby when on January 31 an estimated 20 to 30 birds appeared, about evenly divided between males and females. They remained for three days. Then in February, six appeared on the 8th and 23rd, nine on the 24th, and five on the 26th (Pallister).

The one report of Red Crossbills outside the Chagrin River watershed came from the campus of Western Reserve University on February 13, when 16 birds, in a tight flock, were sighted flying low across a parking lot and then disappeared in the distance (Tramer).

Although the White-winged Crossbill, which was last reported in December 1957, occurred this winter, its numbers were so small that the term "visitation" rather than invasion can better describe its appearance. Its distribution was spotty, and with the exception of four birds at Brecksville on January 5 (Jerry Piskac fide Carrothers), none were reported from west of the Cuyahoga River. On December 7 and 12, one bird was observed feeding on the seeds of a Canada hemlock in the yard of a residence in Aurora (Hamann). Then in January four were seen on the 8th feeding in hemlocks at Chestnut Hill Cemetery, Cuyahoga Falls (Hjelmquist and Glassner); one was eating birch seeds at Holden Arboretum on the 18th (Hammond); and one male visited a feeder in Waite Hill on the 20th and several days thereafter (Flanigan). In February there was a report of just one bird at the feeder in Waite Hill during the last week of the month (Flanigan and Skaggs).

With the exception of a flock of 50 birds at Sunset Pond in North Chagrin Reservation on January 8 and 9 (Rooks), and a flock of 25 at Lower Shaker Lake on February 23 (Rickard and Tramer), the Common Redpoll was reported in negligible numbers and, in all, from just four localities. The Pine Siskin, though rather erratic in occurrence, was present in fair numbers and was reported from nine localities, primarily, however, in the eastern portion of the region. Many flocks of American Goldfinch were observed throughout the winter, among them an estimated 100 to 150 at Lake Lucerne on January 5 and for two to three weeks thereafter (English), and some 125 at Beaver Creek on February 14 (King).

The Snow Bunting was well represented by a number of sizable flocks, including an estimated 125 to 150 birds in a field at North Chagrin Reservation on January 9 (Rooks). But the rare Lapland Longspur was recorded only twice, each time at White City: one bird on December 7 (Klamm) and two on January 14 (Carrothers).

Hardy Wintering Birds. One to two Yellow-shafted Flickers were reported from early in December to the middle of February. Single Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were observed in December and January, including a male bird which came daily from December 29 to January 12 to feed on fallen apples in the yard of a residence in Lorain (Lebold).

"Brown-headed Cowbirds were again numerous in Lorain this winter", flocks at feeding stations ranging from 15 to 50 birds; and "there were also more Common Grackles than usual at feeding stations throughout the city", sometimes as many as 50 birds (Lebold).

In the vicinity of Columbia Station both the White-crowned and White-throated Sparrow were quite common at feeders and in chicken yards (Barber), while in the neighborhood of Grafton "White-crowned Sparrows seemed to be more common than normal," and one flock of 30 was reported (Morse). White-crowns also visited a feeding station in Berea (Chambers), and in Lorain from one to seven birds were daily feeding station visitors from January 25 to the end of February (Mrs. Roy Diedrick fide Lebold). Thus this species was apparently confined to the western portion of the region, as it was not reported elsewhere.

Accidentals and Rare Visitors. We cannot of course explain the causes underlying the occurrence of the many accidentals and rare visitors described in the Noteworthy Records section which follows this commentary. Yet we can explain why these many occurrences were observed and reported. The answer lies in the more intensive as well as extensive coverage of the region which results from the increased number of observers who are contributing to the BIRD CALENDAR. The 54 contributors to this issue is the largest number for any issue in the past ten years.

Early Spring Migrants. In the absence of any warm fronts moving into the region from the Gulf states or the lower Mississippi valley in the latter part of February, there was no influx of some of the hardy early spring migrants, such as Killdeer, Robin, Eastern Meadowlark, and Redwinged Blackbird. Crows, however, began to reappear about February 22. Along the lakefront at Cleveland on February 15, Horned Larks were migrating east (Klamm); and in Grafton Township, Lorain County, this species was "common on and after February 22, when a loose flock of about 300 was seen", with pairs of birds abundant along the roadsides thereafter (Morse). At Holden Arboretum "the local group of Canada Geese returned on February 28" (Bole, Jr.).

New Dates of Occurrence. For annotation in "Birds of the Cleveland Region" are the following new latest fall dates of occurrence:

Green Heron (1) - December 21, Cleveland lakefront (Klamm)
 Black-bellied Plover (1) - December 5, White City (E. Surman)
 Dunlin (1) - December 15 and 21, Cleveland lakefront (Klamm)

CORRIGENDA

Yearly Summary, 1962-63. Since the publication of the Autumn 1963 issue (59:4), the occurrence of three additional species -- Purple Sandpiper, Laughing Gull, Dickcissel -- has been reported in the BIRD CALENDAR year, December 1, 1962 to November 30, 1963. Thus the total number of species recorded in that year is now 262 rather than 259, which was the figure given on page 36 in the Autumn issue.

Phalaropes at Conneaut Harbor. The Autumn 1963 issue (59:4,38) contained erroneous data concerning the occurrence of two species of phalaropes at Conneaut Harbor. This entry should read as follows, as explained in a written communication from J. P. Perkins:

5 Northern Phalaropes, September 2 (Norman Hazen fide Savage);
 1 Red Phalarope almost daily from November 22 to 30 (J. P. Perkins, Norman Hazen, Sally Clark, James Rittenhouse, Jr. (fide Savage).

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS

Falcatated Teal - One bird of this Asian species was identified on the lakefront at Cleveland on December 21 and January 1, each time in association with other ducks, chiefly Scaup. On the first date, the teal was observed on the water in good light at a distance of 150 to 200 feet and was also seen in flight, so that all of the distinguishing characteristics were clearly noted (Surman, Jr.). In response to our request for information concerning this teal, the head bird keeper at The Cleveland Zoological Park, Donald Ehlinger, advises that the Zoo has a single male in its collection. He adds, however, that "Falcatated Teal are rare in any collection in the United States and I know of no one in the Midwest who has a breeding pair." Ehlinger also comments that the lakefront bird could have been one "that was imported by a fancier who neglected to check whether the bird was pinioned. This is possible because we have lost a bird or two this way." If, however, we assume that the lakefront teal was wild and not an escape from an aviary, this occurrence is seemingly the first for Ohio and may be the first record for inland United States.

Harlequin Duck - First reported in the harbor at Lorain on January 11 (Lebold), a fully adult female was present there until February 22, when it was collected by John Ruthven. The duck's stomach was "full of smelt" (Kemsies). This is the fifth occurrence in the history of the region and the first since December 1958.

Common Eider - Five birds -- the largest number ever reported -- were observed on December 3 and 4 at White City (B. Raynes and Carrothers). Then a single bird, presumably the same one, was recorded at various points on the Cleveland lakefront from Rocky River Park on December 7 (Klamm) to White City on January 27 (Carrothers). A third record involved a mature male which was observed swimming, diving, and flying near the Municipal Pier at Lorain on January 5 (Kraus).

King Eider - From December 7 to 22, a female or immature bird was seen at several places on the Cleveland lakefront (Klamm, Tramer, Siebert); and on January 9 an adult male was reported from the lakefront at the East 72nd Street plant of the Illuminating Company (Rooks).

Goshawk - An adult bird was watched for some 20 minutes on January 13, as it sat in a tree overlooking the sloping bank of Interstate Route 71 not far from North Chagrin Reservation (Rooks).

Bald Eagle - (1) At mid-afternoon on January 17, an adult was observed flying from northeast to southwest at a height of only about 200 feet as it passed over the Upper Shaker Lake area (Brickel). (2) Along the Lake Erie shoreline in the vicinity of Lorain, two adult birds were recorded on February 10, and one adult on several dates thereafter to February 26 (Kraus, and Mrs. Calvin Dolbear fide Lebold).

Pigeon Hawk - In Lorain County a male bird was sighted in Penfield Township on February 23, and on February 29 in Grafton Township a male was studied for several minutes as it sat on a fence post (Morse).

Virginia Rail - On December 22 a boy in North Olmsted captured a weak and nearly helpless bird which was apparently attempting to find food along a narrow drainage ditch in a residential area. The bird was taken to the Lake Erie Junior Nature and Science Center where, given proper care, it regained its vitality and was then retained pending its release in the spring (Black). This is the latest date of occurrence.

Common Snipe - Three exceptionally hardy stragglers were reported: one on December 15 at LaDue Reservoir, where it was probing for food in about four square feet of swamp water, which was the only unfrozen area in sight (English); one was tallied on December 22 during the Christmas Count of the Cuyahoga Falls Audubon Club; and one was discovered in a field in Pepper Pike Village on January 9 (Raynes).

Purple Sandpiper - A single bird, whose occurrence was not reported in time for publication in the Autumn 1963 issue, was seen at White City on November 28 in the company of a Dunlin (Rooks). Then on December 8 at White City one bird --- "apparently still retaining much of the streaked spring plumage below" -- was viewed by many observers (English et al); and presumably this same bird was the one recorded there December 15 (Klamm). Finally, one bird was sighted on the ice-covered pier at Clifton Beach on December 22 (Klamm). This species was last reported in December 1954.

Red Phalarope - In the inner basin at White City on December 7 and 8, a single bird was present (Klamm). This is the first winter record since December 1955.

Glaucous Gull - During December single birds were seen on the 28th at Lakewood Park (Klamm) and off the mouth of Rocky River (Stasko), and on the Cleveland lakefront at East 72nd Street on the 29th (Klamm) and the 31st (Raynes). At the dump in Lorain on February 22, where some 3,000 Ring-billed Gulls were gathered, a "fully adult male at least three years old" was collected by John Ruthven. Its stomach was "full of small fish, apparently all smelt" (Kemsies).

Iceland Gull - Among the many gulls assembled at Lorain harbor, one bird of this species was identified on January 16 (Carrothers) and two on January 19 (Klamm). Then one was seen on several dates thereafter, the last date being February 10 (Kraus).

Franklin's Gull - An immature bird was recorded at Lorain harbor on January 19, which is just the second January record in the history of the region (Klamm).

Little Gull - At White City on December 7 and 8, an adult bird was sighted among the many hundreds of gulls, notably Bonaparte's, congregated there (Klamm et al).

Mourning Dove - An exceptionally large band roosted this winter in the grove of pine trees at Clague Park, where on January 4 at about 4:00 p.m. some 150 doves came in to spend the night (Klamm). On February 22 at 5:15 p.m. more than 300 birds settled in the pines, augmenting an uncounted number that had arrived earlier (Black).

Snowy Owl - The two birds which occurred along the Cleveland lakefront in November apparently did not remain long in December: the one at Burke Airport was reported only on the 1st (King), while the Lakewood bird was not recorded after the 7th (Klamm). The only other record was of a bird at Cuyahoga County Airport, Richmond Heights, on January 28 (F. K. Solomon fide Raynes).

Saw-whet Owl - One was discovered in Rocky River Reservation on December 22 (Stasko).

Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker - For fully 30 minutes on February 9 at Bedford Reservation, a female was watched from a distance of a few yards as she worked her way up the trunk of a tall dead conifer, from which she chiseled out large chunks of wood and then often extracted a hidden white grub (Black).

Horned Lark - A lone individual belonging to one of the northern races, Eremophila alpestris alpestris, was identified on December 21 at Gordon Park, where it was photographed as it fed on wind-swept mounds of earth before eventually flying off to the west (Klamm). This subspecies was last reported in October 1956.

Rock Wren - From mid-morning on December 7, when it was discovered among the rocks in the breakwall at Edgewater Park, to December 14, when it was last recorded, this singular stray from the west was the object of study by many observers. It fed "mainly among the rocks of the breakwall, finding in the crevices what appeared to be larvae and pupae of various insects. It also searched for food among the weed stalks, rubble, tree stumps, and the scattered bushes between the breakwall and the adjoining parking lot and playing field. A 45-minute search on December 15 failed to discover the wren" (Surman, Jr.). This is the first occurrence record for the Cleveland region.

Mockingbird - One appeared briefly on December 11 at Waite Hill (Flanigan).

Northern Shrike - (1) In the brushy fields adjoining or close by Interstate Route 71 in Pepper Pike Village, one bird was observed quite often from December 7 to 31 (Tramer and Raynes). (2) From the western portion of the region, which over the years has produced few reports of this shrike, there was one record of a bird in LaGrange Township, Lorain County, on January 4 (Morse).

Western Tanager - A female which was first observed shortly before noon on December 1 at a backyard feeding station in Mentor was recorded on seven dates thereafter through December 28 (Hammond). The bird fed on suet obtained either directly from the suet holder or from bits that had fallen to the ground. This is the second occurrence

in the history of the region, the previous record having been of a male in Mayfield Heights on November 24, 1962.

Dickcissel - From November 27 to December 1, a female or immature bird fed (usually twice a day) in the backyard of a residence in Mentor. The bird always appeared with a flock of House Sparrows and ate on the ground at the base of a feeding station (Fais). This species has not previously been reported in the autumn or winter.

House Finch - During the winter of 1962-63 this species was reported from Holden Arboretum, but the absence of a confirmatory identification by a second observer prevented publication of this occurrence. However, on January 5, 1964, two males were identified in a crabapple orchard at the Arboretum (Hammond), and a pair was reported to have wintered there (Bole, Jr.). At nearby Hanging Rock Farm one male was a regular feeding station visitor "all winter", while in February two females joined him; then on February 29, two pairs were observed (Bole, Jr.). These are the first records for the region.

Pine Grosbeak - (1) At Hanging Rock Farm, Kirtland Hills Village, a female was accidentally caught in a chicken cage on December 10 (Bole, Jr.). (2) In North Chagrin Reservation three males were observed on December 30, then a mixed flock of seven on January 6, five on the 9th, and, lastly, three on January 27 (Rooks).

Lark Sparrow - On January 25 and 27 at Sunset Pond in North Chagrin Reservation, a single individual was watched at close range as it fed on the ground in the company of Slate-colored Juncos and Tree Sparrows. The bird was eating cracked corn as well as the seeds dropped from the speckled alder bushes, on whose catkins Common Red-polls, American Goldfinches, and Tree Sparrows had been feeding earlier (Rooks). This is the first winter record for the region.

Fox Sparrow - Single birds were reported from three localities: in the vicinity of Cuyahoga Falls on December 22 (Christmas Count of Cuyahoga Falls Audubon Club); in Willoughby Hills where one was banded on January 4 (Skaggs); at Painesville on December 23 and on February 8, which is one of a very few February dates for the region (Storer).

FIELD NOTES

Variety of Birds Feed on Apples and Eat Snow. At our home in Waite Hill one of our apple trees was heavily laden with fruit which remained on the tree throughout the winter. I observed the following species feeding on the apples: a Yellow bellied Sapsucker, which ate the pulp daily during December and early January, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Myrtle Warbler, Cardinal. I also noted these species eating snow, which serves of course as a substitute for drinking water: Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Cedar Waxwing, Cardinal, Evening Grosbeak, Slate-colored Junco, Tree Sparrow. - ANNETTE B. FLANIGAN

Female House Sparrows Battle Savagely. On the morning of February 10 at our home in Painesville, my attention was caught by a fluttering mass on the paved terrace. One House Sparrow was crouched nearly flat on the pavement with tail widespread; another with tail and wings extended was angled over the shoulders of the first. What followed was a vigorous, unrelenting attack by one female on another.

The victim of the attack put up little resistance, occasionally pitching its opponent off and moving a few inches, or fluttering up in the air about one foot. Then the battle resumed, with the aggressor chopping at the eyes and crown of the victim with fierce, unremitting jabs. She appeared to bite and pull to such an extent that I suspected cannibalism, for she wiped her bill and seemed to swallow when she stopped for breath. The battle continued for ten minutes. The victim managed to fly 30 feet to the low branches of a firethorn bush, but was followed and driven out onto the snow. Her head went down and her spread tail upended as the attacker stood on her back and, with accompanying spread of wings and tail, pounded her bill into the head and eyes of the almost unresisting opponent. The wounded bird stopped struggling, and after a few more jabs the victor flew off two feet to sit in the firethorn, where she cleaned her bill, swallowed, and preened. Presently another House Sparrow flew into the bush, and these two birds then flew away.

The wounded bird was still breathing when I examined it. Her eyes, surprisingly enough, were intact but the top of her head was bloody and bare of feathers. No marks were evident at the base of the tail, which had received some particularly vicious jabs; nor were there any feathers on the ground at either scene of the battle.

One hour later the injured bird was sitting up, shaking its head, and taking large bites of snow. Ten minutes later I opened the window of the house to get a better look, whereupon the bird flew off some 80 feet to perch in a low bush. She continued to shake her head almost constantly. When I looked out again after a ten-minute interval, she had disappeared. - KAY F. BOOTH

Short-eared Owl in Shaker Heights. As I sat in my second-period class at Shaker Heights High School on January 10, a Short-eared Owl landed on the window sill, but soon flew off to course back and forth over the hockey field. Later, however, it returned to the sill where I could study it at a distance of eight feet. The owl, which remained in the area for the entire fifty-minute class period, may have been attracted to the school grounds by some squirrels which were feeding on the lawn. - GEORGE DIVOKY, JR.