

SUMMARY FOR JANUARY, 1977

This was the twelfth coldest January in 107 years of official record, with the temperature averaging 23.3°F, 5.9° below normal, with a low of 3° on the 18th. No January thaw occurred, the temperature climbed above 40° on only two occasions and then only briefly. Low temperatures were often accompanied by strong winds, which caused bitterly cold windchill conditions. Rainfall totalled 4.41", with 1.71" on the 10th being the heaviest single fall. Snow accumulation totalled 23.2", 11.2" more than average and the most for the month of January since 1966. On the 7th, 13.8" fell during a NE gale for the second greatest 24-hour accumulation on record. This was the first January since 1948 with measurable snow cover all month. Total snow accumulation for this winter now stands at 41.4", double the past average and nearly equal to the whole season's normal. Most unusual was a thunderstorm Jan. 28 bringing heavy rain and high winds to Massachusetts.

LOONS THROUGH CORMORANTS

On Jan. 1, a bird identified as an immature Arctic Loon in basic plumage was studied near Wood's Hole from aboard the Nantucket ferry (DJA,RWS#). During January, a slight influx of Red-necked Grebes was apparent along the coast from Cape Ann to Manomet, the higher counts being 26 at Brant Rock Jan. 2 (WRP), 17 at Manomet Jan. 10 (WRP), and 17 at Rockport Jan. 10 (JWB). A spectacular count of 300+ Northern Fulmars was made from shore at 1st Encounter Beach in Eastham following a NE gale Jan. 8 (CAG,BN), while maxima on Georges Bank were 1200 in the Northeast Channel Jan. 24th and 3000 further to the southwest Jan. 26 (KP for MBO). Of these and the Eastham birds, the vast majority (90%+) were in the light phase, in contrast to the high percentage of dark-phased individuals recorded earlier in the fall in Massachusetts waters, lending support to the theory suggested in the October summary that Fulmars present at this season are comprised of the more southerly breeding Eastern Atlantic population (nominate glacialis), in which the light phase predominates in a similar ratio, while the early fall influx involves the western Atlantic form. Collecting, therefore, may prove invaluable to determine the true picture. An extraordinary late Sooty Shearwater was carefully studied in "the Gulf of Maine" Jan. 27 (KP for MBO) representing one of the very few mid-winter records for the species in New England. Two Double-crested Cormorants persisted on Nantucket until at least the 2nd (RRV,CSS), following a comparatively high number of sightings in December.

HERONS

A Snowy Egret at Buzzard's Bay Jan. 5 (N.Wheelock) was almost certainly the same individual present there on the CBC (Dec. 18th), and a total of 38 Black-crowned Night Herons remained through January, all on the southeastern coastal plain. Two American Bitterns lingered at Eastham until Jan. 15 and at least one at the same location until the 29th (WRP).

WATERFOWL

A "Richardson's" Canada Goose appeared in a mixed flock of feral and wild birds at Town Cove, Orleans Jan. 26, where it remained into February (M.Holland & v.o.). This form (Branta canadensis hutchinsii) may be an early derivative of the same ancestral stock as the pale Atlantic birds (nominate canadensis), being very small (close to the size of a Mallard), light in coloration with a pale breast, a short stubby bill and with the white of the cheeks usually continuous across the chin, and seldom even a hint of a white collar at the base of the neck. Griscom and Snyder state "Due to the complete change in our concepts of the subspecific variations of the Canada Goose, the identity of the subspecies involved in numerous records from 1836 on of small Canada Geese is uncertain." There is but one specimen from the state, from Bridgewater, October 8th, 1910 (William Brewster).

Numbers of wintering waterfowl typically confined to freshwater were substantially depleted by the freeze-up in mid-December, although 18 individual Gadwall survived the first period of cold weather, two of which were found as far north as Newburyport Jan. 2nd (H.D'E.). Pintail totalled 35 throughout the state, and a single Blue-winged Teal survived the entire month in Sandwich (REP), where that species has regularly lingered into January over the last three years. Three adult male European Wigeon were noted on the Nantucket CBC Jan. 2nd (DJA,RWS), and another was present in Buzzard's Bay Jan. 16th (D.Briggs). The species most adversely affected by the harsh weather was Redhead which vanished from most mainland localities by early January and on Nantucket, where they normally reach concentrations of several hundred at this season, the CBC total was a meager 77. However, two adult drakes were seen on the ocean at Plum Island Jan 23rd (RRV). Two Barrow's Goldeneyes were present throughout the month at Newburyport (v.o.) and one in Chatham Jan. 16th-29th (WWB). Harlequin Ducks returned to their traditional haunts at Magnolia and East Orleans where flocks of 7 and 3 respectively were recorded intermittently throughout the month (v.o.). Of five King Eiders reported, one female at Nantucket Jan. 1st was unusual for that locality (DJA,RWS). Unlike Harlequin Duck, King Eider is decidedly scarcer on the coastal plain than on the mainland. Several observers were startled on a crossing of Nantucket Sound Jan. 1st by an apparently pure albino scoter, probably a White-winged, which was seen sitting on the water and then flopping away from the ferry near Cross Rip Shoal (MK,RSH,RWS#).

RAPTORS

Goshawks continue to increase locally, as 16 were recorded this month from widely scattered localities, cf. 0,11,6,7 for the last four Januaries. By comparison, three Cooper's Hawks were reported, one immature at Eastham throughout the month, an adult at Nantucket Jan. 2 (TL) and an adult at Concord on the same day (CBC). Three Red-shouldered Hawks were evidently wintering in Bridgewater (GRF,WRP), and a single bird was seen in Andover Jan. 9 (HWF). Rough-legged Hawks numbered 29 this January (cf. 0,16,11,7 since 1973) indicating a significant influx this winter even considering the possibility of duplication of reports, which is hopefully at a minimum. The white phased Gyrfalcon discovered in December at the Plum Island marshes

continued there throughout the month, though was only observed sporadically by duck hunters and the refuge personnel. Despite the abundant difficulties confronting compilers of separating the legitimate winter Merlins from the misidentified ones, enough reports continue to emanate from the southeastern coastal plain (Nantucket in particular) to strongly suggest their regular occurrence there, at least into early January. Five individuals were competently identified on the Nantucket CBC Jan. 2 (EFA,RRV) and one adult was found in Eastham Jan. 25 (WRP). An immature Bald Eagle was observed feeding on the ice off 1st Encounter Beach, Eastham on the 14th (PAB,FB).

BOBWHITE THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

Four to five Bobwhite were recorded from Lancaster, a first for that area in recent years (HM). A Sandhill Crane was discovered in a Bridgewater cornfield Jan. 20 (Robert & Nadine Timberlake), where it remained until the 22nd to be carefully studied and photographed in color by numerous observers. Ample brown feather edging in the wing coverts suggested a hatching-year bird. A Clapper Rail at Eastham Jan. 15 (WRP) was unique for the state, although 7 Virginia Rails were noted throughout the month, one as far north as Ipswich. A Common Gallinule lingered at Nantucket until at least the 2nd (DJA,RWS) despite the harsh conditions. A single Killdeer was seen in Plymouth Jan. 1 (GAW), while a second individual persisted in Bridgewater until the 14th, where it obtained food at a pig farm (MK). Three American Woodcock were recorded on the Nantucket CBC Jan. 2 (MJL,CSS), and three were present in Wellfleet the same day (BN,CAG). Common Snipe totalled 22 for January.

SKUA THROUGH ALCIDS

Two skuas (sp?) were observed on Georges Bank Jan. 30 (KP for MBO). Due to the recent specific separation of Catharacta skua skua and C. s. mccormickii into C. skua and C. mccormickii (or Northern Skua and South Polar Skua) combined with the uncertainty regarding specific field identification of the two forms, all such reports shall be listed as skua (sp?), unless convincingly identified as either species. It seems likely that most skuas encountered locally, particularly in June - Sept. are actually South Polar Skuas, which is supported by recent specimens as well as re-examination of extant specimens in collections. The Northern Skua, which breeds in the vicinity of Britain and Iceland is actually a scarce bird. Glaucous Gulls totalled 11 at coastal localities, one inland at Natick on the 2nd (EWT) and 3 on Georges Bank Jan. 25 (KP for MBO). Iceland Gulls at Newburyport built up to 60+ Jan. 23 (RRV), of which 2nd-winter birds predominated by 75%, and the maximum count from Cape Ann was 30+ Jan. 16 (JN,JWB). Further south, 9 were recorded on the Nantucket CBC (RRV), and on Georges Bank, a total of 17 were counted between the 21st-31st (KP for MBO). Black-headed Gulls occurred in lower than normal numbers and never congregated at their traditional locales at Newburyport and Boston Harbors. Two separate individuals were seen in Wellfleet Jan. 22; an adult on the ocean side (WWB), and an immature in the bay (N.Mazzarese). For the second consecutive winter, a flock of 1500-2500 Bonaparte's Gulls fed in a tidal rip at Siasconset, Nantucket,

where the species has never previously been recorded so abundantly (EFA,RRV#). The flock contained at least 3 Little Gulls, 2 immatures and one adult (EFA,MJL,RRV), a species which first occurred there in February, 1976. Almost invariably driven inshore by easterly storms, Black-legged Kittiwakes were noted in numbers from land on the 7th, when 2382 were counted passing Rockport (AWN,AGS), on the 8th when 2000 were estimated in Cape Cod Bay from Eastham (BN,CAG), and on the 16th when 500 were estimated off Provincetown (RRV,MJL).

Exceedingly large numbers of alcids, in particular Thick-billed Murres, continued to be reported throughout the month from numerous maritime vantage points. A change from the situation in December, when virtually all of the non-oiled alcids reported were Thick-billed Murres, was evident in that substantial numbers of Razorbills were noted as well. The highest counts were made following major storms from the east and northeast on the 8th and 15th-16th. On the 8th at 1st Encounter Beach in Eastham 300 Razorbills, 1500 Thick-billed Murres, 6+ Dovekies and 8 Common Puffins were recorded (BN,CAG), on the 15th at Orleans 500 Razorbills and only 2 Thick-billed Murres (WRP), and the next day at Race Point, Provincetown, were 800 Razorbills, 2 Common Murres (1 not oiled), 4000 Thick-billed Murres and 1200 unidentified alcids (RRV,MJL). At least 9 oiled Common Murres washed ashore on the outer Cape and Nantucket after presumably acquiring the oil on the Nantucket Shoals (v.o.), and in addition, apparently un-oiled individuals were seen at Rockport on the 6th and 13th (MHM). In addition to the aforementioned Dovekies, one was seen at Rockport on the 2nd (RHS,LT), one at Ipswich on the 9th (JN), and three at Rockport on the 16th (JN,JWB). Black Guillemots remained throughout the month in the vicinity of Provincetown Harbor (BN). Black Guillemots have been reported more and more frequently from the South Shore, the outer Cape and Nantucket in the last five years.

OWLS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Only three Snowy Owls were reported during the month; two in the Plum Island region throughout the month (v.o.) and one at Gloucester Jan. 19 (F.Steadman). Most likely the result of the heavy snow accumulations which concealed their food supply, numerous owls typical of woodland habitats were found in urban areas. Two or three separate Barred Owls roosted in deciduous trees around the Harvard and M.I.T. campuses in Cambridge, Jan. 2-25 (v.o.), and single Long-eared Owls were present briefly in Cambridge (E.Johnson) and Everett (F.Hoenig) on the 3rd. Additional Long-eared Owls were seen on Nantucket Jan. 2 (RRV,MJL), at Wellfleet throughout the month (WWB) and in a suburban section of Hingham from the 15th on (Thatcher;RPE#). At least seven individual Saw-whet Owls occurred in urban localities scattered throughout the state, and two were heard calling repeatedly on Nantucket, in the same forest in which they have bred in recent years, on the 2nd (TL,RSH,RRV#). Most exciting to those fortunate enough to see it was the appearance of a Great Gray Owl in Andover on Jan. 5. During its brief two day visit, it was observed perching in low deciduous growth bordering a field, and was clearly and identifiably photographed (JRK,WCD,RAF,RRV). At very rare intervals, so-called "flights" of these birds are driven southward and eastward to New England, probably due to inaccessibility

of food within their normal range. The only flights of any proportion known in ornithological history occurred in the winters of 1842-43 (when one bird was taken as far south as Stratford, CT), and in 1890-91. During the latter flight, ornithologist William Brewster noted that "throughout eastern Maine, these owls were killed in such numbers that a single taxidermist received no less than 27 specimens." This great flight just barely extended to eastern and central Massachusetts, with specimens taken in Townsend, Groton and Winchendon. Single specimens were also taken in various other non-flight years here in Massachusetts; a total of 25 before the turn of the century. Few Great Grays have appeared in Massachusetts this century, eight records being separated by decades, the most recent being the infamous Gill bird discovered by Vose and Dwelley on 1/22/73 which remained there through mid-March, 1973. A female Red-bellied Woodpecker spent the entire month at a feeder in Adamsville (CW), a female was reported from Natick on the 1st (Biggart); the bird previously reported from Eastern Pt., Gloucester remained until at least the 27th, and a fourth was found in Barnstable on the 30th (CAG). Three Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers somehow managed to survive well into January, although none north of Boston; one in Scituate on the 1st (MFL,BAL), one at Wellfleet on the 12th (WWB) and the third at Sandwich from the 19th-31st (RFP).

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH WRENS

An Eastern Phoebe in Bridgewater on the 10th was unique in the state (LR). A roost of over 1500 Common Crows was discovered on Bellview Hill, West Roxbury and 1537 were reported on the Concord CBC. Note the accompanying table of passerine totals for the Concord CBC which was on Jan. 2 this year, from which it can be seen that Blue Jays and Chickadees have recovered from a low in 1975. The information is really too limited to infer anything about the status of Tufted Titmouse, while Red-breasted Nuthatch has remained constant over the last three years. Carolina Wrens, experiencing peak populations in their centers of abundance, were recorded north to Concord and Littleton on the CBC, in Lexington on the 7th (PNF) and in Ipswich on the 16th (H.Cole). Two Long-billed Marsh Wrens on Nantucket Jan. 2 (SZ,CJ) were the only ones reported.

	1973	1974	1975	1976
Blue Jay	2082	1443	1162	2054
B.C.Chickadee	2053	1994	1757	2149
Tufted Titmouse	251	409	288	502
Red-breasted Nut.	32	13	12	12
Mockingbird	64	77	139	171
Am. Robin	168	46	80	229
Cardinal	140	127	195	260
Eve. Grosbeak	148	209	524	496
White-thr. Sparrow	324	117	177	831

Above is a table of Concord CBC totals since 1973.

MIMIDS THROUGH WARBLERS

From the Concord CBC data, it is evident that Mockingbirds continue to increase markedly in that area, and that a saturation level has not been reached, and probably will not be reached as the continued clearing of land goes on in that area. Robin numbers dwindled this month following an exceedingly strong fall migration and subsequent high number of birds lingering into December, although Concord's CBC total of 229 was still significantly very much higher than the totals for previous years. The Concord and Nantucket CBC's listed 5 and 10 Hermit Thrushes, respectively; 9 others were noted throughout the state. Most unusual was a flock of 10 Eastern Bluebirds on Nantucket, Jan. 2 where the species does not nest (TL,JS). Although winter Bluebirds are quite regular on Cape Cod, they are scarce on Nantucket, particularly in recent years. In addition, 5 Bluebirds were reported from Bedford (L.Brooks). Following an unusually strong fall migration, 6 Water Pipits were recorded on Nantucket Jan. 2 (RRV,SZ,CJ), and 2-4 were present at a cow farm in Bridgewater Jan. 16-31 (WRP#). Two Bohemian Waxwings were found feeding on Viburnum berries in Littleton on the Concord CBC Jan. 2, where they remained until the 8th when the berries had been consumed, and a single bird appeared in Lexington on the 25th (Diane Miller). Cedar Waxwings, in contrast, were decidedly absent throughout the state, the largest flock being one of 35+ at Hanover Jan. 3 (GRF). Northern Shrikes numbered 10 in January, (cf. 13,7,7,9) for the last four years, indicating a close to normal flight. A Loggerhead Shrike was meticulously described at GMNWR on the Concord CBC Jan. 2 (JFK,PSM). Single Orange-crowned Warblers occurred on Cape Cod at E. Orleans Jan. 2 and at Chatham Jan. 5 (CAG,BN), and along with Yellow-rumped, constituted the only warbler species reported in January.

BLACKBIRDS THROUGH FRINGILLIDS

The larger flocks of apparently wintering Rusty Blackbirds were 16 on Nantucket Jan. 2 (RRV), 13 in Concord on the same day (CBC), 18 at S. Peabody the 18th-27th (RSH) and 22 in Barnstable Jan. 16 (REP). A flock of 500 Common Grackles present throughout the month in Orleans was unusually large especially considering the nature of the winter's weather (BN). The Rose-breasted Grosbeak discovered at a feeder in Hudson succumbed to the weather on Jan. 5 and is now a specimen at MAS (Sharon Ford). January Dickcissels numbered 6; in Scituate Jan. 1 (LB), on Nantucket Jan. 2 (CSS), in Gloucester Jan. 6 (S.Howard), in Bridgewater Jan. 16 (RAF), in Chatham the same day (CAG) and in Provincetown Jan. 29 (RRV). January Dickcissels have numbered 4,3,3,2 since 1974. A total of 120 Purple Finches on the Concord CBC was significantly higher than recent years; they have totalled 101,33,41,88 since 1974. House Finches continue to spread westward with a few now in Groton (J.Clancy) and 2-6 in Lancaster (HM). The winter finch population was very low with only one report of Common Redpoll, from Carlisle (KJH). Pine Siskins totalled a scant 9 on the Concord CBC (cf. 1,127,4,375 since 1974). A White-winged Crossbill in Wellfleet Jan. 2 (CAG,BN) was unique. Rufous-sided Towhees numbered a significantly high 28 (cf. 8,41,6,7 since 1974).

A single "Ipswich" Savannah Sparrow was seen Jan. 1 on Duxbury Beach (WRP), and Savannah Sparrows totalled 62 on the Nantucket CBC. Most interesting was the Grasshopper Sparrow at North Wellfleet Jan. 2 and again on the 5th (DMcN). This species has been reported in late December and early January for three years consecutively now in Massachusetts. Two Chipping Sparrows were found on Nantucket Jan. 2 (RRV,CSS) and one continued in Lancaster (HM). Seventeen White-crowned Sparrows were reported during the month - seven of them on the Nantucket CBC. Reports of White-throated Sparrows continued in phenomenal numbers, the ratio being 7-1 on the Concord CBC over the last year's total of 177 (see chart).

The McCown's Longspur was certainly the highlight of the month. The bird was first discovered in a cornfield in Bridgewater on Jan. 9, by Wayne R. Petersen and it remained there until January 26. It was banded by Kathleen S. Anderson of Manomet Bird Observatory on the 23rd. For more details on this record see Bird Observer vol. 4, #6, p.163. The bird was clearly photographed in the hand by Sibley Higginbotham (see photo this issue).

RRV,RHS

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