

# Appalachian Region

## GEORGE A. HALL

Where are the birds? That was the question most often asked by the birders of the Region, as well as the question most asked of them by interested friends. Almost throughout the Region few birds were coming to the feeders, and the mild open season was not conducive to the formation of any concentrations of birds.

It was a mild winter, much in contrast to last year. Both December and January were much warmer than normal (the Pittsburgh weather station had a temperature excess of 375 day degrees). February did have some cold weather with a temperature deficiency of 53 day degrees and a short period of near zero temperatures. All three months were drier than normal, with a rainfall deficiency of 1.84 in at Pittsburgh. There was almost no snow.

There was not even a suggestion of an influx of "northern invaders," and many of the usual wintering species, such as Song and White-throated sparrows, were scarce. Despite the mild weather there were few of the "half-hardy" stragglers. Most bodies of water remained unfrozen, but apparently most



This American White Pelican stayed at Johnson City, Tennessee, from early February into March 1995. Photograph/Rick Knight.

waterfowl never reached as far south as this Region, as most places reported low numbers. It was, however, a great year for the raptors of the open fields, as Northern Harriers, Rough-legged Hawks, and Short-eared Owls all staged great flights in the north.

Most places had successful Christmas Bird Counts, but while there were a number of local record counts, most species were below normal. At Pittsburgh nine species were in lower-than-average numbers, some by as much as 80%, according to Hess.

There were a few unusual records, such as a February Indigo Bunting, and a new species for the Regional list. As a result of the colder weather in late February, there was little sign of the spring migration at the end of the period.

Abbreviations: B.E.S.P. (*Bald Eagle State Park, Centre Co., PA*); Ch.-N.F. (*Chattahoochee Natl. Forest, GA*); G.B.W.M.A., (*Green Bottom W.M.A., Cabell County, WV formerly known as Glenwood Swamp*); M.C.F.H. (*Minor Clark Fish Hatchery, Rowan Co., KY*); P.I.S.P. (*Presque Isle State Park, Erie Co., PA*); P.N.R. (*Powdermill Nature Reserve, Westmoreland Co., PA*); R.C.B.L. (*Robert C. Byrd Locks, Ohio River, Mason County, WV, formerly known as Gallipolis Locks*).

### Loons to Herons

Common Loons wintered at Boone and Watauga lakes, TN (RK), and December records came from Warren, PA Dec. 3 (TG), Colyer L., Centre, PA Dec. 28 (*vide* JPe), and Pymatuning L., PA Dec. 31 (RFL). There were some

unusual concentrations of Horned Grebes: a flock of 23 in *Fayette, PA* in early December (M&EW), and a group of 15 in *Augusta, VA* Dec. 15 (MH). The only report of Red-necked Grebe came from Edinboro L., *Erie, PA* Dec. 7 (JH, LCh). More unusual were four Eared Grebes in *Murray, GA*, Feb. 12 (HD, JL).

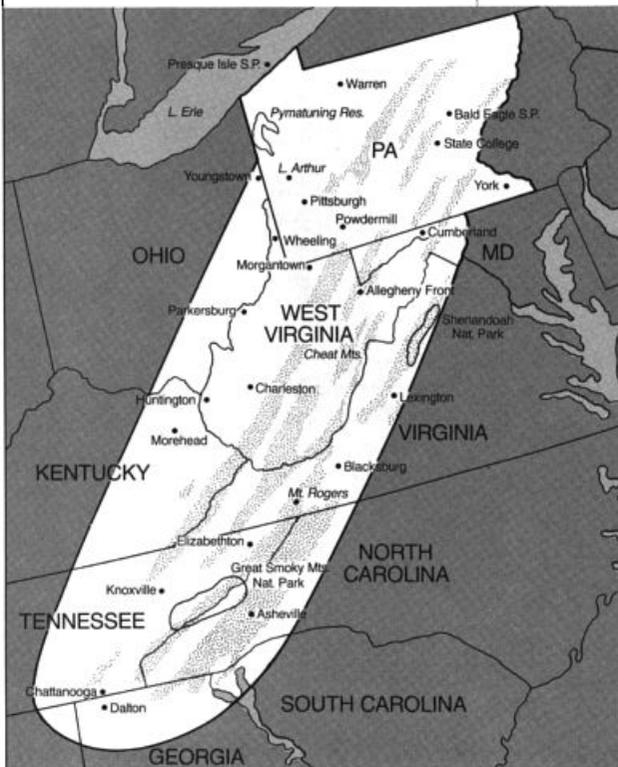
An Am. White Pelican appeared on the Ohio R. in *Beaver, PA* in late May and remained until cold weather drove it upstream to the Pittsburgh area, where it remained until Feb 13 (*vide* PH). The bird was tame, accepted handouts from fishermen, and its behavior in many ways paralleled that of the pelican reported from *Wood, WV* last spring. Another Am. White Pelican was at Johnson City, TN from early February into March (FA, JN). Up to 10 Double-crested Cormorants wintered at Kingsport, TN (WC), and one was at Pymatuning L., PA Dec. 4 & 11 (RFL).

In response to the mild weather and unfrozen wet areas, Great Blue Herons were unusually numerous, with 17 listed on the Pittsburgh CBC (JV). Up to 10 Black-crowned Night-Herons wintered at Kingsport, TN (WC).

### Waterfowl

The lack of a general freeze-up meant that while some n. sites had the best December aggregations of waterfowl in recent years, the s. localities in w. Virginia and e. Tennessee had poor flights. There was little evidence of northbound migration by the end of February.

A flock of 200 Tundra Swans at Warren, PA Dec. 20 (DW) was the only large total reported, but several of the n. areas had small numbers of swans. Of more interest were the reports from out of the usual migratory flight path: Bristol, TN early January (WC); *Meigs, TN* Feb, 23 (JPa), Chattanooga, TN Feb. 16 (JPa), Fishersville, VA January and February (AL); Waynesboro, VA Dec. 15 (RS), and three on the *Highland, VA* CBC (*vide* YL). Mute Swans were reported from



Mosquito Wildlife Ref., OH Dec. 13 (NB) and Ashton, WV Feb. 27–28 (WA, SS). Small numbers of Snow Geese (white morphs where identified) were at Edinboro L., PA (JM, JH), Pymatuning L., PA (RFL, AM), Mosquito Wildlife Ref., OH (CB, DHo), M.C.F.H. (FB), Fishersville, VA (YL), and Washington, TN (RK). The only migrant Canada Geese reported were 357 at Myersdale, PA Feb. 5 and 199 at Youghiogheny Dam, PA Feb. 11 (AM). Wintering Wood Ducks at Warren, PA (TG) and Pymatuning L., PA (RFL) were unusual. Some unusual high counts of Mallards were 2842 at Mosquito L., OH Dec 18 (CB) and 500 at Somerset L., PA Dec. 13 (AW). The normally uncommon Gadwall was widely reported in unusually high numbers: 30 at Pymatuning L., PA Dec. 3 (RSt) and 20 at Pine L., OH Jan 16 (J&DHo). More Canvasbacks and Redheads were reported than usual. Some noteworthy high counts of diving ducks were: 148 Redheads at Boone L., TN Feb. 24 (RK), 1000 Com. Goldeneyes at Pymatuning L., PA Dec. 4 (AM), and 202 Ruddy Ducks at L. Arthur, PA Dec. 17 (GW). Single Greater Scaups, rare in this inland Region, were found at Mosquito L., OH Jan 5 and Feb. 27 (D&JHo), and Donegal L., PA Dec. 19 (M&EW), with high numbers of 28 at L. Somerset, PA Dec. 10 (AW) and 31 at North Park, *Allegheny*, PA Dec 26 (*fide* PH).

Oldsquaws were reported from L. Somerset, PA Dec. 10, (AW), Pymatuning L., PA Dec. 15 (RCL), L. Arthur, PA Dec. 17 (GW) and L. Shenandoah, VA Feb. 17 (LT). In recent years the Surf Scoter has replaced the White-winged as the most common scoter in the Region, and this year reports of Surfs came from Mosquito L., OH Dec. 27 & 28 (CB, J&DHo), Kingston, TN December–February (JPa), Boone L., TN Dec. 11–22 (RK), *Roane*, TN Feb. 12 (DHu), and 300 at P.I.S.P., Dec. 18 and ≤30 there Feb. 24 (JM). White-winged Scoters were at P.I.S.P., Dec. 16–31 (JM), and L. Arthur, PA Dec. 17 (GW). Up to 30 Black Scoters were at P.I.S.P. to Feb. 23 (JM), the only report of that species. Hooded Mergansers continue to be one of the most common and widespread waterfowl, with high numbers of 1200 at Pymatuning L., PA. Dec. 11 (RFL), and a local record-high count of 217 at Bristol, TN Jan 8 (WC).

### Raptors

Both vulture species remained into the winter in unusual numbers. At the Nickajack, TN CBC 420 Blacks and 11 Turkeys provided record highs (*fide* JPa). Both species were present through the period at Pipestem S.P., WV (JP). A Turkey Vulture at Erie Dec. 1 provided the latest date there by 5 weeks

(JM), but other late dates in the north were Dec. 12 at Slippery Rock, PA (GW) and Dec. 31 at Jefferson, PA, furnishing a first CBC record (RB). Unusual for the area was a roost of ≤45 Turkey Vultures on the Kanawha R. in s. West Virginia (LK).

An Osprey at Huntingdon, PA Dec. 15 (CY) provided the 4th winter record, and singles at *Hawkins*, TN Jan. 16 (LM) and Cherokee Dam, TN Jan 17–19 (RK) were also noteworthy.

The Bald Eagle comeback in the Region continues to be impressive, with at least 60 birds reported from 14 locations from Edinboro L., PA in the north (JM) to 3 sites in s.e. Tennessee, where there are 3 nesting pairs (JPa). At Mosquito L., OH the nesting pair was at the nest Feb. 24 (J&DHo). Northern Harriers also continue to do well, with reports of small numbers from 77 locations. There were only 2 reports of N. Goshawks: Lander, PA Jan. 31 (CP) and near Harrisonburg, VA Feb. 19 (CZ).

More Red-shouldered Hawks were reported than usual, and nesting had started in *Trumbull*, OH by Feb. 15 (CB). An albino Red-tailed Hawk wintered at G.B.W.M.A. (MG) and a dark morph was seen there Jan. 22 (MG), while a melanistic form wintered at State College, PA for the 4th winter (WL, KS). It was a great year for Rough-legged Hawks. Besides the normal reports from n. Pennsylvania, with ≤12 in the Warren, PA area (WH), more unusual reports came from such southerly locations as G.B.W.M.A., R.C.B.L. (WA, MG), and *Wood* in West Virginia, *Washington*, OH (JE), and Stuart's Draft (RS, SR) and the *Highland* CBC (*fide* YL) in Virginia.

Twenty-five migrating Golden Eagles at the Bald Eagle Mt., PA Dec. 11 hawk watch station was an all-time, one-day total (RH). Wintering records of 12 birds came from *Cameron*, PA (LC), Pipestem S.P., WV (JP), Bluestone L., WV (AW), Stuart's Draft, VA (SR), *Highland*, VA (MGS, YL), and Ch.N.F., (JPa *et al.*). A Merlin was at Chambersburg, PA from early January+ (KG). The mild open winter probably accounted for the lack of Am. Kestrels along the highways in n. West Virginia (GAH).

### Turkeys to Gulls

Wild Turkey populations continue to boom, even in the suburban areas of Pittsburgh, where a single flock of 60 was seen in the Fox Chapel district (CG), and a record 200 were listed on the CBC at Jefferson, PA (RB). A total of 827 Am. Coots were at L. Arthur, PA Dec. 17 (GW); a flock of 600 at P.I.S.P. through January had declined to 200 by the end of the period (JM), and 285 were on Conneaut L., PA Jan. 1 (RFL). The Sandhill Crane continues to increase in the Chat-

tanooga, TN/n. Georgia area. In 1985 the Hiwasee CBC tallied 18 cranes, which set a state record, but this year a total of 4595 were listed and 4000 were still present Feb. 25 (JPa). At nearby Dalton, GA and Ch.N.F. 2000 cranes were observed flying over Feb. 28 (HD). Out of the normal range cranes were the five at G.B.W.M.A., Feb 4 & 18 (MG, WA).

A few Killdeer had arrived by the last week of February. A Purple Sandpiper was at P.I.S.P., Dec. 1 (JM). Four Dunlins were reported from Tamarack L., *Crawford*, PA Dec. 3 (RFL) and three were at M.C.F.H., Jan. 28 (FB). The lack of freezeup probably accounted for the large number of Com. Snipe: Fairview, PA Jan. 3–5 (JM); 23 at Tamarack L., PA Dec. 3 (RFL); four at New Lexington, PA Feb. 12 (AM); a peak of 29 at Fishersville, VA Feb. 23 (RS); another in *Augusta*, VA Jan 13 (MGS), and one M.C.F.H., Jan. 28 (FB). An Am. Woodcock was heard in *Botetourt*, VA in January (BK).

A total of 211 Bonaparte's Gulls were at L. Arthur, PA Dec. 17 (GW), while hundreds were seen flying SW at P.I.S.P., Feb. 5 (JM). Other records for this gull were from Mosquito L., OH Dec. 13 (NB), Waynesboro, VA Jan. 8 (YL), and M.C.F.H., Feb. 19 (FB). No large concentrations of Ring-billed Gulls were reported, although several reports commented on the new habitat of this species: shopping mall parking lots. Forty-eight Herring Gulls at Pittsburgh was an unusually high number (PH). The rare gull list from P.I.S.P. and Erie included nine Little Gulls Feb. 5; Thayer's Dec. 30 and Feb 2–4; Iceland Feb. 12; Lesser Black-backed Dec. 31 and Feb. 2; and five Glaucous from Dec. 31–Feb. 12 (JM).

### Owls to Wrens

The only Barn Owl reports came from the Shenandoah Valley, Swoope, VA December–February (YL); Bridgewater, VA Feb. 28 (MGS), and Johnson City, TN (RK). Only eight E. Screech-Owls were listed on the Pittsburgh CBC, compared with an average of 17 (PH). A Snowy Owl was seen at Woodcock L., PA Dec. 24 (JBa, IF) and one–two were seen in *Clinton*, PA in mid-February (WL). A Long-eared Owl was at P.I.S.P., Jan 14–28 (DD) and a road-killed Long-eared was found in *Botetourt*, VA Feb. 2 (SR). Pennsylvania areas had a banner year for Short-eared Owls. Concentrations of 27 in *Allegheny* Dec. 18 (CT), 18 in *Lawrence* during January (EK), at least eight in *Warren* (WH) and at least seven near Gettysburg (KG). Lesser numbers were found at Franklin Twp. (JM), Shippensburg, PA (DH), and *Somerset*. (AM). Most of these owls shared the open fields with N. Harriers. Northern Saw-whet Owls were reported from Mor-

aine S.P., PA during January and February (DD); P.I.S.P., Jan 14–29 (DD), and *Augusta*, VA (roadkill) Jan. 9 (3rd county record; YL).

A ♂ Rufous Hummingbird was at a Chattanooga feeder Feb. 14 and a ♀ *Selasphorus* was in that area Dec. 12–February (*fide* JPa). The only reports of Red-headed Woodpeckers came from *Augusta*, VA Dec. 24 (SR) and Jan 18 (MH) and 5 pairs at 5 sites in *Rockingham*, VA (CZ, MGS). An **Eastern Kingbird** was listed on the Lewisburg, WV CBC Dec. 18 (*fide* CH). Eastern Phoebes appeared on several CBCs, and a number had returned by mid-February; January records came from *Cumberland*, PA Jan. 11 (DH), *Cumberland*, MD Jan. 22 (RKi), *Washington*, OH Jan. 4 (JE), and *Calhoun*, WV Jan. 13 (TF). There were a number of sizable flocks of Horned Larks reported, the largest 125 in *Somerset*, PA Jan. 22 (AM). Ten to 20 Fish Crows were seen on every birding trip at Harrisonburg, VA (CZ). Two Com. Ravens Dec. 31 were a Jefferson, PA CBC first (RB). A pair of ravens was nesting at Casselman, PA Feb. 26 (AM) and, most remarkable, a pair was found to be building a nest on the Penn State football stadium, *Centre* (TFI).

No area reported any large numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches. The hard winter of 1993–1994 had a profound effect on Carolina Wren populations. In e. Tennessee they were thought to be back in normal numbers (RK), but northward they remained scarce, e.g. the Jefferson, PA CBC listed only five as compared with 49 a year ago (RB). However, they were present even in the extreme n. of the Region in *Elk*, PA (LC) and *Trumbull*, OH (CB). A Marsh Wren at P.I.S.P., Dec. 31 provided the latest *Erie* record by about 6 weeks (JM), and one at Stuart's Draft, VA Dec. 25–28 furnished the 2nd winter record for the county (SR).

### Kinglets to Warblers

Golden-crowned Kinglets were about 85% below average on both the Butler, PA and Pittsburgh CBCs (PH) The Ruby-crowned Kinglet normally winters in the Region in very low numbers, but several places reported more than the usual numbers. Both E. Bluebirds and Am. Robins were in good numbers throughout, and some big robin flocks were reported. Hermit Thrushes were in better than normal numbers.

A N. Mockingbird was found in Warren, PA Dec. 7 (BH), and a record 14 on the Pittsburgh CBC illustrate how this species is advancing northward (PH). There were five Gray Catbirds reported: P.I.S.P., Dec. 16–31 (JM); *Crawford*, PA Dec. 28 (DS); Seven Valleys, PA Jan. 15 (AP); *Highland*, VA CBC Dec. 20 (NBr); and Bristol, TN

CBC Jan. 1 (RK). A Brown Thrasher was seen several times at a feeder in *Rowan*, KY (FB) and two–three wintered in the Johnson City, TN region (RK).

December and January records for Am. Pipits in *Allegheny*, PA (TFL, JV), *Mason* and *Cabell*, WV (MG, WA), and *Rockingham*, VA (CZ, MGS) were noteworthy. The nearest thing to a “northern invader” was the N. Shrike, with records from P.I.S.P., Dec. 4–11 (EK, DD) and Jan 29–Feb. 2 (EK, JM), Franklin Twp, *Erie*, PA Jan. 14 (MF), Lander, PA Dec. 13 (WH), Akeley, PA Dec. 24 & 26 (DW, JS), and Mosquito L., OH Dec. 18 & 19 (CB) and Jan. 29 (D&JHo). The only reports of Loggerhead Shrikes came from locations in the Great Valley, near Gettysburg, PA (KG), *Augusta*, VA (YL), and Johnson City, TN (RK).

Yellow-rumped Warblers wintered in unusually large numbers and were widespread through the Region. Early arriving Pine Warblers were reported from Roanoke, VA Feb. 10 (GC), *Carter*, TN Feb. 17 (RK), and from Ch.N.F. (HD). Palm Warblers were found at Newville, PA Dec. 31 (DC), *Sullivan*, TN Dec. 22–26 (RK, LM), *Whitfield*, GA Dec. 17, and *Murray*, GA, Dec. 18 (HD). More unusual warbler records included: Orange-crowned at Newville, PA Dec. 31 (DHF); Yellow at *Washington*, OH Jan. 4 (JE), Yellow-throated at Newville, PA Dec. 31 (DC), and Com. Yellowthroat at Newville, PA Dec. 31 (DH), *Huntsdale*, PA (RKO), two in *Centre*, PA Dec. 18 (TFL *et al.*), and B.E.S.P., Jan. 1 (JPe). The warbler report of the year was the Region's first **Townsend's Warbler**, reported with fine details from *Blount*, TN Dec. 3 (GK *et al.*)

### Buntings to Finches

An imm. ♂ **Indigo Bunting** was banded at P.N.R., Feb. 2 (first winter record for w. Pennsylvania; RCL, RM). A Dickcissel was reported from Stuart's Draft, VA Dec. 24 (†) and what was apparently a different bird was seen there Dec. 28 (SR). White-throated Sparrows were in low numbers everywhere, or even missing, while Song Sparrows also wintered in below-normal numbers. Dark-eyed Juncos were near normal in numbers, and “Oregon” juncos were reported from Pipestem, WV (JP) and from Bristol, TN (4th local record, LM). There were only 2 reports of Lapland Longspurs: The ones at P.I.S.P., Dec. 4 (JM) were not unexpected, but those seen at Stuart's Draft, VA Feb 3 & 5 (AL) were a surprise so far south. Snow Buntings were at Mosquito L., OH all season and a flock of 75 was there Dec. 12 (J&DHo). A Chipping sparrow was banded at P.N.R., Jan. 19 (RM, RCL) and eight wintered in *Sullivan*, TN (RK, LM). A Swamp Sparrow came to a *Marion*, WV

feeder all winter (AW). Very few Red-winged Blackbirds and Com. Grackles had arrived by the end of the period. The Nickajack, TN CBC listed a Yellow-headed Blackbird (*fide* JPa). Rusty Blackbirds were reported from the *Highland*, VA CBC (NBr) and from *Marion*, WV Jan, 26 (AW). Of special note were the four Brewer's Blackbirds at Lander, PA Jan. 9 (DW).

Purple Finches were generally scarce, while Am. Goldfinches were numerous at some places but missing at others. House Finches were spottily distributed, and a few cases of conjunctivitis were reported. The only Red Crossbill report came from the Ch.N.F, Dec. 18 (JPa *et al.*). There were only 4 reports of Pine Siskins. Except for the flock of 24 at Lander, PA (WH) the other reports involved one–two birds. There were only 3 reports of Evening Grosbeaks.

### Exotics

The Eur. Collared-Dove arrived in Chattanooga in November. and as many as five were present through the period (JPa).

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