

Hudson-Delaware Region

WILLIAM J. BOYLE, JR., ROBERT O. PAXTON, AND DAVID A. CUTLER

The winter of 1995–1996 will be remembered as the snowiest on record over most of the Region. Snows came early, heavy, and often, restricting the activities of birders from the Great Lakes to the Delmarva Peninsula, despite a January thaw that rapidly melted the accumulating snow cover. Although observers felt that it was a cold winter, temperatures were actually close to normal, as we have been spoiled by the mild winters of the past decade.

Food crops were generally poor, and the hoped for invasion of winter finches never materialized. The massive invasion of Northern Saw-whet Owls noted in the fall resulted in a large wintering population, while the influx of Northern Shrikes was the greatest of modern times. It was not a season for exceptional rarities, with only Western Grebe, Varied Thrush, and Bohemian Waxwing in Pennsylvania rating bold face.

Abbreviations: Avalon (*sea watch n. of Cape May, NJ*); Braddock Bay (*Braddock Bay S.P. and vicinity, Monroe Co., NY*); Bombay Hook (*Bombay Hook N.W.R., near Smyrna, DE*); Brig (*Brigantine Unit, Forsythe N.W.R., Atlantic, NJ*); Cape Henlopen (*Cape Henlopen S.P., Sussex Co., DE*); Hamlin Beach (*Hamlin Beach S.P. and adjacent lakeshore, Monroe Co., NY*); Indian River (*Indian River Inlet, Sussex Co., DE*); Jamaica Bay (*Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens, NYC*); LI (*Long Island, NY*); Peace Valley (*Peace Valley Nature Center, Bucks Co., PA*); Sandy Hook (*Sandy Hook Unit, Gateway National Recreation Area, Monmouth Co., NJ*). D.R.B.C. (*Delaware Rare Birds Committee*); N.J.R.C. (*New Jersey Records Committee*); N.Y.S.A.R.C. (*New York State Avian Rarities Committee*); P.O.R.C. (*Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee*).

Loons to Storks

Red-throated Loons continued to fly past Avalon through early December, with an additional 13,086 birds bringing the 4-month total to 60,307. The previously reported Pacific Loon at Manasquan Inlet was seen again Dec. 10, but not thereafter.

Red-necked Grebes were reported in above-average numbers from all parts of the Region, including two at Essington, just s. of Philadelphia, Feb. 17 (NP) and one near Allentown, PA Feb. 28 (GLF, KC). The latter was part of a major, early flight from the coast to the Great Lakes, as 72 were at Hamlin Beach the same day (WS). Eared Grebe reports continue to increase: This season's total of seven ranged from Conesus L., Rochester, Dec. 26 (A., D., & D. Strong) to Indian River Dec. 30+ (MG, BP, m.ob.). A Western Grebe discovered at Manasquan Inlet Dec. 28 was seen at several locations along the n. New Jersey coast for a couple of weeks (GM *et al.*). What was perhaps the same bird appeared farther south at Barnegat Light Jan. 13–14 (m.ob.); it was, unfortunately, found dead Feb. 1 (BSu). A N. Fulmar being harassed by crows alongside a road at L. Placid, NY Dec. 2, was an amazing sight for David Brant; the bird was taken to a rehabilitator, then transported to Tufts

University for evaluation, banding, and release. A pelagic trip out of Brielle, Monmouth, NJ Dec. 2 produced a Manx Shearwater. Very lost and very early was a Brown Pelican at Cape May Feb. 12 (B&NM); it or another was at Indian River in mid-month (v.o.). Great Cormorant numbers were down considerably along the coast, but the small wintering population along the Delaware R. near Philadelphia remained constant.

The increased number of American Bitterns reported was a pleasant surprise, and included an impressive 16 on the Cape May CBC. Otherwise, herons and egrets were scarce after December due to the cold and snowy conditions.

Waterfowl

An imm. Trumpeter Swan at Irondequoit Bay, Rochester, Dec. 18–31 was presumably from the increasingly successful introduction program in Ontario (m.ob.). The 7 reports of Greater White-fronted Goose came mostly from the coast, Long Island to s. Delaware, with the exception of a bird at Peace Valley Feb. 27–28, where the species has occurred in the past (JHo, SFa).

Ross' Geese no longer attract great attention in the Region, so one at Bombay Hook Dec. 17 (DAC), and another at Clarksville, Sussex, DE Dec. 30 (PL, SFi) were not unexpected. Small numbers of Snow Geese linger with wintering flocks of Canada Geese that feed in corn fields in c. New Jersey, but the number wintering in Delaware has shown a significant decline.

Green-winged Teals of the Eur. subspecies were at Bridgehampton, LI Dec. 3 (*fide* TWB) and at Brig Feb. 27 (J. Danzenbaker). About 20 Eur. Wigeon were mostly in traditional locations along the coast from Long Island to Delaware, but a drake returned to Chestnut Level, Lancaster, PA for the 7th consecutive winter (RMS). After last winter's major invasion, only five Tufted Ducks were detected, four on Long Island; the exception was a drake that wintered at Charlotte, Monroe, Dec. 24+, a first for the Genesee region of upstate New York (MD, m.ob.).

Some 4000–5000 Com. Eider wintered at Montauk, while more modest numbers farther south included 25 at Barnegat Light for most of the season, and a maximum of four at Indian River. Continuing the trend of the past decade, King Eiders were much harder to come by, with only two at Montauk, one at Barnegat Light, and another at Indian River. A pair of King Eiders at Hamlin Beach Feb. 16 were the only ones from the Great Lakes (WS). The usual small flocks of Harlequin Ducks were found along the New York and New





Male Barrow's Goldeneye near Washington Crossing, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, February 12, 1996. Photograph/Rick Wiltraut.

Jersey coasts, but more unusual was a drake at Manitou, *Monroe*, NY Dec. 2 (RO, RGS) and two–three birds a few mi e. at Sodus Point, *Wayne*, NY during January.

Two Barrow's Goldeneyes were at L. Montauk, LI, Dec. 16 (PAB), and another was on Staten I., Feb. 11 (P. Scalesi *et al.*), but a highlight of the season in Pennsylvania was the discovery of a drake on the Delaware R. in *Bucks* Feb. 12 to at least Feb. 17 (B. Hoehne, m.ob., ph. RW); the bird was also seen twice on the New Jersey side of the river Feb. 14 & 15.

Raptors to Cranes

As Black Vultures expand their range farther north, numbers of wintering individuals of this relatively non-migratory species increase; a bird at Letchworth S.P., *Livingston*, NY all season provided only the 2nd winter record for that region. Also highly unusual was a Turkey Vulture near Blue Ridge, *Essex*, NY in the High Peaks area of the Adirondacks Jan. 8 (T. Dudones). Unlike some recent winters, there were no reports of Osprey after early December, but Bald Eagle numbers continue to grow. An impressive 30 eagles were seen flying in to roost along the Wading R., *Atlantic*, NJ in late January, and another 30 were along the Hudson R. in *Westchester*, NY Jan. 11.

Most areas and CBCs noted continuing declines in numbers of Am. Kestrels, a trend also sadly noted at most of the coastal hawk watches during the fall. There were fewer wintering Merlins in Delaware than in recent winters (APE), but elsewhere the modern trend of this species staying north continued. A half dozen were noted inland in *Northampton*, PA during the season (RW), and a similar number was reported from the Genesee region of upstate New York (RGS). Five Gyrfalcons in New York was more than normal in a winter; these included one at Centerport, LI, Dec. 24–25 (ph. A. Wilson); another at Meadowbrook, LI, Feb.

11–25 (m.ob.); what was perhaps the same bird at Cedar Beach, LI, Feb. 12 (KF); one on L. Champlain at *Essex*, *Essex*, NY in December; one at Plattsburgh, returning for its 4th winter; and one in Evans Twp., *Erie*, Feb. 17 (K. Rosenberg *et al.*). The only other report was of a Gyr at Sandy Hook Feb. 3; details are awaited.

Yunick recounts interesting details of Wild Turkeys from the abundant Mohawk Valley population of upstate New York: struggling to find food in December and January, eating frozen fruit from ornamental crab apple trees in a commercial parking lot, oblivious to people coming and going, or climbing in sumac shrubs to eat the normally less-than-desirable sumac seeds. Many, no doubt, perished before the thaw and downpour of Jan. 19–20 melted the snow (RPY). A Yellow Rail at Oak Beach, *Nassau*, LI, was the highlight of the Captree CBC Dec. 17 (KF), while a Black Rail calling in the S. Cape May Meadows Dec. 5 was less unusual (MO). Two Sandhill Cranes arrived in Cape May Dec. 8 and stayed until Jan. 10, to the delight of many observers (JD, m.ob.).

Shorebirds to Alcids

A pair of Am. Golden-Plover were at Mecox, LI, Dec. 1–7 (v.o.); observers should check carefully any golden-plover at this season, as Pacific Golden-Plover is perhaps just as likely as its cousin. American Oystercatchers are expected in moderate numbers along the coast in early winter, but the totals of 175 on the Oceanville, *Atlantic*, NJ CBC and 313 on

the Cape May CBC were well above normal. Shorebird reports were, otherwise, generally unremarkable. A Spotted Sandpiper at Ocean County Park, Lakehurst, NJ Dec. 16 was an exception (*vide* AH). Up to 16 Marbled Godwits continued at Brigantine, NJ through December, but numbers dwindled rapidly thereafter; this has become a favorite late-fall, early-winter spot for this species.

A Great Skua was the highlight of the Dec. 2 pelagic trip out of Brielle, NJ; this species is regularly seen of the nearby Mid-Atlantic Region, but is seldom reported off our shores. The season's only Franklin's Gull was a fly-by at Indian River Dec. 3 (TMC), but Little Gull's were present in normal numbers, with about seven in s. New Jersey, four–five on Long Island, a maximum of 10 in Rochester, Dec. 31, and ≤ 16 at Niagara-on-the-Lake Feb. 24 (GB). Black-headed Gulls continue to be hard to come by, with only about three in the New York City area, a half-dozen along the New Jersey coast, and a single at Cape Henlopen Jan. 30 (S. Fintel).

White-winged gulls were more abundant than in most recent winter, especially Iceland Gulls, with as many as five in Delaware, five at Safe Harbor on the Lancaster, PA CBC, and a couple dozen in New Jersey. Glaucous Gulls were not so common in the south, but an impressive collection at Greece, NY near Rochester hit a maximum of 32 in early January (v.o.). A first-winter Thayer's Gull was reported from Barnegat Light Jan. 28–29 (B&NM, BMO); there is still no fully documented record of this species (form?)



This first-winter gull at the Hackensack Meadowlands, New Jersey, December 12, 1995, was identified as a possible Yellow-legged Gull [*Larus cachinnans*] from Europe. Photograph/Robert H. Lewis.

from New Jersey, and it is not yet on the state list, although it must occur with some regularity.

A bird thought to be a first-winter Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus cacchinnans*) was seen and photographed at the Hackensack Meadows, Bergen, NJ Dec. 5 (JB, RL, A. Johnson); details and photos will be reviewed by the N.J.R.C. With the recent addition of this species by the American Ornithologists' Union, following the lead of most European ornithologists, and the presence of the individual that wintered in the Washington, D.C., area for several years, birders are becoming aware of the possibility of encountering the species in the field. Much needs to be learned about separating it from similar species; the difficulties are further complicated since there are three (at least) identifiable forms, two of which occur together in c. Europe. Several dozen Lesser Black-backed Gulls, from all parts of the Region, were about normal for recent winters.

The previously reported Least Tern at Dunkirk, Chautauqua, NY was seen again Dec. 10, but not thereafter (T. Mosher). The only other tern noted was a returning Forster's Tern at Fishing Cr., Cape May, Feb. 28 (JD), but the presence of eight Black Skimmers on the S. Nassau County, NY CBC was remarkable.

This was not an alcid winter. Only a few Dovekies were seen on the Dec. 2 pelagic trip and other trips offshore; one was at Barnegat Light Jan. 21 (M. Casper, F. Verazzi), and another at Cape May Jan. 27 (FM). More interesting was a Dovekie picked up alive on the Goshen-Court House Road, Cape May, miles from the ocean, also Jan. 27; it was transported to the Avalon Sea Watch and released (CS). A Thick-billed Murre at Manasquan, NJ Jan. 1 provided the only report (GW), as did a Com. Murre seen on the whale-watching boat out of Brielle, Monmouth, NJ Jan. 21, along with 58 Razorbills (GW). There were a few Razorbills elsewhere, including Montauk, which produced the only Black Guillemot on the CBC Dec. 16 (TWB *et al.*).

Doves to Shrikes

The White-winged Dove that appeared at a Heislerville, Cumberland, NJ feeder Nov. 28 was last seen Dec. 2 (*vide* PS). Snow-covered fields must have caused difficulties for wintering Barn Owls, as four were found dead from apparent starvation in Cape May. Snowy Owls were practically non-existent, with few being reported even from upstate New York. There was none in Delaware and Pennsylvania, one in New Jersey, and about a half dozen in

the Long Island-New York City area, including one that perched on a balcony of co-editor Paxton's apartment building, high above Riverside Drive, Manhattan, Feb. 22. The other n. owls were likewise scarce: A Great Gray Owl was at Inlet, Hamilton, NY in late January (GL), and a Boreal Owl was found dead at Perry, Livingston, NY Jan. 1 (MD, D. Tetlow).

It was a very good winter for Short-eared Owls, especially along the coast of Long Island, New Jersey, and Delaware, but they were far outnumbered by N. Saw-whet Owls, which staged the biggest invasion in memory. In addition to the many hundreds banded at Cape May and in Virginia and Maryland, untold hundreds or thousands must have wintered in the Region. The 82 saw-whets picked up as road kills along the Garden State Parkway in s. New Jersey from Nov. 6–Feb. 10 provided a hint of the size of the influx.

The *Selasphorus* hummingbird at a Greenville, DE feeder remained until Dec. 8 (ES), while one at a feeder in Germansville, Lehigh, PA was present into January. Very early Purple Martins at Bridgehampton, LI, Feb. 24 (*vide* TWB) and Fishing Cr., Cape May, Feb. 28 (JD) probably didn't live to regret their mistake. Common Ravens continue to spread in s. New York, with 10 on the Putnam CBC and a pair courting at Doodletown, Rockland, Feb. 26 (FB). A single near Ridley Creek S.P., Delaware, PA represented a first for the local CBC Dec. 16 (J. Freiberg).

A few House Wrens lingered into mid-December for CBCs, while Sedge Wrens were found on the Cape May and Cumberland, NJ CBCs, as well as at Oak Beach, LI, Dec. 17 (KF) and Indian River Dec. 30. A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was at a traditional spot in Washington Boro, Lancaster, PA Dec. 10, but unlike several previous December birds, this one didn't stay around for the CBC (EW). The Wood Thrush discovered on the Oceanville, NJ CBC was the highlight of that count.



Male Varied Thrush in New Castle County, Delaware, January 9, 1996. First state record. Photograph/A. P. Ednie.

Two Varied Thrushes were bright spots in an otherwise dull winter. A male was discovered at a feeder in Edgewood Hills, New Castle, DE Dec. 20, where it was photographed and seen sporadically through the end of the period, providing a first state record (PV, ph. APE, m.ob.). Another male showed up at a Lehigh, PA, feeder in late January and remained through the end of the season (C. Elwell, m.ob.).

A Bohemian Waxwing at Peace Valley Dec. 4 represented a second for Bucks, PA (I. Baldoch, m.ob.), while another was at Valley Forge N.P., Montgomery, PA Dec. 30 (M. Ezzo). Another Bohemian Waxwing was in a flock of Eur. Starlings at Montauk Dec. 16–17 (TWB, J. Ash), and what was probably the same bird in the same flock of starlings was some miles west at Shinnecock, LI, Jan. 1–2 (D. Fotuma *et al.*). The major invasion into the Adirondacks continued into the winter, but the influx in w. New York petered out by mid-December (RGS).

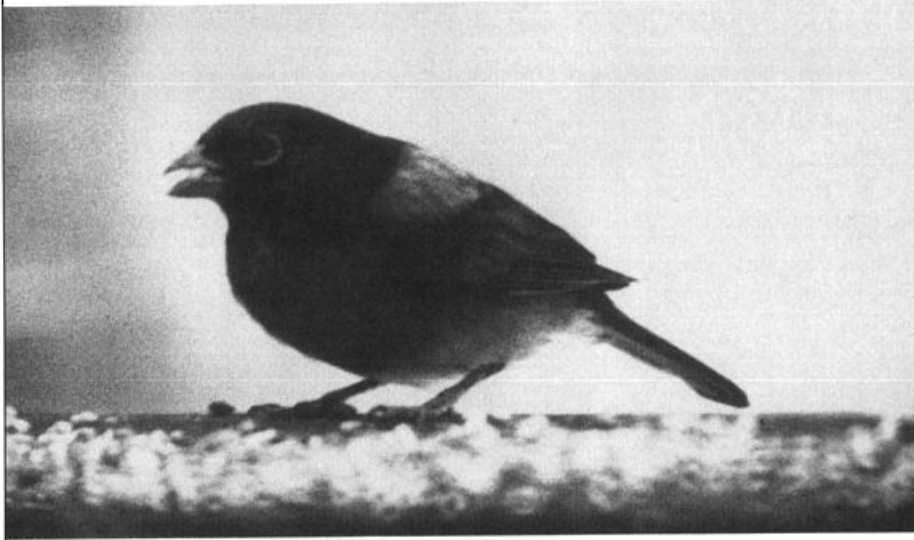
The spectacular invasion of N. Shrikes was the greatest in modern times, far surpassing the numbers from such big years as 1949–1950 and 1978–1979. There were dozens in the New York City area, including an incredible 13 on the Montauk CBC and nine on the S. Nassau CBC. At least 50 (probably many more) were in New Jersey, they were "everywhere" in Lehigh, PA (AK), and five made it to Delaware, mainly along the s. coast. Surprisingly, numbers were unexceptional in the n. parts of the Region.

Vireos to Blackbirds

A Yellow-throated Vireo was unusually late on the Belleplain, NJ CBC Dec. 17 (K. Williams), but there were few late-lingering warblers. The usual small numbers of Orange-crowned Warblers were reported, and a Nashville Warbler was on the Captree, LI, CBC. A Palm Warbler was at Washington Boro, Lancaster, PA Jan. 1 (EW), and there were 5 reports of Yellow-breasted Chat, including 3 on the Montauk CBC.

Delaware had two Painted Buntings, both ad. males. The first was at a Bethany Beach, Sussex, feeder for the entire winter (D. Givarz, ph. APE, m.ob.), while the 2nd had a shorter stay at a Hockessin, New Castle, feeder Dec. 25–Jan. 16 (F. Oates). Two Dickcissels at Trexlertown on the Allentown, PA CBC were in exactly the same spot as last year's single bird. One was at Villas, Cape May, Dec. 5 (JD), and two were at a Cape May feeder from Jan. 8+ (RC, *et al.*).

American Tree Sparrows wintered in good numbers farther south than usual,



Male Painted Bunting in Sussex County, Delaware, January 20, 1996. The bird frequented a feeder here all winter. Photograph/A. P. Ednie.

especially in s. New Jersey and Delaware, while Chipping Sparrows continue to increase as winter visitors, even in upstate New York. A Lark Sparrow spent the whole winter at a Cape May feeder and a Clay-colored Sparrow was at Peace Valley for much of the season, but more surprising was a Lincoln's Sparrow at a feeder in Lost Brook Preserve, *Bergen*, NJ Dec. 9–Feb. 10 (BMo). A color-banded "Ipswich" Savannah Sparrow, probably from Cape Sable Island, NS, was at Bethany Beach, DE Dec. 30, and 12 (unbanded) were at Cape Henlopen the next day (APE, D. Gardner). An "Oregon" Dark-eyed Junco was at Manitou, NY, near Rochester, all of January and February (m.ob.).

Good numbers of Snow Buntings were along the Delaware coast, but nothing like the concentrations in upstate New York, such as 1250 at Hamlin, *Monroe*, Dec. 29 (WS) and 1500 at Caledonia, *Livingston*, Jan. 11 (D&D Traver). Lapland Longspurs, on the other hand, were scarce, with just scattered individuals noted, usually in flocks of Horned Larks. Yellow-headed Blackbirds included three in Delaware in December, and a few in *Salem*, NJ during the season. The flock of Brewer's Blackbirds at their traditional Leipsic, DE spot numbered 71 Dec. 17, although there were far fewer later in the season (FR). Six were at a cow farm near Georgetown, *Sussex*, DE Jan. 29 (C. Faanes), while in New Jersey a single was found in Cape Ma, Feb. 18 (NP). There were about eight Baltimore Orioles early in the season, including one found dead at Rochester Jan. 3, and a Bullock's Oriole (no details) was reported at Assunpink WMA, *Monmouth*, NJ Dec. 3 (GW).

Finches

Pine Grosbeaks didn't venture s. of upstate New York, where an impressive 302 were tallied on the Plattsburgh CBC. A flock of 20 was at Webster Park, near Rochester, NY Dec. 20 (MD), with a few later in the season, and 10 were in Porter Township, *Erie*, Dec. 23 (WDn *et al.*). Numerous observers commented on the sharp drop in the numbers of House Finches, especially on CBCs, and suggested a connection with the conjunctivitis that has afflicted many local populations. A flock of about 30 Red Crossbills at Jones Beach, LI, Dec. 2 (RKu) was the only sizable group, as they were scarce even in the Adirondacks; three made it as far south as *Cape May*, NJ for the Belleplain CBC. One White-winged Crossbill in Princeton, NJ Feb. 28 (J. Bonner) was the only one s. of New York, where they were also very scarce.

Up to 35 Com. Redpoll wintered at Fort Washington S.P., *Montgomery*, PA, where they fed on the birches (B&NM), and six were at a Greenville, DE feeder at season's end (ES), but otherwise they were concentrated mainly in upstate New York, especially the Adirondacks. A Hoary Redpoll was at a feeder in *Lehigh*, PA Feb. 18 (P. Saenger, *vide* AK), and one–three were in Greece, *Monroe*, NY during January and February (KG). One was at Somerset, *Niagara*, NY Feb. 17 (WDn, DD), and several were banded in the Adirondacks (JMCP). Pine Siskins were sporadic in small flocks, and Evening Grosbeaks were almost unreported, except for a flock of >100 at a Chatsworth, *Ocean*, NJ feeder during January (m.ob.).

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Mid-Atlantic Region

MARSHALL ILIFF

John Bjerke wrote that this was "a good season for Redheads and American Tree Sparrows and a really bad one for roofs." The winter of 1995–1996 was indeed exceptional, with the several snowstorms punctuated by the biggest storm to hit the Region in more than a decade. "The Blizzard of '96" hit January 7 and blanketed the Region with up to two feet of snow. A couple of other snowstorms followed in the next week. Overall temperatures were below average in January and precipitation was double what was expected.

All the snow and ice had profound effects on birds. All freshwater and much of the brackish water, including much of the Bay, was frozen for a period from mid-January to February. The blanket of snow and ice drove small landbirds (and, with them, hawks) to feeders, and field birds to plowed roadsides. Everyone reported high feeder activity during and after the storms. In addition, there were small-scale invasions and phenomenal counts of several species, and several rarities that complemented the banner year for feeder birds.

Abbreviations: Assat. (*Assateague Island National Seashore*); Bay (*Chesapeake Bay*);

Black. (*Blackwater N.W.R.*); C.B.B.T. (*Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel*); Chinc. (*Chincoteague N.W.R.*); D.C. (*District of Columbia*); Deal (*Deal I. Wildlife Management Area*); E.N.N.W.R. (*Eastern Neck N.W.R.*); p.a. (*pending acceptance by the local records committee*); P.R.N.A.S. (*Patuxent R. Naval Air Station*).

Loons to Waterfowl

Unusual gatherings of Red-throated Loons included flocks of 400 at Bethel Pt., *Mathews*, Dec. 29 (JBB) and Pt. Lookout, *Saint Mary's*, Dec. 31 (JLS), while two at Beaverdam Res., *Loudoun*, Dec. 2 (DA) and a single bird at Kerr Res., *Mecklenburg*, Dec. 6–17 (BP, BPe) were rare inland sightings. Red-necked Grebes were present in better-than-average numbers, probably being frozen out of more northerly climes. The 4 reports in December were spread throughout the state, while the 20 other reports were almost entirely restricted to open water on the coast and in the lower Bay (v.o.). Northern Gannets continued in the upper Bay through late December (v.o.) and arrived again Feb. 25 (MC), with only one report in January (DL). A high count of 1000 was made on the Feb. 10 pelagic off Virginia Beach (DA). Brown Pelicans put on perhaps their best winter showing, with reports of one from Cape Charles, *Northampton*, Dec. 30 (HTA), five at Virginia Beach Feb. 9 (JFI), one at Ocean City, *Worcester* (JBC, D&CB), six at the C.B.B.T., Feb. 11, and one at Pt. Lookout Feb. 25 (B&WW). The Hopewell CBC had 449 Double-crested Cormorants Dec. 16 (*vide LR*), an excellent count for this

