

White-winged outnumbered Red throughout the period, with numbers tending to decrease from December to January (*fide* MR, DE). The latter observation is temptingly consistent with the later influxes of birds to coastal Connecticut. Away from the coast, both species were apparently rare in s. New England, and only slightly more common in Vermont and New Hampshire, where White-wingeds outnumbered Reds by up to ten-to-one. In Maine, Red Crossbills occurred in flocks of up to 10 birds, and were more common after December. White-winged Crossbills were more common, although flocks rarely exceeded 30, and showed no obvious changes in abundance over the course of the season (*fide* JD, WT). It is thus unclear whether crossbill movements in n. New England had any effect on numbers in the south, or if instead the entire Region was subject to influences from beyond its boundaries.

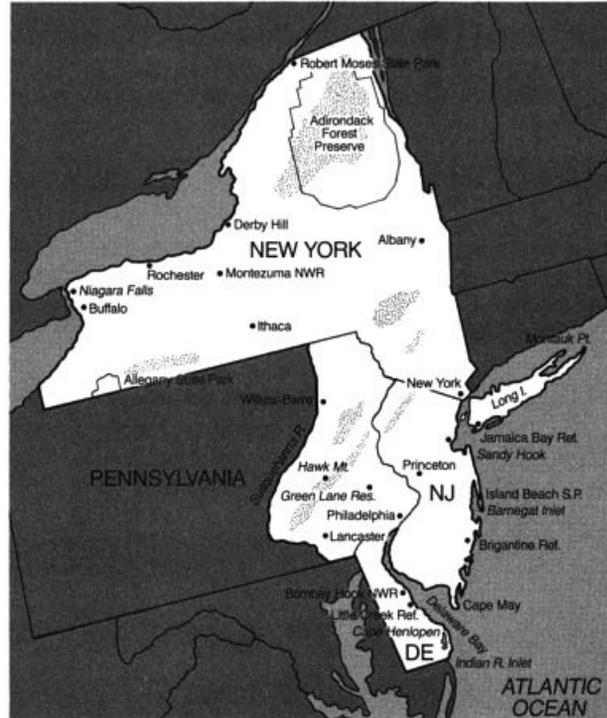
The final invader of 1997–1998 was the Com. Redpoll, although numbers were generally not as high as during the previous irruption in 1995–1996. Redpolls occurred in flocks of up to 200 in the north and west, but rarely exceeded 50 in s. coastal areas. After peaking in December (in conjunction with their late fall arrival), redpolls declined through January in most areas, only to reappear in February, perhaps as birds started to move back north. As expected during a redpoll year, there were several reports of Hoary Redpoll, including four in Vermont, five in New Hampshire, at least 10 in Maine, and one in w. Massachusetts. Written details were not available for all these individuals, but some remained at feeders for extended periods, and it is reasonable to assume that there were at least a few of this hard-to-identify species in the Region this winter. On the flip side, Purple Finches were generally scarce Regionwide, and both Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks were below average.

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HUDSON- DELAWARE REGION



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We thought last winter unusually warm, but it was nothing compared to the winter of 1997–1998, which was one of the two or three warmest in the twentieth century for most of the Region. Precipitation was again well above normal, and included some early and heavy snows in the northern and western parts of New York. After mid-January, however, even the north was essentially snow free. For the southern parts of the Region, including all of Delaware and most of New Jersey, there was no significant snowfall during the entire winter, as temperatures averaged 5–10 degrees above normal.

The major weather event of the season was the Great Ice Storm of 1998 in early January, a three-day hell of frozen rain that wiped out forests in Québec and northern New England, but affected only the northern tier of counties in upstate New York,

sparing most of the Adirondacks. As compiler Peterson notes, the end of the millennium may see a subsequent surge of Mourning Warblers and Indigo Buntings as second-growth woodland succeeds the devastation. Two back-to-back nor'easters January 28–29 and February 3–4 caused extensive flooding and beach erosion in coastal New Jersey and Delaware.

Ornithologically, it was an unspectacular season, although the first major winter finch invasion in years reached as far south as Delaware, then petered out with the beginning of the new year. Many late-lingering and half-hardy species, lulled into a sense of security by the warm fall and early winter, were detected on Christmas Bird Counts, with a good percentage successfully completing the season. Top rarities of the season were New York's second Yellow-billed Loon and Pennsylvania's second Townsend's Warbler. Other highlights included Yellow Rail, two Ash-throated Flycatchers, Bohemian Waxwing, Le Conte's Sparrow, and Golden-crowned

Sparrow in New Jersey; a continuing Ash-throated Flycatcher in Pennsylvania; continuing Allen's Hummingbird and a Painted Bunting in Delaware; and Black-headed Grosbeak in New York.

Abbreviations: Avalon (*sea watch n. of Cape May, NJ*); Braddock Bay (*Braddock Bay S.P. and vicinity, Monroe Co., NY*); Bombay Hook (*Bombay Hook Nat'l Wildlife Ref., near Smyrna, DE*); Brig (*Brigantine Unit, Forsythe Nat'l Wildlife Ref., Atlantic Co., NJ*); Cape Henlopen (*Cape Henlopen S.P., Sussex Co., DE*); Hamlin Beach (*Hamlin Beach S.P. and adjacent lake-shore, Monroe Co., NY*); Indian River (*Indian River Inlet, Sussex Co., DE*); Jamaica Bay (*Jamaica Bay Wildlife Ref., Queens, NYC*); LI (*Long I., NY*); Sandy Hook (*Sandy Hook Unit, Gateway Nat'l Recreation Area, Monmouth Co., NJ*); DRBC (*Delaware Rare Birds Committee*); NJBRC (*New Jersey Bird Records Committee*); NYSARC (*New York State Avian Rarities Committee*); PORC (*Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee*).



Only the second record for New York (and the first since 1930) was provided by this immature Yellow-billed Loon in Oswego Harbor on December 27, 1997. Photograph/ Rick Wiltraut

LOONS TO STORKS

The premier rarity of the season was unquestionably the imm. **Yellow-billed Loon** discovered in Oswego Harbor, Oswego, NY, during the CBC Dec. 21. Seen almost daily until heavy rains silted up the river Jan. 8, and last noted Jan. 18, it represents the 2nd confirmed New York and Regional record for this species, the first being a partial specimen discovered on Long Island in 1930 (S. Boettger, GP, m.ob.). A couple of other sight records have not been accepted by the respective state committees.

Red-necked Grebes were scarce, reflect-

ing the mild conditions and open water to the north, while the usual quota of Eared Grebes consisted of individuals at Montauk Dec. 30 (A. Baldelli); Larchmont, Westchester, NY, Jan. 17 through March (TWB et al.); and Rehobeth Bay, Sussex, DE, Feb. 5-14 (J. Gordon et al.). Several Brown Pelicans were along the Delaware coast in late December-early January (CB, SD), and a single was at Barnegat Inlet, Ocean, NJ, Jan. 3 (S. Malmid).

The increasing presence of Great Cormorant in the Region was evidenced by 20 on the Lewes, Sussex, DE, breakwater for the Cape Henlopen CBC. One was at Oswego Harbor from late November into January, two immatures were on Irondequoit Bay, Rochester, all February, and an adult flew past nearby Hamlin Beach Feb. 8 (WSy). A Green Heron was a treat for the Sandy Hook CBC Dec. 20, but even more surprising was one at Wildwood Crest, Cape May, Jan. 27 (FM, B. Mitchell). Similarly unexpected was an imm. Black-crowned Night-Heron near Syracuse Dec. 10, for a first local winter record (B. Carr).

WATERFOWL

Reports of Trumpeter Swans continue to increase in areas of upstate New York, including a returning pair at Perch River W.M.A., Jefferson, that has apparently nested successfully for the past 3-4 years. The several birds in the Rochester area may be from the increasingly successful introduction program in neighboring Ontario, but additional birds are likely coming from a private breeding collection in Wayne, near Montezuma N.W.R., where no attempt is made to contain the free-flying offspring (GS, SK).

The usual scattering of Greater White-fronted Geese were mainly on Long I. (eight-plus), c. New Jersey (three-four), and e. Pennsylvania (two-three). As highlighted in news reports, Snow Goose numbers continue to increase not only in the Arctic, but here on the wintering grounds, with far more inland reports than previously. A flock of 100,000-200,000 at Mannington Marsh, Salem, NJ, Dec. 14 was unprecedented (WD, A. Driscoll, S. Merkh); among them were four Ross's Geese. Exceptional numbers of Ross's Geese were found in Pennsylvania: two on the S. Lancaster CBC; four, including one blue morph, at Fogelsville, Lehigh, Jan. 13 (JH, RW); another blue morph at Nazareth, Northampton, Jan. 21 (RW); and the last at Middle Creek W.M.A., Lebanon, in late February.

Two-three Brant of the *nigricans* subspecies were at Riis Park, Queens, NY, and vicinity all winter, often feeding on open fields where they could be readily spotted. Several reports of Barnacle Geese from Pennsylvania included a group of five at Peace Valley Nature Center, Montgomery, Jan. 10 (AM) and later four (presumably from the same group) at nearby Green Lane Res. A single was at Hereford, Berks, Feb. 14 (JH, RW). In view of past experience, especially the similarly sized family group that visited Grand Manan, Cape Cod, and Long I. a few years ago, it seems highly unlikely that these birds are of wild origin.

Eurasian Wigeon were somewhat scarcer than usual, with only about four in New York, two in New Jersey, and one in Delaware. Redheads seem to be slowly increasing in the Region, but a count of 74 at Silver L., Rehobeth, DE, Jan. 31, furnished a state record (M. Barnhill). A drake Tufted Duck was at Sandy Hook Dec. 27 (RK), and occasionally thereafter, while on e. Long I., two were at Riverhead, Suffolk, in mid-December (*vide* TWB), and another was at East Patchogue, Suffolk, in January and February (SW et al.). Continuing the influx from the fall, King Eiders were widely reported and outnumbered Commons by a good margin. Thirteen Kings passed Hamlin Beach in early December, bringing the total to over 50 for the migration season; several more were there in January and February. Up to eight were at Pt. Lookout, Nassau, LI, during the season, and up to 17 were at Barnegat Light, NJ, in December, although they didn't stay for the whole season. Another continued at Lewes, DE, from the fall, and a single was at Indian R. Inlet Jan. 3.

Harlequin Ducks, on the other hand, seemed down a bit, with only a few at Pt. Lookout, up to a dozen at Barnegat Light, and four at Cape Henlopen, but a fly-by at Hamlin Beach Dec. 12 was noteworthy, as was one at Ausable Point W.M.A. on L. Champlain, Essex, NY, Dec. 27-Jan. 3 (H. Klein et al.). Barrow's Goldeneyes staged a veritable invasion by Regional standards, especially in upstate New York, with three-four in the Rochester area in January (RGS, DT et al.), three in the Oswego-Oneida L. area for most of the season, one on the St. Lawrence R. at Fishers Landing, Jefferson, all winter (NL), and others downstate at Rye, Westchester, and e. Long I. in late February (TWB et al.). A drake returned to the Sandy Hook-Monmouth Beach area in late December through January (RKA et al.).

RAPTORS TO RAILS

It was a truly unremarkable season for raptors, as the mild weather and open water combined to keep the northern birds north and the rest widely dispersed. Single Ospreys on 3 different New Jersey CBCs and one on the Elverson, PA, CBC were not unexpected in view of recent trends, while one at Heislerville, *Cumberland*, NJ, Feb. 11 was either overwintering or a very early migrant (DiOrio). Only in the St. Lawrence region of upstate New York were Rough-legged Hawks in high, but nowhere near record, numbers. Observers in every part of the Region and most CBC compilers commented on the continuing decline of Am. Kestrel. For the most part, the CBC records bear this out; for example, in New Jersey the number of kestrels per count is less than a third of the average of 10 years ago.

A report of a Yellow Rail flushed from a trail at Cape May Pt. Jan. 13 will be reviewed by the NJBRC (TP); although this species occurs annually in the state in small numbers, it is seldom heard and less often seen. The more common rails were well represented on CBCs in the s. part of the Region, while a Com. Moorhen, probably injured, was unexpected at Beaver Meadows, near Watertown, *Jefferson*, NY, Dec. 28 (D&M Brouse, LC). Another Com. Moorhen along the Erie Canal at Fayetteville, *Onondaga*, NY, Dec. 12 may have left in time, but an imm. Purple Gallinule picked up at Breezy Pt., *Queens*, LI, died in rehabilitation (D. Riepe).

SHOREBIRDS TO ALCIDS

A Piping Plover, rare in winter, was a highlight of the Oceanville, *Atlantic*, NJ, CBC. American Oystercatchers lingered n. in bigger than usual numbers, with an estimated 300+ at Stone Harbor, *Cape May*, NJ, Jan. 3 (VE). Likewise, 26 Am. Avocets at Kitts Hummock, *Kent*, DE, Dec. 28 were delaying their departure in deference to the mild weather (APE). Equally surprising was a group of four Lesser Yellowlegs on the Philadelphia Midwinter Census Jan. 10 (C. Walters) and a flock of 52 on a rain-soaked ballfield in North Cape May Jan. 29 (D Sibley).

A Spotted Sandpiper furnished another highlight of the Oceanville count, as did five Willets of the western subspecies and seven Marbled Godwits. Continuing a trend started in the early 1990s, small numbers of western Willets and Marbled Godwits have begun to winter or attempt to winter in s. coastal New Jersey, particularly at Brigantine I and Stone Harbor

A Franklin's Gull at Charlotte, *Monroe*, on the Ontario lakeshore Dec. 12 was record late for the area (DT, RM), but Marcotte topped that off with an ad. California Gull at nearby Durand-Eastman Park the same day (RMA). Another, or perhaps the same, California Gull was at Charlotte Jan. 6 & 10 (DT, KG). One Little Gull was at Indian R. in early December, and two were at Cape May Feb. 12 (B. Glaser), but the usual L. Ontario flock peaked at 19 at Rochester area, also in February.

The big gull concentration at Florence, *Burlington*, NJ, opposite the Tulleytown, *Bucks*, PA, dump attracted an estimated 50,000 gulls (mainly Herring), including a good selection of the less common ones, such as 30 Iceland and 10 Glaucous (WD et al.). Dasey was at a loss to estimate the number of Lesser Black-backed Gulls (perhaps 100+), but a count of 61 on a wet ballfield in Richboro, *Bucks*, in late February gives an idea of the magnitude (A. Binns). Among the gulls at Florence were up to three Thayer's Gulls, two adults and one first-winter (WD, LL, RL); these reports have been submitted to the NJBRC. Other Thayer's Gulls were in upstate New York, where they are more regular, but no less difficult to identify. One was at Perinton, near Rochester, in December (D. Sherony, ph.), and another at Hamlin Beach Feb. 3 (WS). Three different birds were in the Oswego area in late December and early January, while farthest afield was one at Plattsburgh, *Clinton*, Dec. 6 (J&R Heintz).

An interesting, but controversial, bird at Longport, *Atlantic*, NJ, in January and February was identified as a possible Yellow-legged gull (RL, SF et al.). Numerous photographs were taken, but opinion was divided on whether the bird was in fact a Yellow-legged or a Herring gull. The controversy is now in the hands of the NJBRC, which may be unable to resolve the issue. There is a previous photographic record of a possible Yellow-legged Gull in New Jersey, but as yet no accepted record for the Region. Other unusual larids included a record-late Black-legged Kittiwake at Oswego Dec. 21-26 (S. Adair et al.) and an unseasonable Forster's Tern at Cape May Jan. 9.

It was not a good winter for alcids, with only a few reports, mainly from offshore. A Com. Murre was picked up dead at Breezy Pt. Feb. 10, a rare find for New York City (*fide* TWB), and a Thick-billed Murre was seen from shore at Cape May Pt. Feb. 20 (K. Lukens). The only Black Guillemot of the season was at Montauk Dec 20 (L. Brisker)

OWLS TO SHRIKES

As with so many other northern species, wintering owls were in short supply. There was a scattering of reports of Snowy Owls from e. Pennsylvania and the New York City area, and only a half-dozen or so in upstate New York, mainly in early December. Likewise, Long-eared, Short-eared, and N Saw-whet owls were hard to come by. The ad. female **Allen's Hummingbird** noted in the fall column, the Region's first, remained at the Rohrbacher feeder near Wilmington, DE, until Feb. 12 (FR, m.ob.).

An influx of Red-headed Woodpeckers brought a couple dozen to *Morris*, NJ; at least five wintering in Central Park, NYC; and one to Wyalusing, *Wyoming*, PA, where they are extremely rare (WR). An *Empidonax* flycatcher, identified from a series of photographs as a Least Flycatcher, was at Alley Pond Park, *Queens*, NYC, Dec. 13-22 (SW et al.). In addition to the continuing Ash-throated Flycatcher in Easton, PA, reported in the fall season, one was in Palmyra, *Burlington*, NJ, Dec. 26-28 (B. Filemyr, M. Selzer), and another in Long Branch, *Ocean*, NJ, for a couple of weeks in early January (m.ob.). A W. Kingbird present in Alley Pond Park for most of December was the original quest of the discoverers of the Least Flycatcher.

In addition to the numerous Tree Swallows wintering in the s. parts of the Region, a very early Purple Martin was at Cape May Feb. 22 (MO, LZ). Several upstate New York observers and compilers commented with satisfaction on the increasing numbers of Com. Ravens, as they return to areas from which they were long ago extirpated in the w. part of the state and the periphery of the Adirondacks. Although it was not an invasion year for chickadees moving S, Yunick reported a good banding season for Black-capped Chickadees at his s. Adirondacks station, including one return of a bird that was 9 years old (RPY).

In yet another example of the Patagonia Picnic Table effect, Robert Machover and Starr Saphir discovered a **Bohemian Waxwing** at the Cape May National Golf Course, *Cape May*, NJ, while searching for a rare sparrow Jan. 29. Although it was never seen again, the bird, a first for the county and one of few ever for the state, was well photographed (R. Machover, S. Saphir). The only other Bohemian Waxwings reported were in the more normal locations of upstate New York, with a maximum of 83 at Keene Valley, *Essex*, Dec. 19 (JMCP). Like the waxwings, N. Shrikes were scarce everywhere but upstate New York; two birds



Two views of the Bohemian Waxwing found at Cape May National Golf Course, New Jersey, on January 29, 1998. While some regions far to the north experienced big invasions of Bohemians during the season, this individual was alone, and it furnished a first record for well-watched Cape May County. Photographs/ Robert Machover



on the Captree, LI, CBC were the only ones far afield.

VIREOS TO BLACKBIRDS

A White-eyed Vireo wintered in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY (R. Jones), but the only Blue-headed Vireo was one on the S. Lancaster CBC. An amazing 14 species of wood warblers were reported during the season, presumably reflecting the mild fall and early winter. A scattering of Orange-crowned Warblers in the s. part of the Region was not unexpected, but one that wintered at the Brouses feeder in Watertown, NY, was really taking a risk (m.ob.). Nashville Warbler was a good find on the Princeton, NJ, CBC, but even better was a female Black-throated Blue Warbler at Inwood Park, Manhattan, on the Lower Hudson CBC, that remained through the winter (J. DiCostanzo et al.).

The top rarity of the season in Pennsylvania was a **Townsend's Warbler** in Drums, *Luzerne*, that was discovered in mid-December and remained throughout the season, the 2nd record for the state (m.ob.). A Yellow-throated Warbler frequented a feeder in Margate, *Atlantic*, NJ, from Jan. 16 through the end of the season (R&E Cantor et al.). Three different Ovenbirds included one on the Cape May CBC; another in *Berks*, PA, in January (*vide* R. Cook); and the most remarkable one at Shavertown, *Luzerne*, from Feb. 8 into March (J. Hoyson et al.). In addition to the previously reported **MacGillivray's Warbler** at Cape May, which survived until at least Jan. 10 before disappearing; other noteworthy species were a Prairie Warbler at the Cape May National Golf Course, a Wilson's Warbler on the Sandy Hook CBC, and several Yellow-breasted Chats.

A Western Tanager was a brief visitor to Cape May Dec. 20 (PL), while at least one (possibly two) were at L. Nockamixon, *Bucks*, PA, in late December (AM, RW et al.). A **Black-headed Grosbeak** visited a Staten I., NY, feeder from Dec. 5 to Jan. 10, where it was viewed by many (G. Deppe et al.). Less cooperative was a female **Painted Bunting** at Little Creek W.M.A., *Kent*, DE, Dec. 28 (BP, MG), but not seen again.

A Clay-colored Sparrow appeared at the Montauk dump Feb. 8–22 for the enjoyment of many (D. Fetuma et al.), but more remarkable were three different Savannah Sparrows at Pt. Penn, Cape Vincent, *Jefferson*, NY, Jan. 21–Feb. 12, for an unprecedented winter record (GS et al.). What would have been the sparrow rarity of the season was a **Le Conte's Sparrow** at the



Townsend's Warbler at Drums, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, on December 18, 1997. This bird, which stayed through the winter, provided a second state record. Photograph/ James Hoyson

Cape May National Golf Course, Feb. 1 into March, discovered by Dowdell as he searched for an even rarer sparrow for his month list (JD). This rarer sparrow was an imm. **Golden-crowned Sparrow**, a first for *Cape May*, discovered by Dowdell and Lehman on Jan. 1 as they searched for the previously reported Prairie Warbler (JD, PL). Thus, the lingering Prairie Warbler led to the subsequent discovery of 3 prime rarities, Golden-crowned Sparrow, then Bohemian Waxwing, and finally Le Conte's Sparrow.

Yellow-headed Blackbirds were up slightly from last year, with two on the S. Lancaster CBC, and about a half-dozen at several sites in s.w. New Jersey. A Brewer's Blackbird was an outstanding find for the N.W. Hunterdon, NJ, CBC (D. Freiday), but only about 18 could be found at the traditional Leipsic, Kent, DE, pig farm in late December (J. Miller).

FINCHES

After years of waiting, we finally got a major invasion of crossbills across much of the Region, although it petered out with the coming of the new year. Still, many places as far south as *Sussex*, DE, enjoyed flocks of dozens of Red Crossbills, while the major wave of White-winged Crossbills seems to have stopped in n. New Jersey. Some parts of upstate New York had large numbers of both species, while Long I. was visited mainly by White-wingeds, with 135 on the Captree CBC. Pennsylvania missed out on

the largest part of the flight. As noted above, most of the birds seem to have departed by the end of January, but small groups were detected well beyond the end of the season.

Pine Grosbeaks were common only in the Adirondacks, and Com. Redpolls staged a major invasion into the n. tier of counties in New York. Smaller numbers reached as far south as Whitesbog, *Burlington*, NJ, where a flock of 50 was present Feb. 15 (L. Little). Among the many Commons were the expected small numbers of Hoary Redpolls, with as many as 15 different individuals in large flocks of Commons in the St. Lawrence region. Lesser numbers were along the Ontario Lakeshore from Rochester e., as well as in the Adirondacks. A single Hoary at Oneida, Schuylkill, PA, Dec. 14 was an excellent find for interior Pennsylvania (RKO, JH, J. Heuges, AG). Evening Grosbeaks were more widely reported than has been the case in recent years, but still nowhere near the numbers of twenty years ago.

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Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *Field Notes* are keyed on page 160.