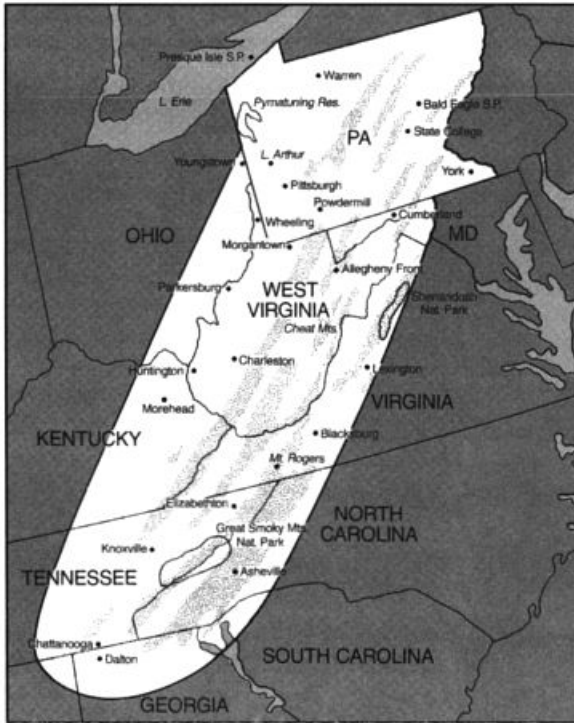


Appalachia



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It was an exceptionally mild winter over most of Appalachia, with little significant snowfall even in the north. In some ways it was nearly, as one correspondent put it, “the winter that wasn’t.” For more species than usual, it was difficult to differentiate among later-than-usual southbound migrants, more northerly-than-usual wintering birds, and earlier-than-usual spring arrivals. Lake Erie and other large bodies of water in the northern tier of the Region remained largely ice-free for the entire season. This enabled many ducks and gulls to remain farther north and accounts for the relatively low numbers of waterfowl reported on many lakes and reservoirs in the southern Appalachians. The mild weather also allowed a scattering of Neotropical migrants, such as Cape May and Yellow Warblers and a Baltimore Oriole, to linger as far north as Pennsylvania, while semi-hardy species like Carolina Wren and Brown Thrasher survived the northern winter very well. Another product of the mild weather was that feeding stations attracted fewer birds,

which caused some birders to describe the season as dull. A scattering of northern finches and Red-breasted Nuthatches brightened the season for some feeder watchers well into the southern highlands.

Abbreviation: P.I.S.P. (Presque Isle S.P., Erie, PA).

LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

An unprecedented 42 late migrating Red-throated Loons were listed during a waterbird count at Sunset Point, P.I.S.P. 1 Dec—1 Jan (JM); away from L. Erie, late birds were at Bald Eagle S.P., PA 9 Dec (*fide* EZ), at L. Arthur 16 Dec (DDr, DY), and on the Allegheny R. at Starbrick 20 Jan (DWa). A remarkably high count of 709 Common Loons passed Sunset Pt., P.I.S.P. 2 Dec (JM); in Tennessee, 42 were on Boone L. 8 Dec and 40 at Douglas L. 11 Dec (RKn). High counts for Horned Grebes were of 160+ each on both Douglas and Cherokee Lakes, TN 11 Dec (RKn). Up to 3 Red-necked Grebes frequented P.I.S.P. 11-15 Dec (DWi, AE), and another was there 6-9 Feb (PR), but none was reported from elsewhere in the Region. An Eared Grebe was at P.I.S.P. 1-5 & 15 Dec (JM), and up to 3 lingered at S. Holston L., TN through Dec (RKn, WC). An ice-free Erie Bay enabled good numbers of Double-crested

Cormorants to winter at P.I.S.P. for the first time ever (JM), and winter cormorant records came from at least six other w. Pennsylvania counties.

Open water conditions allowed many more than the usual number of Great Blue Herons to winter across the length and breadth of Appalachia, with a maximum count of 180+ at Douglas L., TN 11 Dec (RKn). The only Great Egret reported was at Hiwassee W.R., Meigs, TN 1 Jan (BJ), while a Green Heron was an unexpected find in Raleigh, WV 29 Dec (*fide* RC). Wintering Black-crowned Night-Herons were noteworthy at several e. Tennessee sites, with a high count of 12 at Cherokee Dam 11 Dec (RKn); even rarer was an imm. bird on the Allegheny R. at Rosston, Armstrong, PA 1 Jan (MH) and an ad. along the Ohio R. at McKees Rocks, PA 3-6 Jan (DW, m. ob.). Turkey Vultures, all but unknown in w. Pennsylvania in mid-winter until just a few years ago, were seen in unprecedented numbers as far n. as Erie beginning in mid-Jan (JM, m. ob.).

WATERFOWL

Scattered sightings of Greater White-fronted Geese include one at Kingwood, Preston, WV 5 Jan (GF) and 6 on the Ohio R. at Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam, Mason, WV 1 Feb+ (ph. WA, m. ob.); 2 each were at Grayson L., Carter, KY 20 Jan (*fide* BPB) and at Hiwassee W.R., TN 2 Feb (*fide* KC). Small groups of Snow Geese were spotted over almost the full length of the Region, with a top count of 30 over Clarksburg, Greene, PA 8 Dec (RB). A Ross’s Goose appeared at Cove L. S.P., TN 6 Feb (NM), and one at Minor Clark Fish Hatchery, Rowan, KY 17 Feb established the easternmost record for that state (GR). Mild weather and open water conditions apparently contributed to an unusual build-up of Canada Geese in the Pymatuning region, Crawford, PA where 19,000 were estimated 16 Jan (RFL). A rare winter straggler in w. Pennsylvania, single Brant were at P.I.S.P. 24-26 Dec (JE, BC), on the Youghiogheny R., at Boston, Allegheny 1-6 Jan (*fide* PH), and near State College 3 Jan (EZ, m. ob.). Apparently, there was only a short break between southbound and northbound Tundra Swan flights. A flock of 250 southbound swans stopped at Hartstown, Crawford, PA 20 Dec (MBy), and 60 were flying se. at Warren, PA 1 Jan (DWa); by 2 Feb spring migrants began to arrive in numbers at State College, PA (EZ). A Tundra Swan at L. Julian, Buncombe, NC 25 Dec was the first for the mountains there in many years (WF), and one at Hiwassee W.R. 1 Jan was unusual for Tennessee (KC).

Again, ice-free conditions nearly throughout the Region allowed many ducks to either linger

late, overwinter, or begin their spring migration early. Wintering Gadwalls peaked at 254 at Kingston, TN 9 Jan (RKn), and in Pennsylvania counts of 68 at Pymatuning 16 Dec (RH), and 63 on L. Arthur 24 Dec (GW) were exceptional. The 37 Northern Shovelers at Pymatuning 10 Jan (DS) certainly established a new winter high count there, and 7 early migrants were on L. Osceola, Henderson, NC 28 Feb (WF). In an excellent flight, 102 Redheads put down on L. Cumberland, Pulaski, KY 8 Dec (*vide* SS); in Tennessee, 301 were at Chickamauga L. 10 Dec (KC) and 400 at Cherokee L. on the 11th (RKn). An imm. male **Harlequin Duck**, casual anywhere in Appalachia, attracted the attention of many birders at P.I.S.P. 29 Jan+ (DBo, JM, m. ob.) Up to 6 Surf Scoters could be found w. of Erie through 19 Jan (BC), and 2 were at P.I.S.P. 2 Dec (JM). A White-winged Scoter was a good find at Prince Gallitzin S.P., PA 5 Dec (DG), and 21 were listed on the P.I.S.P. waterbird count through 19 Jan (JM). Several Black Scoters were in the Erie area during the Dec-Jan period (BC, JM), one was a rare find at Staunton, VA 8 Dec (AL), and 5 were at Cherokee L., TN 11 Dec (RKn). There were some high counts of Hooded Mergansers, including 368 in Augusta, VA 8 Dec (AL), 348 at Pymatuning L. 11 Dec (SK), and 225 at Kingston Steamplant, TN 5 Jan (NM). A raft of 400+ Common Mergansers at Conneaut L., Crawford, PA 23 Feb, was unusually large for that area (RFL).

RAPTORS THROUGH GULLS

Was the Osprey in Anderson, TN 1 Feb (NM) an early migrant or a wintering bird? By Regional standards, there were some large concentrations of Bald Eagles, including 9 at Mosquito W.A., Trumbull, OH 13 Jan (DH), 17 at Pymatuning L., PA 16 Dec (RH), and a record 20 on the Hiwassee, TN C.B.C. 1 Jan (KC). A Northern Goshawk over Jackson Park 7 Dec represented a first record for Henderson, NC (RSe), and there were scattered sightings from w. Pennsylvania, including singles in Huntingdon 15 Dec (*vide* GG), at L. Arthur 15 Dec (RSt, JSt), and in Natrona Heights, Allegheny 16 Feb (DHe, PH). Rough-legged Hawks were widely reported across e. Ohio and w. Pennsylvania, if in somewhat smaller numbers than during the previous winter; one wintered at Pickway, Monroe, WV (JPh), one was at a regular wintering site at Burke's Garden, VA 16 Feb (WC), and 2 were in the Sequatchie Valley, Bledsoe, TN 12-20 Jan (*vide* KC, SS). Winter Golden Eagle sightings included one at Quehanna W.A., Clearfield, PA 17 Jan (*vide* EZ), 2 at Burke's Garden, VA 16 Feb (WC), and one in Meigs, TN 23 Feb (*vide* KC); the first northbound bird flew past the Tussey Mt., PA hawkwatch 24 Feb (CWi).

Wintering Sandhill Crane numbers continue to increase in Appalachia. In Tennessee, a remarkable 11,658 cranes were listed on the Hiwassee W.R. C.B.C. 1 Jan (*vide* KC). In North Carolina, single birds were at Four Season's Marsh, Henderson 26 Jan (WF) and at Rosman, Transylvania 27 Jan (NS); 6 were at Huntington, WV 30 Dec (WA); in Pennsylvania 15 cranes were in Lawrence 31 Dec (*vide* PH), 21 at Pennsy Swamp, Mercer 23 Feb (BV), and 5 at P.I.S.P. 25-26 Feb (BC). A Spotted Sandpiper at P.I.S.P. 15 Dec was record late for Erie (JM); an extremely early (or overwintering?) bird was at L. Perez, Huntingdon, PA 23 Feb (DWe). A record-late Ruddy Turnstone lingered at P.I.S.P. 1-22 Dec (BC, MT), and in Tennessee 3 Least Sandpipers remained for the Hiwassee C.B.C. 1 Jan (*vide* KC). A Dunlin at L. Somerset 11 Dec (JPa) was very late for the Pennsylvania mountains; farther s., 94 were at Douglas L., TN on the same date (RKn). Single unidentified jaegers were seen on the P.I.S.P. waterbird count 24 & 28 Dec (JM, BC), and a Pomarine Jaeger was identified there on 1 Jan (JM). The Bonaparte's Gull migration peaked at 2200 at Pymatuning L., PA 3 Dec (SK), and on 11 Dec, 900 were at Douglas L., TN (RKn). The high count of Ring-billed Gulls, away from L. Erie, was 5800 at Pymatuning 3 Dec (SK). Up to 3 Thayer's Gulls were identified at P.I.S.P. 13 Jan & 16-28 Feb; there were several Iceland Gulls there beginning 12 Jan, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls first appeared at Erie 13 Jan (JM). A few Glaucous Gulls also were at Erie 10 Jan+ (BC). A Great Black-backed Gull was a rare find on the Ohio R. at Huntington, WV 10-16 Jan (WA, m. ob.).

DOVES THROUGH WRENS

In Hamilton, TN, where the Eurasian Collared-Dove population had been building up to substantial numbers over the past few years, few were reported this season (KC); one that appeared at Fairview, Erie, PA this past Nov (establishing a first county record) remained through the winter, attracting many birders (JM). There was a minor invasion of Snowy Owls into the Region: a bird that had appeared in Pleasants, WV in late Nov remained through 20 Dec (JE), one was at Youngsville, Warren, PA 29 Nov (*vide* JF), one at Lakewood, Union, PA over much of Jan and Feb (m. ob.), and still another was at Cherokee L., TN 11 Dec (*vide* RKn). Up to 5 Short-eared Owls frequented various reclaimed stripmines in Lawrence (PH), Armstrong (*vide* MH), Indiana (MH) and Somerset, PA (JPa, TM) this winter; and as many as 5 were seen at several sites in Augusta, VA (AL, YL). A Northern Saw-whet Owl was a rare find at Poland, OH 21 Jan (*vide* NB) and on the Rector, PA C.B.C. 16 Dec; more southerly reports

included scattered individuals in the Big S Fork National River and Recreation Area, KY & TN between 27 Jan and 1 Mar (*vide* SS, BPB), one at Roan Mt., TN 2 Dec (AH), and a few birds were located at classic Saw-whet sites in Rabun, GA (*vide* MB & JSe).

Each year, the number of Rufous Hummingbirds wintering in the s. Appalachians seems to increase: in e. Tennessee, at least 8 birds were seen/banded over seven different counties (*vide* RKn, KC), one was at Bristol, VA all season (WC), and singles were also found at both Flat Rock and Long John Mt., Henderson, NC (WF, BO). A Loggerhead Shrike was a rare winter find in s. Adams, PA 16 Jan, but in ne. Tennessee, wintering numbers were considered low (RKn). A minor flight of Northern Shrikes brought birds to at least eight scattered counties of w. Pennsylvania; one was at Grand R.W.A., Trumbull, OH 16 & 27 Jan (CB), while the southernmost record came from Finzel Swamp, Garrett, MD in early Dec (RKi, JC). The only mid-winter Blue-headed Vireo report came from Knoxville, TN 1 Feb (CWe). Common Ravens continued to expand their range beyond the "wilderness" of the mountain ridges. One pair, for instance, was reported in late Feb (DW1) at an active nest under a bridge abutment along a major highway at Ginger Hill, Washington, PA 48 km w. of the mountains, in an area where the species was unknown just a few years ago. Indicative of the mild late winter weather was the early return of the first Tree Swallows at McClintic W.S., Mason, WV 23 Feb (WA), and at Blount, TN the 24th (DT, AH). On the heels of a heavy fall influx, high counts of Black-capped Chickadees were made in w. Pennsylvania during C.B.C.s (e.g., 517 at Butler 15 Dec, 808 at Indiana 26 Dec, and a record 872 at Rector 16 Dec), but apparently few strayed beyond their normal winter range, and Black-capped were completely missing at the Southern West Virginia Bird Research Center, where they occurred during the past few winters (RC). Red-breasted Nuthatches invaded much of the Region, with good numbers s. as far as ne. Tennessee (RKn), and 16 were listed in Rabun, GA 26 Jan (EB). Carolina Wrens achieved very high population levels in the n. half of the Region (e.g., a record 70 on the Rector, PA C.B.C. 16 Dec), and, no doubt thanks to the unusually mild conditions, apparently most of these overwintered successfully. A House Wren at Grand R.W.A., Trumbull, OH 16 Dec was well n. of the usual winter range (DH), as were singles at Sweenyburg and L. Stephens, Raleigh, WV in Dec (RC) and at Parkersburg 29 Dec (*vide* JE). A Sedge Wren was a rare winter visitor in Hamilton, TN 29 Nov (*vide* KC), as was a Marsh Wren at Fisherville, Augusta, VA 28-29 Dec (*vide* YL).

WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

An **Orange-crowned Warbler** at a bird feeder at Sewickley, *Allegheny*, PA 2 Jan (ph. CM) established the first winter record for the w. half of the state, and a late Cape May Warbler was at P.I.S.P. 2 Dec (PH, SSi). A **Yellow Warbler** divided its time between two neighborhood feeders in Warren, PA 18 Nov—26 Dec (DWa). Rarely found wintering in w. Pennsylvania, single Common Yellowthroats were at P.I.S.P. 15 Dec (DS), New Castle 15 Dec (BD), and at Upper St. Clair, *Allegheny* 9 Dec (DWI). A Chipping Sparrow at Patton, *Cambria*, PA 6 Dec (DG) was well n. of the usual wintering range in Appalachia, as was a Savannah Sparrow at Berlin, *Somerset*, PA 9 Dec (JPa). A record-high winter count of 71 Savannah Sparrows was established for *Augusta*, VA 20 Jan (*vide* YL). One of the highlights of the season was 2 **Harris's Sparrows** at the Blythe Ferry Unit, Hiwassee W.R., TN 5 Jan—23 Feb (JH, DJ, m. ob.); another good find was an Oregon Junco at Pipestem S.P., WV 24 Dec+ (JPh). Lapland Longspurs were largely confined to n. Pennsylvania, with scattered singles s. to State College 16 Dec (*vide* EZ) and Berlin 1 Jan (JPa); likewise, Snow Buntings were locally common in Pennsylvania, with singles reaching s. to *Ritchie*, WV 16 Dec (GF) and *Whitetop Mt.*, VA 1-3 Dec (GE, m. ob.). A Dickcissel was a rarity at a feeding station in Greene Twp., *Erie*, PA 1 Feb+ (*vide* JM), as was another at Boalsburg, *Centre*, PA 1-30 Dec (*vide* EZ). Infrequent in the Region, at least 10 Brewer's Blackbirds were at Cooley's Pond, *Wayne*, KY 30 Jan (*vide* SS), and one was in *Sequatchie*, TN 23 Feb (JH, DJ), at a site where the species has been found for three consecutive years (KC). The only Baltimore Oriole reported this season was at Warren, PA through the first half of Dec (*vide* TG).

In general, the n. finch invasion was lighter than expected considering the number and early appearance of a few species in the fall. A small flock of Pine Grosbeaks near Mansfield, *Tioga*, PA 30 Dec—6 Feb, however, attracted much birder attention (BI, m. ob.), and 2 were at Brush Valley, *Indiana*, PA 30 Dec (*vide* MH). Red Crossbills peaked at 26 in *Rabun*, GA 26 Jan (EB), 10 were at Rock Creek L., *Fannin*, GA 14 Jan (BB), and one was there on the 15th (DF). A few White-winged Crossbills were scattered across w. Pennsylvania (m. ob.), highlighted by 20+ at Lake City, *Erie* from early Dec+ (*vide* JM); up to 14 were at Grandfather Mt., NC 8-13 Dec (WF, D&LM, m. ob.). Common Redpolls were reported only from Pennsylvania, where better counts included 400+ in one flock at Hills Cr. L., *Tioga*, 9 Jan (BI) and up to 35 at P.I.S.P. 5 Dec—26 Feb (BC). By mid-winter, only scattered flocks of Pine Siskins remained in

most of n. Appalachia, while southward a few were scattered about in e. Tennessee (RKn, KC), and 82 were seen along Burrell's Ford Road, *Rabun*, GA 26 Jan (EB). Flocks of up to 60 Evening Grosbeaks frequented scattered sites in w. Pennsylvania; farther s. one was at Somerset, *Pulaski*, KY 21 Dec (CN), they were "sporadic" in *Transylvania*, NC (NS), and sightings in the Georgia mountains included 20 birds in *Rabun* 24 Dec (*vide* MB) and 2 at Cherry Log, *Gilmer*, in mid-Jan (CF). In Virginia, only a handful could be found in traditional sites in *Highland* (*vide* YL).

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Western Great Lakes



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All three states reported very mild conditions throughout most of the season. Temperatures were above average throughout the Region, while precipitation was either below

average or average. Most of the Region encountered little deep snow until very late in February, when some areas received up to 50 cm.

With the mild conditions, it is not surprising that much of the excitement this season involved late and lingering species. Some real rarities were seen, with Michigan getting more than its fair share. Highlights in Minnesota included Anna's Hummingbird and Brambling, while Wisconsin boasted a Ross's Gull, a first