

Snow cover and subfreezing temperatures came early and were persistent, especially across the more northerly and mountainous parts of the Region. Most inland lakes and ponds froze over in December. Even Lake Erie was essentially icebound by mid-January: many of the waterbirds that were forced south were observed stopping over on the Region's larger, swifter rivers. By mid-February, it was unclear if fallouts of some species, such as Red-throated Loons and Red-necked Grebes, involved northbound migrants or wintering birds forced off the frozen Great Lakes, but that latter is far more likely for these two species.

Some feeder-watchers described the season as slow, undoubtedly reflecting a virtual absence of the irruptive northern finches and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Regionally, however, there were some remarkable finds, often at feeding stations—including species that normally winter well to the south (Black-throated Green Warbler, Painted and Indigo Buntings) and western vagrants such as Varied Thrush, Black-headed Grosbeak, Green-tailed Towhee, and Clay-colored, Gambel's White-crowned, and Harris's Sparrows. All in all, it was an interesting season for birdwatching.

**Abbreviations:** P.I.S.P. (Presque Isle State Park, Erie, PA); O.N.W.R. (Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Ottawa/Lucas, OH); P.V.S.P. (Peace Valley Park, Bucks, PA); P.N.R. (Powdermill Nature Reserve, Rector, Westmoreland, PA).

### LOONS THROUGH STORKS

A count of 24 Red-throated Loons at P.I.S.P. 12 Jan was exceptional (JM), and by late Feb, a good scattering of Red-throateds began appearing on Pennsylvania's larger rivers. A major fallout of Red-necked Grebes, which would continue over much of the spring period, began across most of the Region during the last week of Feb. At least 65 grebes put down on Cheat L., Morgantown, WV on the 27th (GF); 90 were counted along a 10-km section of the Allegheny R., *Armstrong*, PA 25 Feb+ (MH); and 35 fell out along a 35-km stretch of the Ohio R. in *Allegheny/Beaver*, PA during that same period (*fide* PH). Rare, but becoming increasingly regular along L. Erie, 2 Eared Grebes remained off Cleveland's lakefront from fall through 24 Dec (m. ob., RH), and 2 were at P.I.S.P. 2 Dec (BC). At least 6 imm. Northern Gannets, carry-overs from the fall season, were reported from Ohio (*fide* RH) from 1 Dec through a late bird at Lorain 10 Jan (JPo); 2 birds found grounded inland in *Seneca* and *Ashland* were sent to rehabilitation stations but did not survive. In Pennsylvania, 2 gannets remained at P.I.S.P. until 3 Dec (JM, BC), and one was spotted inland at *Beltzville L.*, *Carbon* 8 Dec (D. Hawk, S.

# Eastern Highlands & Upper Ohio River Valley



Hawk). An imm. American White Pelican made an unexpected midwinter stopover on the Great Miami R., Dayton, OH 20-21 Jan (J. Lanham, m. ob.), and a bird on the Ohio R. off Cincinnati (technically in Kentucky) 24 Jan was almost certainly the same individual (FR, J. Hays). An American Bittern was a good find at a *Boone*, WV wetland 11 Jan (RC), while a Great Egret 8 Dec—15 Jan at Fairview, Erie provided a first midwinter record for w. Pennsylvania (JM). During "the most severe snowstorm of the season," an ad. Wood Stork was seen flying over Paint Cr., Pax, *Fayette*, WV 9 Jan (RC, Bev Canterbury)—an unprecedented winter record.

### WATERFOWL THROUGH RAPTORS

Single mid-season Greater White-fronted Geese appeared in se. Pennsylvania at New Holland 5 Jan (JHe), P.V.S.P. 12 Jan (DW, DF), and on L. Ontelaunee 26 Jan (M. Wlasniewski); one was a Clearfork Res., *Richland/Morrow*, OH 12 Jan (J. Herman), and up to 10 early migrants stopped at Cowan L., *Clinton*, OH 9-15 Feb (E. Roush). A flock of 8000 Snow Geese gathered on the Susquehanna R. near Muddy Run Res., *Lancaster*, PA 2 Dec, and at the opposite end of the Region, 40 were at O.N.W.R. 6 Dec (EP). Single Ross's Geese were in se. Pennsylvania at P.V.S.P. 7-14 Dec (C. Crunkleton, E.

## Robert C. Leberman

Powdermill Nature Reserve

Carnegie Museum of Natural History

HC 64, Box 453

Rector, Pennsylvania 15677-9605

(rleberm@charterpa.net)

Ryan), *Muddy Run Res.* 21 Dec (JHe), and L. Ontelaunee 18-26 Jan (RK); in Ohio, one was along the Great Miami R. s. of Dayton 11-26 Jan (DD). Some 20,000 Canada Geese were listed at Pymatuning L., *Crawford*, PA 30 Jan (RFL), and 60,000 were estimated to have wintered in *Bucks*, PA (AM). A late Brant lingered at P.V.S.P. until 8 Dec (N. Zahn)—the season's only report. A count of 450 Tundra Swans at O.N.W.R. 5 Jan presumably consisted mostly of migrants, augmented by a few wintering birds (EP); 170 southbound swans flew over *Bellfonte*, *Centre*, PA 5 Dec (ML).

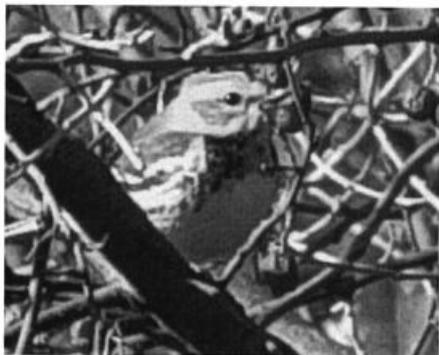
A flock of 43 American Black Ducks on the *Youghiogheny R.* at *Confluence*, *Somerset* 18 Jan was unusual for the mountain

uplands of sw. Pennsylvania (AMa); elsewhere, a remarkable flocking of 1250 Blacks had congregated on a pond at Castalisa, Erie, OH 18 Feb (VF). An imm. King Eider remained at Mentor, Lake, OH from fall through 18 Dec (LR, m. ob.), while a Common Eider holdover from fall remained at Fairport Harbor, OH through 13 Jan (LR). At P.I.S.P., an unidentified eider passed the Sunset Beach water-bird count site 10 Dec (JM). A Harlequin Duck was an unexpected rarity at a Toledo, OH quarry pond 22-29 Dec (M. Anderson), and a pair was on the Great Miami R., Dayton 5 Dec—26 Jan (S. Tackett); in Pennsylvania, a female Harlequin frequented the Raystown Branch of the Juniata R., Hunt-

ingdon 26 Jan—9 Feb (GG, D. Kyler). Away from L. Erie, a Surf Scoter was seen during the Pittsburgh South Hills C.B.C. 21 Dec (fide N. Page), and another was on the Delaware R. at Bristol, PA 2 Jan (DF). Fifteen White-winged Scoters on the Ohio R. at St. Marys, Pleasants, WV were exceptional for that area (J. Benedetti). About 10 Long-tailed Ducks were reported from various sites in Ohio during the season (fide RH), and in Pennsylvania, 2 were at Derry L., Westmoreland 1 Jan (MM), 2 on the Allegheny R. at Harmarsville 27 Dec (DW), and another on the Allegheny at Starbrick, Warren 8 Jan (B. Watts). Common Goldeneyes were more frequent than usual in West Virginia, where up to 30 wintered at Bluestone Dam, Summers (JPh); in Lucas, OH, goldeneye numbers built up to a high of 1050 at Bayshore Power Plant by 21 Feb (GL). A bird identified as a female Barrow's Goldeneye was on the Delaware R. at Yardley, PA 1 Jan (DF). High merganser counts in Erie, OH included 3650 Commons 13 Jan and 4600 Red-breasteds 10 Jan (VF).

A record-high count of 304 Bald Eagles (167 ads., 137 imms.) was made during a mid-Jan Ohio survey by the Department of Wildlife, with birds found in 45 of 88 counties (including 65 eagles at Sandusky Bay sites alone). "Post-season" counts at Hawk Mt. Sanctuary, PA totaled 42 Bald Eagles 16 Dec—17 Jan (fide RK), and 21 (6 ads., 15 imms.) were listed during the Linesville (Pymatuning L. area) C.B.C. 29 Dec (RHL). Up to 10 Northern Harriers were observed at a roost near Nockamixon S.P., Bucks, PA until 25 Jan (B. Etter). A state-wide Winter Raptor Survey, coordinated by Greg Grove

in Pennsylvania, indicated that the severe winter conditions may have contributed to a decline in wintering Red-tailed Hawk numbers—down to 1182 birds (3.02 birds per route hr.) from 1399 Red-tails (4.47 per hr.) in 2002. Surveyors, on the other hand, listed 99 Rough-legged Hawks (0.25 per hr.) in the state this season, compared to



This Black-throated Green Warbler surely brightened the C.B.C. season near Pennsbury Manor, Falls Township, in Bucks County, Pennsylvania 14 to (here) 22 December; there are no previous winter records for the state. Photograph by Rick Mellon.

just 21 (0.07 per hr.) the previous winter. Unusually good numbers of Rough-leggeds also wintered in s. West Virginia, where two observers (RC, JPh) each found about a half-dozen different birds in Dec. A Golden Eagle was an unusual find, well w. of the mountain ridges, at the Pymatuning Goose Management Area, Crawford, PA 13 Dec (RFL), and an "amazing" 3 birds wintered at reclaimed stripmines in Muskingum, OH (A. Parker, m. ob.).

### RAILS THROUGH TERNS

Rare anywhere in the Region during mid-winter, up to 3 Virginia Rails were found frequenting the area around an open spring at Spring Valley Wildlife Area, Greene/Warren, OH 19-26 Jan (DD, M. Busam). Away from L. Erie, American Coot peaked at 450 on Conneaut L., PA 24 Dec—just before the freeze-over (RFL, RCL). In an unusually



The only Snowy Owl reported in the Region was this bird found by Claus Herrmann at Broadheadsville, Pennsylvania 11 January 2003; it remained through the end of the period. Photograph by Brian Hardiman.

heavy flight, close to 1000 migrating Sandhill Cranes were tallied passing through far w. Ohio 1-8 Dec (fide RH), and elsewhere 21 spent the entire winter at Black Swamp, Lawrence, PA (fide PH). A Purple Sandpiper

was at P.I.S.P. 14 Dec (A. Troyer), and in Ohio, one was at Headlands Beach/Fairport Harbor 1-16 Dec (m. ob.) and 2 on Kelley's I. 16 Dec (JPh). A mid-Jan American Woodcock was unusual at Woodbury Wildlife Area, Coshocton, OH (D. St. John); an early migrant had returned in Summers, WV by 23 Feb (RC).

A Laughing Gull was certainly out of time and place on Bluestone L., WV 2 Feb (JPh). One or 2 Little Gulls lingered in Lake, OH through mid-Jan (LR, RH), where an ad. Black-headed Gull was located at Eastlake Power Plant 19 Jan (JPh). High counts for Bonaparte's Gull included 6000 at Cleveland 14 Dec and 1450 at Fairport Harbor 21 Dec (LR). A California Gull was at P.I.S.P. 24 Dec (R. Fridell, fide JM), and in Ohio, one was at Avon L. 14 Jan (JPh). Herring Gulls peaked at the Tullytown dump, Bucks, PA at well over 77,000 birds 14 Dec (BM); 15 Iceland Gulls were at Tullytown 25 Jan, and 178 Lesser Black-backed Gulls there 8 Dec (fide AM). Exceptional counts of Great Black-backed Gulls included 1300 at Avon L., OH 14 Jan (JPh) and over 2400 at Tullytown, PA 14 Dec (BM). The Region's only Black-legged Kittiwake was an imm. that remained at Cleveland from the fall period through 12 Dec (LR, m. ob.). A late Common Tern appeared at Lakeshore Municipal Park, Cleveland 8 Dec (JPh), and 2 late Forster's Terns were an unprecedented winter find for the West Virginia mountains at Bluestone L. 3 Dec (JPh).

### OWLS THROUGH WARBLERS

The only Snowy Owl confirmation for the Region was of a very cooperative bird at Broadheadsville, Monroe, PA 11 Jan+ (C. Herrmann), which allowed hundreds of birders to add it to their lists. Better counts of Long-eared Owls included 6 at Green Lane Res., Montgomery, PA 31 Dec (G. Franchois) and 7 at P.V.S.P. 6 Feb (AM); 5 were listed at Killdeer Plains W.A., Wyandot, OH 16 Jan (T. Archdeacon). Short-eared Owls were widely observed at suitable locations across Ohio and Pennsylvania, topped by 25 birds at a site in Montour, PA 9 Feb (S. Pinkerton). An unidentified

hummingbird remained in Jackson, OH through 21 Jan (M. Ball), and at least 6 Rufous Hummingbirds remained at as many sites in Ohio through as late as 14 Jan (fide RH); one banded in Media, PA 8 Dec had

been visiting a feeder there since 16 Nov (S. Weidensaul).

A Loggerhead Shrike remained at Killdeer Plains, OH from fall through 3 Dec (L. Gardella), and another was reported from Headlands Beach S.P. on the unusual mid-winter date of 12 Jan (*vide* LR); even more exceptional was one at Mt. Davis, Somerset, PA (the state's highest point) 17-18 Dec (K. Dodge, J. Vitak, D. Jeffrey). A modest invasion of Northern Shrikes into the Region included at least 6 or 7 birds in Ohio, and perhaps a few dozen across Pennsylvania, including 2 near Pymatuning L. 29 Dec (RHL). An American Crow roost at Cincinnati (FR) was down to 25,000 birds from a high of 70,000 in the winter of 2000-2001; West Nile virus is likely the culprit. Five Fish Crows wintered in a small disjunct colony located near the town of Indiana (*vide* PH), well west of the usual Pennsylvania range, which is almost entirely to the e. of the Allegheny Front.

Heavy snow cover apparently concentrated Horned Larks more than usual, with flocks of 300+ frequent across Pennsylvania, while 1250-1450 were estimated on Hamilton, OH fields 15 Feb (P. Wharton). Three Tree Swallows were very late migrants at Bluestone L., WV 3 Dec (JPh). Virtually no Red-breasted Nuthatches were to be found in Ohio (FR), and only small numbers were seen in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Carolina Wrens apparently made it through deep snow and prolonged low temperatures in good numbers even in the more n. parts of Ohio and Pennsylvania. Two Marsh Wrens were rarities at Cedar Point N.W.R. 15 Dec (GL). A Varied Thrush periodically visited a feeder at McKean, Erie, PA 1 Jan—9 Feb (ph. S. Stull, B. Mitchell, m. ob.), the 2nd county record, and a Bohemian Waxwing was at Lake City, Erie, PA 28 Jan—6 Feb (R. Kreider, *vide* JM).

Not unexpectedly, considering the severe weather, there were few reports of wintering warblers. A single Orange-crowned Warbler, however, was found on the S. Bucks, PA C.B.C. 14 Dec (BM), while a Black-throated Green Warbler at the Penn-Warner Tract (also in Bucks) 14-22 Dec (R. Mellon) established the first such winter record for the state. A Yellow-throated Warbler was spotted near Muddy Run Res., Lancaster, PA 17 Dec (P. Robinson); another was a rarity at a feeder at Berlin, Holmes, OH 18-19 Jan (N. Lowe, M. & M. Weaver, B. Morrison). A total of 5 Pine Warblers, scattered about Ohio 12 Dec—12 Feb, was considered a high number (RH), and one survived the winter at a feeder at Blue Marsh, Berks, PA (J. Silagy). A Palm Warbler was an unexpected rarity in the

mountains near Pleasant Gap, Centre, PA 13 Dec (J. Kennedy), and a late Ovenbird was at Columbus, OH 3-4 Dec (D. Snapp).

### TOWHEES THROUGH FINCHES

The Green-tailed Towhee previously reported as visiting a feeder near Centre, Juniata, PA in Nov (T. Petersheim) lingered through 1 Dec. More than the usual number of wintering Eastern Towhees was observed



This Varied Thrush that visited a feeder at McKean, Pennsylvania periodically from 1 January (here) to 9 February 2003 represented just the second Erie County record. Photograph by Sam Stull.

from almost throughout the Region, including 5 in Fayette, PA as late as 8 Feb (MMC); likewise, American Tree Sparrows were thought to be in better-than-usual numbers, with 200+ at West Branch S.P., OH 12 Jan, and "hundreds, if not thousands" wintering in rural areas of Portage, OH (LR). Exceptionally rare in winter so far n., a Clay-colored Sparrow frequented a feeder at Meadville, Crawford, PA 12 Jan—8 Feb, where it was banded 25 Jan (RFL), and at the opposite end of the state, one visited a feeder near Leesport, Berks, PA 25 Dec—1 Feb (D. Kendall). A Savannah Sparrow at P.I.S.P. 6 Dec established a first winter record for Erie, PA (J. Stanley), and a Grasshopper Sparrow at a Logan, OH feeder 25-26 Jan was most unusual (T. Shiveley). Fox Sparrow records included those of birds wintering at higher-than-usual elevations, like the one at P.N.R. in the Laurel Highlands (RCL, RM) 7 Jan+ and another at nearby Ligonier, PA in early Jan (C. Labarthe); one at Twinsburg, Portage, OH 16 Jan was considered a good find for that area (LR). A wintering Lincoln's Sparrow was at P.V.S.P., PA 21 Dec+ (AM, m. ob.). A Harris's Sparrow was observed throughout much of Dec in Raleigh, WV (RC), and a Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow at Martin's Creek Power Plant, Northampton, PA was seen with a flock of 30 *leucophrys* White-crowns 24 Jan (R. Wiltraut). For the 3rd winter in a row, an Oregon Junco spent the season at Pipestem S.P., WV (JPh). Lapland Longspurs

were widely reported in small numbers across much of Pennsylvania and n. Ohio, and 173 spring migrants passed Maumee Bay S.P., Lucas, OH 21 Feb (VF). A Black-headed Grosbeak was a rarity near Lancaster, PA 15-17 Dec (D. & M. Montgomery, ph. F. & B. Haas, m. ob.), a male Indigo Bunting was an exceptional find at a Cincinnati bird feeder 1-30 Jan (N. Keller), and even more unusual was the male Painted Bunting that wandered about visiting various feeders in Lower Makefield Twp. and nearby areas in Pennsylvania from late Dec through 16 Feb (F. & M. Coburn, *vide* AM).

Considering the harsh winter weather, 3 Eastern Meadowlarks were an unexpected find at Rockwood, high in the Laurel Mts. of sw. Pennsylvania 15 Dec (AMa). A Yellow-headed Blackbird was a rarity at Mt. Hope, Holmes, OH in mid-Jan (B. Jackson), and singles were also in Lancaster, PA at Hensel 21 Dec (J. Heller) and Penn Hill 6 Feb (T. Amico, R. Schutsky). There were three reports of single Brewer's Blackbirds in w. Pennsylvania: Shannondale, Clarion 7 Dec (JH, DW),

Indiana 25 Dec (*vide* MH), and Elton, Cambria 31 Dec (Ross Gallardy). A Baltimore Oriole was at P.V.S.P. 9 Dec—8 Feb (*vide* AM), and a female oriole, thought to be a Baltimore, visited a feeder near Moyerstown, Berks, PA for a few weeks in Jan (J. Keim). The near-absence of n. finches was one of the more notable features of the season: neither Red or White-winged Crossbills were verified in the Region, and the only report of a Common Redpoll came from Nockamixon S.P., Bucks, PA 15 Dec (G. Carmichael). A few Pine Siskins were seen at widely scattered sites across the Region, but, despite a few fall sightings, the only winter Evening Grosbeak report was from near Rock, Schuylkill, PA 15 Feb (D. Krue).

**Contributors and initialed observers:** Carole Babyak, Ralph Bell, Dick Byers, Ronald Canterbury, David Dister, Jeanette Esker, Devich Farbotnik, Victor Fazio, Gary Felton, George Franchois, Ted Grisez, Greg Grove, Robert Harlan (RH), Ron Harrell (RHL), Johnathan Heller (JHe), Paul Hess, Margaret Higbee, Deuane Hoffman, Joyce Hoffmann, Rudy Keller; Mike Lanzone, Robert C. Leberman (RCL), Ronald F. Leberman (RFL), Gus Links, Anthony Marich (AMa), Mark McConaughy, Jerry McWilliams (JM); Bob Mercer, August Mirabella (AM), Robert Mulvihill, Jeff Payne, Ed Pierce, Jim Phillips (JPh), John Pogacnik (JPo), Willard Rahn, Frank Renfrow, Larry Rosche, Richard Shelling, Dave Wilton, Eugene Zielinski. 🐦