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FAREWELL TO 2020, BY TRISTAN LOWERY



As uncertain as the future may be, I'm sure we're all ready to bid farewell to the year 2020. And while we're all looking forward to 2021 with an uneasy mix of hope and trepidation, I recently spent time looking back at a happier time when carefree travel was still possible – though not without its own hardships.

In October of 2017, I took what was my first trip to California as a birder. My girlfriend Katherine and I had planned an eight-day vacation to the Bay Area, mostly to visit her sister in Napa County, but also to see as much of San Francisco as we could. It was our first real vacation away from New York together and we were really looking forward to it.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

There is no President's Corner column this month.

You, too, can contribute to Feathers!

- Do you have a birding story or photos that might be of interest to other birders?
- Have you led a field trip for HMBC?
- Have you written short prose or poetry on the subject of birds? We're starting a Writers' Page!
- Did you take a birding vacation?
- Do you have a favorite birding spot?

SHARE them with HMBC members by submitting them to:

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E-mail: contact@hmbc.net

HMBC website: <http://hmbc.net>

Please send all **electronic submissions for Feathers** via e-mail to:
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New printing of *Birding New York's Hudson Mohawk Region* is now available

Birding New York's Hudson Mohawk Region, a new printing of HMBC's classic book, is now available. A copy is \$20 for HMBC members and \$25 for non-members. An additional charge of \$5 for postage and handling will be added to the price per book. Contact Gregg Recer gregg_recer@alum.rpi.edu or (518) 899-2678 if you are interested in purchasing a copy. Checks should be made out to ***Hudson Mohawk Bird Club*** and should be sent to:

Gregg Recer

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UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

COVID-19 Response Update, September 25, 2020: The HMBC Board has decided to cancel all club field trips until further notice. One possible exception to this may be the 2020 Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). Guidance from the National Audubon Society indicates that the decision whether or not to hold each count is up to the individual count compilers, and NAS recommends waiting until after November 15th to make that decision based on the pandemic conditions at that time. Announcement of the status of the three HMBC CBCs will be made after that date. HMBC virtual programs will continue via Zoom until further notice. We will continue to monitor New York State Executive Orders and guidance related to social-distancing requirements. As the details of orders and guidance are revised, we will re-evaluate whether or not to hold subsequent events. Please check hmbc.net frequently for any updates.

ARTIST PAGE, SNOWY OWLS BY BOB BUDLIGER



WRITERS PAGE

Staying Warm

By: Marilyn Hamecher 1/24/21

We worry about our beloved birds on those cold winter nights.
Just listening to freezing howling winds, gives us such a fright.

How could they possibly stay warm, when we would all be turning blue.
With highly motivated instincts, they know...but we don't have a clue.

Many song birds have high body temps at 105 which helps them survive
All those winter birds have it covered, they know just how to stay alive.

Blue Jays seek out dense pines and hideaway from the freezing cold.
They know how to protect themselves, its part of every bird's mold.

Chickadees snuggle inside building cracks, tree hollows and bird boxes.
They know how to stay warm and conceal themselves from hungry foxes.

Finches are crafty; they tunnel into the snow creating a sleeping cavity.
Burrowing inside for the night, keeps them warm and avoids calamity.

Nuthatches commandeered Woodpecker holes with other birds of a feather.
Knowing the addresses of the sleeping holes, they hop in and sleep together.

The Goldfinches hunker down with all their other relatives, the Finches.
They spend winter nights nestled close to each other, within a few inches.

Northern Cardinals will find an evergreen, roost together to keep warm.
Like the Blue Jay, they find a hideaway, cluster closely until early morn.

Wrens and Titmice search out the small tree cracks to secure their cover.
They only need a tiny pocket to fit into, then they wrap around each other.

Woodpeckers sleep in tree cavities, for shelter from the cold winter nights.
If they can't find a decent spot they make their own and stay until its light.

Woodpeckers seem to be landlords for birds seeking a warm winter cover.
The holes they made for their young make a perfect shelter, like none other.

Pigeons are very brave and like to sleep high up on beams and flat ledges.
Their Down coat keeps them warm from blowing winds atop building edges.

Now we know how some birds navigate the winter cold and keep on going.
They are all amazing birds, especially when it's freezing cold and snowing..

ON NATURE

Winter Surprises, by Denise Hackert-Stoner

Here we are, in the middle of another northeast winter. We have already experienced the expected large snowfall, unexpected warm-ups, and long periods of cloudy weather. With Christmas Counts behind us, we continue to monitor feeder birds, search the grasslands for owls, and check farm fields for larks and Snow Buntings. Many of us have enjoyed some winter finches, which to me at least seem to be unusually high in numbers. These activities are all part of winter for birders in our region, and quite expected. Lately though, I have been thinking of some quite unexpected sightings I have had during winters past and present. Because these occurrences were surprising, and because they raised questions in my mind, they have driven me to inquiry. I would like to share four examples of these winter surprises, along with some of the facts I have since discovered about them.

The first winter surprise I'd like to share came to me very recently, while Scott and I were searching for crossbills at the Clifton Park Library. Not having much luck at the pines near the parking lot we decided to split up and search around the property. That's how I happened to discover a lovely little wet woodland along a trail connecting the library with the elementary school just behind it. Standing on a wooden bridge I was enjoying the view of this sweet little swamp thinking that it would be a good place to find skunk cabbage in very early spring. We often enjoy our skunk cabbage flower search in late February or early March in the swamp alongside Ann Lee Pond, and this swamp looked like a miniature version of that. I was pretty surprised when I noticed not one, but at least five of these tough, leathery plants already poking up through the mud and ice, the first of January! But an article by Laura Lutz in "Find Your Chesapeake" called "Skunk Cabbage Rules the Winter Wetlands" taught me that indeed, these unique, hardy, heat-producing plants do sometimes emerge during mid-winter, so I will be looking for it much earlier from now on!



ON NATURE *(CONTINUED)*

The second winter surprise came to me last year at the Pine Bush Preserve, shortly after a snowfall. We were hiking along the snowy trail when I noticed a tiny brown spider making its way along the snow! I never would have expected to see a spider outdoors in winter. It seems they all take up residence in our house! But I have since learned that although most spiders over-winter as eggs nestled in leaf litter, or as dormant adults, legs curled up and resting under the snow, there are some spiders that take advantage of the heat of a sunny day and go out and about. The microhabitats found in the nooks and crannies of the snow surface provide enough warmth for the spider to keep from freezing. (Susie Spikol, "Northern Woodlands")



My next winter surprise came in the form of an insect, and again, at the Pine Bush, in late winter. Because I sometimes like to shoot macro shots I am often looking closely at patterns in dead flower heads, tree bark, etc. On this particular day I was scanning the trunk of a tree. Coming to a small round hole in the tree I peered in. Imagine my surprise when I found I was eye-to-eye with a firefly! I do love fireflies, and often see them resting on grass stems and flowers on summer mornings after their bright, night-time courtship displays. Seeing this firefly in the winter, peering out of its little hole, I became very curious. I also wanted to correctly identify the photo I took of it. I was surprised to learn that there is a lampless firefly that winters as an adult in the crevices of tree bark, called the Winter Dark Firefly. These fireflies thrive in the colder months, and become more active as spring approaches, dining on tree sap. They mate in April and May, and their eggs hatch a couple of weeks later. Interestingly, the larva glow, even though the adults lack bioluminescence. By the time summer comes and the familiar, blinking fireflies fill our nights with their light, the Winter Dark adults have all died, leaving their larvae to develop in the leaf litter. I was so happy to learn of this interesting creature of the late winter and early spring! (Laurie D. Morrissey, "Fireflies of Winter")



ON NATURE *(CONTINUED)*

Finally, a winter surprise that came to me and Scott quite a few years ago: While filling our bird feeders on a winter morning we noticed a little shrew making tracks away from us, carrying a sunflower seed that looked nearly as big as the animal itself. The sighting was surprising to me, mostly because as it turned out I didn't know much at all about shrews. But in learning more about this small creature it has become even more surprising! My incorrect assumption was that shrews hibernate, or at least semi-hibernate, like chipmunks. As it turns out they do not hibernate at all. They are equally active in summer and winter, and they have a very fast metabolism which requires them to consume a great deal of food. In fact, a shrew will starve to death in just a few hours without any food. Shrews are primarily carnivores (although they do occasionally eat nuts and seeds, hence the sunflower seed), and food is harder to come by in the winter, so this little animal has evolved a unique survival strategy. It physically shrinks in the winter, up to ten to twenty percent of its body weight, and its excessively high metabolic rate produces enough heat for survival, even with its lowered intake of calories in the winter. ("Science Daily" and Scott Shalaway, "Wildlife: Feeders a Target for Hungry Shrews")



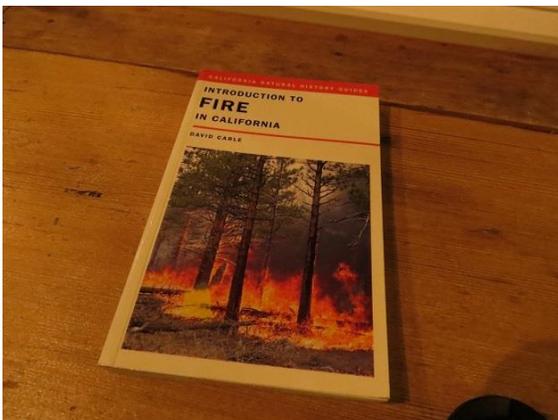
Farewell to 2020 *(continued...)*

After landing at SFO, we got off to a whirlwind start, hopping on BART to the 24th Street Mission station for “super burritos” at El Farolito, still toting our luggage into this tiny landmark taquería. After checking into the excellent hostel at historic Fort Mason Park just east of the Presidio, we spent the rest of the afternoon and evening being complete San Fran tourists: Katherine the architect loved wandering around Russian Hill and Cow Hollow neighborhoods with their ornate Victorian homes, while I added Western Gull (*Larus occidentalis*), Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*), and Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) to my life list as we strolled along the marina. I’m not ashamed to admit that we had dinner at the hopelessly touristy Fisherman’s Wharf at sunset, with two orders clam chowder in a bread bowl, washed down with cool bottles of the city’s native Anchor Steam Beer.



My lifer Golden-crowned Sparrow at the Lombard Street Reservoir in San Francisco, just around the corner from the most famous crooked street in the world.

The next morning was Sunday, October 8th, and I was up before sunrise to bird the gardens of Fort Mason, leaving Katherine to sleep in for another hour or two before we got ready for a long day of city sightseeing. But when I stepped outside, there was an unmistakable haze all around in the dim twilight, which even I realized was not San Francisco’s famous fog. Something was amiss. No fires were visible, but the air reeked of smoke. I pulled out my phone and searched for “San Francisco” and “fire”, expecting to find news of some conflagration nearby in the city. Instead, there were dire reports of overnight wildfires in Sonoma and Napa Counties, with the nearest over twenty miles away on the north shores of San Pablo Bay. We’d arrived in San Francisco just in time for the very beginning of the record-breaking 2017 Northern California wildfires.



The title of this book I found in the library at the Point Reyes hostel was just a little too accurate a description of our vacation thus far.

Farewell to 2020 *(continued...)*

Of course, we never ended up making it to Napa County that week, where we'd been planning to spend part of three days of our vacation. I cut short my birding that morning, headed back to our room to wake up Katherine, and told her she'd better call her sister. With the rest of our vacation now up in the air, we did our best to enjoy the next two days in San Francisco as planned, all the while keeping in touch with her sister, who was making plans to evacuate Napa County. As the days went by, the fires worsened, but the coast north of San Francisco was so far spared. So, on Tuesday, we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge into Marin County, stopping at Muir Woods National Monument on the way to Point Reyes National Seashore, where we spent the rest of the day getting lost in the fog high above the crashing Pacific waves below.



Katherine took this photo of the strange, foggy landscape of Point Reyes.

After a night at the Point Reyes hostel and a long walk to Limantour Beach the next morning, Katherine and I drove into Point Reyes Station for a breakfast of buttermilk blueberry scones at the excellent Bovine Bakery, where the Brewer's Blackbirds outside gathered around us and begged for crumbs.



I wasn't joking – the Brewer's Blackbirds outside the Bovine Bakery really were expecting us to share our scones with them.

Farewell to 2020 *(continued...)*

Up to this point, our trip was – amazingly – going as planned, despite the natural and humanitarian disaster that was unfolding at what was for us a safe but still troubling distance. But Point Reyes represented the turning point – and the high-water mark – of our trip. With fires getting out of control just east of us in Santa Rosa, we knew we would be retreating to the south before long. But I knew we couldn't come this far without making one more stop up north before turning back to San Francisco.

When you're in this quiet part of California, the best meal you can treat yourself to involves a short drive up the Pacific Highway, which snakes along Tomales Bay to Marshall, where the Hog Island Oyster Company sells fresh oysters by the dozen from their barebones wholesale store. The service and accommodations are sparse; just a handful of weathered picnic tables stand out back by the bay for seating and you have to shuck your own oysters – but the views and the atmosphere are incredible.



The view of Tomales Bay from the picnic tables at Hog Island Oyster Company in Marshall, California.

As we'd just eaten our breakfast with the blackbirds, Katherine and I had some time to kill before our next meal. We picked up extra provisions to complement our oyster lunch at the Cowgirl Creamery Cantina, a small shop in Point Reyes Station run by the award-winning cheesemakers at Cowgirl Creamery. We grabbed an amber ale from the Marin Brewing Company, a baguette, green olives, a local saucisson sec, a lemon to cut up for the oysters, and a round of Chimney Rock, an earthy cow's milk cheese made by Cowgirl Creamery with shiitake mushrooms and summer savory. Despite our well-laid vacation plans beginning to unravel due to forces beyond our control, we had all the makings of a lovely lunch by the bay – once we'd gotten to Hog Island and bought our oysters, that is.

Farewell to 2020 *(continued...)*

Katherine had plans to call her sister that morning so we could figure out when and where we might meet up with her, now that she'd finally evacuated her house in Napa County (in the end, I'm happy to report both she and her house remained safe during the fires). We could have stayed in town for this call, but it was a beautiful and sunny autumn morning in Northern California, so I talked Katherine into driving over to the nearby Tomales Bay Ecological Reserve, just outside of Point Reyes Station, for some more inspiring scenery. She walked around with me for a little while, before returning to the car to call her sister, while I roamed around the salt marsh a bit longer. I didn't get any lifers on this outing, but I had wonderful views of some of the West Coast birds that inhabit this sublime landscape.



Upland habitat at Tomales Bay Ecological Reserve.



Ecological Reserve.

Western Meadowlark (Sturnella neglecta) at Tomales Bay

Farewell to 2020 *(continued...)*



Say's Phoebe (Sayornis saya) at Tomales Bay Ecological Reserve.



California Scrub-Jay (Aphelocoma californica) at Tomales Bay Ecological Reserve.

Farewell to 2020 *(continued...)*

I got back to the car to learn we finally knew our next move: we were to head back to the Bay to meet Katherine's sister that evening in San Rafael, a city about an hour southeast of Tomales Bay. With the rest of the day to get there, we made the most of our remaining time in Marin County. We made an impromptu stop at the outstanding Heidrun Meadery in Point Reyes Station for a tour and tasting of their dry, sparkling honey wines. After this perfect aperitif, we were ready for lunch and headed up California Highway 1 to the Hog Island Oyster Company in Marshall.



Considering everything that was happening around us, we'd been very fortunate. We were safe, as was Katherine's sister. Sure, the next three days we planned to spend in Napa County were out, and we scrambled to find last-minute accommodations and to replan the rest of our trip. But we knew these were trivial inconveniences compared to the suffering the fires were causing, which became more evident as we continued our journey that week: the highways crowded with refugees fleeing from the north and east and we witnessed a great outpouring of neighborly help for those in need at many roadside stops. It's easy to feel helpless amidst a disaster of that scale – and impossible not to feel guilt when passing through it as a mere tourist.



Farewell to 2020 *(continued...)*

Despite this, our meal at Hog Island Oyster Company was everything I hoped it would be. Katherine and I ordered a dozen oysters on a tray of ice, found a seat at the water's edge out back, and unpacked our lunch. I found my oyster knife I'd thoughtfully brought all the way from New York for this very moment, and thanks to my long-ago stint as a sous-chef at a busy Manhattan restaurant with a raw bar, the shucking went very easily. It was the early afternoon on a nearly cloudless day, the bright sun was glinting off the calm waters of the Tomales Bay, and a noisy Belted Kingfisher kept us company while we ate. I know I took tasting notes on the beer for my weekly reviews at the blog 10,000 Birds, but I lost track of those long ago and never got around to writing about this day until now anyway. But none of that matters now: it was exactly the right beer for a perfect moment and that's how I remember it.



Our bayside spread at Hog Island Oyster Company

With that, cheers, and here's to a better year in 2021. Some of you who know me personally know that Katherine passed away in August of 2020 after a brief and unexpected illness. Going on without her has been difficult, especially with everything going on in the world now, but it's given me the chance to remember and reflect on the time we did have together. Even in the best of times, life doesn't always go as planned, but it's still possible to find moments of peace and happiness in the worst of circumstances, which is something I think we've all been discovering in the last year.

Will WhatsApp Be the End of HMBirds? By Gregg Recer

One important aspect of encouraging an active and engaged local birding community is having a robust and efficient communication system for sharing bird sightings. For the Hudson-Mohawk region the HMBirds listserv group (hmbirds@groups.io) has been the foundation of that system for many years. HMBC member Barb Putnam was the original organizer of HMBirds, and the group archive goes back to March of 1999. Before that we relied on labor-intensive surveillance of the Birdline telephone system, combined with phone trees and word of mouth to find out about unusual or rare bird sightings. HMBirds provided a way to get email messages about local sightings widely-distributed essentially instantly when they were submitted. Eventually, the benefits of HMBirds so outweighed those of Birdline that the latter was abandoned.

Recently, birders have been organizing groups to share rare-bird sightings using WhatsApp; a mobil-phone-based application that works analogous to a group text (SMS) platform. Messages posted by any member of the group are immediately sent to all groups users who see the messages as a running conversation in the app on their phone. Currently, both HMBirds and a local WhatsApp birding group are operating essentially simultaneously in the greater Hudson-Mohawk (Kingbird Region 8) area. HMBirds has over 500 subscribed members. The local WhatsApp group is about a tenth of that size.

The major reason I am aware of that triggered people locally to start using WhatsApp was a perceived improvement in timeliness of sighting reports compared to HMBirds. It was true that when HMBirds was hosted on Yahoo! Groups there were occasional technical issues that caused delays in messages being posted to the group. In my experience, these were very infrequent, but did sometimes result in loss of timely information. These technical issues were a major factor (along with Yahoo!'s long-term viability) leading HMBC to move HMBirds to groups.io in 2018. Other benefits of using the app that I have heard people mention include getting notifications on their phone of incoming messages, being able to use SMS-type abbreviated language vs. full grammatical sentences in email, and that using the app is a quicker experience than email. In fact, I don't think any of those "features" differs significantly for HMBirds: First and foremost, the message lag issue was solved with the move to groups.io; posts via email or from the browser appear essentially instantaneously. [Groups.io](https://groups.io) accounts support notifications sent to computer and mobile browsers (mobile app in development), and mobile-phone email apps like Gmail also support notifications. There are no specific style rules on groups.io that I am aware that preclude using compact/shorth-handed txt type language to convey a post in a very succinct fashion (I often do that when posting from the field b/c typing on the phone is laborious). And using a browser or phone email app to send a message only requires typing and hitting 'send' -- no different from messaging apps. On the flip side, all of HMBirds content appears on the birding.aba.org rare bird aggregator site helping provide broader access to local bird sightings to others outside of the region -- something messaging apps don't do.

While I don't see any real significant benefit in performance right now for WhatsApp over HMBirds, I believe there is a significant detriment: WhatsApp groups are essentially closed communities that require active invitation to join from a group administrator. HMBirds is freely available for anyone to join, regardless of HMBC membership status. HMBC promotes viewing and joining HMBirds on our public web site, and guidance for joining the group is provided to all new HMBC members. The original intent of messaging apps like WhatsApp was to provide encrypted communications among a self-selected group of people and to keep the group anonymous and closed off to others unless they were provided with a specific invitation link for the group. This "gate-keeper" aspect of the current way WhatsApp is being used among local birders gives the appearance of being contrary to HMBC's purpose of building the birding community in the greater Capital District area, and, anecdotally, is already undermining that open-communication and community-engagement purpose of HMBirds to some degree. Through contacts who use WhatsApp, I'm aware of increasing instances where rare bird information is only getting shared on the messaging app and never making it to the broader community on HMBirds, or getting there much more slowly.

Will WhatsApp Be the End of HMBirds? *(continued...)*

There are other issues with WhatsApp in particular (e.g., its ownership by Facebook and how Facebook is using WhatsApp user data). However, any encrypted messaging system (e.g., Signal) potentially creates the same issue from the HMBC perspective -- we should be promoting more open access to timely birding information, not information exclusivity. While probably not the intent, having two competing platforms operating simultaneously is fragmenting the information that should be shared with all birders who are seeking it.

My feeling right now is that HMBirds capabilities completely measure-up to WhatsApp, and ideally we would all use the HMBirds service as our primary communication tool. However, I recognize that, unlike HMBirds, the current local WhatsApp group isn't an HMBC-supported service, and so the organization and management of that service is outside of any HMBC control. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the WhatsApp group should strive to contribute to the HMBC mission of promoting field birding and appreciation of wild birds in the Region 8 area. The best way to do that would be to simultaneously share all rare bird information from WhatsApp on HMBirds. Additionally, to avoid the appearance of exclusivity, I would suggest publicly promoting the WhatsApp group and making an invite link publically available (e.g., via the HMBC web site) rather than the current invitation-only arrangement which depends on selective invites being offered by group gate-keepers. All of this would create redundancy of effort, but unless everyone returns to HMBirds as the agreed communication platform for the region, that seems preferable to me to the current situation that creates at least an appearance of selective information sharing.

CBC Reports 2020

Albany County, Alan Mapes

The 35th annual Albany County Christmas Bird Count took place on Sunday, December 20. A 30" snowfall from a few days earlier was still on the ground, preventing our counters from walking some of their usual areas, but also driving small birds to the road edges to feed. The need for social distancing caused the count circle to be split into 12 sectors, rather than the usual 8. The species total for the day was 72, just over the average of 71.

Two new species were officially added to the count: a lone savannah sparrow and a group of 14 red crossbills. One more new species was present, but not found by one of our participants. A snowy owl was photographed at the Selkirk Train Yard that day and we learned of it the day after. How to handle this bird will be taken up with the CBC officials.

As always, some species were found in significantly higher numbers relative to the long-term averages, and some were relatively scarce. Highest-ever numbers were recorded for a surprising number of species: ring-necked duck at 520, Cooper's hawk with 11, merlin with 2, mourning dove at 534, yellow-bellied sapsucker at 11 (previous high was 7), tufted titmouse at 176, red-breasted nuthatch at 102 (previous high was 32 in 1997, we had 1 last year), white-breasted nuthatch at 150, Carolina wren at 40, fox sparrow with 5, song sparrow with 132, white-throated sparrow more than doubled their previous high at 512, dark-eyed juncos were found at four times the previous high at 4129, northern cardinal more than double their previous numbers at 310. Brown creeper tied its best year at 13.

Found in notably higher numbers were: black vulture in its third year of good numbers at 43, American tree sparrow at 200, and blue jays were found in their second highest number ever at 420.

Other good finds included: 1 mute swan, 1 northern shoveler, 1 northern pintail, 1 eastern phoebe, 1 hermit thrush, 2 swamp sparrows, and 70 common redpolls.

Species missed on that day included sharp shinned hawk, ruffed grouse, and golden-crowned kinglet. Gulls were scarce - ring-billed was the only species found.

What caused so many species to be found in higher numbers? Much of this effect might be explained by the dividing up of sectors of the circle. We had more birding parties afield, even though each party was just one person, or in some cases two family members. It is hard to say how this effects final results, though. I'm sure that many birds in my sector were missed because I did not have the usual two excellent birders with me. Whatever the cause, we had a very good count. Thanks go out to all the dedicated participants!

Schenectady Christmas Bird Count – December 19, 2020, Larry Alden

Twenty-five participants in as many as 14 field parties, and one feeder watcher, took part in the 92nd running of the Schenectady Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 19. The Schenectady CBC has been held continuously each year since 1929.

Weather in the count circle was partly clear and very cold. Temperatures ranged from a pre-dawn low of -11°F to an afternoon high of 25°F. Flowing water was mostly frozen and still water was completely iced over. An average of 24 inches of snow covered the count circle. Mercifully, there was little to no wind. Field parties covered the 15-mile diameter count circle between the hours of 5:30 a.m. and 6:50 p.m.

The weather in the week leading up to count day was variable. Early in the week, temperatures were in the 40s during the day and hovered around freezing at night. By Tuesday, it started to get colder, with daily temperatures around freezing and nights in the teens. On Wednesday into Thursday, a major snowstorm hit, leaving upwards of two feet of snow across the area. Temperatures plunged into the negative numbers on Saturday morning, depending on where and when people began the day. Roadside pull-offs and parking areas were not plowed out and only the most popular trails had seen any foot traffic by count day. Snowplows had cleared most roads and left bare grass on the shoulders.

Field parties located 59 species, with an additional five count week species (species found in the count circle in the three days on each side of count day but not on count day.) This is a little below the average of the previous 10 years of 60.2 species. The count maximum is 70 species from the count held in December 2007.

CBC Reports 2020 *(continued...)*

Once again, we added a new species to the count – Eurasian Wigeon. This species is unusual in this area, but it has been found at least once on a local CBC (Troy, in December 1984). The count composite total now stands at 143 species with three additional species found only during count week.

Along with the Eurasian Wigeon, there were some interesting finds this year. The following ten species were notable due to them having been found on 20 or fewer counts: Gadwall (7th occurrence), Eurasian Wigeon (1st), Green-winged Teal (9th), Black Vulture (7th), Bald Eagle (20th), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (16th), Merlin (11th), Peregrine Falcon (9th), Red Crossbill (9th), and Fox Sparrow (8th). As I mentioned last year, some of these species (for example, Black Vulture and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker) have become more common in the last few years but haven't reached the 20-occurrence threshold. Bald Eagle has finally reached the 20th occurrence, so it will drop off this "notable species" list next time it's encountered.

For comparative purposes, the following eleven species have been found on 40 or more counts, but were not found on this one: Ring-necked Pheasant (found on 47 of 92 counts), Ruffed Grouse (71 counts), Ring-billed Gull (54), Herring Gull (83), American Kestrel (84), Northern Shrike (42), Horned Lark (42), Winter Wren (50), Golden-crowned Kinglet (70), Cedar Waxwing (62), and Purple Finch (52). Some species in this group were far more common in the early years of the count, when conditions in the count circle were more rural and/or agrarian in nature.

There were record high (or tied) counts for the following five species: Eurasian Wigeon (new record: 1, old record: 0), Cooper's Hawk (11, 7), Merlin (3, 3), Peregrine Falcon (2, 2), and Common Raven (7, 6). We missed the Dark-eyed Junco record of 580 by just three individuals!

Waterfowl numbers were low, which was not unexpected due to limited open water. Only 79 Canada Geese were reported, the lowest number since December 1995. However, the limited open water also made it easier to find the odd ducks that were still hanging around. The complete lack of gulls was remarkable, but with lots of snow and ice, they probably headed to Colonie Landfill where the pickings were easier. We only had count week Ring-billed Gull.

Hawk numbers were low, although Cooper's Hawks were out in force in Sector D. Single Rough-legged Hawks and Northern Harriers were good finds in a year where they just don't seem to be around. Windless pre-dawn hours were good for locating owls, and it seems most parties looking for them were able to find some.

Three Great Blue Herons (lowest since 2000) and four Belted Kingfishers were found. These guys were probably shellshocked by suddenly finding themselves with very little open water.

Red-breasted Nuthatches are irrupting this year, with the highest total (28) since 34 were found in 1997. Another bright spot was finding both Red Crossbills (last reported in 1987) and Pine Siskins (highest total since 2001). Sparrows were concentrated along bare roadsides, and numbers were up. Single Fox and Swamp sparrows were good finds, although the Swamp Sparrow was subsequently picked off by a Cooper's Hawk.

Blackbirds were represented by scattered Red-winged Blackbirds in six sectors and two cowbirds in one sector. A Rusty Blackbird was a count week bird, having been found before the count (and before the snow).

I don't normally comment on the total number of birds found, but it seemed like there were fewer than usual. The total of 7,445 individuals was higher than last year's 6,545 but well below the 20-year average of 11,441. This might be attributable to the snow and cold, but it may also be a trend - this was the sixth year in a row where the total was below 10,000 individuals.

The table accompanying this article shows each field party's sightings and effort. The last column shows how many times a species has been found on the last 25 counts. This can highlight the relative rarity of a particular species.

In this time of pandemic, I want to thank all the adaptable participants who were out in the field for this more difficult than usual count. In order to maintain adequate social distancing, I asked each field party leader to form his or her own field party and figure out how they wanted to cover their territories. Some groups split up their territories and some covered them as a single group in multiple vehicles. Still others did a combination of the two, with parties splitting and re-forming throughout the day to cover different areas. Hopefully, you were able to explore some new spots. I particularly want to thank the people who take time off from their busy lives and jobs to do these bird counts – if only to maintain their sanity. I sincerely hope we can go back to a more normal count next year.

	A	B	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	F	G	H	I/J	Total	Last 25
Song Sparrow	1	8	11		8		3	2	5	4	2	1	45	25
Swamp Sparrow					1								1	14
White-throated Sparrow	4	3	11	2	78	4		1	53	9	3	2	170	25
Dark-eyed Junco	19	14	180	12	95	10	48	10	56	38	79	16	577	25
Red-winged Blackbird	8	6	1	10	2		3		7				37	21
Brown-headed Cowbird									2				2	15
Rusty Blackbird		CW											0	2
Northern Cardinal	16	19	9	2	52	6	9	4	49	18	18	11	213	25
Total Birds	328	673	1125	598	1136	97	390	164	1065	706	467	697	7446	
Total Species	33	33	30	26	38	19	28	22	38	28	29	37	59	
Count Week Species	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	
	A	B	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	F	G	H	I/J	Total	

CW - Denotes species found in the count circle during the count week (3 days on each side of count day) but not on count day.
Last 25 - Number of occurrences on the last 25 counts.

Group A: Bob Yunick, Ted Hicks. 6:45 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. (4.75 hours, 2.0 miles on foot; 2.5 hours, 33.5 miles by car. Also 0.5 hours, 2.5 miles owling.)

Group B: Eric Molho, John Hershey, Pat Dollard. 6:40 a.m. - 7:00 a.m. and 7:20 a.m. – 2:20 p.m. (3.0 hours, 1.5 miles on foot; 4.0 hours, 8.5 miles by car. Also 0.25 hours, 0.25 miles owling.)

Group C1: Gregg Recer, Cathy Graichen. 7:55 a.m. – 4:40 p.m., less 0.5 hours not birding. (3.0 hours, 3.6 miles on foot; 5.25 hours, 59 miles by car.)

Group C2: Scott Stoner, Denise Hackert-Stoner. 7:00 a.m. – 4:15 p.m., less 1.75 hours not birding (2.5 hours, 1 mile on foot; 5.0 hours, 30 miles by car.)

Group D1: Larry Alden, Cindy and Chris Edwardson. 5:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (3.0 hours, 3.1 miles on foot; 6.75 hours, 58.7 miles by car. Also 1.75 hours, 11.3 miles owling.)

Group D2: Paul Novak. 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. (1.0 hour, 1.5 miles on foot. Also 4.5 hours feeder watch.)

Group E1: Naomi Lloyd. 8:48 a.m. – 12:50 p.m. (0.5 hours, 0.5 miles on foot; 3.75 hours, 33.4 miles by car.)

Group E2: Tom Williams, Colleen Williams. 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. (0.5 hours, 0.1 miles on foot; 2.5 hours, 27 miles by car.)

Group F: George Steele. 6:15 a.m. – 6:50 p.m. (0.5 hours, 0.0 miles on foot; 9.25 hours, 54 miles by car. Also 1.75 hours, 19 miles owling.)

Group G: John Roosenberg, Janet Betlejeskie. 7:12 a.m. – 1:24 p.m. (1.25 hours, 1.4 miles on foot; 5.0 hours, 51 miles by car.)

Group H: Kathleen LoGiudice, John Blanchard, Kurt Weiskotten. Kelsey Schumacher, Kelsey Pangman. Between 8:00 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. (This group was together from 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. and separate groups for the rest of the time, so total mileages and times are not included here.)

Group I/J: Steve Mesick, Richard White. Between 6:12 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. (This group was together from 8:38 a.m. – 2:39 p.m. and separate groups for the rest of the time, so total mileages and times are not included here.)

Notes: Hours and times rounded to the nearest quarter hour.

CBC Reports 2020 *(continued...)*

Troy Christmas Bird Count – January 02, 2021, Larry Alden

Twenty participants in up to ten field parties took part in the 72nd Troy CBC, covering the count circle on Saturday, January 2, 2021. This club-sponsored CBC has been held every year since 12/31/1949, and my statistics are based on the counts from then onward. Nearly every count has been held a few days on either side of New Year's Day, so I refer to past counts with a two-year name (e.g., this year's is 2020-21).

The weather on count day started cloudy with light rain but the rain ended early and there were periods of sun in the afternoon. Temperatures ranged from a morning low of 32°F rising to a high of 41°F. There was a 1-2" slushy snow cover and a light wind from 0-15 mph from the northwest. Field parties covered the 15-mile diameter count circle between the hours of 5:34 a.m. and 6:02 p.m. Rivers and streams were flowing strongly but lakes and ponds were mostly frozen over. About one third of the Tomhannock Reservoir was open water.

Weather in the week preceding the count was seasonal and unremarkable. Daytime temperatures were in the 30's and nighttime temperatures were mostly in the 20's. The snow from several weeks before had completely melted, but a fast-moving storm dropped an inch or two of snow on Friday night into Saturday morning before turning to rain.

Field parties located a total of 63 species on count day, below the average of the previous ten years of 66.4 species. There were two "count week" species (species found in the count circle during the three days on each side of count day but not on count day). The most species found in the history of this count was 74, on the 2005-06 count.

We had a new high count for only a single species, Red-breasted Nuthatch, with 35, besting the 21 found on the 2005-2006 count.

There were eight less-common birds found, i.e., ones seen on 20 or fewer counts: Long-tailed Duck (11th occurrence of 72 counts), Ruddy Duck (7th), Barred Owl (16th), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (17th), Peregrine Falcon (20th), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (10th), Pine Grosbeak (18th), and White-winged Crossbill (5th).

Waterfowl numbers were on the low side but diversity was up. As usual, Canada Geese were the most abundant waterfowl species. More unusual were Northern Pintail (found on 11 of the last 25 counts), Long-tailed Duck (6 of 25), Red-breasted Merganser (8 of 25), and Ruddy Duck (7 of 25).

The three common gull species were seen in relatively lower numbers. A single Iceland Gull was found, and Lesser Black-backed Gull and Glaucous Gull were the two count week species.

Raptor numbers were about average, although this clearly wasn't a year for Northern Harriers, with only one found. Bald Eagles were common along the open rivers. The three common owl species were found, even with poor conditions in the early morning.

The six common woodpeckers were reported, with numbers about normal except for flickers, which were in the single digits for the third straight year. A single kestrel and five Peregrine Falcons were found.

American Crow numbers were down from the last two years, but the other corvids were about average. Numbers were up for both nuthatch species and Brown Creeper, and a single Ruby-crowned Kinglet was a nice find.

This was an irruption year, and in addition to the Red-breasted Nuthatches, "winter finches" were represented by Pine Grosbeak, Common Redpoll (although only a single bird), and White-winged Crossbill. There were no buntings, larks, or longspurs, and sparrow numbers were remarkably low, with only the four commonly encountered species (and only 20 white-throats). This is surprising in relation to some of the earlier CBCs in the region this season, which had the opposite results.

CBC Reports 2020 *(continued...)*

Blackbirds were represented by only Brown-headed Cowbirds in a single territory.

For perspective, the following species have been found on 40 or more counts, but were not found on this one: Ruffed Grouse (54 of the previous 71 counts), Rough-legged Hawk (50), Horned Lark (52), Golden-crowned Kinglet (51), and Cedar Waxwing (50). In addition, these three species have been found on 15 or more of the last 25 counts, but not this one: Ring-necked Duck (17 of 25), Great Blue Heron (18 of 25), and Merlin (18 of 25). Of these, I think the missed heron is the most surprising, given the amount of open water in rivers and streams.

The table accompanying this article shows each field party's sightings and effort. The last column shows how many times a species has been found on the last 25 counts. This can highlight the relative rarity of a particular species.

The cumulative total of species for the count stands at 144 species, and there are four additional species that have been only seen on count week.

Thanks again to all the adaptable participants. Each field party leader formed his or her own field party and worked out ways to cover their territories. They also adjusted well to reporting their results without holding our traditional compilation gathering. Here's to a more normal count next year.

Larry Alden - Compiler

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Total	25 Years
Ruby-crowned Kinglet			1					1	5
Eastern Bluebird	9	34	3	15	7	31	7	106	25
American Robin		43	2	44	23		47	159	25
Northern Mockingbird	3	5	1	3	3		1	16	25
European Starling	116	363	1082	887	284	285	522	3539	25
House Sparrow	33	44	77	152	17	118	18	459	25
Pine Grosbeak	9					5		14	2
House Finch	12	16	6	28	2	20	29	113	25
Common Redpoll				1				1	11
White-winged Crossbill			6					6	2
American Goldfinch	9	10	17	15	3	22	12	88	25
American Tree Sparrow		17	2	4	3	2	3	31	25
Song Sparrow	1	8		5	2		5	21	25
White-throated Sparrow		7	4	3	3	3		20	25
Dark-eyed Junco	35	72	51	65	19	81	28	351	25
Brown-headed Cowbird	13							13	23
Northern Cardinal	11	46	12	11	13	10	19	122	25
Total Birds	744	2433	4693	3334	2503	1716	1353	16771	
Total Species	37	41	43	43	41	36	40	63	
Count Week Species	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Total	25 Years

CW = Denotes species found in the count circle during the count week (3 days on each side of count day) but not on count day. Bald Eagle totals do not match the total reported by each individual party. Numbers were adjusted to account for birds which were likely seen by two or more parties.

Bold = record number or tied record for the count.

Group A: Jeremy Kirchman, Emmett Kirchman, Matt Schlesinger, Flora Schlesinger. 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. (3.0 hours, 0.5 miles on foot; 4.0 hours, 41 miles by car.)

Group B: Larry Alden, Steve Chorvas, Jackie Bogardus. 5:34 a.m. – 6:08 a.m. and 7:10 a.m. – 6:02 p.m. (2.5 hours, 1.8 miles on foot; 7.25 hours, 63.6 miles by car. Also 1.75 hours, 13.7 miles owling.)

Group C: Cassandra Davis, Zach Davis, Barb O'Bryan. 7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., less 0.5 hours not birding. (2.0 hours, 2.0 miles on foot; 7.0 hours, 43 miles by car. Also 0.5 hours, 0 miles owling.)

Group D: George Steele, Alan Mapes. 8:15 a.m. – 5:15 p.m. (This group was together from 12:15 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. and separate groups for the rest of the time, so total mileages and times are not included here.)

Group E: Steve Mesick, Peter Siciliano. 5:58 a.m. – 4:50 p.m., less 0.25 hours not birding (2.75 hours, 4.25 miles on foot; 6.5 hours, 57.5 miles by car. Also 1.0 hour, 5.4 miles owling.)

Group F: Kathryn Schneider, Naomi Lloyd, Marian Sole, Eric Molho. 8:05 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (This group was together from 8:05 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. and separate groups for the rest of the time, so total mileages and times are not included here.)

Group G: Richard White, James Sutton. 5:50 a.m. – 5:13 p.m. (4.5 hours, 3.8 miles on foot, 5.5 hours, 53.2 miles by car. Also 1.25 hours, 2.6 miles owling.)

Notes: Hours rounded to the nearest quarter hour.

CBC Reports 2020 *(continued...)*

Saratoga Springs, December 18, 2020, Jean Holcomb

Despite a pandemic and a record setting snow storm, the Saratoga Christmas Bird Count was a great success. Originally scheduled for December 17th, the day 30 inches of snow fell in Saratoga Springs, there was a consensus-driven change a few days in advance to the following day, December 18. At that time we had no idea how much snow would actually fall. With other counts looming, I went with the 18th, fingers crossed. As it was there were many back roads unplowed and no access to traditional walking options. The Spa Park was un-walkable, the Saratoga Battlefield was not accessible, Bog Meadow Brook was unavailable to mention a few. Even if one could have trudged through the snow, there was no safe parking for most places. Only Ray Perry who decided "not to participate in the field" ended up somehow birding the Spring Run Trail and snagged the local red winged blackbirds plus a hermit thrush. As car pooling was not an option, everyone had to brave the bad road conditions on their own. Steve Mesick made it up from Albany to do section C alone. Naomi Lloyd did a similar drive to do half of D with Al Mapes, recently retired to Schuylerville, jumping in to do the other half. Ron Harrower did C by himself and using his trusty camera and a drive, pause and shoot approach, got good coverage on Saratoga Lake. Ron counted over 600 Hooded Mergansers and at Spa Park, 57 red breasted nuthatches. Georgia Fitzpatrick and family did A with dogged determination. Having the advantage of being local and having relatives along, she was able to find white crowned sparrows, pine grosbeaks, two broad winged hawks and even 6 evening grosbeaks. Barb Putnam and Ellen Kiehl divided up B section and Barb found 10 Black Vultures in the air. Susan Bedoin hadn't been able to head south to Florida, so she took the west half of F, which was her old territory, while Linda White covered the east half. With no access to the battlefield Linda had to be content to drive the roads surrounding it. She managed a barred owl and rough legged hawk and still had time to rescue an elderly man who had fallen down in the snow far from any house.

The snow drove birds to the road so there were plenty of juncos, plus snow buntings, horned larks and a nice flock of redpolls that Steve reported. We ended up with 65 species which was actually more than last year. Thankfully there were no road accidents. I missed having the compilation as there were many stories to be heard. But hopefully next year, normality!!

Upcoming HMBC Programs

When: Feb 1, 2021, 6:30-8:00

Location: Via Zoom – watch for email with link to connect

Speaker: gregg recer

Topic: Birding the West Indies



Puerto Rican Tody, by Gregg Recer

Summary: The West Indies comprises hundreds of islands spread throughout the greater Caribbean region. The whole area is an avian endemism hot-spot just a short plane ride from the US east coast. Many of the islands offer the opportunity to combine a relaxing tropical vacation with exciting birding. This travelogue program will be a broad composite overview from several trips to the region.

Gregg Recer is a former HMBC president. He and his wife, Cathy Graichen, have been HMBC members for 30+ years and over that time have become avid world birders.

When: March 1, 2021, 6:30-8:00

Where: Via Zoom – watch for email with link to connect

Speaker: Chris Benesh of Field Guides

Topic: Workshop on flycatcher identification (More info to follow)



Tonight's talk looks at breaking down the mystique of flycatchers. Taken as a whole, this group can be a bit overwhelming, and all but the most experienced birders can struggle with them. In tonight's talk, we will consider structure, behavior, along with vocal clues in sorting out differences between types of flycatchers likely to be encountered in the United States and Canada. "How do I tell if I'm looking at a pewee or an empid?" "...pewee or Phoebe?" "...crested flycatchers (*Myiarchus*) versus kingbirds (*Tyrannus*), etc. Once we have identified these groupings, we will touch on some of the best ways to tackle identification within each of the groups.

Chris Benesh is a lifelong birder living in Tucson, Arizona and has been studying flycatchers for many years. He works for Field Guides as a birding guide and produces educational videos for OutBirding.com. Chris grew up birding in California. After earning his degree in zoology, Chris joined the Field Guides staff, and his life underwent a wonderful transformation. The intervening years at Field Guides have taken him to many corners of the world and across both the Arctic and Antarctic circles! Chris's passion for education has led to his serving on the Arizona Bird Committee, leading the occasional workshop, and thoroughly explaining in admirable detail the nuances of flycatchers to tour participants and colleagues alike.

Upcoming HMBC Programs *(Continued...)*

When: Monday, April 12 - Business meeting 6:30PM Program 7:30PM

Location: Via Zoom – watch for email with link to connect

Speaker: Jon Atwood

Annual Meeting Presentation: The California Gnatcatcher Story

In the 1990's, the most publicized debate over the US Endangered Species Act concerned protections for the Northern Spotted Owl, with timber companies and loggers pitted against owls living in stands of old forest located mainly on National Forest lands. Yet there was also a concurrent argument over proposed listing of the coastal California Gnatcatcher. Unlike the owl, this small gray songbird occurs on some of the country's most expensive private real estate, introducing a very different dynamic to the Endangered Species Act debate.

This presentation will explore the background of this contentious issue, including how Atwood's seemingly esoteric study of gnatcatcher taxonomy turned into a conservation discussion that continues to this day. Has protection of the California Gnatcatcher catalyzed a new way of accomplishing the goals of the Endangered Species Act?

Jon Atwood is Director of Bird Conservation at Mass Audubon in Lincoln, Massachusetts. He has been a practicing ornithologist and conservation biologist for 40 years, specializing in integrating behavioral studies of rare and endangered bird species with habitat conservation planning. After completing his Master's and Doctoral degrees in southern California, he moved to the East coast in 1986. While working at Manomet Bird Observatory (now "Manomet") during the early 1990's he collaborated in the analysis of the first 30 years of Manomet's landbird banding effort, spearheaded federal protection of the California Gnatcatcher under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, led a long-term study of factors affecting Least Tern colony site selection, and contributed to early studies of Bicknell's Thrush in New England. From 1998-2011 he directed the Conservation Biology Program at Antioch University, New England, taught classes in Ornithology, Ecological Research Design, and GIS, and mentored over 70 graduate students working on various wildlife studies. During 2011-2013 he was Science Director at Biodiversity Research Institute in southern Maine. He has worked for Mass Audubon since 2014.



Feathers

Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club

c/o Five Rivers EEC

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