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WINTER SEASON 1985-86

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FREDERICK A. PRATT, SEASONAL EDITOR

After three consecutive winters of unseasonably mild weather, the elements finally decreed harder times for 1985-86. Two mild Decembers (in 1982 and 1984) and three protracted February thaws had simply left us expecting too much from both our woodpiles and our birding activities.

As it turned out, this past winter was neither exceptionally cold nor excessively snowy. December, to be sure, was about 3° colder than normal, but precipitation totals were actually below average. Unfortunately, the cold weather began early and ran almost without interruption until December twenty-third. With a major snowfall on the thirteenth following lesser amounts earlier in the month, snow and cold combined to make tough sledding for even our most determined Christmas Counters. Still, 104 species were recorded on Vermont's fourteen Christmas Bird Counts (hereafter CBC), hardly an embarrassment and, in fact, the second highest total recorded in these Records of Vermont Birds. The number of individuals was another matter, however, as the final figure of 71,227 was the lowest since 1979-80.

Furthermore, although January was actually a bit warmer than usual (and offered a genuine thaw commencing on the seventeenth), the return of prolonged cold in February dashed hopes for an influx of early migrants. In short, it was a difficult winter for birders.

Yet the season was not without its compensations and surprises. Certainly unexpected were winter sightings of Hermit Thrush, Eastern Phoebe, American Coot and Common Yellowthroat. More surprising were multiple reports of Northern Oriole and Carolina Wren. Even more noteworthy were two records of AMERICAN BITTERN, an injured bird found in Fayston in late December and an individual attempting to overwinter in Clarendon. Other highlights of the season were HARLEQUIN DUCK and BARROW'S GOLDENEYE, both winter sea ducks that only rarely reach landlocked Vermont, and a gull of strange appearance and obscure identification observed at Blodgett's Beach in mid-January.

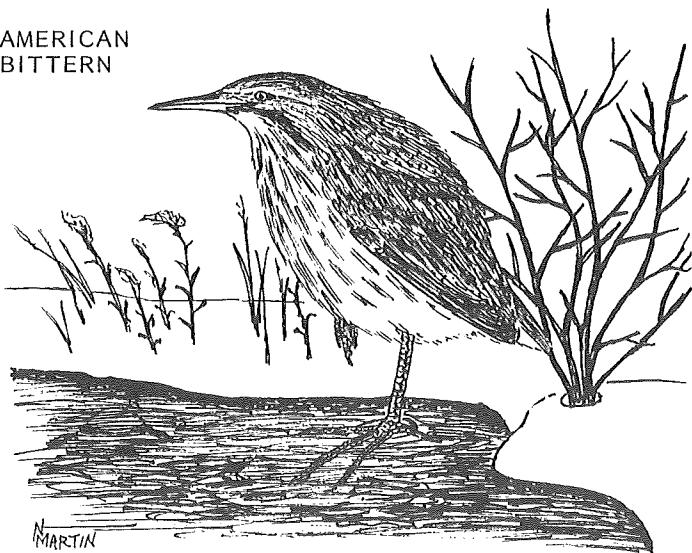
The most dramatic events of the winter were the invasions - those that occurred and those that didn't. Many northern species such as Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, Black-backed Woodpecker and Northern Shrike were plainly scarcer than ever, while the finches carried on in their usual erratic way. On the one hand, Pine Siskin and Purple Finch were remarkable for their scarcity; on the other, Pine Grosbeak and especially Common Redpoll invaded in force. But for most observers the major excitement of the winter was the eruption of Bohemian Waxwings. In their most dazzling display in Vermont's recorded history, flocks of these "aristocrats" literally covered the state. 1985-86 can be remembered as the "Year of the Bohemian Waxwing."

LOONS THROUGH HERONS

The only Red-throated Loons of the season were two off Charlotte Beach on 12/7 (JDM), confirming anew the scarcity in Vermont of this handsome winter migrant.

By contrast, the Common Loon was well represented, notwithstanding a rather meager CBC total of 10 birds. Early December sightings included a single at Peacham Pond on 12/1 (AVG), 4 at Lake Morey on 12/1 (WGE) and 6 cruising off Grand Isle County on 12/8 (WGE,NLM). The latest reports were from 1/19 with 2 birds off Charlotte and another at Meach Cove in Shelburne (WGE,NLM). Certainly of note was the presence of a hardy, if not foolhardy, Pied-billed Grebe at McNeil Cove on 1/19 (MJM). Winter records of this diminutive species are quite rare, especially so late in January. The Horned Grebe was present in good numbers with a record 224 on the Ferrisburg CBC, although the grand total fell just short of the figures for 1981 and 1983. Other nice counts included 13 on 12/7 off Shelburne and Charlotte (JDM), 18 on 12/8 at North Hero (WGE,NLM) and ten at Meach and McNeil Coves on 1/19 (WGE, NLM). The uncommon Red-necked Grebe accommodated the Ferrisburg CBC for the third year in a row, but other reports were scarce: one at Lake Morey on 12/3 (WGE) and two off Thompson's Point on 2/7 (MCD,JID). Overwintering of this species on Lake Champlain certainly seems plausible, although late-winter reports in past years have been remarkably few. Of great interest are the first reports of AMERICAN BITTERN to appear in these winter Records. An injured bird was discovered near Shepard Brook in North Fayston on 12/27 and subsequently released along coastal Massachusetts, after care and rehabilitation at the Valley Animal Hospital in Waitsfield and at VINS (MQ,GM,NER). An even later bird was flushed from a spring-fed ditch in Clarendon on 1/18 (CJF), a report happily accompanied by excellent supporting details. Whether the bird successfully overwintered is uncertain, but the attempt was almost assuredly

AMERICAN
BITTERN



made. Overwintering Great Blue Herons appear increasingly likely also, although late reports are generally considered to be of lingers. A Great Blue observed in flight over Bolton Falls on 2/2 (NE) was almost certainly overwintering; less conclusive would be reports of single birds from South Shaftsbury on 1/12 (MPH), McNeil Cove on 1/12 (WGE,NLM,SJS) and Quechee on 1/14 (KT).

**CHRISTMAS
COUNTS
1985 - 86**

COMMON LOON	9	FERRISBURG Dec. 21	SAXTONS RIVER Dec. 21	BURLINGTON Dec. 22	MAQUAM Dec. 22	WOODSTOCK Dec. 27	BENNINGTON Dec. 28	BRATTLEBORO Dec. 28	PLAINFIELD Dec. 28	CRAFTSBURY-GR. Dec. 29	RUTLAND Dec. 29	SPRINGFIELD Dec. 29	WINHALL Jan. 2	ISLAND POND Jan. 4	HANOVER-NORWICH Jan. 5	TOTALS
HORNED GREBE	224		19													10
RED-NECKED GREBE	2															243
GREAT BLUE HERON	2															2
CANADA GOOSE	830		211													CP
WOOD DUCK	1											1				2
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	1															1
AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	162	1	96			17				16						309
MALLARD	53		323			26				106			1			510
AMERICAN WIGEON				1												2
CANVASBACK	1			3												4
RING-NECKED DUCK	1															1
GREATER SCAUP	19															19
LESSER SCAUP	1			1												2
SCAUP sp.		3	3													6
WHITE-WINGED SCOTER	6															6
COMMON GOLDENEYE	525	18	253													805
BUFFLEHEAD	9		28													37
HOODED MERGANSER	15		1													20
COMMON MERGANSER	2715	23	92	2	CP	1						CP				38
RED-BREASTED MERGANSER	18		1													2,871
DUCK sp.	6															19
BALD EAGLE	2															3
NORTHERN HARRIER	3															3
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK	8	1				1	1	1	CP		3	1				18
COOPER'S HAWK	4	1	1			1										8
NORTHERN GOSHAWK	1			2								1				5
ACCIPITER sp.																1
RED-TAILED HAWK	40	13	8	10	2	16	3				2	3				98
ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK	14				3		2									19
BUTEO sp.			4													4
AMERICAN KESTREL	3	1	1	1		5										11
PEREGRINE FALCON		CP														
GRAY PARTRIDGE				63												63
RING-NECKED PHEASANT												1				2
RUFFED GROUSE	15	1	12	4		1	1			5	10	7				58
WILD TURKEY		8			13	55	9			10	3					98
NORTHERN BOBWHITE													1			1
COMMON SNIPE			1									1				2
BONAPARTE'S GULL	113															113
RING-BILLED GULL	614	1	484	1												1,100
HERRING GULL	83	2	507	39				3								634
ICELAND GULL			1													1
GLAUCOUS GULL			1													1
GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL	44	1	70	3												118
GULL sp.	155		66	1												222
ROCK DOVE	639	294	414	665	143	383	157	220	336	628	339	14	51	351		4,634
MOURNING DOVE	1192	453	321	295	244	285	125	199	48	421	260	34	41	388		4,306
EASTERN SCREECH-OWL	8			1												9
GREAT HORNED OWL	11		2	5	1							1				22
SNOWY OWL			1													1
BARRED OWL	3	2	1		1		1		1	CP						9
LONG-EARED OWL			1													1
SHORT-EARED OWL			1													1
NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL	1															1
BELTED KINGFISHER	4	2	1		1	1					3	2	1			15
DOWNTY WOODPECKER	117	45	45	20	30	15	21	22	23	47	44	9	13	15		466
HAIRY WOODPECKER	47	33	26	6	33	3	15	16	21	33	48	9	14	30		334

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	FERRISBURG Dec. 21	SAXTONS RIVER Dec. 21	BURLINGTON Dec. 22	MAQUAM Dec. 22	WOODSTOCK Dec. 27	BENNINGTON Dec. 28	BRATTLEBORO Dec. 28	PLAINFIELD Dec. 28	CRAFTSBURY-GR. Dec. 29	RUTLAND Dec. 29	SPRINGFIELD Dec. 29	WINHALL Jan. 2	ISLAND FOND Jan. 4	HANOVER-NORWICH Jan. 5	TOTALS
BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER									1						1
NORTHERN FLICKER		1													1
PILEATED WOODPECKER	10	6	11	2	1	3	2	2	3	5	7	3	1	4	60
EASTERN PHOEBE		1													1
HORNED LARK	1139	100	5	742	8	375	23	3	8	119					2,522
GRAY JAY													1		1
BBLUE JAY	419	587	258	78	411	96	363	191	246	461	939	248	132	368	4,797
AMERICAN CROW	385	432	452	62	153	194	275	617	74	341	123	16		366	3,490
COMMON RAVEN	1						1	19	40	5	6	14	24	4	128
BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE	968	690	617	271	813	194	421	503	647	633	1283	555	449	652	8,696
BOREAL CHICKADEE									6				7		13
TUFTED TITMOUSE	6	11	10		1	1	6			11	2	1		8	57
RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH	31	8	27	2	11	8	8	37	53	11	6	22	22	4	250
WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH	103	80	63	21	66	23	54	21	18	75	85	22	8	36	675
BROWN CREEPER	9	1	6	2	4		4	4	5	4	3	8	1	CP	51
CAROLINA WREN		CP													
WINTER WREN	1														1
GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET	5	25	5		17		18	4	33	4	8	29	22	7	177
EASTERN BLUEBIRD	CP				8										8
HERMIT THRUSH		1													1
AMERICAN ROBIN	25	4	80		1	2	1		1	20				1	135
NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD	5	5	11	CP		CP	7		1	1	4			1	35
BOHEMIAN WAXWING	44		182				2	63	38	CP				CP	329
CEDAR WAXWING	158	2	197				84				14			10	465
NORTHERN SHRIKE	2		1	4					1	1	3	2			14
EUROPEAN STARLING	1765	977	1187	821	205	1787	660	563	261	710	615	108	16	530	10,205
COMMON YELLOWTHROAT						1									1
NORTHERN CARDINAL	151	50	116	5	21	26	28	7	CP	77	42	5	1	40	569
TREE SPARROW	795	153	195	290	76	100	72	49	111	303	175	11	18	124	2,472
FIELD SPARROW		1							CP						1
SAVANNAH SPARROW	2														2
SONG SPARROW	15	26	11	4		1	7			13	13			3	93
SWAMP SPARROW	3									1					4
WHITE-THROATED SPARROW	5	9	2		2	5				1	2	1		1	28
WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW	1				1										2
DARK-EYED JUNCO	106	40	68	15	21	53	60		1	38	29		2	21	454
LAPLAND LONGSPUR	4			15											19
SNOW BUNTING	340		67	677		CP	1	49	161	2					1,297
RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD	4	1		3						1					9
EASTERN MEADOWLARK		2													2
RUSTY BLACKBIRD					1										1
COMMON GRACKLE	7		5		CP			2				1	2		17
BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD		13	1	6	1		2	3	27	2	32			20	107
PINE GROSBEAK	88	47	95	71	177	9	4	145	175	26	43	10	56	111	1,057
PURPLE FINCH		7					13		2	6	5			3	36
HOUSE FINCH	282	154	217	50	42	113	46			235	113			372	1,624
RED CROSSBILL				19											19
WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL									3						3
COMMON REDPOLL	525	103	81	311	82		12		107	131	80	8	130	355	1,925
HOARY REDPOLL *	1														1
PINE SISKIN	13		55		2			5	75	41				2	193
AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	420	37	269	92	5	38	26	7	4	58	3			2	961
EVENING GROSBEAK	119	221	30	45	190	39	100	53	153	126	300	77	58	271	1,782
HOUSE SPARROW	1755	554	961	1333	291	440	347	167	362	706	803	78	68	270	8,135
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	17443	5240	8308	6043	3086	4328	2982	2972	3050	5432	5468	1288	1144	4443	71,227
TOTAL SPECIES	82	47	67	40	37	37	38	27	34	47	40	27	28	40	105

WATERFOWL

The winter's only Snow Geese were a party of 3 off Shelburne 1/4 (v.o.), with the last report from there 1/19 (WAM). Numbers of Canada Geese also seemed restrained, with the CBC total of 1041 amounting to only a third of last year's count. This figure may have been a bit low, however, as 1250 Canadas were observed in Addison on 1/11 (CJF). About 600 were still present at Panton on 2/1 (MBN,WGE,NLM) but other reports were relatively scarce. A skein of 50 over Fuller Mountain on 2/19 (MCD,JID) were presumably early returnees from the south. Despite a cold December Wood Ducks continued their string of CBC appearances, as single birds were tallied at Ferrisburg and Rutland. A hen at Wilder Dam on 2/15 (DHC) was particularly noteworthy and suggests again the possibility of overwintering. A drake Green-winged Teal in West Rutland on 2/1 (CJF,RHH) was another notable find and the first late-winter record for this species in three years. Earlier, up to 25 individuals had been noted at the beginning of December at the Missisquoi NWR (JBG). Reports of the American Black Duck and Mallard were about in line with expectations with neither species particularly numerous in the hard of winter. Although Mallards outnumbered Blacks 5-3 on the overall CBC tally, other reports proved inconclusive. For example, whereas average population figures for December at Missisquoi gave Mallards close to a 3-2 edge (JBG), the results of the Midwinter Waterfowl Survey of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (hereafter VFWD) showed Blacks in the lead 230-130 (TRM,NEK). Other reports included 25 Blacks at Lake Morey on 12/15 (WGE,NLM), another 20 at Thetford on 12/15 (WGE,NLM), a high of 34 on the Winooski in South Burlington on 1/12 (WGE,NLM,SJS) and 29 in New Haven on 2/13 (JRA). Mallards were somewhat more numerous with 34 at Lake Morey on 12/15 (WGE,NLM), 41 in Burlington on 12/28 (WAM), 34 in Rutland and West Rutland on 1/1 (WGE,NLM) and 120 on the Winooski at South Burlington on 1/12 (WGE, NLM). Meanwhile, Christmas Counters missed the Northern Pintail for the first time in six years, but happily as many as 10 individuals were observed at Missisquoi NWR in early December (JBG). Late reports were limited to a single in Burlington on 12/21 (WAM) and a pair on the Winooski in South Burlington on 1/12 (WGE,NLM). The Gadwall followed a similar pattern with a peak count of 10 at Missisquoi NWR on 12/1 (JBG) followed by rapidly declining numbers. The only other report was of 2 birds in Burlington on 1/19 (CJF,RHH;WGE,NLM). The American Wigeon was also present in small numbers at Missisquoi during early December (JBG), but thereafter the only reports received were for singles on the Burlington and Rutland CBC's, the latter bird having been uncovered in West Rutland on 12/28 (RWP). Canvasback, too, seemed to have opted rather early in the season for warmer climes, as but 4 CBC birds were spotted, one at Ferrisburg and 3 at Burlington. A season high of 26 was noted at Alburg on 12/8 (WGE,NLM) while late reports included 5 at Panton on 12/28 (MBN) and 6 at Addison on 1/4 (WAM,DLC). Not surprisingly, the Ring-necked Duck also became scarce once winter had arrived in earnest. A peak population of 10 at Missisquoi on 12/1 (JBG) quickly declined, while the only CBC report was for single at Ferrisburg. Once again, Greater Scaup were quite rare with just 19 CBC birds, all from Ferrisburg. Early December reports were very sparse, with 3 singles on 12/8 at Sandbar, Alburg and North Hero (WGE,NLM) and a lone female at Lake Morey on 12/15 (WGE,NLM). The last of the season were 5 at Addison on 1/4 (WAM,DLC). The only Lesser Scaup reported were two CBC birds, one each from Burlington and Ferrisburg. In addition, 6 scaup (sp.) were tallied on the Saxtons River and Burlington CBC's. As was true a year ago, the VFWD Aerial Survey failed to

-4- uncover a single individual of either scaup species. An exceptional find, indeed, was a first-winter male HARLEQUIN DUCK on the Vermont side of the Connecticut River near West Lebanon on 2/8 (DHC). This represents the third Harlequin report in three years and the seventh state record overall. Oldsquaw were also scarce with but two reports, a female off Shelburne Beach on 12/7 (JDM) and a drake at North Hero State Park on 12/8 (WGE,NLM). After a banner year in 1984, scoters settled for normality as no reports for Black or Surf were received, while the only White-winged Scoters were an immature female at North Hero on 12/8 (WGE,NLM) and an even half-dozen on the Ferrisburg CBC. Common Goldeneye were undeterred by the hard winter as 805 were found on CBC's and a spectacular 4880 on the VFWD Aerial Survey held on 1/9. Of these, 3645 were concentrated between Otter Creek and Chimney Point. Other reports included 14 on Lake Morey on 12/1-3 (WGE,NLM), 675 in Grand Isle County on 12/8 (WGE,NLM), 25 on Lake Bomoseen on 12/15 (CJF) and 42 at White River Junction on 2/9 (WGE,NLM,SJS). A young male BARROW'S GOLDENEYE at North Hero State Park on 12/8 (WGE,NLM) was not only exceptional but also carefully described. Unlike Goldeneye, Bufflehead had a rather mediocre season with just 37 CBC birds and only a scattering of other reports. The maximum was 33 at Shelburne on 1/19 (WAM), 1 at Charlotte on 1/19 (CJF) and 2 females at White River Jct. on 2/9-11 (WGE,NLM). By contrast Hooded Merganser numbers were excellent throughout the season. A splendid flotilla of 40 on Lake Morey on 12/1 (WGE,NLM) was the high count, followed by a record CBC tally of 15 at Ferrisburg and a smaller squadron of 12 on Lake Bomoseen on 12/8 (CJF). Late reports included 3 at Charlotte on 1/19 (CJF;WGE, NLM), 2 at Ferrisburg on 1/19 (CJF), 4 at White River Junction until 1/25 (WGE,NLM et al.) and 8 at Newbury on 2/10 (DHC). The Common Merganser was not to be outdone by its smaller relative as Ferrisburg again set a single-count record, although the overall CBC tally of 2871 fell just shy of 1980's total. The VFWD survey in early January located 1975 individuals, while other reports came from such locations as Vernon Dam (JJJC), Wilder Dam (MPH,JMN), Stockbridge (EH), Bellows Falls (MPH,TEJ), Montpelier (MFM), New Haven (JRA) and White River Junction (v.o.). 150 were seen at Lake Morey on 12/1 (WGE,NLM), 270 at Alburg on 12/8 (WGE,NLM) and 500 at Shelburne Bay on 1/1 (WAM). The Red-breasted Merganser was typically scarce, however, although 19 CBC birds was certainly a creditable showing. The only other reports were for a pair at Lake Morey on 12/3 (WGE), two young males at Mallets Bay on 12/27 (JDM) and 6 at New Haven on 2/19 (JRA).

HAWKS AND FALCONS

It was a good year for Bald Eagles, starting with an immature and an adult observed on the Ferrisburg CBC. Whether these birds were the same as the immature at Thompson Point in early January (fide NLM) and the adult at Shelburne on 2/16 (PBr) is open to conjecture. Across the state, Wilder Dam once again hosted an adult throughout the season (v.o.), while a second bird, also an adult, was spotted at North Hartland on 2/9 (WGE,NLM). One or the other of these birds must surely have been the "magnificent adult" reported from White River Junction in February (JMN,PP). Another two adults were at the Harriman Sub-station in Readsboro, one arriving in early January, to be joined by a second on 2/13 (JJJC,HD,EFJ). Two final reports came from Brownsville on 12/3 (SM) and from Bellows Falls on 2/22 (MPH), this last also an adult. Northern Harriers left according to schedule with the last reported a "probable" in Dorset on 12/24 (EFG). The only other records were one at Cornwall on 12/8 (MBN) and the 3 counted on the Ferrisburg CBC. The smaller accipiters were well represented as both species established new

CBC records, thanks once again to Ferrisburg. Sharp-shinned Hawks, as would be expected, were the more numerous with 18 CBC birds, plus another 22 reports from individual contributors. An immature in North Hartland was nicely photographed while eyeing Mourning Doves at a feeder (ECM). The remaining reports came from Ferrisburg (MCD,JID), Burlington (PFZ), Bristol (JRA), Clarendon and Rutland (CJF), Weybridge and Addison (MBN), Panton and Addison (WAM), Addison (BMP), Woodstock (JMN,HOT,PH,DH), South Duxbury (FAP), Grand Isle (DJH) and Hubbardton, Shoreham, Rochester and Shelburne (WGE). Cooper's Hawks were also present in record numbers for CBC's, but thereafter eluded most observers. December reports came from South Duxbury (FAP), Winhall (WJN) and Ferrisburg (MCD,JID) while later reports came from Addison on 1/4 (WAM,DLC) and Hartland Dam on 1/12 (TL). A male Cooper's kept an eye on a Williston feeder throughout the season (CCY), perhaps the same individual that was observed there on 2/17 (WGE,NLM). Northern Goshawks were less common than usual with only 5 CBC birds. Other reports were for singles in Woodstock on 12/3 (JMN), Franklin on 12/7 and 12/19 (PJM), Reading on 12/24 (FMH,GEH), Brookfield on 1/6 (WGE,NLM), Plainfield on 1/7 (MFM) and Shrewsbury on 2/28 (LPS). Although Red-tailed Hawks were very much in evidence during December with a good CBC tally of 98, the species seemed relatively uncommon during late winter. The maximum was 8 on 2/1 (MBN;WGE,NLM) with most in the Addison area. Rough-legged Hawks were also surprisingly scarce after December, and even then their numbers were unimpressive. Only 19 CBC birds were recorded, the lowest total since 1978; the high count thereafter was a mere 3 on 1/16 in Addison (MBN). An individual in East Montpelier early in February (NE) was the only record from outside the Champlain basin. In like manner the American Kestrel chose to forego winter in Vermont as just 11 birds were tallied on CBC's, 5 of these in Bennington. Only a handful of other reports came in, primarily from such Champlain locations as Addison (MBN,WAM,WGE,NLM), Shelburne (LPS,WAM,MCD,JID), Bridport (CJF), Charlotte (CJF), Sudbury (LPS) and Burlington (JF,WGE,NLM et al.). In Rutland one was reported 1/12 (SBL,JDL), and in Woodstock one bird was observed in flight on 2/10 (NER). The only Peregrine Falcon of the winter was a male that "flew directly over our yard" in Ferrisburg on 12/18 (MCD,JID).

GRAY PARTRIDGE THROUGH SNIPE

Sixty-three Gray Partridge on the Maquam CBC are evidence that this species is flourishing and happy in Grand Isle County and the Champlain shore of Franklin County. Also reported were coveys of 7 on 12/8 (WGE, NLM), 5 on 12/18 (GEB) and perhaps as many as fifteen in mid-February (DJH). Single Ring-necked Pheasants on the Springfield and Winhall CBC's were the only reports for this handsome but rather scarce species. The Winhall bird was a first for that particular count. The 58 Ruffed Grouse tallied on the various CBC's was low, the result no doubt of the early snows. About a dozen other reports were received, all for singles except for 4 or 5 in Norton in early December (CEA). Unfortunately, there were no reports of Spruce Grouse, the second year running this endangered species has eluded all observers. Not so the Wild Turkey, which rebounded from last year's poor showing in most impressive manner with flocks from Bennington to Grand Isle (DJH). Bennington's 55 birds comfortably outdistanced Rutland's old record set back in 1977, while the overall CBC tally of 98 also exceeded the old mark. Woodstock appears to have become a favored location, judging from one report of their "rummaging in the garbage pit" and "taking to the air without any apparent effort" when flushed by skiers (JMN). High counts were about 30 near Fair

-5- Haven (fide EPA), 14 off I-91 at Black Mountain Road (JJJC), 11 in Woodstock (JMN) and 10 in West Rutland (JMCP). A Northern Bobwhite on the Springfield CBC was certainly newsworthy and the first winter sighting of this difficult species since 1981. Even more surprising was an American Coot near Long Point, Ferrisburg, on 1/19 (MJM). The most recent winter record for coot was in 1979, when 4 were seen on Lake Morey in early December. Given the cold winter, the absence of Killdeer was not surprising, but Common Snipe turned up on two CBC's for the first time since 1980. The Burlington bird was present at least until 1/12 (WGE,NLM), while the Clarendon bird was still frequenting its spring-fed ditch on 2/1 (CJF).

GULLS

Bonaparte's Gulls were evident over Lake Champlain during early winter as 100 were spotted off Thompson's Point on 12/7 (MCD,JID) and another 17 were at North Hero the following day (WGE,NLM). One hundred and thirteen birds on the Ferrisburg CBC were a good but certainly not unexpected showing. Numbers of both Ring-billed Gulls and Herring Gulls were down, to judge from CBC results. Both species seem to have been noticeably scarce in February (WGE), a view upheld by the lack of reports from other observers. The only white-winged gulls of the season were one each of the Iceland Gull and Glaucous Gull, both recorded on the Burlington CBC. The Great Black-backed Gull fared better than the other Laridae, as a CBC tally of 118 was not far off the record set in 1984; 43 were still present in Burlington on 1/19 (WGE,NLM), but once again numbers in February were low. A final gull of tantalizing interest was observed at Blodgett's Beach on 1/12 (WGE,NLM,SJS). Despite lengthy observation and meticulous care in recording details, a definitive identification has eluded even our most experienced of gull-watchers. The most likely possibility according to gull experts queried was a very dark 'Kumlien's' Iceland Gull.

DOVES

Numbers of Rock Doves remained steady as 4634 CBC birds matched last year's figure almost exactly. The paucity of other reports reflects, of course, observer indifference and/or distaste. The Mourning Dove put on a spectacular performance as Ferrisburg easily surpassed its old single-count high by recording 1192 birds. The overall CBC tally of 4306 virtually matched that of its generally more abundant but less popular relative. Other reports were widespread, generally in the range of 10-20 individuals. Maximum numbers were 81 in Addison-Ferrisburg on 2/1 (WGE,NLM), 40 on 12/8 in Woodstock (LWS) and 35 through January in Randolph (MCC,EWC).

OWLS

Eight Eastern Screech-Owls were located on the Ferrisburg CBC, not quite matching the record of 9 set back in 1978. The only others were a single on the Maquam count and an apparent resident (or residents) of a Wood Duck box at Missisquoi, whose presence was revealed by collections of pellets and decapitated voles or shrews (MNWR). The Great Horned Owl was well reported with a record 11 on the Ferrisburg CBC and a grand total of 22, twice the number located in recent years. A peak population of 8 was noted at Missisquoi in December (JBG) while other records were received from Ferrisburg (MCD,JID), Woodstock (RC,CRP,WGE) and Clarendon (CJF). A Snowy Owl on the Burlington waterfront was admired by many observers and also proved to be the only CBC record for this splendid species. A second bird was seen in Williston on 12/26 (BLR) but apparently eluded later detection. The Barred Owl had a good year with 9 CBC birds distributed over six counts. Others were reported in

North Hartland (ECM), Woodstock (JMN), Clarendon (CJF), Addison (WAM,DLC), Ferrisburg (MCD,JID), Rutland (LPS), Shrewsbury (LPS) and Pittsford (JuW). For the second year running, a Long-eared Owl was reported on the Burlington CBC, though once again without supporting details. Short-eared Owls were scarce with only two records, a single on the Burlington CBC and an individual hunting over a marsh by Shelburne Bay on 12/30 (MPB). Finally, a Northern Saw-whet Owl on the Ferrisburg CBC was the only record of the winter for the most beguiling of our Strigidae.

KINGFISHERS AND WOODPECKERS

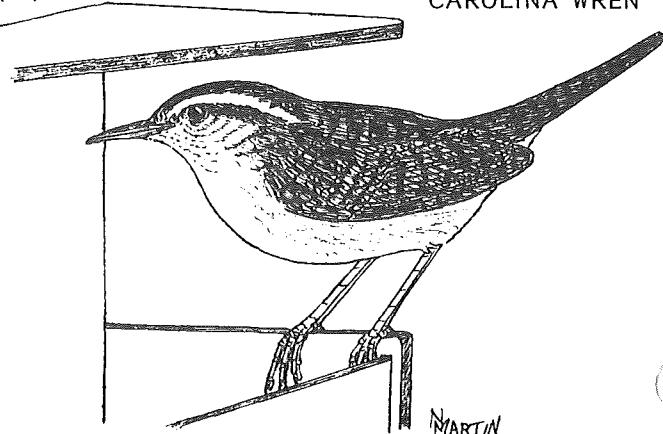
A CBC tally of 15 Belted Kingfishers nearly matched last year's total, but other reports were decidedly less frequent: single birds in Franklin (PJM), North Pomfret (RHB), Bartonsville (TEJ), Vernon (JJG), Burlington (WGE,NLM) and Woodstock on 1/21 (CRP). There were no reports for the month of February as opposed to six in 1985. The Downy Woodpecker improved on its poor showing of last year, although CBC numbers still were well below those for 1980-83. However, feeder reports for 1-2 pairs were widespread, while one energetic team of observers spotted 17 in the Addison-Ferrisburg area on 2/1 (WGE,NLM). Similar results were posted by the Hairy Woodpecker, as an improved CBC showing of 334 individuals still failed to match totals reached during the early 1980's. Meanwhile, the northern Picidae stayed north, as the Three-toed Woodpecker escaped all observers and the Black-backed Woodpecker was reported but once, a single on the Craftsbury-Greensboro CBC. By contrast, the Northern Flicker opted for the south, apparently rather early in the proceedings, as the only bird uncovered was one on the Burlington CBC. The Pileated Woodpecker, however, proved its mettle as an excellent CBC total of 60 was recorded, with at least one individual noted in every circle. Additionally, more than twenty other reports were received from contributors throughout the state.

EASTERN PHOEBE THROUGH CREEPER

An Eastern Phoebe at Burlington (WGE,NLM) was noteworthy as the first CBC flycatcher since 1977. Horned Larks were both widespread and abundant, as ten CBC's recorded the species, with Ferrisburg's 1139 easily surpassing the old record of 953. Other reports of interest were 300 in Alburg on 12/8 (WGE,NLM), 175 in Addison on 2/1 (MBN), up to 120 throughout the season in Vernon (JJG) and a wayward 3 in East Montpelier on 2/28 (DL). Somewhat disconcerting was the presence of just one Gray Jay on the Island Pond CBC, the lowest total for this boreal species in at least ten years. The ubiquitous Blue Jay showed no ill effects from the hard winter, as a representative 4797 individuals were recorded on the fourteen CBC's. Feeder flocks generally fell in the 5-20 range, about in line with observer expectations. The American Crow persevered through the CBC season in near-record numbers, thanks in large measure to a surprising 617 at Plainfield. The maximum mid-winter count was 100 at Weybridge on 1/12 (MBN), while migrating birds in late February were relatively scarce. Three individuals in Winhall/South Londonderry on 2/27 (WJN) were the area's first returnees to "high country," as presumably were the flocks in Lincoln on 2/28 (JRA). Common Ravens were present in somewhat diminished numbers, but the species appears by all accounts both widespread and secure. Much to the pleasure of all, the Black-capped Chickadee rebounded smartly from last year's low reported numbers. The CBC total of 8696 was up by more than 60 percent and numbers in the 15-25 range were widespread at feeders. Boreal Chickadees, like so many of the northern species, were relatively

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scarce, with only 13 CBC birds. One pair was feeding on suet at a feeder in Sheffield on 2/22 (PFW). The last of our Paridae, the Tufted Titmouse, recovered encouragingly from a dismal 1984-85 season. Figures from the CBC's and February census (57 and 59 individuals respectively) were both up substantially though still well below the records set back in 1982. Feeder reports naturally reflected this improvement; maximum count was 4 in Brandon on 12/27 (EBB,SSW). Both the Red-breasted Nuthatch and White-breasted Nuthatch turned in good but not outstanding performances. CBC totals for the two species were about average, as were the many feeder observations. Numbers for the Brown Creeper seemed low, but the species is easily overlooked, especially in a winter of early and continuing snow. Fifty-one CBC birds were the fewest since 1978; however, 14 other reports were received, all for single birds except for a pair in Timmoult on 12/7 (CJF). An enterprising but somewhat unscrupulous individual in Woodstock was observed stealing from a Downy Woodpecker's supply of suet, carefully stored beneath the bark of a tree (RC).

CAROLINA WREN



N. MARTIN

CAROLINA WREN THROUGH STARLING

The harsh winter sent a surprising 4 Carolina Wrens scurrying to feeders for shelter and sustenance. The first was observed in Woodstock from 12/11 to 12/18 (CMW et al.), where a feeder and nearby brush pile were the main attractions. The other reports gave far greater hope of successful overwintering. Two birds observed at a feeder in Brandon on 12/21 (SSW et al.) found the suet, fruit and peanut butter so to their liking that they settled in for the winter. At least one of the pair was still present as late as 2/21. The fourth Carolina was first observed in mid-January at a Ferrisburg feeder (DD), where it remained throughout the season and into early spring. Winter Wrens were less adventuresome, however, as the only record was for a single on the Ferrisburg CBC. After an extraordinary performance a year ago, the Muscicapidae settled for relative obscurity, although a CBC total of 177 Golden-crowned Kinglets was certainly creditable. Other reports were scattered, with a high count of 5 almost daily at Topsham (AM,EM). Eight Eastern Bluebirds on the Bennington CBC was a new record, but the only other report was a count period bird at Ferrisburg. Saxtons River's Hermit Thrush (TEJ,CDK), the best of the year's Muscicapidae, was only the fifth recorded on a CBC. Its close relative, the American Robin, fared well on CBC's, although 135 birds could scarcely compete with the 952 logged in 1984. A few individuals continued on through the winter at favored Champlain location with a high of 22 at Shelburne on 1/12 (WGE,NLM,SJS). Single birds were noted in Montpelier on 12/27 (JOS) and in Plainfield on 1/6 (MFM). A Gray Catbird in East Dorset enjoyed the accoutrements of affluence by visiting a heated birdbath as well as feeder from 12/28 to spring (JWa,IWa et al.). Thirty-five Northern

Mockingbirds on 8 CBC's (plus another 2 count period birds) was the best showing in four years, but later reports were scarce with singles in Plainfield (BG), Wallingford (WJN), Addison (BMP) and South Burlington (MCD,JID), a pair in Charlotte on 2/9 (MCD,JID) and an undisclosed number in the berry-rich thickets of West Dummerston (JJC). The February census could locate but 6 individuals. The highlight of the season was the astonishing influx of Bohemian Waxwings. A single party on the Burlington CBC discovered 182, exceeding singlehandedly the record for an entire circle set by Ferrisburg back in 1977. The CBC total of 329 was also a new high, but these numbers had already been eclipsed by winter's end. Stunning flocks of 450 in Shelburne on 2/17 (WGE,NLM) and of 500 (including some Cedars) in South Hero on 2/23 (MPA) are totally without precedent for these Records. Other major sightings included 150 in Ferrisburg on 1/19 (MCD,JID), 150 in Shoreham on 1/12 (SBL,JDL), 125 in Brandon on 1/12 (JB,EBB,HB,SSW) and 100 in St. Albans on 2/22 (via DHH). In most years memorable reports would have included the flocks in the 20-75 range observed in Barre (MFM), Montpelier (BMP), Duxbury (FAP), Londonderry (SDA), Orwell (WGE,NLM) and Shoreham (WGE,NLM). Cedar Waxwings did their best to keep pace with a fine CBC total of 465, followed by many important sightings throughout the winter. Late February again brought in astonishing numbers with a massive flock of 550 at Thompson's Point on 2/25 (MCD,JID), 310 at Shelburne on 2/17 (WGE,NLM) and 200 in Brattleboro on 2/20 (JJC). Smaller numbers were reported from such scattered locations as Sheffield (PFW), Duxbury (FAP), Rochester (MC), Bartonsville (AJ), Randolph Center (MEH), Springfield (MPH), Woodstock (WGE,NLM) and Randolph, (WGE,NLM). The Northern Shrike was scarcer than usual with just 14 CBC birds and only 9 other reports, including 3 on 2/8 in North Hero and Alburg (WGE,NLM). The rapacious nature of this hunter drew comment from a number of observers, who identified a wide range of prey, both actual and intended, including chickadees, jays, woodpeckers, a sparrow and a squirrel. Its distinctive method of caching its prey was graphically revealed by the discovery in Reading of a Golden-crowned Kinglet hanging by the neck from the forked twig of a tree (FMH,GEH). The continued abundance of the European Starling was indicated by a CBC population in excess of 10,000 individuals. Still, the total was nearly two thousand less than the record 12,181 counted in 1984.

YELLOWTHROAT THROUGH JUNCO

A Common Yellowthroat on the Bennington CBC was discovered in neighboring New York. Unfortunately, details were not very convincing for a bird never before reported on a Vermont CBC (other than a count period bird found near Rutland on 12/31/82). An earlier Yellowthroat, far better described, was at Herrick's Cove on 12/8 (JJC). The Northern Cardinal returned to prosperity with 569 CBC birds, not too far off the record set back in 1981. The February census totaled 466, an encouraging improvement over last year but still short of earlier highs. Reports from individual contributors, however, were very numerous and included such numbers as 26 in the Addison-Ferrisburg area on 2/1 (WGE,NLM) and up to 20 in Whiting on 2/4 (FS). The American Tree Sparrow enjoyed unequivocal success with 795 birds at Ferrisburg and 2472 on the CBC tally as a whole, both figures setting new records by comfortable margins. Reports from the field were also impressive: 25 in Franklin on 12/24 (PJM), a similar number in Randolph throughout the season (EWC,MCC), 70 in North Hero and Alburg on 12/8 (WGE,NLM), 71 in Shoreham on 1/9 (WGE,NLM), 78 in Sudbury and Shoreham on 1/2 (LPS) and 189 in Addison and Ferrisburg on 2/1 (WGE,NLM). Only

3 Field Sparrows were reported, a single on the Ferrisburg CBC and a pair at Rutland on 1/1 (WGE,NLM). Two Savannah Sparrows at Ferrisburg were the first CBC reports for this difficult species since 1981. Although the Song Sparrows stayed on in good numbers for the CBC season, later reports were sparse: 6 in Rutland on 1/1 (WGE,NLM), 3 in Addison and Ferrisburg on 2/1 (WGE,NLM), 2 in Orwell on 1/9 (WGE,NLM), a single photographed in North Hartland on 1/3 (ECM) and another single in Essex Junction on 1/15 (JDM). In addition, overwintering individuals were noted in Brattleboro (JJC), Burlington (DL) and Fair Haven (EPA). For the fifth consecutive year Swamp Sparrows graced the CBC tally with a record 3 at Ferrisburg and a well-described single at Rutland (CJF). The only other record was one at North Hero on 12/8 (WGE,NLM). The White-throated Sparrow settled for rather indifferent numbers this year, with a below-average CBC showing and less than a half dozen other sightings. Overwintering took place in "unusually low numbers" in the Brattleboro area (JJC). Other reports were limited to a single bird at a Winhall feeder as late as 2/21 (WJN), an immature in Fayston on 2/26 (CP) and an individual in South Burlington on 2/17 (WGE,NLM). White-crowned Sparrows made the CBC rollcall for only the fourth time in ten years, as singles were reported from Ferrisburg and Woodstock. After a memorable season a year ago, the Dark-eyed Junco produced a rather typical CBC tally of 454 individuals. Overwintering flocks were small with 6-8 in Fair Haven (EPA) and Ferrisburg (MCD,JID) the largest reported; 17 were counted in the Addison-Ferrisburg area on 2/1 (WGE,NLM).

LONGSPUR THROUGH ICTERIDS

Lapland Longspurs were uncommon with just 19 birds on the Ferrisburg and Maquam CBC's. The only other reports were 5 at Alburg on 12/8 (WGE,NLM) and up to 13 at Waltham on 2/1-3 (MBN). Snow Buntings had a good year, especially in the lowlands of the Champlain basin. Giant flocks of 500 in Shelburne on 12/29 (WAM) and of 400 in Addison on 2/1 (WGE,NLM) were backed up by more typical flocks in the 100-200 range reported from Waltham (MBN), Addison (MBN), Shelburne (MCD,JID) and Williston (via FCH). Much smaller numbers were noted in less obvious locations such as Vernon (JJC), Lyndonville (PFW), Franklin (PJM), Elmore (DL), Plainfield (MFM), Mt. Holly and Winhall (WJN), East Thetford (WHT), South Duxbury (FAP), Pomfret (LS), Woodstock (JRL,EH) and Plymouth (DVK). Weather conditions explain the very low numbers of Red-winged Blackbirds observed. A CBC total of 9 was the smallest since 1977 and a meager 3 records were received from contributors: single birds in South Duxbury on 12/7 (FAP), in North Clarendon on 1/1 (WGE,NLM) and in Addison on 1/4 (WAM,DLC). There was not even a trace of migratory movement during late February. Two Eastern Meadowlarks on the Ferrisburg CBC were a good find, especially in view of the early snows of December. More surprising were two late Rusty Blackbirds, one on the Woodstock CBC (SBL,BLR) and a male in Rochester village on 1/15 (NER,WGE). The Common Grackle followed the lead of the other icterids by departing early and not returning until March. Just 17 CBC birds were found, the lowest number since 1976, and only 4 other laggards were noted: singles in Plainfield on 12/14 (MFM) and in Bridgewater from 12/17-28 (WGE,NLM) along with a pair in New Haven on 12/9 (JRA). Brown-headed Cowbirds produced their poorest CBC showing in at least ten years as only 107 birds were located, none in the fabled Ferrisburg circle. January reports from individual observers were limited to a single in Addison on 1/4 (WAM,DLC) and a flock of 40 at Bridport on 1/9 (WGE,NLM). One of the big surprises of the winter was the Northern Oriole, with three separate

records. A female frequented a feeder in Burlington from 12/6-23 (FCH), where its diet consisted of suet and sunflower seed. A second feeder bird was noted during December in Williston (ADP) while the third individual was in Proctorsville until 1/4 (TR), where it was seen "eating spiders" on the porch (unhappily, this bird did not survive).

FRINGILLIDS THROUGH HOUSE SPARROW

One of the stars of the winter was the Pine Grosbeak which had blanketed the state by late December. All 14 CBC's located at least a few of these handsome finches, which combined to produce the best overall total since 1980. Flocks of a dozen or so were widespread, while larger numbers included 18 in Shrewsbury on 12/8 (LPS), a similar number in Brownsville in early February (via BMH), 20 in Plainfield on 12/27 (MBM), 21 in Shelburne on 1/4 (WAM,DLC), 30 in Ferrisburg on 2/17 (MCD,JID), 33 near Lake Bomoseen on 1/9 (WGE,NLM), 35 in Barre on 2/16 (DL) and 49 in Burlington and South Burlington on 2/17 (WGE,NLM). As if overawed by its larger relative, the Purple Finch did not winter here as a mere 36 CBC birds were located, the lowest showing since 1977. With many observers commenting on the bird's scarcity or complete absence, only six actual records were submitted: singles in Sheffield on 12/1 (PFW), in Hartford on 1/25 (WGE,NLM) and in Ferrisburg on 2/1 (WGE,NLM), a trio in Fair Haven on 12/6 (EPA), 5 in Barnard on 1/30 (JNF) and an even dozen in Ferrisburg on 2/26 (MCD,JID). The House Finch suffered no such decline as the CBC score of 1624 birds was just five short of last year's record. On the other hand, the dramatic increases of recent years were finally halted and reports from contributors were not particularly ominous. High counts were 65 at a Montpelier feeder on 12/14 (DL), 70 at a renowned Hartford bird diner on 1/25 (WGE,NLM,GFE) and 110 in the Burlington area on 2/17 (WGE,NLM). After a good year in 1984-85, the crossbills withdrew into almost total obscurity: 19 Red Crossbills on the Burlington CBC were exciting, but the only others reported were 2 males at a feeder in Weybridge on 2/1 (MBN) and a female, also at a feeder, in Proctor on 2/2 (RWP). The White-winged Crossbill, generally the more common, was even scarcer as the only birds reported were 3 on the Craftsbury-Greensboro CBC. The Common Redpoll, however, was anything but obscure in its best flight year since 1980. An impressive CBC tally of 1925 individuals proved an accurate harbinger of this lovely little bird's typical mid-February invasion of feeder stations and backyards. Late-winter reports of flocks up to 100 were too numerous to recite, while maximum counts were 180 in Shoreham and Bridport on 1/9 (WGE,NLM), 200 in Weybridge on 2/3 (MBN), 200 in Vernon on 2/27 (JJC) and 430 in North Hero and Alburg on 12/8 (WGE,NLM). White-rumped individuals were observed in Alburg on 12/8 (WGE,NLM), on the Ferrisburg CBC on 12/21 (MCD,JID) and at a feeder in Williston from late January until 2/3 (CCY), raising anew the possibility of Hoary Redpolls. Given the difficulty of separating these species due to plumage variations and hybridization, judgment on the merits of these three reports is best left to a panel of experts. The Vermont Bird Records Committee does not believe that the species can be safely identified in the field, and indeed doubts the "Hoary" is a separate species. Rather easier to identify, the Pine Siskin chose this winter to remain in hiding. Only 193 CBC birds were tallied, a tad less than last year's 4087, and most of these had moved out by the end of the year. Reports in January and February were almost nonexistent: a pair in Rutland on 1/1 (WGE,NLM), a single in Weybridge on 1/18 (MBN), 9 in East Charleston on 2/12 (MPH), 2 in Woodstock on 2/26 (JMN) and about 10 at a feeder in Newport during February

(via PFW,SWA). The American Goldfinch was also far less common than usual, especially as winter wore on. The 961 CBC birds were the fewest since 1980, and records after mid-January were infrequent at best. Contradicting this overall pattern were 80 birds in Weybridge on 2/7, with feeder activity throughout January and February (MBN). Another dozen or so were in Fair Haven throughout the season (EPA). Even the Evening Grosbeak seemed almost scarce, with its poorest CBC showing in a decade amounting to a mere 1782 individuals. This species, too, peaked early as few flocks after New Year's exceeded the 20-30 range. Maximum numbers were 40 in South Lincoln on 2/15 (MBN) and 56 on 2/3 in Sheffield (PFW,SWA). Finally, the under-loved but, it is hoped, not underobserved House Sparrow declined a further notch, as its CBC total reached its lowest level since 1979.

CONTRIBUTORS

CEA	Cedric Alexander	JRL	Jenepher Lingelbach
SDA	Stan Allaben	GPL	George Lisi
EPA	Betty Allen	MWL	Martha Lussier
JRA	Jean Arrowsmith	EL	Mrs. Edwin Lyman
PB	Phillip Ballou	GM	Gordon Marcel
EBB	Betty Barbarise	JDM	John Marsh
JB	Joe Barbarise	NLM	Nancy Martin
MWB	Margaret Barker	RM	Robert Mattuck
WRB	Will Beecher	MMJ	Mike Maurer
MPB	Mark Biercevicz	SM	Sarah McConnell
GEB	Gilbert Bolsterle	JMC	Jonathan McDill
PBR	Peter Briggs	AM	Alison Macdonald
HB	Helen Brokaw	EM	Elizabeth Macdonald
AAB	Ada Brown	WAM	Bill Meador
RHB	Ruth Buchanon	ABM	Al Merritt
DLC	Dwight Cargill	MRM	Marion Metcalf
EMC	Elizabeth Clapp	MM	Martin Milkens
MCC	Mary Clapp	ECM	Elizabeth Miller
DC	Don Clark	MMNR	Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge
BBC	Barbara Carpenter	PJM	Phoebe Jane Mullen
JJC	Jeremy Coleman	TRM	Tom Myers
BC	Betsy Cook	MBN	Marge Nelson
MC	Mary Cornwall	GPN	Jerry Nicholson
RC	Ron Cox	JMN	Julie Nicholson
DHC	Dan Crook	EN	Mrs. Edwin Nimmro
HD	Henry Dandeneau	WJN	William Norse
DD	Doris DeVine	MPA	Michelle Patnode
BCD	Bonita Dundas	ADP	Anna & Dean Peake
JID	John Dye	JMCP	Mike Peterson
MCD	Margaret Dye	BMP	Bryan Pfeiffer
EE	Eleanor Ellis	RWP	Roy Pilcher
GFE	George F. Ellison	PP	Patricia Pinder
WGB	Walter Ellison	AP	Alan Pistorius
NE	Nona Estrin	CRP	Carol Powell
JF	Jonathan Falk	CP	Chris Pratt
TF	Todd Fenton	FAP	Frederick Pratt
JNF	Jean Fleming	HSP	Hugh Putnam
CJF	C.J. Frankiewicz	MQ	Michael Quennville
JBG	John Gallegos	TR	Therese Raymond
EFG	Betty Gilbert	NER	Nancy Read
AVG	Arthur Gilman	HR	Herman Redden
BG	Bea Goodridge	BLR	Betty Rist
JGG	June Guyette	HRO	Heide Rogers
RYG	Robert Guyette	JS	Jeff Sanderson
EH	Ed Hack	SJS	Jean Sangdahl
MPH	Mark Harris	JMS	Julie Schroeder
JHT	Jeanne Heft	MS	Mark Scott
JOHT	John Heft	LS	Leila Sears
MEH	Miriam Herwig	LPS	Linda Shelby
DH	Don Hesterberg	FS	Francis Simonds
PH	Pat Hesterberg	NS	Nancy Simson
DHH	Donald Hill	JOS	John Snell
BMH	Beryl Hinton	LWS	Leola Stillwell
PHH	Patsy Highborg	KT	Kevin Taft
DJH	David Hoag	WHT	Bill Tewell
FCH	Fran Howe	HOT	Mrs. H.O. Thomsen
PHo	Paula Howes	VFW	Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department
RHH	Rhoda Horne	VINS	Vermont Institute of Natural Science
FMH	Fred Hunt	PFW	Paul Wagner
GEH	Gloria Hunt	SAW	Shirley Wagner
AJ	Alyson Johansson	JWA	Jane Walker
TEJ	Tait Johansson	LWa	Lynn Walker
EEJ	Edward & Florence Jones	SSW	Susanne Wetmore
CDK	Chris Kibbe	JWU	Julie Witham
NEK	Neil King	CMW	Carol Wood
DVK	Doris Klein	CCY	Cathy Yandell
JDL	David Laughlin	JZ	Jane Zecher
SBL	Sally Laughlin	MZ	Melissa Zecher
TL	Ted Levin	RAZ	Al Zelly (manager, Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge)
DL	Dan Lidner	PFZ	Peter Zika

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