



RECORDS OF VERMONT BIRDS

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Frederick A. Pratt, Seasonal Editor

The winter of 1996-97 was ushered in by a decidedly mild December, which averaged a remarkable 9.7°F warmer than usual. Only the last day of the month boasted significantly cold temperatures, so the stage was nicely set for an enjoyable and successful Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season. The 118 species found was the second highest total ever, just 2 shy of the 1984 record. To be sure, individuals totaled only 109,619 – an impressive enough figure but about 13,000 fewer than the record high of winter 1995-96. Fluctuations in numbers for often-abundant species provide the explanation. Six species (Common Merganser, Mourning Dove, Horned Lark, Bohemian Waxwing, Snow Bunting and House Sparrow) suffered declines of 3000 or more individuals, while several other common species dropped by 1000. By contrast, only American Goldfinch, Blue Jay and Cedar Waxwing posted increases of 2000 or more birds.

Of course, if the truth be told, most CBC's measure success by the number of species found, especially those that are uncommon or rare. By this measure there were reasons enough for smiling faces come the close of business on January 1st. Adorning the CBC roster were such "good" ducks as Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Oldsquaw, Black Scoter and White-winged Scoter, as well as Wood Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye, both of which have become virtual staples of the CBC season. Sparrows and other half-hardies were also well represented, and included such goodies as Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Gray Catbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Rufous-sided Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow and Eastern Meadowlark.

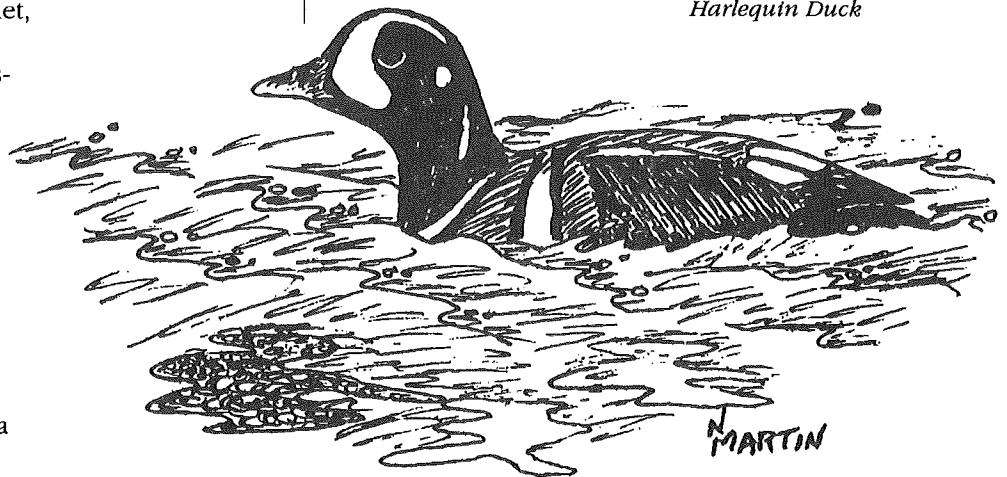
Raptors, too, are a special attraction for Christmas counters. Imagine the joy in Middlebury with a Long-eared Owl and 2 NORTHERN HAWK-OWLS, or the excitement in Ferrisburgh with 2 Merlins and a

mighty Gyrfalcon. Indeed, raptors were the highlight of the winter – not only for Vermonters but for out-of-state birders as well. An extraordinary 5 Northern Hawk-Owls appeared, and 3 took up permanent (winter) residence. Four Snowy Owls were reported and two of these obliged with lengthy stays, one at Taft Corners in Williston, the other in Charlotte. With multiple sightings of Gyrfalcon at Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area and adjacent territory and Short-eared Owls as well, visiting birders with scopes, parkas and coffee mugs in tow soon outnumbered Vermonters at favored sites. It was a scene not soon to be forgotten.

There were other rarities as well. A pair of HARLEQUIN DUCKS off Charlotte Town Beach in mid-December constituted the 10th state record for this elusive and elegant species, while a SOLITARY VIREO on the Saxtons River CBC was without precedent. In this editor's view, a normally common species found so far out of season is as exciting, even breathtaking, as the extraterritorial rarity birders understandably flock to admire.

Finally, no winter report is complete without mention of the vagaries of our friends from the north. Conspicuous by their absence were Bohemian Waxwing, Pine Grosbeak and Common Redpoll, all so much appreciated when they choose to brighten our winter landscape. Also scarce were both crossbills and the sometimes ubiquitous and always noisy Evening Grosbeak. On the other hand, both Pine Siskin and the ever-popular Purple Finch enjoyed good years, while the American Goldfinch rose to new prominence with its best winter in recorded history.

Harlequin Duck



RECORDS OF VERMONT BIRDS

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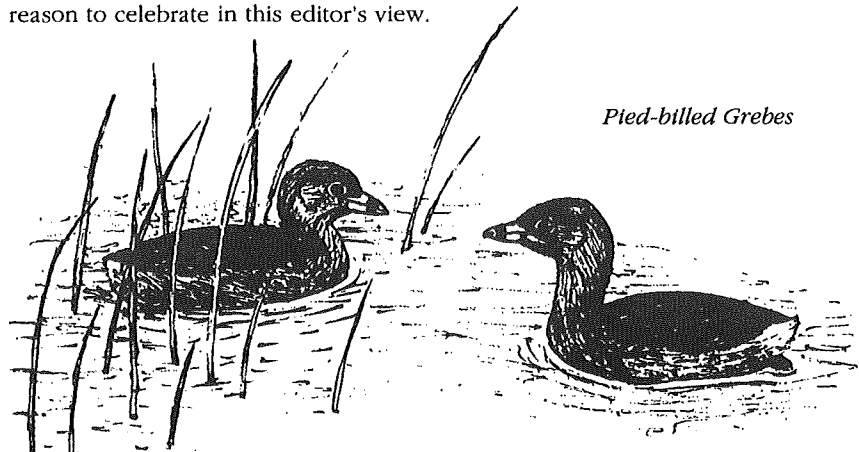
LOONS THROUGH HERONS

It was a good year for Red-throated Loon, as three reports from contributors nicely supplemented a CBC bird at Ferrisburgh. One individual was off Grand Isle on 12/1, 12/18 and 1/4 (DJH), another was at Button Bay on 1/11 (SSW) and, most interestingly, a single was spotted near Woodstock "just upstream of Taftsville Dam" on 12/13 (KRT,SDF). Also encouraging was the number of Common Loon reports, which included a strong CBC tally of 36 birds, as well as December sightings of 3 to 5 individuals off Grand Isle (DJH), Button Bay (TGM) and the Tri-town Water District plant in Addison (FAP,EBP). Late-winter records were also a feature with 3 at Converse Bay in Charlotte, 1 at Meach Cove in Shelburne and 8 off Charlotte Town Beach, all on 2/1 (TGM). Three were still at Charlotte as late as 2/18 (DJH). The diminutive Pied-billed Grebe was a surprise of the season, appearing on the CBC registers of Ferrisburgh, Burlington and the Champlain Islands. The latter bird was still off Grand Isle as late as 12/26 (DJH). It was an uneven picture for the handsome Horned Grebe: a no-better-than-average CBC total, but a remarkable 160 birds present on 1/4 from Meach Cove in Shelburne to Button Bay (TGM). Roughly two dozen were still off Shelburne and Charlotte on 2/7 (DJH). The Red-necked Grebe enjoyed an excellent season, as a record 5 CBC birds were found, including 3 at the Champlain Islands. The latter trio was still cruising off Grand Isle on 1/4 (DJH), while singles were spotted in Button Bay on 1/4 (TGM) and at Meach Cove on 2/10 (TGM,DJH). There were two late reports of Double-crested Cormorant, one off Grand Isle on 12/3 (DJH) and a second padding the Ferrisburgh CBC roster. Neither is reason to celebrate in this editor's view.

Late reports of Great Blue Heron were again quite numerous, with several individuals lingering into January. A surprising 3 were at Shelburne Bay on 1/4 (TGM) and the last were birds at Clarendon on 1/19 (CJF) and at Dorset on 1/30 (EFG).

WATERFOWL

The controversial Mute Swan was perhaps too much in evidence, although a CBC total of just two birds at the Champlain Islands was well down from the record 8 in 1994. Contributors reported several sightings, with a maximum of 5 in Charlotte on 12/14 and 12/16 (TGM). Other reports, all of two birds each, came from St. Albans Bay on 12/8 (EMA,RDB) and from Converse Bay and McNeil Cove in Charlotte on several dates in February (DJH,TGM,FAP,EBP,SSW). Snow Geese lingered into December in small numbers only, although a CBC tally of 139 was certainly respectable. The last reported were 60 in Grand Isle on 12/25 (DJH) and 2 in Shelburne on 12/28 (DJH). Canada Geese were much in evidence during early winter, as a new CBC record of 5207 birds was established. January reports, however, were more subdued, with flocks of 200 at East Dorset on 1/1 (NAB), 84 at Dorset on 1/12 (EFG), 72 at Grand Isle on 1/15 (DJH), 75 at Shelburne on 1/19 (FAP,EBP) and 200 at Meach Cove on 1/24 (TGM). The Wood Duck once again graced the CBC roster as two birds were found at Saxtons River. This lovely species has not missed a CBC appearance since 1978. A Green-winged Teal on the Champlain Islands CBC was a good find and the only report for the season of this occasional lingerer. The American Black Duck enjoyed a good but not exceptional winter, with somewhat reduced numbers reported



Pied-billed Grebes

by Christmas counters and individual contributors. High counts were 50 at the Grand Isle ferry landing on 1/4 (DJH), 50 in a cornfield in Pawlet on 1/8 (GRB) and 28 in Clarendon on 1/19 (CJF). The Mallard was its usual abundant self, judging from another strong CBC showing. A flock of 300 was found feeding in meadows in N. Rupert on 1/21 (EFG), while the Burlington throng was numbered at 800 on 2/23 (TGM,FAP,EBP). A Northern Pintail at Ferrisburgh and another at Hanover-Norwich produced a nice CBC figure, while a drake off Grand Isle tarried until 2/2 (DJH). Early spring migrants included 2 at Grand Isle on 2/20 (DJH), 4 at Grand Isle on 2/22-2/24 (DJH,FAP,EBP) and 8 at Burlington on 2/23 (TGM,FAP,EBP). The Gadwall, another occasional lingerer, was represented by 3 reports: a drake at McNeil Cove in Charlotte on 2/10 (TGM), 2 drakes and a hen at Converse Bay in Charlotte on 2/11 (TGM) and the 2 drakes again at Converse Bay on 2/20 (TGM). A single Canvasback at Middlebury was unique for the CBC season, but contributors enjoyed the biggest winter for this splendid diving duck since 1989. Meach Cove in Shelburne hosted up to 17 birds as of 1/19 (TGM,FAP,EBP) while other reports included 3 drakes at Willow Point in Bridport on 12/18 (FAP,EBP), 6 individuals in Shelburne on 2/8 and 2/12 (DJH) and 2 drakes at Blodgett's Beach in Burlington on 2/23 (FAP,EBP,TGM). Four Redhead at Burlington was a great find and the best CBC total since 1983, when a like number was found at Ferrisburgh. Equally noteworthy were 4 drakes and a hen observed from 2/1 through 2/12 at McNeil Cove in Charlotte (SSW,TGM,DJH).

The Ring-necked Duck was also well represented, with 2 CBC birds at Middlebury and several others sighted by contributors. A single drake was off Grand Isle on 1/15 (DJH), 3 drakes were at Potash Bay in Addison on 1/15 (FAP,EBP) and a female was at

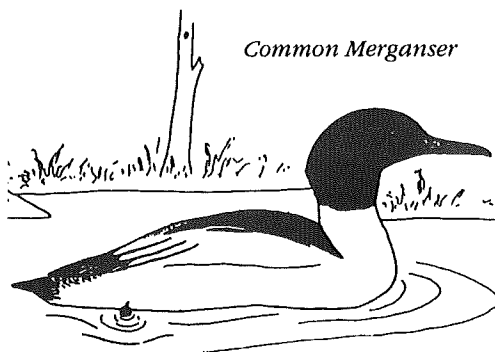
McNeil Cove from 2/18-2/22 (DJH,TGM). The Greater Scaup had its best CBC showing in recorded history, with 397 individuals counted, including a record 322 at Burlington. Curiously, the mid-winter arial waterfowl survey on Lake Champlain, conducted by Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department on 1/9, found no scaup of either species, but numbers later began to congregate in Meach Cove in Shelburne, where 520 were meticulously counted on 2/10 (TGM). The Lesser Scaup, always less common in winter and easily overlooked or misidentified, was represented by just 3 CBC birds at the Champlain Islands and a late high count of 7 at Meach Cove on 2/20 (SSW). The rare HARLEQUIN DUCK made its first winter appearance since 1993, when 2 birds, including a superb male, were discovered and well studied off Charlotte Town Beach on 12/15 (TGM). Unfortunately, the birds were present only briefly, much to the disappointment of other birders anxious to admire this Vermont rarity. More accommodating, indeed, was the handsome Oldsquaw, which was present in its best CBC numbers since 1983. Among other reports were 10 on the mid-winter waterfowl survey, 4 at Willow Point on 12/7 (FAP,EBP) and 2 at Button Bay on 1/4 (TGM). The Black Scoter was again scarce, with just a single female off Charlotte Town Beach on 12/15 and 12/16 (TGM) plus a twosome on the Ferrisburgh CBC. The White-winged Scoter was a bit more numerous, with a total of 5 reports: 15 CBC birds at Ferrisburgh, one on the Middlebury CBC, 2 off Grand Isle as late as 12/17 (DJH), a single at Willow Point on 12/18 (FAP,EBP) and 2 at Meach Cove in Shelburne on 1/31 and 2/11 (TGM). The Common Goldeneye again lived up to its name as more than 2000 CBC birds were found for the fourth year running. Among numerous reports from readers were 300 off Grand Isle as late as 1/14 (DJH), 300 at McNeil Cove in Charlotte on 2/16 (NAB) and 800 at the South Hero railroad causeway on 2/1 (TGM). The Barrow's Goldeneye, now a Vermont specialty in winter, appeared on 2 CBC rosters and probably numbered in excess of 6 individuals for the season. Meach Cove in Shelburne hosted 2 drakes and 2 hens on 2/15 (TGM), while Charlotte Town Beach boasted 3 males and a hen on 2/18 (TGM). Other locations where this lovely species was

spotted include Grand Isle (DJH), McNeil Cove in Charlotte (FAP,EBP,TGM), Converse Bay in Charlotte (TGM), the South Hero railroad causeway (TGM) and Blodgett's Beach (FAP,EBP).

The dapper Bufflehead also was much in evidence, to wit an excellent CBC tally of 91 birds. Late-winter reports were also impressive, with 31 in Charlotte on 2/11 and 2/16 (TGM,NAB) and an additional 19 at Converse Bay on 2/11 (TGM). Equally handsome and nearly as numerous was the Hooded Merganser, which produced a new CBC record of 78 birds, exactly 50 more than one year earlier. A number overwintered, to judge from a single at South Hero on 2/3 and 2/6 (DJH), 5 at Converse Bay on 2/1 (TGM) and 4 at McNeil Cove in Charlotte on 2/20 (SSW). The Common Merganser backed off from last year's record, as a mediocre total of 1717 individuals was found. Indeed, the mid-winter survey for the Atlantic flyway showed this species down by 48%, although Vermont's survey total of 3275 was certainly comparable to those of recent years. Also reassuring was an estimated 1000 off the Champlain Islands in mid-January (DJH) and an additional 700 birds at Button Bay on 1/4 (TGM). Meanwhile, Red-breasted Merganser numbers were normal, as Christmas counters came up with 20 birds and readers added another 7 sightings. High counts were 6 at the Tri-town Water District plant on 12/18 (FAP,EBP) and 6 off Grand Isle on 1/13 and 1/15 (DJH). This latter flock was quickly reduced to 5, when one bird fell victim to a voracious Black-backed Gull.

RAPTORS

The rising prosperity of the Bald Eagle was never more apparent than during the winter of 1996-97. CBC records fell as 15 birds were located, including 9 at Ferrisburgh, a new Vermont high for a single circle. Even more impressive, the midwinter survey for Vermont produced 13 eagles – not counting 2 each at Wilder Dam, Bellows Falls and Vernon Dam that were claimed by neighboring New Hampshire. When the many reports from readers are added to the picture, it seems reasonable to assume Vermont was the winter home of at least 20 of America's national bird. Less formidable and perhaps less hardy as well, the



Common Merganser

Northern Harrier settled for an average showing, although 20 CBC birds compared favorably with the 7 of one year ago. Late-winter reports included a female in Bridport on 1/15 (FAP,EBP), a male along Nortontown Road in Addison on 1/19 (TGM,FAP,EBP) and a female in South Hero on 2/6 (DJH). Three birds in Charlotte on 2/26 (TGM) were presumably new arrivals eager to pronounce the arrival of spring. Among the accipiters, the Sharp-shinned Hawk overwintered in good numbers, as 28 CBC birds were located while 16 others were reported by readers. The Cooper's Hawk fared nearly as well, falling just 4 individuals short of last winter's record CBC tally. Contributors reported another 10 birds, including 3 in Grand Isle (DJH) and 2 in Ferrisburgh (SSW). Always less common than its smaller relatives, the Northern Goshawk settled for 11 CBC birds and just one other report, a single in Sheffield on 1/31 (PFW,SAW). As usual, the Red-tailed Hawk was both numerous and widespread. A CBC total of 252 was the second-highest ever, while the maximum count from readers was 23 birds seen in the Addison and Cornwall area on 2/15 (TGM). The Rough-legged Hawk, however, could muster up only a so-so CBC performance; still, enough of these splendid raptors were around to impress the many out-of-state birders visiting Vermont for our unique hawk and owl show (see below). High counts from contributors included 10 on 1/15 from Cornwall to Addison (FAP,EBP) and 8 on 2/21 in Addison alone (TGM). Two reports of Golden Eagle are noteworthy, although details have not yet been received by this editor. One, in Goshen, "flew overhead as we cut Christmas trees" on 12/13 (SSW); the second, described as a "possible," was in Grand Isle on 1/2 (DJH).

The diminutive American Kestrel was barely visible as a mere 3 CBC birds were found, 1 in Ferrisburgh and 2 in Middlebury. Readers fared no better with just 3 reports: singles in Ferrisburgh on 1/11 (SSW), in Bridport on 1/12 (NAB) and in Addison on 2/2 (JMN,EFG,BRJ). The Merlin provided equally surprising but far more welcome news, as an unprecedented 4 CBC birds were found, 2 in Ferrisburgh and 1 each in Burlington and Middlebury. From readers came two further reports, a single in Addison on 1/4 (TGM) and a second in Florence on 2/18 "seen in front yard after catching

prey, apparently a smaller bird" (VH). Two Peregrine Falcons at Middlebury were the only CBC birds found – and nearly unique for the entire winter. Just one other was reported, a single bird flying 30 feet above I-89 in Bolton on 2/18 (PCR). Last but hardly least among the falconiformes, the rare Gyr Falcon was represented by a near plethora of reports: a CBC bird at Ferrisburgh, a gray-morph individual at Button Bay on 12/11 (SSW,JAP), an adult (also grey-morph) along Route 17 in Addison on 12/28 (SWM), an immature at DCWMA also on 12/28 (SWM) and, finally, an individual "gray with white belly" on Young Island on 2/20 (DJH).

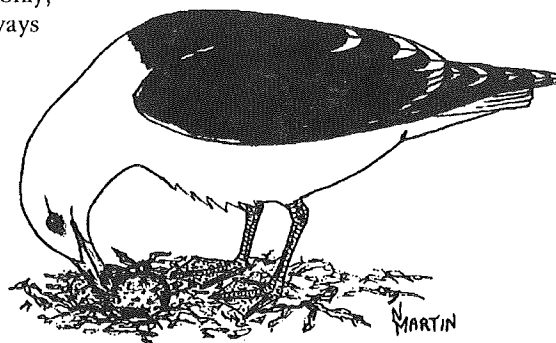
PHEASANTS THROUGH CRANES

The Gray Partridge, more or less a Vermont specialty, was reported just once: 8 birds found on the Champlain Islands CBC. Surprisingly, the Ring-necked Pheasant was somewhat better represented, although one is never certain as to its origin. In addition to 3 CBC individuals, an "escaped bird" was seen on several dates on Grand Isle (DJH), a female was found in Woodstock on 2/11 (JWL) and 4 birds, including 2 males, were observed along Slang Road in Pantton on 1/15 (FAP,EBP). The Ruffed Grouse enjoyed the winter in good numbers, as evidenced by a healthy 145 CBC birds. Readers chipped in with several additional reports, headed up by 6 at Mt. Independence on 12/13 (FAP,EBP), 6 at Ripton on 1/4 (CJF), 5 in Reading on 12/16 (EJH,FMH) and 5 in Cornwall on 2/12 (MBN). The Wild Turkey was also conspicuous during the season, although numbers were well down from last winter's record pace. High counts from contributors were 60 in Pawlet on 2/4 (NAB), 50 in Chester on 2/21 (EJH,FMH), 35 in Fair Haven on 1/19 (BWP) and 30 in Whiting on 1/1 (SSW). A Northern Bobwhite on the Ferrisburgh CBC was the season's only, but again this species' origin is always suspect. Rather rare in winter, the American Coot was nevertheless spotted in Burlington on three occasions: 2 individuals on 12/9 and 12/13 (DJH,TGM) and a single bird on 1/31 (DJH).

GULLS AND TERNS

Reports of the elegant Bonaparte's Gull were limited to 16 CBC birds at the Champlain Islands and 2 at St. Albans Bay on 12/8 (EMA,RDB). As for the nearly ubiquitous Ring-billed Gull, numbers were comfortably adequate, as 1250 CBC birds were found. Reports from contributors were restrained, although 120 were noted in Grand Isle on 12/20 (DJH) and 200 in Burlington on 1/26 (TGM). In like manner, the Herring Gull settled for a CBC tally of 1213 and a high count from contributors of 200 at Shelburne Bay on 1/13 (TGM). Neither figure is particularly impressive when compared to those for recent years. A most comprehensive report of a Thayer's Gull at Burlington on 12/3 and 12/5 (DJH) is certainly noteworthy. Given the complexity of gull identification, to say nothing of the possibility that Thayer's may yet be found not even to be a species, this editor can only commend the observer for his very complete description of an intriguing bird. An Iceland Gull at Hanover-Norwich was the only CBC entry, but the Burlington waterfront produced several early reports of single birds (at least 2 different individuals) between 12/3 and 12/13 (DJH,TGM). First-year birds were also sighted at Sandbar State Park in Milton on 2/1 (TGM) and at Blodgett's on 2/22 (TGM). The larger Glaucous Gull was also well represented, with 4 birds on the CBC roster, including 3 at the Champlain Islands. Others were an immature at Burlington on 12/5 and 1/5 (TGM), another at White River Junction on 2/12 (JMN) and 2 immatures at Blodgett's in Burlington on 2/22 (TGM). Finally, the Great Black-backed Gull retreated slightly from recent highs as a more than sufficient 582 CBC birds were tallied. Interesting to note was the abundance of this species at Hanover-Norwich as compared to Burlington or Ferrisburgh.

Great Black-backed Gull



However, by 2/22 no less than 280 were dutifully counted at the Burlington waterfront (TGM).

DOVES THROUGH NIGHJARS

Rock Dove numbers remained distressingly high – though down somewhat from last year's record. The same held true for the Mourning Dove, although the retreat from high ground was more pronounced. In Ferrisburgh alone the CBC drop-off exceeded 1000 individuals. Feeder flocks were paced by 31 in Danby (NAB) and a like number in Swanton (EMA,RDB). A flock of up to 27 birds in Sheffield "fell to mostly single numbers" thanks to the healthy appetite of a resident Sharp-shinned Hawk. Turning to the Strigidae, the Eastern Screech-Owl produced its poorest CBC showing (or more accurately, audition) since 1989 as just 5 individuals were counted. The only other report came from Addison, where a single bird was noted on 2/21 (SSW). The Great Horned Owl also proved elusive as a CBC tally of just 8 birds was the lowest since 1987. However, readers provided a number of additional reports including a twosome at the LaPlatte River Marsh on 1/4 (TGM) and another 2 at Grand Isle on 2/10, one of which devoured a goldeneye on 1/20 (DJH). Also reported were singles in Georgia (EMA,RDB), West Rutland (NAB), Clarendon (CJF), S. Londonderry (WJN) and Brandon (SSW). Meanwhile, the majestic Snowy Owl generated considerable excitement far and wide, thanks in great measure to 2 individuals remaining on location for much of the winter – one at Taft Corners in Williston and one near Lake Street in Charlotte. Additional sightings were in Bradford on 12/25 (JNF) and in S. Burlington, also on Christmas Day (PAS).

Yet the undoubted star of the season was the NORTHERN HAWK-OWL, which staged its first mini-invasion since the memorable winter of 1991-92. First on the scene was an individual found along West Street in Cornwall on 11/21 (AP) and subsequently admired by one and all. Two other birds also remained throughout the winter, one near the Green Mountain Club headquarters on Route 100 in Waterbury Center and one at the junction of Cross and East Streets in Bridport. The former was discovered on 12/9 (MS) and the latter on 12/5 (JAP).

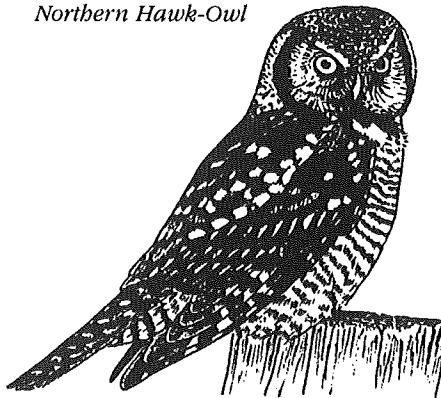
Also taking part in the invasion was a bird in Brandon on 11/28 (SSW) and another in Craftsbury during early January (FO). One would hope all Vermont birders now have this splendid owl on their life lists; certainly countless birders from other states.

By contrast the Barred Owl was almost a rarity as just 6 CBC birds were found, the poorest showing since 1989. From readers came reports of single birds in Pawlet (GRB), Tinmouth (CJF), Reading (EJH,FMH), Woodstock (JWL) and Addison (SSW), while "several" were heard in Chittenden during February (DMM). The only Long-eared Owl of the season was one heard on the Middlebury CBC near its roost on Snake Mountain. The more likely Short-eared Owl was represented by only 3 CBC birds, but a number of others were reported by contributors: 2 at Grand Isle on 1/21 and 1/22 (DJH), at least 2 at DCWMA (FAP,EBP,TGM,SSW) and 2 along West Street in Cornwall on 1/21 (TGM). Rounding out a great winter for the Strigidae, the ever-popular Northern Saw-whet Owl produced an average CBC total of 3 birds, while others were reported from Essex Center (PCR), Mendon (BRJ), Huntington (PAS) and two locations in Brandon (SSW).

SWIFTS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

A count of 20 was the best CBC showing for the Belted Kingfisher since the record-setting year of 1991. Overwintering birds were also numerous, with February reports coming from East Dorset (NAB), Dummerston (NBu), Charlotte Town Beach (TGM) and Meach Cove in Shelburne (SSW). Also, a bird at Grand Isle was present as late as 1/13 (DJH). A single Red-headed Woodpecker, presumably from the small colony in Bridport, persevered

Northern Hawk-Owl



long enough to enhance the Middlebury CBC list, while the Red-bellied Woodpecker chipped in with 2 CBC appearances, a single at Rutland and a "count period" bird at Springfield. Numbers of both Downy Woodpecker and Hairy Woodpecker were unremarkable, with CBC totals of 614 and 297 respectively. Feeder visitors of both species were rather limited, with maximums of 4 at Danby Four Corners (NAB) and Woodstock (CRF). The Northern Flicker provided a commendable 22 CBC birds, including an impressive 8 at Middlebury. Late-winter reports featured singles in Grand Isle on 1/13 (DJH), in Charlotte as late as 2/13 (TGM,DJH) and in Manchester Center on 2/14 (BWP). Finally, the conspicuous but often wary Pileated Woodpecker dropped back to 69 CBC birds, the poorest showing since 1989. However, on Grand Isle "at least two pairs" were seen on various dates throughout the winter (DJH).

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH WRENS

In an abrupt reversal, the Horned Lark dropped from a CBC high of 5010 one year ago to a paltry 732, the lowest tally since 1982. Still, one contributor reported a flock of 1000 along Gage Road in Addison on 1/12 (NAB). Other readers settled for much smaller numbers, however, such as 45 in Bridport on 1/19 (BWP) and 45 in Charlotte on 1/26 (FAP,EBP). The Gray Jay, one of Vermont's boreal species, settled for just 3 reports: 5 CBC birds at Island Pond, 3 at Moose Bog on 2/18 (PAS) and 3 in Georgia, surprisingly, on 1/13 (EMA,RDB). Not a surprise was the conspicuous presence of the Blue Jay. A CBC total of 5313 was typical, while the maximum feeder flock was 36 birds in Sheffield (PFW,SAW). The American Crow was also both seen and heard by all, as it once again surpassed the 6000 mark on the CBC tally. Flocks of 50-100 were noted in such places as Salisbury (NAB), Newfane (AMD), Clarendon (CJF), Manchester Center (BWP) and Grand Isle (DJH). Less numerous but more loved, the Common Raven held its ground, as 196 CBC birds were located with all 16 circles contributing. From readers came such reports as 33 in Reading on 2/14 (EJH,FMH), fewer than 15 in Manchester Center on 12/8 (BWP) and 9 at DCWMA on 2/15 (TGM). The brave Black-capped Chickadee was again abundant, though in slightly

reduced numbers. The winner of the feeder derby was a station in Dorset where up to 23 birds enjoyed the fare (EFG). The Boreal Chickadee had one of its better years, with 26 present for the Island Pond CBC. One observer counted 15 at Moose Bog on 2/18 (PAS). Another stalwart of the Vermont winter, the Tufted Titmouse produced 349 CBC birds, down a bit from last year but still its second highest total in recorded history. Numerous feeders hosted a pair or so. Both the Red-breasted Nuthatch and the White-breasted Nuthatch came in with rather ordinary results, neither exhilarating nor worrisome. Interesting to note was a "complete albino" white nut that appeared at a feeder in Barnard on 1/3 for one day only (BM). Another hardy little fellow, the Brown Creeper rebounded from an off year to produce an entirely respectable CBC total of 140 birds. Readers could add just a half dozen reports, including a twosome in Georgia on 2/3 (EMA,RDB). A Carolina Wren on the Middlebury CBC was unique for the season, clear evidence that this species has yet to recover from the harsh winter of 1993-94. Happily, the rugged Winter Wren fared considerably better as 4 CBC birds were discovered, its best total since 1992.

KINGLETS THROUGH VIREOS

A CBC total of 233 individuals was an excellent showing for the regular but erratic Golden-crowned Kinglet. Few reports came from readers, but 8 birds were in Chittenden on 12/23 (DMM) and 6 in Putney on 1/4 (MJL). The more difficult Ruby-crowned Kinglet was also nicely represented, as a surprising 2 were uncovered on the Plainfield CBC. Meanwhile, the Eastern Bluebird enjoyed another excellent year, with 5 circles reporting 101 CBC birds. Readers added about a dozen other sightings, including up to 5 in Pawlet on various dates in December (GRB) and 11 in Cornwall on 1/15 (SSW). February reports featured 4 in Charlotte on 2/11 (TGM), 4 in Panton on 2/2 (JMN,EFG,BRJ), 2 in Addison on 2/20 (TGM), 1 in Dorset on 2/21 (EFG) and 2 in Brandon on 2/22 (SSW). A Hermit Thrush at Saxtons River was a nice surprise, making it 3 years in a row for this species on a CBC roster. Also pleasantly surprising was another big winter for the American Robin. A CBC

tally of 1450 birds was second only to the extraordinary 2607 in 1994, while contributors added a host of additional sightings. Highlights included 150 overwintering robins on Grand Isle (DJH), 50 in Dorset on 2/11 (EFG), 50 in Addison on 2/15 (TGM) and 30 in Brandon on 2/22 (SSW).

The Gray Catbird made it 3 years in 4 on the CBC roster as 2 were found at Springfield, almost certainly a record for an individual circle. On the other hand, just 18 Northern Mockingbirds were found by Christmas counters, the poorest showing since 1982. Readers added a twosome in Bridport on 2/15 (TGM) and a single in Putney on 2/10 (MJL).

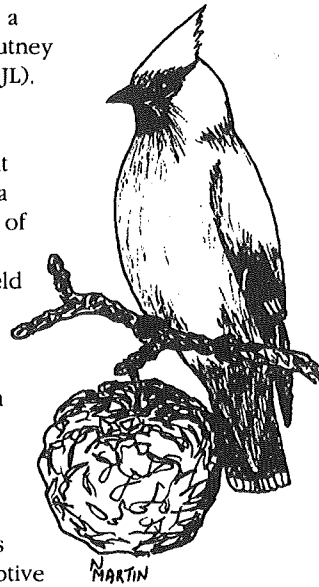
As for the Bohemian Waxwing, it settled for a grand total of 3 birds on the Plainfield CBC, thus following last year's feast with a virtual famine. Of course in some winters this highly irruptive species is totally absent.

On the other hand, there certainly was no dearth of the Cedar Waxwing as 2450 CBC birds were found, including 1322 at Middlebury. Reports from readers were also impressive and included 50 in Georgia on 12/8 (EMA,RDB), 80 in Norwich on 2/15 (KRT), 170 in Grand Isle on 2/24 and 2/27 (DJH) and 40 in Weybridge on 2/28 (MBN). A CBC tally of 29 was an excellent showing for the Northern Shrike, though no match for last year's record high. Another 10 birds were reported by contributors. Meanwhile, the European Starling had the poor taste to establish yet another CBC high, falling just 3 individuals shy of an even 21,000. One diligent reader reported a block of 3000 in Shoreham on 2/9 (TGM). Perhaps the most remarkable bird of the winter was the SOLITARY VIREO seen feeding in sycamores along the Saxtons River on 12/21. So far as this editor knows, this was the first

vireo of any kind ever to appear on a Vermont CBC roster.

WARBLERS THROUGH SPARROWS

For the third year in succession the Yellow-rumped Warbler graced the CBC tally sheet, as 3 were found at Burlington and 1 at Ferrisburgh. Also reported was a single in Berlin on 12/1 (FAP,EBP) and a threesome along Arnold Bay Road in Ferrisburgh on 2/2 (TGM). A CBC total of 526 was decidedly low for the Northern Cardinal, its poorest showing since 1986. Feeder watchers also reported reduced numbers, with maximum counts 10 in Manchester Center (BWP) and 7 in Woodstock (JMN). A Rufous-sided Towhee on the Woodstock CBC was the first in 3 winters, about all we can hope for in snowy Vermont. No such problem exists with the American Tree Sparrow, which was present in its customary CBC abundance. Later reports were unremarkable, however, although 40 were in Addison on 1/1 (NAB) and 25 were in Clarendon, also on New Year's Day (CJF). A well-described Chipping Sparrow in Brattleboro and another in Ferrisburgh produced the best CBC showing for this difficult species since 1991. After a hiatus of 3 years, the Field Sparrow returned to the CBC roster thanks to a single bird at Saxtons River. Also unusual in winter but apparently increasing, the Savannah Sparrow was reported 3 times: 4 individuals along Hawkins Road in Ferrisburgh on 1/11 (JAP,SSW), a single at the DCWMA goose-viewing pull-off on 1/19 (FAP,EBP,TGM) and a threesome along Nortontown Road in Addison on 2/2 (JAP,SSW). Yet another good find was a lone Fox Sparrow, seen several times in a yard in Danby Four Corners, with its last visit on 12/10 (NAB). The Song Sparrow persevered into winter in typical numbers as 91 CBC birds were recorded. Overwintering again occurred as 3 birds were seen along Slang Road in Panton on 2/2 (JMN,EFG,BRJ) and another in Reading on 2/12 was described as having been "back" for two weeks (JDL). In a bit of a surprise the Swamp Sparrow eluded all observers, but the White-throated Sparrow enjoyed its best CBC season since 1992. However, the only February sighting was of a single bird in Ferrisburgh on 2/2 (TGM). The handsome White-crowned Sparrow, never very fond of



Bohemian Waxwing

Vermont winters, nonetheless showed up in Bennington and Woodstock, thus making it 5 years in a row on the CBC tally sheet. Joining the sparrow brigade was the Dark-eyed Junco with its second huge CBC showing in the last 3 years. Springfield alone tallied 1001 individuals, easily a new high for a single count. Feeder flocks in the 15-20 range were reported from Barnard (JNF), Manchester Center (BWP), S. Londonderry (WJN) and Woodstock (JMN). Numbers for the Lapland Longspur were about average, with all reports coming from the Champlain valley, except for one on the Saxtons River CBC. Maximum counts from readers were 8 at the Route 17 goose-viewing area on 1/1 (NAB), 9 at DCWMA on 1/18 (SSW) and 7 along Nortontown Road in Addison on 1/19 (TGM,FAP,EBP). However, results for the Snow Bunting were rather poor, especially in comparison to the previous year. A CBC production of 149 birds was the lowest since 1992, but readers came in with a few good flocks. The largest were 300 birds in Charlotte on 1/21 (TGM), 200 along Slang Road on 2/2 (JMN,EFG,BRJ) and 150 in Panton on 1/15 (FAP,EBP).

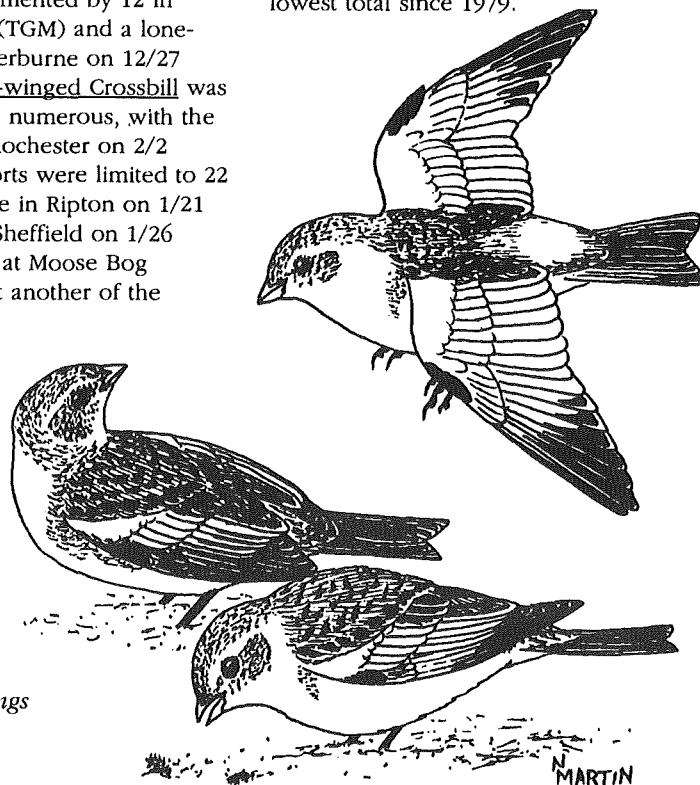
BLACKBIRDS THROUGH WEAVERS

A Red-winged Blackbird count of 11 for the entire CBC season was low but not unprecedented. Only 3 January reports were received, with 1 in Essex as late as 1/3 (RBL), 2 in Cornwall on 1/19 (FAP,EBP) and another in Bridport, also on 1/19 (TGM). February sightings by contributors gave evidence of a good influx of early migrants from the south. Representative were 12 birds in Williston on 2/15 (RBL), followed by 30 in Danby Four Corners on 2/22 (NAB), 15 in Charlotte on 2/25 (TGM), 30 in S. Londonderry on 2/27 (WJN), 50 in Woodstock on 2/28 (CRP) and 40 in Essex, also on 2/28 (RBL). Distinctly uncommon in winter, the Eastern Meadowlark provided a nice CBC surprise when 4 birds were uncovered in Burlington. This species has virtually boycotted the CBC since back in 1987, when Bennington recorded a record high of 10. Meanwhile, the Common Grackle was anything but common, with just 7 CBC birds. Lingerers were in Danby Four Corners on 12/7-8 (NAB), in Weybridge on 12/30 and 1/13 (MBN) and at a Brandon feeder as late as 2/4

(SSW). Early birds from the south included 1 in Thetford on 2/23 (KRT), 1 in Essex on 2/28 (RBL), 2 in Weybridge on 2/28 (MBN) and 6 in Woodstock on 2/28 (CRP). A Brown-headed Cowbird CBC tally of 118 was the lowest since 1985; however, the survival of this species seems not in jeopardy. A flock of about 30 was in Cornwall at least through 1/19 (TGM,FAP,EBP), while 7 were still there on 2/15 (TGM). Early migrants included 2 in Weybridge on 2/24 (MBN), 8 in Brandon on 2/25 (SSW) and 2 in Essex on 2/28 (RBL).

The erratic Pine Grosbeak was scarce, with just a handful of CBC birds, along with 12 in Sheffield on 2/4 (PFW,SAW) and 7 in Woodstock on 2/9 (JMN). But the Purple Finch rebounded from a dismal season in 1995-96 to post a good CBC tally and also to bring a bit of color and class to a number of feeding stations. High counts from readers were 65 in Grand Isle (DJH), 35 in Brandon (SSW) and 30 in Weybridge (MBN). The House Finch declined for the second year in a row, the victim of a serious outbreak of conjunctivitis. CBC numbers were down about 60% from 1994 and feeder flocks at least as drastically. Maximum counts were 30 in Brandon (SSW) and 28 in Dorset (EFG), but most stations hosted fewer than 10 birds. It was another off year for the Red Crossbill, generally a rather uncommon winter visitor. Eight CBC birds were supplemented by 12 in Weston on 12/14 (TGM) and a lone-some single in Sherburne on 12/27 (JMN). The White-winged Crossbill was only slightly more numerous, with the best count 15 in Rochester on 2/2 (KRT). Other reports were limited to 22 CBC birds, a single in Ripton on 1/21 (WBK), a pair in Sheffield on 1/26 (PFW,SAW) and 4 at Moose Bog on 2/18 (PAS). Yet another of the

northern finches in short supply was the Common Redpoll. The only reports came from the CBC with Plainfield's 20 birds easily the high count. At least the Pine Siskin came through with respectable numbers, especially during the CBC. The most favored feeder appears to have been in Georgia, where up to 100 birds were visitors (EMA,RDB). Not satisfied with its high established just two years ago, the American Goldfinch stormed the gates in record numbers, paced by 819 birds on the Springfield CBC. Feeder flocks in the 50-60 range were widespread, but by late winter numbers were noticeably reduced. A European Goldfinch at a feeder in New Haven on 12/22 (AK) must have been a surprise and a delight, but one can only assume it was an escapee. The somewhat mystifying decline of the Evening Grosbeak continued into its fifth winter, as an unprecedented low of 358 CBC birds were found. As recently as 1991 the figure stood at 5892, while counts during the 1980s on four occasions exceeded 8000 birds and only once dipped below 2000. However, readers did report a few feeder flocks of note: up to 54 in Reading (EJH,FMH), a maximum of 45 in Sheffield (PFW,SAW) and perhaps 25 in Barnard (JAK). Perhaps out of sympathy, the House Sparrow also went into retreat. A CBC tally of 6843 was down about 4000 from the prior year and was the second lowest total since 1979.



Snow Buntings

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NOTES ON THE DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD SPECIES

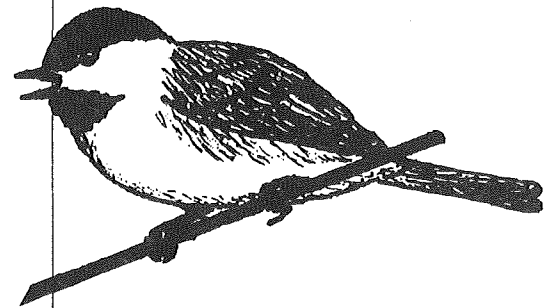
The Vermont Bird Records Committee (VBRC) emphasizes the importance of detailed, descriptive documentation of all rarities, rare nesting species or out-of-season species. It is frustrating for both the observer and the committee to have a tantalizing sighting of a rare species rejected for listing due to insufficient details.

The committee is anxious to involve all Vermont birders in producing as accurate a Vermont state list as possible. This list and all documentation must be credible to future ornithologists who will use the material for research.

In the field, writing down the salient points of identification, talking into a tape recorder, making a sketch or taking a photograph are ways to help with accurate recounting later.

The Rare Species Documentation (RSD) form is both for filing the reports and is intended as a guide for the information needed. After completing the first page, reporters may prefer to write the description of the bird on a separate sheet of paper while also checking the form for the details requested. The committee welcomes suggestions for improving the reporting and voting process.

Again, the VRBC expresses its thanks to all observers who have contributed valuable information to the Vermont state list.



The Vermont Institute of Natural Science is a nonprofit organization that recognizes scientific research and environmental education are the most effective ways to appreciate and protect the natural world. VINS members receive free admission to the Vermont Raptor Center, subscriptions to our natural history publications, privileges at the Olin S. Pettingill natural history library and discounts on nature programs, workshops, courses, field trips and items from our gift shops.

Vermont Christmas Counts 1996-1997

	Bernington 12/21/96	Brattleboro 12/21/96	Ferrisburg 12/21/96	Island Pond 12/21/96	Saxtons Riv 12/21/96	Winhall 12/21/96	Burlington 12/22/96	Champ Isl 12/22/96	Middlebury 12/22/96	Springfield 12/22/96	Woodstock 12/27/96	Crafts-Green 12/28/96	Plainfield 12/28/96	Rutland 12/29/96	Barnet 1/1/96	Han-Nwch 1/1/96	Total
Red-throated Loon			1														1
Common Loon			24	1			4	7									36
Pied-billed Grebe			1				1	1									3
Horned Grebe			81				16	11	1								109
Red-necked Grebe			1				1	3									5
Double-crested Cormorant			1														1
Great Blue Heron	1		4		1			2	1			1	cp				10
Mute Swan								2									2
Snow Goose			20				cp	112	7								139
Canada Goose	569		953		132		752	985	1645	56				115			5207
Wood Duck					2												2
Green-winged Teal								1									1
American Black Duck	18	2	76		38		165	105	25	3	15		3	27	30	11	518
Mallard	174	22	210		10		1199	640	33	20	2			98	39	106	2553
Northern Pintail			1														1
Mallard Hybrid							1			1						1	3
Canvasback									1								1
Redhead							4										4
Ring-necked Duck									2								2
Greater Scaup							322	1	74								397
Lesser Scaup								3									3
Oldsquaw			2					5	1								8
Black Scoter			2														2
Scoter sp.							16										16
White-winged Scoter			15						1								16
Common Goldeneye		22	180		2		626	1196	41	2						2	2071
Barrow's Goldeneye							1	1									2
Bufflehead			48		1		34	3	5								91
Hooded Merganser			6		3		22	18	20					4	5		78
Common Merganser	9	14	73		26		271	1188	1	18	2		3	8	18	86	1717
Red-breasted Merganser			15				2	2	1								20
Duck Sp.							6										6
Bald Eagle			9				1		4					cp		1	15
Northern Harrier			9				cp	2	9								20
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	cp	6		2		4	2	5	1	1		1	1	1	3	28
Cooper's Hawk	1	1	5		3		cp	2	4	1	1		1	1		1	21
Northern Goshawk	cp		1	2	2					1	1	1	2			1	11
Accipiter Sp.								1									1
Red-tailed Hawk	49	6	49		20	1	15	8	60	12	5	1	2	14	3	7	252
Rough-legged Hawk			30				2	2	9	1				3			47
Buteo Sp.								1									1
Hawk Sp.							2										2
American Kestrel			1						2								3
Merlin			2				1		1								4
Peregrine Falcon									2								2
Gyrfalcon			1														1
Gray Partridge								8									8
Ring-necked Pheasant								1	2								3
Ruffed Grouse	4		12	12	2	4	11	6	20	6	12	5	18	11	13	9	145
Wild Turkey	cp				37		20	41	35	10		11	46	cp	64		264
Northern Bobwhite			1														1
Bonaparte's Gull								16									16
Ring-billed Gull		1	385	1			656	145	53			2	7				1250
Herring Gull	2	44	769		25		188	120	6	5			1	1		52	1213
Iceland Gull																1	1
Glaucous Gull								3	1								4
Great Black-backed Gull		24	110		4		153	47	3	1						240	582
Gull Sp.							83	14									97
Rock Dove	1527	108	645	42	457	160	919	671	538	1297	400	277	331	685	333	659	9049
Mourning Dove	438	208	402	18	441	76	277	393	943	660	358	45	158	541	102	335	5395
Eastern Screech-Owl			3					1	1								5
Great Horned Owl	cp		1				2	2	2					1			8
Snowy Owl							cp										cp
Northern Hawk Owl									2								2

Vermont Christmas Counts 1996-1997

	Barnington 12/21/96	Brattleboro 12/21/96	Ferisburg 12/21/96	Island Pond 12/21/96	Saxtons Riv 12/21/96	Winhall 12/21/96	Burlington 12/22/96	Champ Isls 12/22/96	Middlebury 12/22/96	Springfield 12/22/96	Woodstock 12/21/96	Crafts-Green 12/28/96	Plainfield 12/28/96	Rutland 12/29/96	Barnet 1/1/96	Han-Nunch 1/1/96	Total
Barred Owl			1					1			2				cp	1	6
Long-eared Owl									1								1
Short-eared Owl			2						1								3
Northern Saw-whet Owl					1				1							1	3
Owl sp.			1														1
Belted Kingfisher	4	1		1	5	1	2	1					1	3	1		20
Red-headed Woodpecker									1								1
Red-bellied Woodpecker									cp					1			1
Downy Woodpecker	26	8	74	8	30	8	60	62	85	53	32	13	26	39	21	69	614
Hairy Woodpecker	12	5	18	10	8	7	21	25	25	18	19	13	40	12	28	36	297
Northern Flicker	4		2				4	1	8	2				1			22
Pileated Woodpecker	1	cp	10	2	2	1	13	4	6	4	4	3	5	7	3	4	69
Horned Lark		4	389		150				189								732
Gray Jay				5													5
Blue Jay	265	82	299	160	332	207	164	165	291	814	465	66	418	452	466	667	5313
American Crow	346	86	554	19	399	22	611	553	524	528	153	155	386	728	499	474	6037
Common Raven	4	4	12	21	4	5	7	4	11	30	10	11	40	7	20	6	196
Black-capped Chickadee	341	145	1020	394	639	343	611	554	609	1181	1481	584	1447	1023	594	1614	12580
Boreal Chickadee				26													26
Tufted Titmouse	25	21	18		41	3	69	9	15	63	21			24		40	349
Red-breasted Nuthatch		4	2	37	7	16	6	4	4	21	79	33	117	28	24	28	410
White-breasted Nuthatch	35	15	136	4	32	21	75	45	90	77	83	9	41	96	17	83	859
Brown Creeper	3		11	2	6	4	15	3	1	6	30	3	19	12	4	21	140
Carolina Wren									1								1
Winter Wren					1		1			1		1					4
Golden-crowned Kinglet		11	7	17	11	7	4		2	27	42	11	69	4	7	14	233
Ruby-crowned Kinglet													2				2
Eastern Bluebird	29	3	34						31	4							101
Hermil Thrush					1												1
American Robin	20		822			1	122	22	457	cp	1		1	2	1	1	1450
Gray Catbird										2							2
Northern Mockingbird	1	2	2		7				3	1				1		1	18
Bohemian Waxwing													3				3
Cedar Waxwing	51	34	423				79	111	1322	164			48	191		27	2450
Northern Shrike			4	3	1	1		1	1	1	1	7	3		2	4	29
European Starling	2748	138	2800	56	1331	67	1355	3065	4250	881	381	738	373	2151	193	470	20997
Solitary Vireo					1												1
Yellow-rumped Warbler			1				3										4
Northern Cardinal	49	16	42	3	42	2	66	32	48	65	20	5	18	62		56	526
Rufous-sided Towhee											1						1
American Tree Sparrow	167	19	425	4	81	5	75	157	435	84	6	24	85	85	47	97	1796
Chipping Sparrow		1	1														2
Field Sparrow					1												1
Song Sparrow	4	3	4		38		11	8	7	7	1			4		4	91
White-throated Sparrow	27	1	8		20				10	11	1	1	4	1	1	8	93
White-crowned Sparrow	1										1						2
Dark-eyed Junco	308	112	120	10	278	34	71	61	224	1001	173	19	66	91	39	321	2928
Lapland Longspur			17		1					16							34
Snow Bunting			43		25		20	20	12		1	8			20		149
Red-winged Blackbird	cp							6	3	cp				2			11
Eastern Meadowlark							4										4
Common Grackle			2				1			1				3			7
Brown-headed Cowbird	cp		13		2	2	cp	15	49	5		20			2	10	118
Pine Grosbeak	1									5				3			9
Purple Finch	19	3	253		12	2	79	40	112	19	19	5	142	59	24	9	797
House Finch	155	40	286		195	11	152	485	445	369	74	20	39	192	13	202	2678
Red Crossbill		cp				1					4		3				8
White-winged Crossbill				2							8	2	10	cp			22
Common Redpoll	13		2	2									20	2			39
Pine Siskin		116	417		44	37	113	85		216	17	69	425	133	133	115	1920
American Goldfinch	181	267	666	85	360	101	198	730	661	819	379	319	436	369	526	615	6712
Evening Grosbeak		cp		105		26		2		5	10	54	76	1	61	18	358
House Sparrow	322	134	872	17	806	17	441	865	799	586	207	195	184	792	159	447	6843
Finch sp.				12													12
TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	7955	1728	13969	1079	6122	1193	10230	12808	14313	9165	4523	2731	5123	8084	3512	6984	109619
TOTAL SPECIES	41	39	78	29	54	31	60	69	77	50	42	35	44	46	36	48	118