

THE CLEVELAND BIRD CALENDAR

Winter Number

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SUMMARY OF WEATHER CONDITIONS

From U. S. Weather Bureau Reports (Cleveland Hopkins Airport)

December - Total snowfall of 30.3 inches is the largest amount ever recorded for the month; almost 22 inches fell between the 6th and 12th. Temperatures averaged 3.5° below normal.

January - Snowfall of 12.1 inches was about 3 inches above normal. Temperatures averaged almost 10° below normal, and a reading of -19° on the morning of the 24th was the lowest ever recorded in the history of the local Weather Bureau.

February - Snowfall totaled 13.4 inches, about 3 inches above normal. Average temperature was 10.6° below normal. The average temperature for the three months was 20.5°, which is the coldest on record. There were 9 days in January and 7 in February when the minimum reading was zero or below.

All records, observations, and comments should be sent to Donald L. Newman, 14174 Superior Road, Cleveland 18, Ohio.

COMMENT ON THE SEASON

More About the Weather. Although the statistics shown on the preceding page give impressive evidence of the severity of the winter, they do not tell the whole story. For these statistics relate only to the Weather Bureau station at Cleveland Hopkins Airport, which is located on the lake plain in the westerly portion of the Cleveland region, whereas in the Appalachian Plateau area to the east and southeast - in Lake and Geauga Counties - the weather was even more severe. Thus between December 6-12, an estimated 50 to 60 inches of snow fell in portions of those counties. In Kirtland Hills Village, Lake County, where careful records have been maintained for many years, snowfall totaled 174 inches. Ground cover in December reached 41 inches and in January 38 inches, the deepest cover ever recorded there. On one-third of the days during the three winter months, the minimum temperature was below zero and on 14 nights the mercury fell to below -10° (Bole, Jr.).

Effects of Weather. Obviously the depth of the snow and the intensity and prolonged duration of the cold had an effect upon the wintering bird population. In an attempt to discover what the effect was, we posed four questions to our contributors, whose response was most gratifying. The following is a summary of their replies.

1) Bird Mortality? Three instances of death seemingly attributable to the cold were reported. In Willoughby two House Sparrows were found dead near a feeding station, and "Mrs. J. D. Halliday reported an [American] Goldfinch which died just short of her feeder, the marks of its wing beats being evident where it had come across the snow" (Pallister). On January 25, which was the day following the all-time low temperature of -19° , eight dead Starlings were found at one end of the Board of Education Building in downtown Cleveland, where thousands regularly roost at night. Several were on the ground, several lying on the stone ledges of the building, and two dangling by one foot from the treetops (Newman).

Evidence of the pronounced effect of intense cold upon some birds at the beginning of the day, when their heat-energy resources would be low, was provided by one observer who noted that "on extremely cold mornings the birds seemed slowed down, lethargic, and huddled miserably at the feeding stations, eating slowly" (Pallister). Another observer reported that "one morning when the temperature was down to -15° , a Mourning Dove was around for about ten minutes in an almost comatose state. However, after eating some feed we scattered, the dove revived" (Barbour).

2) Changes in Feeding Habits? There seemed to be little change in the accustomed feeding habits, either in the wild or at feeding stations. One instance of a change in diet was observed at a feeding station in Berea where "Tree Sparrows ate small amounts of fat" (Chambers). Also, two Cardinals were seen picking at "an old pork roast bone" at a feeding station in Broadview Heights (Smith).

With most sources of water frozen over, birds undoubtedly had difficulty in finding drinking water. Some of them apparently found snow an acceptable substitute. A perceptive daily observer in Waite Hill recorded the following species eating snow sometime during the winter: Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, a band of seven Cedar Waxwings, Cardinal, Tree Sparrow, and Song Sparrow (Flanigan); and at Painesville, Slate-colored Juncos (Booth).

3) Increase or Decrease in Numbers of Common Species? There was no appreciable change in the size of the population of common resident arboreal species, such as the Hairy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, & Tufted Titmouse. It was generally agreed, however, that the Tree Sparrow was considerably less numerous than in previous winters. One observer explained this decrease by pointing out that “the snow laid flat all standing weeds and then did not melt all winter so as to give those sparrows that feed on small seeds an opportunity to do so” (Barber).

A veteran bird-bander in Willoughby Hills reported he believed “that normal wintering birds such as Juncos and Tree Sparrows suffered some loss - perhaps 20% due to the cold. Birds banded in November are not here now and these two species are diminished in number at our feeding station” (Skaggs). Having spent much time afield in various localities in the eastern portion of the region, another observer declared that both Tree Sparrows and Song Sparrows “were down in numbers” (DeSante).

An insight into the effects of the severe winter weather on certain of the ground-feeding species in one locality was provided by an analytical observer living in LaGrange Township, Lorain County, on the Black River. He wrote as follows:

At the beginning of December we had typical maximum counts of 25 Tree Sparrows, 20 Juncos, and 10 Song Sparrows at the feeders. I estimate, however, that this represented only about 20% of the numbers of each species wintering in my immediate vicinity (perhaps one-half mile up and down river). Immediately after the snow [December 6] these species and others increased at the feeders, but by December 15 a definite decrease was noted. Typical maximum counts after this date were 8 Tree Sparrows, 5 Juncos, and 11 Song Sparrows. These figures alone could indicate a 60% to 75% reduction, but I believe that it was actually much greater than this, perhaps 90% for these three species, because almost all birds in the half-mile stretch up and down the river were concentrated at the feeder, whereas before the snow they had been almost evenly spread over the area. This situation prevailed until about February 15, when a definite increase in numbers was noted (Morse).

4) Changes in Composition of Feeding Station Populations? This question produced no consensus, for some observers had a greater number and greater variety of feeding station visitors while at other stations the opposite was true. At still other stations the population was quite stable and typical of prior winters.

Scarcity of Waterfowl. As a consequence of the early arrival of severe weather and the extensive icing of Lake Erie which followed, "waterfowl population fell to a new low" (Klamm). Along the lakefront at Cleveland the Common Goldeneye and Scaup "were the most abundant species, with only the Goldeneye being in wide distribution. Of the Scaup ducks, the Greater was the dominant species" (Klamm).

All three species of scoters were recorded, and a few Oldsquaws were observed throughout the winter. During the latter part of February several hundred Common Mergansers congregated at the warm water outlet of the Illuminating Company plant at Eastlake. On February 23 at Lorain an estimated 800 Canvasback were observed as compared with a mid-January figure of about 200 birds (Lebold). Thus this species seemed to hold to its customary pattern of a sizable late winter increase.

Even at warm-water fed Summit Lake in Akron, the wintering waterfowl population was only "about one-third of normal" (DeSante). The Pied-billed Grebe and the Coot were completely absent, though nine Gadwall were present in early February (Hjelmquist).

Gulls Greatly Diminished. Both at Cleveland and Lorain the numbers of Herring and of Ring-billed Gulls were quite low, notably so in December when they normally appear in thousands or, sometimes, in tens of thousands. Evidence of this relative scarcity is revealed in the following tabulation taken from a summary of Elyria Audubon Society Christmas Counts, which include the harbor at Lorain;

	<u>1958</u>	<u>1959</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1961</u>	<u>1962</u>
Herring Gull	670	371	15,264	20,000	110
Ring-billed Gull	108	4,943	30,830	61,000	750

Other Scarce Species. There were no records of the Common Loon, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Lapland Longspur. Just one Pied-billed Grebe was reported, and only four Horned Grebes. In January and February there were but two records of the Golden-crowned Kinglet, each of a single bird.

Except for the Pine Siskin, which was observed in fair numbers in five localities, the northern finches were almost completely absent. For the Evening Grosbeak there were just two records of a single bird each. The only reports of the Common Redpoll were from the Lower Shaker Lake in February, when six birds constituted the high count. Neither species of crossbill was recorded.

Hardy Visitors. Yet despite the severity of the winter, a few Yellow-shafted Flickers and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers spent the winter here as did a few White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows. These birds were of course largely dependent upon feeding stations for survival. Of interest, too, was the large number of Brown-headed Cowbirds which were present throughout December in many portions of the region. For example, 120 Cowbirds were recorded on the Lakewood Christmas Count on December 23. A few scattered individuals remained for the rest of the winter; however, as late as January 25 in the Elyria area, 71 birds were counted (P. Johnson).

Rough-legged Hawk Invasion. This winter produced the largest invasion of Rough-legged Hawks of any winter for which we have detailed records dating back to 1954-55, a total of at least nine birds was reported from seven localities. By comparison, none at all were rerecorded in the winters of 1956-57 and 1958-59. This hawk seemingly did not enter our region until winter was well advanced, for the first bird was not recorded until December 28. Many of the hawks stayed in a given area for a considerable time - in one case for almost seven weeks.

Influx of Robins. Beginning about January 17, Robins - chiefly, if not entirely males - moved into the region in modest numbers and apparently remained for the balance of the winter. At Holden Arboretum, where the largest flock was recorded comprising about 50 male birds, the Robins fed on crabapples and staghorn sumac seeds and even bathed in the water of an overflowing well when the thermometer read -15° (Bole, Jr.).

Signs of Spring. One certain sign of spring was observed in Lorain County on February 10, "when five instances of Horned Larks in what appeared to be mated pairs were found. In one case a courtship display was noted. After this date both flocks and pairs were found, but pairs were predominant" (Morse).

With the exception of the Common Crow, none of the traditional harbingers of spring - Canada Goose, Killdeer, etc. - appeared in late February. Had they done so, they would have been greeted by thermometer readings of -15° on the 26th and -10° on the 27th. The Crow, however, was on schedule, the first few migrants arriving about February 9. Returning birds were also recorded on the 18th, 23rd 26th, and 27th, but not in large numbers.

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS

Red-necked Grebe - Two birds were discovered on Summit Lake in Akron on February 2, and they were still there at the end of the month (DeSante).

Black-crowned Night Heron - A bird which was "nearly frozen but could not be caught" was observed in Lake County on January 3 (Bole, Jr.).

Peregrine Falcon - Pausing but momentarily in the top of a tall tree, a single bird swept in and then out of the spacious grounds of a residence in Painesville on December 15 (Booth).

Glaucous Gull - At East 72nd Street on the Cleveland lakefront, an immature bird was studied for about half an hour on February 16 as it sat on the ice feeding on an unidentified object, meanwhile taking care that nearby Herring Gulls did not intrude (DeSante). This, or another, bird was seen there again on February 25 (Raynes).

Iceland Gull - An immature bird was discovered in the midst of about 200 Herring Gulls at East 72nd Street on February 12 (DeSante).

Franklin's Gull - Two birds were recorded at Beach Cliff Park, Rocky River, on December 2 (Stasko).

Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker - At Hanging Rock Farm in Lake County, where this species has been observed before, a single bird was seen at a suet feeder on January 3 and 23 (Bole, Jr.).

Eastern Phoebe - An extraordinarily hardy bird, which was known to have been present in November 1962, was recorded between December 19 and January 17 in the Cuyahoga River valley at Botzum, Northampton Township, Summit County (Hjelmquist and Glassner). At first it was found near a little bridge but later at an old farmhouse, where it was seen to "catch some type of black flying insect that came from around the roof" (Hjelmquist). The only previous winter record is of a bird at North Chagrin Reservation on December 27, 1956.

Long-billed Marsh Wren - Late in November 1962, a single bird was observed in a cattail swamp at Columbia Station, where it was seen again on December 2, which is a new latest fall date of occurrence (Barber).

Mockingbird - To have three winter records is most unusual: one bird in Willoughby on December 30 (Pallister); one on January 17 in Willoughby Hills (Skaggs); and a "rather dark, dirty, tattered" bird which appeared at a backyard suet feeder in Warrensville Heights on January 26, after which it came daily through February 1, and then irregularly through February 14. (Rickard).

Bohemian Waxwing - A flock of about 30 birds was reported from Hanging Rock Farm in Lake County on January 2 (Bole, Jr.). This record and one from Holden Arboretum in March 1962 are the only records of occurrence since April 1944.

Northern Shrike - Two birds were reported: one in the vicinity of Beachwood and Pepper Pike Village from December 22 to January 30 (Raynes et al); and a "loudly singing" bird at the Lower Shaker Lake on January 3 (Tramer).

Pine Warbler - On December 1, an Indian-summer day, a single individual, in the company of Tree Sparrows and American Goldfinches., was observed in a small stand of evergreens in a scrub growth area in Mayfield Heights (Raynes). This is the first winter record for the Cleveland region.

Pine Grosbeak - An adult male appeared at a feeding station in Gates Mills on February 16 (Tramer).

Savannah Sparrow - Feeding stations were the sites of the first January and February records of occurrence in the history of the region: one bird, in Hunting Valley on January 27 (Swetland), and one in Willoughby on February 27 and 28 (Pallister).

Le Conte's Sparrow - On December 10 at a residence in LaGrange Township, Lorain County, an enfeebled bird was captured by Mrs. Robert J. Morse. Despite the care given it, the bird died two days later (Morse). It was then made into a study skin by Howard W. Martin, who found it was a female. The skin, which has been added to the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, was examined by Dr. Harry C. Oberholser, who confirmed the identification. Although there is one sight record for this species (April 29, 1962 in the Rocky River Reservation), this is the first specimen record for the Cleveland region.

Oregon Junco - (1) One bird was a quite regular visitor to a feeding station in Iradale, Summit County, beginning about December 6 and continuing through February. For a period of about two weeks, a second bird was present (Glassner). (2) In Chestnut Hill Cemetery, Cuyahoga Falls, a single bird was identified on February 2 (DeSante).

FIELD NOTES

House Sparrow Delouses Cowbird? In the backyard of our home in Mentor on December 30, we observed some rather puzzling behavior on the part of a female House Sparrow and a female Brown-headed Cowbird. The sparrow appeared to be delousing the cowbird, which was perched on a lower branch of a spruce tree. The sparrow was on the cowbird's back, plucking at the feathers on the head and neck. Then it hopped down the cowbird's back to work on its wings. All this time the cowbird remained motionless. Finally, after perhaps a minute or more, the cowbird shook its self free. Then the sparrow perched on the same branch a few inches away from the cowbird. The two sat there ignoring each other for a short time before the sparrow flew away. There was no indication that the cowbird was sick or incapacitated, as it flew away easily also; but it had sat in a perfectly normal pose while the sparrow moved up and down its back as though on a solid ramp. - WAYNE and HILDA HAMMOND

House Sparrows in Mortal Combat. On January 27, I was watching several Cardinals at the feeder in my backyard in Mayfield Heights, when suddenly two male House Sparrows whirled into the yard, struck the snow, tumbled about in it for a moment, and disappeared into a depression in the snow at the base of a tree. They remained hidden from view for a short time except for an occasional wing or tail which would flutter into sight. They reappeared and continued to tumble about in the snow, but at intervals flew upward to a height of from two to ten feet and then fell back again, sometimes breast to breast, sometimes with one atop the other.

The struggle continued for a period of about five minutes until one bird succeeded in forcing the other into the snow. From his superior position he repeatedly struck his opponent about the head and breast until the latter's struggles became very weak. The victor then flew to a nearby bush and perched for a moment, flew to a tree slightly farther away to perch momentarily again, and flew away. The vanquished bird fluttered weakly for a few moments and then ceased to move. About 45 minutes later I went out to examine the bird and found it already frozen stiff.

During the combat other House Sparrows paused briefly to watch on two occasions. On the second occasion, late in the struggle when the one bird was clearly being defeated, the attacking bird paused to rest for a moment whereupon one of the spectators hopped up and pecked at the injured bird several times before flying off. The rested bird then vigorously renewed his attack and did not stop until his opponent could no longer resist. - WILLIAM C. SNIDER

("The following is an excerpt from an editorial entitled "Sight Records" written by Dr. George A. Hall, editor of THE REDSTART, publication of the Brooks Bird Club, Inc. of Wheeling, West Virginia. This editorial appeared in the March 1961 issue, Volume XXVIII, No, 2) "The almost forgotten burlesque publication, THE UPSTART, always contained the statement, 'Send us your doubtful sight records'. There are times when the Editor of this or any other publication wonders if all his contributors are not indeed following that suggestion. In truth, scarcely an issue is prepared without there being some record or records about whose validity the Editor has some doubts. In this day and age when few ornithologists are collectors and when many enthusiastic amateurs are afield and are submitting records, it is inevitable that some erroneous reports will come to hand from time to time. There is seldom, if ever, any question about the honesty of the reporter; he sincerely believes the truth of his report, but he is also usually reluctant to admit that he can make a mistake. . . And yet honesty would force even the best of observers to admit that he sometimes made mistakes.

"An erroneous record in the private notebook of the birder does no harm but when it appears in print, serious damage may be done and the error may be perpetuated forever. A printed erroneous sight record of today will plague the compiler of local records in the future, just as a similar record from the past bothers us today. . .

"In highly doubtful cases it is always far better to leave the record buried in one's own field notes, and in ones own mind, rather than publish a possible erroneous record Often there is a tendency to publish a record for what it is worth." The answer to that is easy. An unsupported or undocumented sight record is worth exactly nothing."