

New York State Winter Waterfowl Count – January 14, 2012

Nine observers in five field parties participated in the 2012 Ulster County segment of the annual NYSOA New York State January Waterfowl Count on Saturday, 14 January, encountering a total of **8,874 individuals** of **9 species** during a 9.5-hour effort. This year's count was remarkable for the mild weather and extraordinary number of Canada Geese wintering throughout the county, vastly contributing to a potentially record high number of individual waterfowl, three times greater than last year's exceptionally low count of 2,940 and exceeding our previous 7-year range of 2,940-7,094 individuals/year. Species diversity was only slightly better than last year's dismal 8 species, and at the low end of our recent 8-17 species/year range and 13 species/year average.

An exceptionally mild season leading up to the count resulted in regionally widespread areas of open water with no snow or ice on agricultural fields and pastures. Temperatures dropped and remained at seasonally cold levels on count day, narrowly ranging from a low of 29° (F) at sunrise in Saugerties to an afternoon high of 32° (F) out on the Lomontville Flats in the Town of Hurley. Variable winds were at times pleasantly calm in a few sheltered inland areas, but more often very brisk with a biting cold wind-chill along exposed river and reservoir sites. Overcast skies were predominately cloudy throughout the day with only a few brief interludes of sunshine.

Major rivers, creeks, and reservoirs were entirely open; smaller ponds, marshes, and lakes ranged from mostly or partially open to completely frozen. The Wallkill River was flowing swiftly below the dam in Wallkill and the lower Esopus Creek below Ashokan Reservoir continued to suffer from exceptionally turbid (muddy) water and strong currents. Viewing conditions were not hampered by fog this year, and no precipitation was recorded during the count day.

Ashokan Reservoir was completely open but surprisingly devoid of waterfowl and eagles. Stone Ridge Pond on Mill Dam Road was entirely open but harbored a smaller diversity of waterfowl than we have come to expect, with below-average numbers of Canada Geese (375) and Mallards (150). Historically productive grazing pastures at Blue Chip Farm in southern Ulster County provided perplexing insight into the movement of large wintering flocks of Canada Geese. Large flocks of approximately 2,000 geese were reported in the farm pastures during the weeks leading up to count day, but Selden Spencer encountered only 900 during his morning survey, and Mark DeDea observed no geese during his afternoon drive-by, adding "I don't believe I have ever traveled through Bates Lane this time of year and not encountered a flock of decent enough size to warrant a scan."

Additional concentrations of the ubiquitous Canada Goose were encountered throughout the eastern half of the county, including flocks of 1,000 geese in the Hudson River just north of the Saugerties Lighthouse, 1,000+ in the Esopus Creek at Lake Katrine, another flock of 1,000 in a cornfield in Kingston, and 1,500+ scattered in several flocks along the Wallkill River in the southern half of the county, ultimately accounting for 8,137 individuals and 92% of all waterfowl observed on this year's count.

A molting male **Northern Shoveler** found by Mark DeDea and Peter Schoenberger on a small pond on Old Fort Road opposite Bates Lane at Blue Chip Farm is unusual for this count and may represent a first count record. Frank Murphy and Deb Ferguson identified a lone **Red-breasted Merganser** in the Hudson River from River Road in the Town of Esopus, and two separate reports of a lone **Snow Goose** at Blue Chip Farm is presumed to be one individual. Only three Bald Eagles were observed during this year's waterfowl count, in stark contrast to last year's remarkable 32, another indication of this year's exceptionally mild weather and abundance of open water to our north providing little imperative for migrant eagles to move south into our area. A single adult eagle observed from the Port Ewen Town Beach and an adult pair off Saugerties Lighthouse are likely resident breeding birds.

Additional non-waterfowl highlights include three Belted Kingfishers (one on Stone Ridge Pond, one flying under a drainage culvert along Hurley Mountain Road on the Lomontville Flats, and one at Spring Lake in Kingston); two Great Blue Herons (Stone Ridge Pond and The Great Vly WMA outflow in Saugerties); and a reappearance of an **Orange-crowned Warbler** originally found by Mark DeDea along North Street in East Kingston during the recent Ulster/Dutchess Christmas Bird Count.

The following table summarizes the Ulster County effort, including species and total number of individuals recorded by area, followed by field party and area descriptions. Thanks to all of the field observers for their effort once again this year in documenting Ulster County winter waterfowl.

Steve M. Chorvas – compiler

New York State Winter Waterfowl Count – 2012

Ulster County Area Summary

January 14, 2012

Total	Species	A	B	C	D	E	F	M
1*	Snow Goose				1	1		
8,177	Canada Goose	1,825	634	1,123	650	2,490	1,455	
17	Mute Swan	7	2	4	4			
207	American Black Duck	155	23		11		18	
193	Mallard	78	38	35	28		14	
6	<i>Mallard X Black</i>					6		
1	Northern Shoveler				1			
114	Common Goldeneye	52	1	29		6	26	
157	Common Merganser	42	28	69	6	10	2	
1	Red-breasted Merganser			1				
8,874	Total Individuals	2,159	726	1,261	701	2,513	1,515	
9	Total Species	6	6	6	7	5	5	

* Total number of Snow Geese adjusted down (-1) to reflect probable duplication by field parties D and E at Blue Chip Farm.

3A/OJ	Bald Eagle (Adult / Juvenile)	2A	0	1A	0	0	0	
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Field Parties, Effort and Area Descriptions (sector leaders are listed first)

Group A: Steve Chorvas, Alan Beebe (7:15 a.m.- 4:15 p.m.) 9.00 hours.

The Great Vly WMA; Hudson River- Bristol Beach State Park (Saugerties), Malden Park, Latham Circle, Saugerties Lighthouse, Falling Waters Preserve, Glasco Park; Esopus Creek- Glenerie Falls to confluence with Hudson River and Fording Place at Hurley; Lomontville cornfields and holding ponds; Stone Ridge Pond; Ashokan Reservoir (upper and lower basin, Esopus outflow); Sawerkill Creek at HITS, Kenozia Lake; Onteora Lake, Blue Mtn. Reservoir.

Group B: Mark DeDea, Peter Schoenberger (7:00 a.m.- 10:07 a.m.) 3.00 hours.

Hudson River- Ulster Landing County Park, Rider Park, Post Park, East Kingston, Kingston Point; Esopus Creek (Town of Ulster and Kingston); Interstate 587 pond.

Group C: Frank Murphy, Deb Ferguson (9:25 a.m.- 1:05 p.m., 4:10 p.m.- 4:30 p.m.) 4.00 hours.

Rondout Creek- Rosendale to Kingston waterfront, including East Strand; Sturgeon Pool; Hudson River- Sleightsburgh, Port Ewen Beach, Esopus Meadows. Rte. 209 cornfield in Kingston.

Group D: Mark DeDea, Peter Schoenberger (10:25 a.m.- 2:15 p.m.) 4.00 hours.

Hudson River- Lamont Landing and Mt. Saint Alphonsus (Esopus), Black Creek confluence (Winding Brook Road, Esopus), Mariner's Restaurant (Highland), Dock Street (Marlboro); Humpo Marsh and Harcourt Wildlife Sanctuary (New Paltz); Denniston Rd. (Gardiner), Sandhill Rd. (Shawangunk); Wallkill River - River Road. Libertyville Road cornfield, New Paltz.

Group E: Selden Spencer (9:30 a.m.- 1:15 a.m.) 3.75 hours.

Wallkill River- Wallkill north to Tillson; Shawangunk Creek; Rondout Creek- Rosendale; Watch Tower Farm, Blue Chip Farm.

Group F: Evelyn & Bob Rifenburg (9:15 a.m.- 3:33 p.m.) 6.25 hours.

Sawkill Creek (Zena to Lake Katrine); Kingston Reservoirs #1 and #4; Esopus Creek (Leggs Mills Rd bridge, Lake Katrine); Rondout Creek- Accord to High Falls; Bennekill Pond, and area fields.

M: Miscellaneous Reports (not covered by an organized group).