

New York State January Waterfowl Count – January 16-17, 2016

The 2016 Ulster County segment of the annual NYSOA New York State January Waterfowl Count was conducted on Saturday, 16 January (seven field parties) and Sunday, 17 January (one field party), under relatively mild temperatures and a largely snow and ice-free environment. Thirteen participants in eight field parties encountered a total of **5,105 individuals of 17 species** during an 8-hour effort. Waterfowl were well-represented this year, especially in comparison to typical past counts that featured low diversity and extensive frozen water and snow-covered grazing fields. County-wide diversity tied our previous record high counts tallied in 2013 and 2008, and abundance was just slightly below our ten-year average of 5,549 individuals/year.

Morning fog and a steady cold rain created challenging conditions early on Saturday, but improved considerably by late morning and afternoon. Overcast skies with occasional breaks of sunshine and relatively mild temperatures (36-45 degrees F) prevailed throughout the remainder of the count day. Sunday was ten degrees colder, with cloudy skies, no precipitation or fog. Visibility was hampered early Saturday morning along major river valleys, but the lack of bright sunlight later in the day provided better than normal viewing conditions for inland sites like Stone Ridge Pond, where the angle of afternoon sunlight typically compromises the view on this mid-winter survey.

Most bodies of water in the county were entirely free of ice or at least partially open, including shallow marshes that typically freeze solid by this time of the year. In severely cold winters, we typically encounter very few waterfowl and very little in the way of open habitat. Mild winters over the recent past decade usually result in expansive open water producing low numbers and diversity of waterfowl, likely due to a lack of a concentration component and overwintering birds remaining farther north and more widely dispersed throughout the region. This year's combination of a very mild start to the winter season, followed by more typical freezing conditions over the two weeks immediately preceding the count, apparently moved some waterfowl down into our area while also holding local birds in substantial open habitat.

Two locally rare or unusual species of geese were the outstanding highlights of our 2016 survey. A **Greater White-fronted Goose** grazing in a massive flock of Canada Geese on Blue Chip Farm was originally found by Mark DeDea on 22 November 2015, and has remained faithful to the horse pastures at Blue Chip Farm for nearly two months. On nearby Old Fort Road pond, one **Cackling Goose** was found among large numbers of Canada Geese, very likely one of two continuing birds originally reported from the Bates Lane/Old Fort Road area in early December 2015.

Additional highlights include two **Snow Geese** on Old Fort Road, a lone hen **Wood Duck** in the Hudson River off Post Park in the Town of Ulster, and a remarkable **sixteen Gadwall** on Stone Ridge Pond, previously recorded only once on this count as a single individual in 2013. New high counts (since 2003) were also established for **Ring-necked Duck** (29, eclipsing 10 in 2007), **Greater Scaup** (10, compared to one previous record of 3 in 2014), and **Bufflehead** (10, eclipsing 5 in 2007).

A lingering (or early) **Killdeer** and a flock of 55 **Horned Larks** were observed at Blue Chip Farm; three separate **Yellow-rumped Warblers** were encountered along the Hudson River in the Town of Ulster, three **Red-headed Woodpeckers** were detected in the Weston Road marsh on the Esopus/New Paltz town line, and a large and very vocal flock of 1,000+ blackbirds (mostly Common Grackles) were observed in tree tops and foraging out on the Hurley cornfields off Fording Place Road in Lomontville. A total of sixteen **Bald Eagles** (12 adults, 4 sub-adult) were observed by four of the eight field parties, three **Belted Kingfishers** (single birds found by three field parties), and three **Great Blue Herons** (also single birds found by three field parties) were noted during the course of the waterfowl census.

The following table summarizes the 2016 Ulster County results by territory, followed by field party effort and area descriptions. Thanks to all of the participants for their time and effort documenting Ulster County winter waterfowl. Next year's Ulster County segment of the NYSOA NYS January Waterfowl Count is scheduled for **Saturday, January 14, 2017**.

New York State January Waterfowl Count
Ulster County Area Summary - January 16-17, 2016

Total	Species	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	M
1	Greater White-fronted Goose					1			
2	Snow Goose					2			
3,884	Canada Goose	396	75	92	22	3,188	72	9	30
1	Cackling Goose					1			
8	Mute Swan	3			5				
1	Wood Duck		1						
16	Gadwall	16							
45	American Black Duck	5	2	5			13	20	
744	Mallard	349	34	47	182	26	61	18	27
29	Ring-necked Duck						26	3	
10	Greater Scaup	10							
10	Bufflehead								10
144	Common Goldeneye	34	28	67		2			13
20	Hooded Merganser	2	2	4		7	1	4	
180	Common Merganser	58	18	16	35	19	6	4	24
1	Red-breasted Merganser								1
2	Common Loon							2	
7	<i>Other/Unidentified</i>							7	
5,105	Total Individuals	873	160	231	244	3,246	179	67	105
17	Total Species	9	7	6	4	8	6	7	6

16	Bald Eagle (12 Adult / 4 Juvenile)	4A/1J	0	0	0	3A	1A	1A/3J	3A
-----------	------------------------------------	--------------	----------	----------	----------	-----------	-----------	--------------	-----------

Field Parties, Effort and Area Descriptions

Group A: Steve Chorvas (8:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m.) 8.00 hours / 80 miles.

The Great Vly WMA; Hudson River (Bristol Beach State Park, Malden Park, Latham Circle, Saugerties Lighthouse, Glasco Park); Esopus Creek (Glenerie Falls to confluence with Hudson River and Fording Place at Hurley); Plattekill Creek (Saugerties); Blue Mountain Reservoir; Sawerkill at HITS; Lomontville cornfields and holding ponds; Stone Ridge Pond; and area marshes.

Group B: Mark DeDea, Peter Schoenberger, Donna Seymour (7:30 a.m.- 10:25 p.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: Lin Fagan, Annie Mardiney (Sunday, January 17) (9:00 a.m.- 1:15 p.m.) 4.25 hours.

Rondout Creek (Rosendale to Kingston waterfront, including East Strand); Sturgeon Pool; New Salem Lake; Hudson River (Sleightsburgh, Port Ewen Beach).

Group D: Gerhard and Tracy Patsch (8:45 a.m.- 4:15 p.m.) 7.50 hours / 85 miles.

Hudson River- Lamont Landing (Esopus), Black Creek confluence (Winding Brook Road), Mariner's Restaurant (Highland), Dock Street (Marlboro); Black Creek, Humpo Marsh, Harcourt Wildlife Sanctuary, Weston Road Swamp (New Paltz); Chodikee Lake, Lily Lake (Highland); and area ponds.

Group E: Mark DeDea, Peter Schoenberger, Donna Seymour (10:45 a.m.-3:15 p.m.) 4.50 hours.

Wallkill River (Wallkill north to Tillson); Shawangunk Creek; Watch Tower Farm, Old Fort Rd. pond, Wallkill Prison grounds, Blue Chip Farm; and area fields; Springtown and Libertyville Road agricultural fields in New Paltz.

Group F: Jessica Prockup, Wendy Tocci (8:30 a.m.- 04:45 p.m.) 8.25 hours / 110 miles.

Cooper Lake, Spring Lake, Binnewater Lake, Williams Lake; Rondout Creek (Accord to High Falls and Napanoch); Sawkill Creek (Lake Katrine); Esopus Creek (Leggs Mills Rd bridge, Lake Katrine); Rondout Reservoir; Bennekil Pond; and area fields.

Group G: Dixon Onderdonk, Loren Quinby (1:15 p.m. - 4:35 p.m.) 3.25 hours.

Ashokan Reservoir (upper and lower basin, Esopus outflow); Kenozia Lake; Onteora Lake; Yankeetown Pond; Wilson SP.; Kingston Reservoirs #1 and #4; Sawkill Creek (Zena); Thorn Preserve field.

Group M: Arnold Meier (8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.) 6.00 hours.

Hudson River (Esopus Meadows and Mount Community); Spring House Pond (Mapleridge Community, Ulster Park).