

February Talk and Speaker

Conserving Grassland Birds in Agricultural Landscapes

Grassland birds show some of the most dramatic population declines in North America as a result of habitat loss and intensive agricultural management. Allan Strong has studied Bobolinks and Savannah Sparrows in the dairy country of Vermont's Champlain Valley since 2002. He will present some of his research results that have led to innovative conservation practices in the region that work to support grassland bird populations and maintain economic viability for landowners.

Allan Strong is a professor in the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Vermont. His research focuses on avian ecology and the factors that influence habitat quality. He has taught at the University of Vermont since 1999 after receiving his Ph.D. from Tulane University. He grew up in the Rochester area and he comes back regularly to visit his Dad (long-time RBA member, David Strong) and to bird.



December 2020 Sightings Report

December 2020 was a quiet month weather-wise, with only a continuing series of nuisance snows and no extremes in temperatures. Temperatures averaged 32.9 °F, 2.9° above normal. There were 3 days exceeding 50° for highs and 2 periods cooler than normal, December 6-8 and 15-19.

Precipitation totaled 2.31", 0.50" below normal, with 20 days with measurable precipitation. Snowfall totaled 10.5", 11.3" below normal. The maximum snowfall was 2.7", and snow depth 2". As seems typical in recent years, the Christmas Bird Counts were again all affected to some extent by weather issues from some precipitation to windy periods.

Species counts for these Christmas Bird Counts were back to average or above, in spite of the weather, waterfowl seasons open, COVID restrictions, and no countdown gatherings. The species total was 74 (76 with count week species) for Letchworth-Silver Lake, with 3 new high counts – Bald Eagle, Blue Jay, and American Crow. For the Rochester CBC it was 95 (108) species, with two new highs – Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Hermit Thrush, 2 tie highs – Northern Saw-whet Owl and Common Raven, and one tie cw – Black-legged Kittiwake – plus a new species, Swainson's Thrush, and a new cw species, Pine Warbler. Also the Rochester crow roost tally was less organized and only totaled 14,066 this year. Finally, the Conesus-Hemlock (Little Lakes) CBC tallied 83 (83) species, with 4 new highs – Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Tufted Titmouse, White-crowned Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco.

Again, all the expected waterfowl for the season were reported, but in generally low to modest numbers, as can be seen in the Noteworthy Records table on the RBA website. High numbers were noted for Snow Goose, Canada Goose, Mallard, and Redhead, but generally on only one or a very few dates. Rarer ducks were only King Eider and Harlequin Duck in the area at or just east of Braddock Bay. Mute Swan numbers were high at several locations, but the other swan species low. Again, Long-tailed Duck flocks were noted on Lake Ontario off Greece, but in numbers lower than some recent years. Redheads were again numerous on Conesus Lake and Ring-necked Ducks on Hemlock Lake. Merganser numbers were relatively low. Grebes were scarce, but Brad Carlson counted 118 Red-necked Grebes off Hamlin Beach State Park on the 14th,

high historically but down a bit for very recent years. Sandhill Crane numbers into early winter continue to climb, with the maximum 138 in the Northern Montezuma Wildlife Management Area (NMWMA) in our region and 9 noted in the Taylor Marsh area.

As usual, shorebird reports were scarce, with only a Killdeer showing up on the barrier island in Braddock Bay late in the month, Purple Sandpipers there and at Point Breeze, and Wilson's Snipe at 2 locations. Two more surprises in this part of the list were a **Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird** photographed at a feeder near Sodus and a Sora in Mendon Ponds Park mid-month. With the bays and ponds varying in ice cover through the month, the location of gull gatherings moved about, and generally numbers were relatively low. Surprises were a first winter Black-legged Kittiwake seen on the docks at the Newport Marina and sites nearby on the 18th-19th and an adult Little Gull from Turning Point Park to the Genesee River mouth on the 18th. The usual winter visitor gulls—Iceland, Lesser Black-backed, and Glaucous—were present at a few locations in low numbers. Though there were a couple of decent Red-throated Loon counts, loon reports were low. The bird of the season was a regional 1st and state 5th adult male **Anhinga** found in Churchville Park on Black Creek and first photographed by Pam Inzinna on December 13, and then seen and photographed by many through the 18th. Lingering Double-crested Cormorant counts ranged to 32 at the Newport Marina through month's end.

Turkey Vultures and diurnal raptor records were also on the low side. A rare-in-winter Golden Eagle was reported from the Honeoye Lake Inlet Wildlife Management Area, Bald Eagle numbers were good, Cooper's Hawk reports again outnumbered Sharp-shinned Hawk by more than 5:1, there were no Northern Goshawk reports, and only 3 Red-shouldered Hawk reports, and Rough-legged Hawks were relatively scarce. Among the owls, at least for the RCBC, the count for Eastern Screech-Owl seemed surprisingly good for a morning with light snow and rain and

low effort. Only about 3 Snowy Owls were reported, and none lingered long. The annual, DEC Short-eared Owl surveys reported good numbers this month at several sites. A Long-eared Owl and two Northern Saw-whet Owls were found in the Owl Woods area, and another saw-whet was heard on the RCBC at Frisbee Hill Park. There were no Red-headed Woodpecker reports, but ~40 reports for Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Finally, numbers of individuals and different locations were good for all 3 of our regular falcon species.

Among the passerines, species variety was very good; essentially all of the half-hardy lingering species were located, many in good numbers. All cannot be noted in these short notes, but the Noteworthy Records table has a good sampling with some numbers. We can start with another contestant for bird of the season, with a **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** netted and banded at Braddock Bay Bird Observatory with photos, audio recording, and a feather sent out for DNA analysis to support this record late occurrence. Moving on, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was record late and Ruby-crowned Kinglet unusual this late with 2 reports. A **Swainson's Thrush** on the RCBC is a regional record late report. Brown Thrasher, Fox Sparrow, and Pine Warbler are rarely reported in winter. Numbers of reports for Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, and White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows were high. Marsh Wren; Gray Catbird; Chipping, Field, Vesper, and Savannah Sparrows; Rusty Blackbird; and Common Yellowthroat are often missing. Add to this a lingering winter finch winter, with all species continuing to be reported, though numbers down quite a bit from earlier for most species. The rarest of that group, Hoary Redpoll, was reported at 3 sites, frequently on the Braddock Bay barrier island. Interestingly, blackbird numbers were generally low, especially for Common Grackle.

This month's eBird download reflected the numbers of lingering half-hardy birds, noted also in the past 2 months, and produced a large rebound from last December's low total to 24,222 records, almost double last year's download. Clearly, a part of this is the continuing input of non-breeding-bird data through the NY Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) eBird portal; a positive for overall bird records, but a negative in terms of the records review that will be needed to sort out real BBA data.

Please send your reports by the 5th of the month to Andrea Patterson, 144 Greystone Lane, #24, Rochester, NY 14618.

Bob Spahn and the RBA Records Committee

	2020	2019	10-year Average (2010-2019)
Species for December	147	125	132.0
New for the year	2	3	1.3
Total for the year	297	295	291.7

Observers: Jim Adams, Janet Akin, Cynthia Barlow, Ted Barnett, Carolyn & Jerry Barnhart, Jim Barry, Mitchell Barry, Sue Barth, Douglas Bassett, Will Baxter-Bray, BBBO (Andrea Patterson), BBRR owl counter, Doug Beattie, Don Belmont, Linda Clark Benedict, Mike Bergin, Lynn Bergmeyer, Barry Bermudez, Chris Bertola, John Boettcher, Terry Bohling, Lynn Braband, Joe Brin, Kyle Brock, Logan Brunner, Robert Buckert, Sara Burch, Bruce Cady, Brad Carlson, Gary Chapin, Douglas Carpenter, Tom Cerdillo, Kelly Close, Jeremy Collison, Doug Daniels, Willie D'Anna, Gregg Dashnau, Peter Debes, Joe Fell, George Ford, Jim Fry, Kyle Gage, Andy Garland, Janis George, Jessica George, Candy Giles, Bill Gillette, Christopher Goetz, John Gordinier, Sheryl Gracewski, Jay Greenberg, Kevin Griffith, Michael Gullo, Andrew Guthrie, Chris Guthrie, Helen & Chris Haller, Kim Hartquist, Jim & Allison Healy, Christina Hoh, Debi Holt, Dick Horsey, Bill Howe, Alec Humann, IBA Monitoring, Bella Inigo-Payne, Pam Inzinna, Nancy Jameson, Alyssa Johnson, Jordan Juzdowski, Nicholas Kachala, Laura & Paul Kammermeier, Hayden Keene, David Kennedy, Bernie Kester, Josh Ketry, Jim Kimball, Cindy Kindle, Kathy Kirsch, Renee Kittleman, Hans Kunze, Karl Kunze, Greg Lawrence, Tim Lenz, Joan & Vern Lindberg, Peggy Mabb, Bill Maier, Cindy Marino, Pat Martin, Donna Mason-Spier, Lauri Mattle, Jacob McCartney, Daniel McDermott, Kevin McGann, Jay McGowan, Chita McKinney, Ann McMican, Matthew Medler, Jim Miles, Kent Millham, Adrielle Mitchell, Mike Morgante, Celeste Morien, Brian & Brooke Morse, Linda Mott, Leah Mould, Allen Nash, Ann Nash, Tom Nash, Dave Odell, Tom & Susan O'Donnell, Erma Perkins, Mike Peters, Norma Platt, Jo Popma, Jay Powell, Bill Purcell, RBA Field Trips, Susan Roberts, Neal Reilly, Rosemary Reilly, Bruce Robinson, Susan Roberts, Wade & Melissa Rowley, Carole & Jim Rudman, Robert Ryan, Kevin Rybczynski, Jackie Salisbury, Karl Schmidt, Erin Shannon, Shirley Shaw, Dominic Sherony, Judy Slein, Roger Smith, Tom & Pat Smith, Cathy Spahn, Robert & Susan Spahn, Dave Spier, Nancy Sprague, Chris Stanger, Rick Stevens, David Strong, David Tetlow, Mike & Joann Tetlow, Eunice Thein, John Thomas, Brian Tuttle, Nathan Ukens, Jeanne & Tom Verhulst, Jules Wagner, Mike Wasilco, Bridget Watts, Drew Weber, David Wheeler, Kinsley Whittum, Joe Wing, Jim Wood, Rochester Young Birders, and nearly 300 additional eBird observers.

(Editor's Corner, continued)

7. Become an educator, ambassador, and advocate for insect conservation.
8. Get involved in local politics, support science, and vote.

*Kawahara, Akito Y, Reeves, Lawrence E., Barber, Jesse R. and Black, Scott H. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 2021 Vol. 118 No. 2 e2002547117. This article and all the others in the special section are open access. They can be viewed and downloaded freely at <https://www.pnas.org/content/118/2>.



The Churchville Park **Anhinga** with a fish. Photo by Jay Greenberg.



The Churchville Park **Anhinga** about to enter the water. Photo by Jay Greenberg.

Rochester, NY Area Christmas Bird Count Summary 2020

	Letchworth-Silver Lake	Rochester	Conesus-Hemlock	
	Dec. 19, 2020	Dec. 20, 2020	Dec. 26, 2020	Total
Cackling Goose	4	cw		4
Canada Goose	4,255	3,653	1431	9,339
Mute Swan		483		483
Trumpeter Swan		3		3
Tundra Swan		6	44	50
Gadwall		29	8	37
Northern Shoveler		19	3	22
American Wigeon	3	1		4
American Black Duck	54	49	176	279
Mallard	93	1,603	397	2,093
Northern Pintail			1	1
Green-winged Teal		2		2
Canvasback		cw	6	6
Redhead	8	25	2,533	2,566
Ring-necked Duck	10	1	365	376
Greater Scaup		1	12	13
Lesser Scaup	6	52	11	69
King Eider		cw		cw
Harlequin Duck		cw		cw
Surf Scoter		2		2
White-winged Scoter		63		63
Black Scoter		1		1
Long-tailed Duck		1,455		1,455
Bufflehead	22	17	118	157
Common Goldeneye	34	110	526	670
Hooded Merganser	6	36	100	142
Common Merganser	19	73	28	120
Red-breasted Merganser		357		357

Rochester, NY Area Christmas Bird Count Summary 2020 (continued)				
	Letchworth- Silver Lake	Rochester	Conesus- Hemlock	
	Dec. 19, 2020	Dec. 20, 2020	Dec. 26, 2020	Total
Ruddy Duck	1	cw	2	3
Ring-necked Pheasant	1			1
Ruffed Grouse			1	1
Wild Turkey	35	9	31	75
Red-throated Loon		5		5
Common Loon	2	4	2	8
Pied-billed Grebe		1		1
Red-necked Grebe		3	1	4
Double-crested Cormorant	1	38		39
Great Blue Heron	1	8	2	12
Turkey Vulture			3	12
Bald Eagle	12	7	5	24
Northern Harrier	7	cw	10	17
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	4	1	8
Cooper's Hawk	5	10	7	22
Red-tailed Hawk	60	35	57	152
Rough-legged Hawk	1		2	3
American Coot		30		30
Killdeer	cw			cw
Sandhill Crane			9	9
Black-legged Kittiwake		cw		cw
Little Gull		cw		cw
Bonaparte's Gull		52		52
Ring-billed Gull	125	5,282	340	5,747
Herring Gull	7	2,285	48	2,340
Iceland Gull		1		1
Lesser Black-backed Gull		cw		cw
Glaucous Gull		1		1
Great Black-backed Gull		47	1	48
Rock Pigeon	567	1,408	222	2,197
Mourning Dove	607	249	230	1,086
Eastern Screech-Owl	3	62	9	74
Great Horned Owl	1	4		5
Snowy Owl		cw		cw
Barred Owl	1	1		2
Short-eared Owl	3		6	9
Northern Saw-whet Owl		1		1
Belted Kingfisher	2	3	1	6
Red-bellied Woodpecker	52	164	59	275
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2	3	4	9
Downy Woodpecker	75	145	110	330
Hairy Woodpecker	24	47	22	93
Northern Flicker	12	38	19	69
Pileated Woodpecker	8	17	6	31
American Kestrel	1	2	4	7
Merlin	cw	7	1	8
Peregrine Falcon		4	1	5
Northern Shrike		cw		cw
Blue Jay	317	289	334	940
American Crow	2,801	16,349	331	19,481

Rochester, NY Area Christmas Bird Count Summary 2020 (continued)				
	Letchworth- Silver Lake	Rochester	Conesus- Hemlock	
	Dec. 19, 2020	Dec. 20, 2020	Dec. 26, 2020	Total
Fish Crow		6		6
Common Raven	7	4	8	19
Horned Lark	222		3	225
Black-capped Chickadee	262	503	535	1,300
Tufted Titmouse	78	104	147	329
Red-breasted Nuthatch	10	31	15	56
White-breasted Nuthatch	108	105	124	337
Brown Creeper	7	12	2	21
Winter Wren		12	3	15
Carolina Wren	8	17	24	49
Golden-crowned Kinglet	5	2	4	11
Eastern Bluebird	15	31	70	116
Swainson's Thrush		1		1
Hermit Thrush		14	2	16
American Robin	113	1975	21	2,109
Gray Catbird		2		2
Northern Mockingbird	7	16	6	29
European Starling	4,583	6,288	1,982	12,853
Cedar Waxwing	23	22	33	78
Common Yellowthroat			1	1
Pine Warbler		cw		cw
Yellow-rumped Warbler		11	1	12
Lapland Longspur	1			1
Snow Bunting	291	7	30	328
American Tree Sparrow	148	147	268	563
Field Sparrow			1	1
Vesper Sparrow			1	1
Savannah Sparrow	1			1
Fox Sparrow		cw		cw
Song Sparrow	36	29	45	110
Swamp Sparrow	1	4	5	10
White-throated Sparrow	36	83	40	159
White-crowned Sparrow	38	24	11	73
Dark-eyed (S-c) Junco	649	279	434	1,362
Northern Cardinal	82	362	225	669
Red-winged Blackbird	51	382		433
Rusty Blackbird			1	1
Common Grackle	3	1		4
Brown-headed Cowbird	64		7	71
House Finch	32	102	59	193
Purple Finch		6		6
Common Redpoll	62	68	302	432
Hoary Redpoll		cw		cw
Pine Siskin	23	15		38
American Goldfinch	186	151	196	533
House Sparrow	442	1,579	276	2,297
Total Individuals (count day)	16,845	47,029	12,522	76,396
Total species (count day)	74	95	83	114
Total species (incl. count week)	76	108	83	124

Bold number indicates new high or low count