



Take a Second Look  
42 Baker Avenue  
Lexington, MA 02173

*Look for shorebird/heron census dates this summer and fall. (Announcement soon.)*

## Winter Season Summary

Over the first thirteen years of the TASL project we canceled a total of two or three censuses due to bad weather. This year, between January 9 and February 27, we canceled at least three times!

My friend Craig Jackson, in Costa Rica for two years on a Peace Corps assignment, wrote earlier in the winter asking what conditions here had been like. He was a co-founder of TASL censuses and had always insisted that we go out regardless of weather. He had apparently been hearing, from his tropical station, about the outrageous winter we had been experiencing and *wanted to find out if we would cancel!* So I started a chronology of events--or non-events--to send him.

This is how it went:

**Sunday, November 14:** Census in 70 degree weather. Not many birds (except Red-breasted Mergansers); we said everything was still coming.

**Early December:** the usual high counts of eider did not show up. 3000-4000 were seen off Winthrop, compared to 10,000 plus in typical years.

**Sunday, December 19:** Greater Boston Christmas Count. Rainy, snowy, raw day; lots of species; counts low.

**Sunday, January 9:** First scheduled census of 1994. Bad snow storm on Saturday, dumping 16 inches on Boston, made censusing impossible. *Canceled.*

**Sunday, January 23:** Rescheduled census. One and a half weeks of extreme cold (0 to 10F) culminated in 12-inch snow-storm on Tuesday the 18th; howling winds, poor visibility and bad driving conditions on the weekend. Police in Hull, claiming 40 inches of snow already on the ground, discouraged Polly Stevens and Company from showing up for TASL count. *Canceled.*

**Sunday, February 13:** Second scheduled census of the year. Sleet and fog. Two 10-inch snow-storms on Wednesday and Friday added to the drifts. Mimi Murphy scouted Hough's Neck mid-week and reported there was no way to stop at most of the census spots or to look over the immense piles of snow into the harbor. Also, there was nothing to be seen--the inner harbor was frozen. She would not go on Sunday. My threats did not change her mind; nor that of a number of other parties. *Canceled.*

Pat Randall and Peter and Fay Vale covered a lot of Winthrop and sent in reports for that day. Inside Winthrop Harbor a flock of 1900 Greater Scaup surrounded Snake Island, dwarfing any other single scaup flock seen on TASL counts of the last 8 years. On the ocean side of Winthrop Pat could not find much to report. Too much snow piled up; too much ice at the shoreline.

Scott Bickerton and I also toured Winthrop and Revere Beach that day. We estimated the scaup flock off Snake Island at 1500. Also, off Deer Island, we saw an enormous congregation of Common Eider way off in the Presidents' Roads (shipping channel to the inner harbor). We estimated about 5000 birds in one flock; one or two thousand more were seen in other scattered flocks in the outer harbor. At Point of Pines, Revere Beach, a Snowy Owl floated about on an ice chunk and harassed large flocks of black ducks.

**Thursday, February 17:** Maury Hall observed the same gigantic eider flocks off Deer island; estimated over

6000 in one flock.

**Saturday, February 19:** Harbor Wildlife Cruise sponsored by Friends of Boston Harbor Islands and the MDC. A beautiful, mild day, promising the end of winter. I saw the same enormous eider flocks off Deer Island and scattered among the outer islands. Close to a dozen Red-necked Grebes flying around Gallup and Lovell's Islands also promised the beginning of spring migration. Four Black Guillemots were seen way out close to Boston Light. Also, from Boston Light looking back toward Boston, a herd of 61 Harbor Seals were seen hauled out on one of the Brewster Islands

**Sunday, February 27:** Last chance for a mid-winter census. Finally made it; all areas covered, but many of the regular censusers could not go. Extreme bad conditions: very windy and cold; visibility poor.

No access to Deer Island. (MWRA claimed that conditions were so bad on the island that large pieces of construction equipment were falling down into mudholes or getting stuck in snow-drifts. They simply could not risk problems with civilians driving regular vehicles on the island.) Large flock of eider off Deer Island NOT seen on February 27--only 147 seen from Winthrop, 480 from Long Island. The 1400 seen from Hull probably were some of the birds scattered in the islands, but what happened to the big Deer Island group?

On March 5, looking from Winthrop, I estimated 2100 eider off Winthrop and Deer Island. But many could have been hidden behind Deer Island.

Also, the big Greater Scaup flock around Snake Island was not there on February 27--only 280 or so counted.

**Sunday, March 13:** A windy, cloudy day, with good visibility. The final census of the winter seemed to settle the Common Eider question at least: There were the same large flocks among the islands and off Deer Island and Long Island as there had been since January. They did not actually disappear at the end of February--they just could not be seen due to the conditions. Maury Hall estimated that 9000 eider were in and around the harbor throughout January and February.

Brant and American Black Duck numbers rebounded to their November levels, and new migrants such as Northern Pintail, Ring-necked Duck, and Killdeer were seen. At long last the winter appeared to be truly over.

*Soheil Zende*

## Compiler's Note

The table (bottom of next page) lists the commoner harbor bird species, comparing their 1993-94 TASL counts to long-term averages.

Most species showed 50 to 70% or more decline in February. This is not surprising as during that period a large part of the southern harbor was frozen. Cormorants, however, with a decline of over 95%, are obviously in a special case. Most of our winter cormorants are Greats, which typically feed in deeper waters outside the harbor, so the freeze may not have affected them as much as other factors. We have been watching Great Cormorant numbers declining for almost a decade (see

*Continued next page*

# 1993-94 Boston Harbor TASL Census Totals

SPECIES	11/14/93	2/27/94	3/13/94
RED-THROATED LOON	57		11
COMMON LOON	10	3	8
LOON (sp)		1	
HORNED GREBE	349	20	76
RED-NECKED GREBE	14	2	23
GREAT CORMORANT	15	1	6
DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT	211		
CORMORANT (sp)	83	1	
GREAT BLUE HERON	30		
MUTE SWAN	4	1	4
BRANT	1476	630	1777
CANADA GOOSE	44	53	120
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	3		
AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	1397	474	1351
MALLARD	102	170	141
NORTHERN PINTAIL			1
RING-NECKED DUCK			2
GREATER SCAUP	127	285	656
COMMON EIDER	264	3625	7993
KING EIDER			
OLDSQUAW			2
BLACK SCOTER	2		15
SURF SCOTER	443	223	135
WHITE-WINGED SCOTER	392	432	192
COMMON GOLDENEYE	478	531	1221
BUFFLEHEAD	2114	758	1331
HOODED MERGANSER	7	1	
COMMON MERGANSER			2
RED-BREASTED MERGANSER	2496	460	1096
NORTHERN HARRIER	1	1	
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK	1		
COOPER'S HAWK	1		1
RED-TAILED HAWK	1		1
AMERICAN KESTREL	2	1	
MERLIN	1		1
PEREGRINE			2
BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER	66		
SEMIPALMATED PLOVER	1		
KILLDEER	1		5
GREATER YELLOWLEGS	22		
RUDDY TURNSTONE	9		
SANDERLING	113	2	180
PURPLE SANDPIPER	301	23	91
DUNLIN	33	125	120
LAUGHING GULL	4		
COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL	3	5	4
BONAPARTE'S GULL	394		2
ICELAND GULL		1	1
GLAUCOUS GULL			1
BLACK GUILLEMOT			2
SNOWY OWL		1	4
EASTERN PHOEBE	1		
HORNED LARK	218	22	10
LAPLAND LONGSPUR	2		
SNOW BUNTING	102	28	61
COMMON REDPOLL	3		
HARBOR SEAL	17	3	
RED BAT	1		
WEATHER	Sun AM/cldy	Clr/blowing snow	Cldy
WIND	SW 10 mph	WNW 15-40 mph	SE 15-20 mph
TEMP	71F	5-10F	35-40F
HI TIDE	10:45 AM	11:56 AM	01:00 PM

## Participants:

**Nabant:** Steve Ells, Todd Ongaro, Marge Rines, Sherri Smith, Bob Stymeist  
**Winthrop:** Wayne Barron, Jane Nalwalk, Pat Randall, Tina Robbellard, Ed Sullivan, Faye & Peter Vale  
**Boston:** Jim Barton, Scott Bickerton, Chris Ellison, Mike Fager, Beth Finch, Mike Flamang, Kathy Foley, Jim & Matthew Powers, Janet Wojciechowski, Soheil Zendehe  
**Squantum:** Ronnie Donovan, Steve Ells, Paul Fitzgerald, Mark Jordan, Dave Lange  
**Hough's Neck:** Jim Barton, Fred Bouchard, Mimi Murphy, Michelle Parham, Betsy Peterson, Dave Petrie  
**Hingham:** Fred Bouchard, Kent Griffis, Maury Hall, Betsy Sims  
**Hull:** Fred Bouchard, Ted Mara, Dennis Oliver, Polly Stevens, Craig Walker  
*Thanks to all the participants, and our apologies to anyone whose name was inadvertently left off this list.*



*TASL (Take Second Look) is organized and staffed entirely by volunteers. For more information please call Maury Hall, data compiler (268-7571), or Soheil Zendehe (863-2392H, 923-0941W). TASL News is produced by Soheil Zendehe.*

## Compiler's Note (Continued)

TASL News 1/91).

Loons and grebes have been increasing for a couple of years and, except for the freeze-out, increased again this year; Horned Grebe showed no change in March, however.

Greater Scaup decreased greatly last year and this. But the February count did not include a flock of almost 2000 off Winthrop seen through a couple of weeks of February. If we include that flock in the counts, the February number was just average.

Purple Sandpiper has some people worried. This winter, especially, they were hard to find in their usual coastal haunts, and the numbers bear out that impression.

Bonaparte's Gulls were low in November. They usually are gone by February anyway.

Maury Hall  
Soheil Zendehe

SPECIES	Nov '93 vs early winter averages	Feb '94 vs mid-winter averages	Mar '94 vs Mar averages
Horned Grebe	+118%	-64%	no change
Loons & other grebes	+179	-25	+147
Cormorants	-11	-97	-98
Brant	+11	-60	-8
Canada Goose	-19	-63	+224
Am Black Duck	-14	-77	+22
Gr Scaup	-84	-86	-57
Com Eider	-95	-19	+64
Scoters	+40	+187	+185
Com Goldeneye	+5	-56	+57
Bufflehead	+8	-53	-3
RB Merganser	+47	-52	-21
Purple Sand	+234	-77	-43
Bonaparte's Gull	-37	-99	none