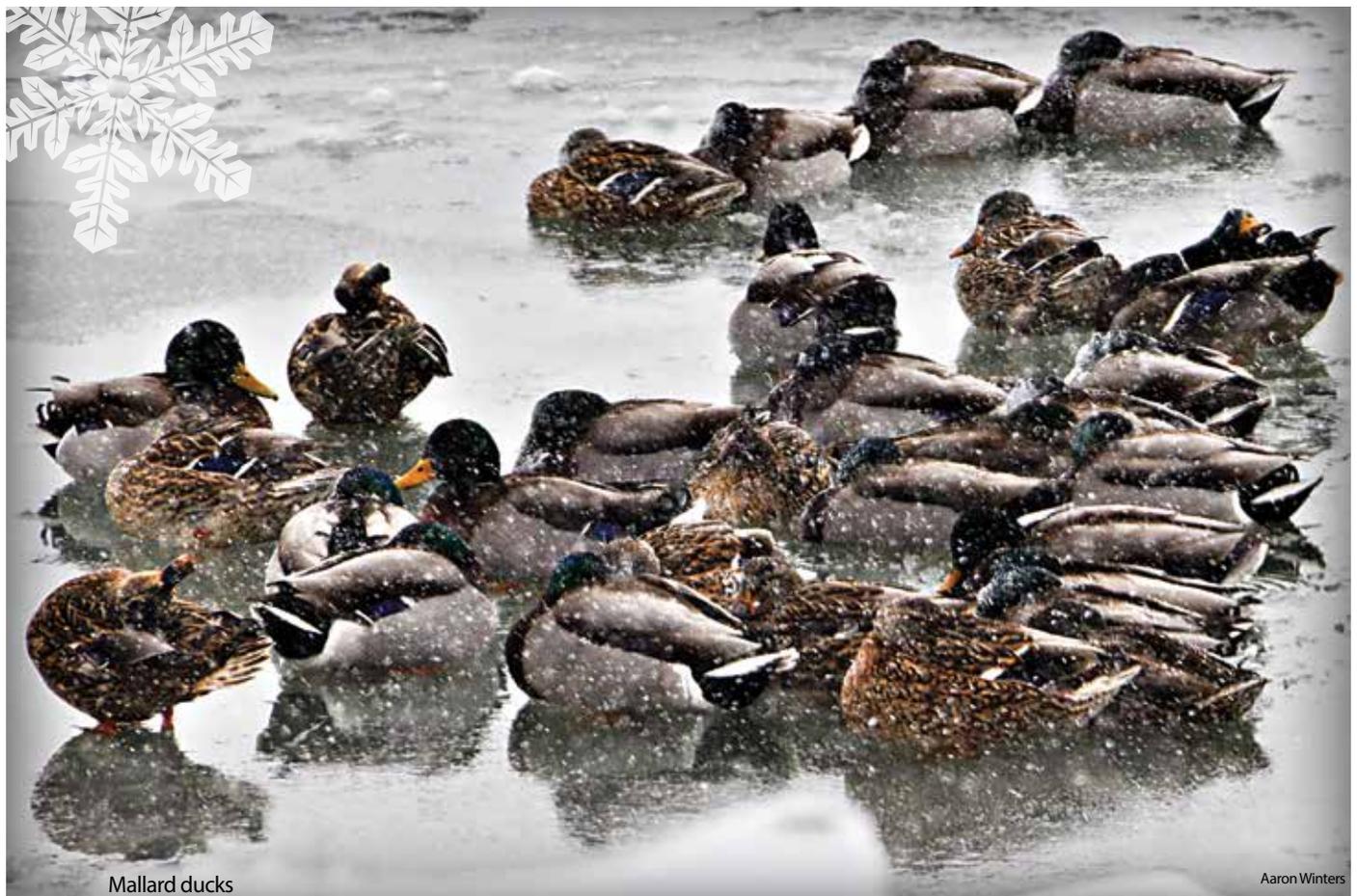


Wintering Waterfowl



Mallard ducks

Aaron Winters

Text by Jeremy Taylor

Cardinals, blue jays, chickadees—these songbirds are probably what pops into most peoples’ minds when they think of winter birds in New York. However, there is another group of birds that call New York home during the winter: waterfowl.

While some waterfowl migrate south for the winter, many others seek out areas of open water, at times forming large gatherings in these ice-free zones. Some are year-round residents of the state, while others breed further to the north, heading south for a “milder” New York winter.

The largest concentrations of waterfowl are found in Lakes Erie and Ontario, portions of the Finger Lakes, and in the NYC/Long Island area, but you can find wintering waterfowl wherever there is water that does not freeze. This can range from rivers to larger lakes, as well as the nearshore waters around Long Island. In a particularly severe winter with limited open water, there tends to be higher concentrations of birds in the sites that do remain open.

Winter birders can view a wide variety of waterfowl species. According to the

2014 survey by the New York State Ornithological Association, Canada goose, brant, gadwall, American black duck, mallard, canvasback, redhead, ring-necked duck, greater scaup, white-winged surf scoter, long-tailed duck, bufflehead, common goldeneye, three species of merganser (hooded, common, red-breasted), and ruddy ducks were some of the most commonly observed species.

An avid birder since childhood, **Jeremy Taylor** is editor of *Conservationist for Kids*.

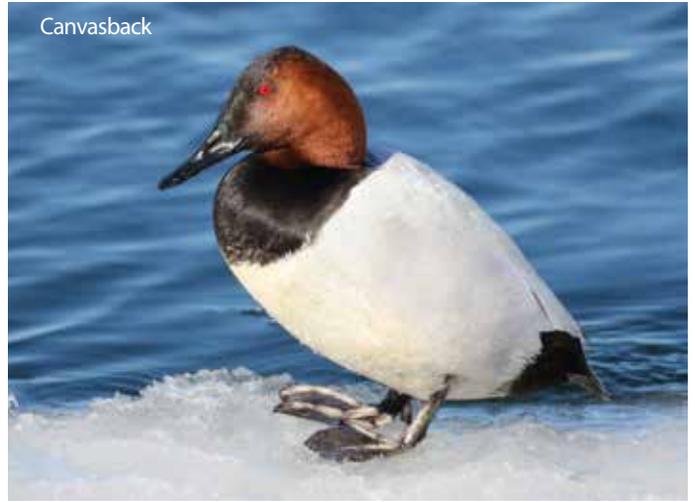
Scott Kruitbosch

Long-tailed duck



Laurie Dirks

Canvasback



Aaron Winters

Common goldeneye



Jeff Nadler

Ring-necked duck



Laurie Dirks

Red-throated loon



Although technically not waterfowl, loons can also be found in open waters in winter.







Winter Waterfowl Viewing

No matter where you live in New York State, there's a nearby location where you can reliably view wintering waterfowl. Here's just a sampling of locations and the types of species you might expect to see.

Great Lakes Seaway Trail: Beginning on the Ohio/Pennsylvania border and ending in Rooseveltown, St. Lawrence Co., the Great Lakes Seaway Trail has many locations along the route where numerous species of wintering waterfowl can be observed. Popular locations include the Dunkirk Harbor area of eastern Lake Erie, the Niagara River region, along Lake Ontario (Braddock Bay, Sodus Bay, and Henderson Bay), and along the St. Lawrence River. These areas are also known for large gatherings of wintering gulls. For more information, visit www.seawaytrail.com.

The Finger Lakes: While portions of the Finger Lakes in central New York do freeze over, there are parts of the larger lakes (Canandaigua, Cayuga, Keuka and Seneca) that typically remain ice-free, attracting hundreds of thousands of birds. Visitors might spot: snow geese, tundra swans, canvasbacks, ring-necked ducks, redhead ducks, hooded mergansers, American wigeon and common goldeneye.

Lake Champlain: The Lake Champlain region is a popular stopover for many species of waterfowl during their spring and fall migrations, and the portions that remain ice-free attract a wide variety of wintering waterfowl. Several notable locations include Ausable Marsh Wildlife Management

Area, Crown Point Boat Launch Area, Cumberland Head, Essex Ferry Terminal, Lake Champlain Bridge, the mouth of the Saranac River, Port Henry Boat Launch, Port Kent Ferry Terminal, Westport Boat Launch, Whallon Bay and Wilcox Docks. Commonly observed species include common merganser, bufflehead, common goldeneye, hooded merganser, mallard, black duck and greater and lesser scaup. Learn more at www.lakechamplainregion.com.

NYC/Long Island: One of the best places to see wintering waterfowl in New York is Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, part of the Gateway National Recreation Area. Located within New York City, the refuge covers more than 9,000 acres, and is a great place for spotting birds such as snow geese, lesser and greater scaup, ruddy duck, ring-necked duck, green-winged teal, northern pintail, American wigeon and gadwall.

The shores of Long Island are some of the few places in New York where you can regularly see wintering sea ducks, including common eider, harlequin duck (rare), surf scoter, white-winged scoter, black scoter, oldsquaw, bufflehead and common goldeneye. Other commonly observed species include brant, mute and tundra swans, American black duck, mallard and red-breasted merganser. Some of the best locations on Long Island for observing wintering waterfowl are Montauk Point, Oyster Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Cold Spring Harbor State Park, Fire Island National Seashore, a number of North Fork locations, and Great Peconic Bay.

Male wood ducks



Winter Survey

Since 1955, member groups of the New York State Ornithological Association (NYSOA) have conducted a winter waterfowl survey throughout New York (with the exception of the years 1968-72). Most years, the survey tallies more than a quarter million birds. DEC relies on this survey as one of the sources of data for long-term population monitoring. Additionally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducts annual mid-winter waterfowl surveys to better understand the population trends of species that nest in the Arctic. Data from these surveys is used to help determine waterfowl hunting season dates and bag limits.

If you are interested in participating in a winter waterfowl survey, check out NYSOA's website, <http://nybirds.org>.

