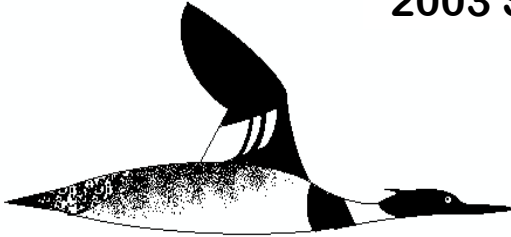


# Cape Cod Lake & Pond Waterfowl Survey

## 2003 SUMMARY



The 21<sup>st</sup> annual Cape Cod Lake and Pond Waterfowl Survey was conducted on the weekend of December 6-7, 2003. For the first time in two decades, horrendous weather conditions prevailed throughout the weekend and severely impacted the survey results. A strong Northeaster struck late Friday night and lingered through Sunday, bringing snow, rain and gale force winds, and making it nearly impossible to access some areas, much less see what birds might have been present. Anticipating the storm, a fortunate few got out on Friday (12/5) to cover their ponds, while a few others waited until Monday (12/8). Additionally, although November was milder than normal, a sharp cold snap the first week in December caused many of the smaller ponds to freeze, with the result that 118 ponds (almost 40%) were iced over. In contrast to last year, water levels were quite high.

The severe weather prevented some observers from getting out at all and a number of ponds were not covered this year. Thirty-eight observers, the fewest since 1993, surveyed 298 ponds, the fewest since 1989. The total of 9,044 individuals was — surprisingly, given the limited coverage — not the lowest ever; in fact, it was only the fourth lowest total over the 20 years of the survey. Presumably, had the coverage been more complete, the overall total would have been fairly close to normal.

Given the miserable conditions and reduced coverage, it's difficult to draw any meaningful

conclusions from this year's results. As would be expected, most species were found in below average numbers, but it is difficult to determine to what degree this reflects the reduced coverage versus the actual number of birds. On the other hand, for any species that were found in above average numbers, we can be quite certain that local populations were, indeed, up this year.

### RESULTS BY SPECIES

Remarkably, after 20 years, two species never before recorded on this survey were found this year: **Brant** and **Barrow's Goldeneye**, both found by Dennis Wiehe in Falmouth. Thirty-one Brant were on Great Pond, a salt pond on Nantucket Sound (and thus not too surprising). The Barrow's Goldeneye was on Salt Pond, just a stone's throw from a stretch of Nantucket Sound where several Barrow's have been wintering recently.

**Pied-billed Grebes**, totaling just 11 birds, established yet another record low, some 87% below average. This continues a sharp five-year decline from their peak of 204 birds in 1998. Weather conditions likely made this inconspicuous species harder to detect, but even if some were missed, the low total is still disturbing.

**Gadwall**, at just 26 individuals, were at their lowest level since 1986, though some of their favored ponds were among those not covered this year. This species has declined steadily on this survey since peaking in 1995.

**American Black Ducks** totaled a record low 653 birds, 52% below average.

**Northern Pintail** numbered just five individuals, tying the record low.

Only one **Canvasback** was found, a record low, though a couple of ponds that sometimes host this species were not covered this year.

**Ring-necked Ducks** provided one of the few bright spots, with 410 birds (73% above average) constituting the second highest total in this 20-year survey.

**Common Goldeneye** totaled 73 birds, a record low, though several of this species' favored ponds were not covered this year.

**Common Merganser** was down considerably from last year's record high (912), but 535 individuals was still the second highest ever.

**Red-breasted Mergansers**, at 461 birds, were 115% above normal.

**American Coots** were almost non-existent, for the third straight year, with a meager 7 birds some 95% below the survey average.

Scaup (both species combined = 2548 birds; 94% of these were on just one pond) were again the most numerous birds on the survey, followed by Mallard (1580 birds), and Bufflehead (1264). These four species comprised 60% of the overall total. The most widespread species were Mallard, occurring on 94 ponds (52% of the non-frozen ponds), and Bufflehead on 62 (34%) ponds.

## RESULTS BY TOWN

As always, Falmouth out-distanced all other towns, this year by an even wider margin than usual, with 4068 birds or 45% of the Capewide



total. No other town recorded more than a thousand birds. The best variety was also in Falmouth, where 18 species were found, followed by Barnstable and Sandwich with 14 species each.

## RESULTS BY POND

An average of 30 birds/pond was recorded, though if the frozen ponds are eliminated, the average jumps to 50 birds/open pond. Of the 180 open ponds, 44 (24%) had no birds at all. Salt Pond in Falmouth traditionally harbors a large flock of scaup and thus usually hosts the largest number of birds. However, this year the scaup had temporarily moved to Little Pond in Falmouth, which had 2501 birds (28% of the survey total), 2400 (96%) of which were scaup. Salt Pond came in a distant second with 481 birds. However, Salt Pond, along with Lover's Lake in Chatham, had the best variety with 10 species each, followed by Great Pond and Herring Pond, both in Eastham, with 9 species each.

## PARTICIPATION

At least 38 people took part in this year's survey. Many thanks to each and every one, with special kudos to those who soldiered on through the miserable weekend weather!

### *Participants*

Ron Ayotte, Matt Bailey, John Berg, Carl Bergfors, Sally Branch, Keith Brunell, Frank Caruso, Dick Comeau, Molly Cornell, Marlene Denessen, Mike Dettrey, Linda & Ken Duffy, Don Dyer, Nathan Dyer, Judy Gordon, George Gove, Seward Highley, Dick Jurkowski, Gemma Matthews, Kathy & Rives McGinley, Tom Noonan, Ginie Page, Alida Pellegrini-Toole, John Toole, John Redfern, Alison Robb, Don Scott, Diane Silverstein, Dick Stacey, Betsy Stepney, Beth Schwartzman, Jim Talin, Aurele Thomas, Lou Turner, Dennis Wiehe, and Ellie Winslow.

If you would like additional copies of this summary, send a large S.A.S.E. to the compiler:  
**Blair Nikula, 2 Gilbert Lane, Harwich Port, MA 02646**

## 2003 Cape Cod Lake and Pond Waterfowl Survey

### Results by Town

Species	BOURNE	FALMOUTH	SANDWICH	MASHPEE	BARNSTABLE	YARMOUTH	DENNIS	BREWSTER	HARWICH	CHATHAM	ORLEANS	EASTHAM	WELLFLEET	TRURO	PROVINCETOWN	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL	# OF PONDS
Pied-billed Grebe	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	11	0.1	11
Canada Goose	0	116	145	0	197	21	43	6	0	38	11	38	0	0	0	615	6.8	41
Brant	0	31	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	0.3	1
Mute Swan	2	20	9	3	7	45	7	0	4	13	10	4	0	0	0	124	1.4	27
Wood Duck	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	0.1	3
Gadwall	0	0	6	0	16	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	0.3	7
American Wigeon	12	3	3	0	8	0	0	0	0	3	2	55	0	0	0	86	1.0	8
Black Duck	12	92	4	71	36	13	56	5	6	26	146	186	0	0	0	653	7.2	55
Mallard	6	290	179	19	433	85	67	59	57	69	103	192	0	21	0	1580	17.5	82
Northern Shoveler	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0.0	1
Northern Pintail	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0.1	2
Green-winged Teal	0	2	22	0	0	0	0	0	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	32	0.4	4
Canvasback	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.0	4
Ring-necked Duck	0	44	116	0	116	0	0	0	2	41	11	36	0	44	0	410	4.5	19
Greater Scaup	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0.2	5
Lesser Scaup	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	4
scaup species	0	2527	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2533	28.0	13
Bufflehead	4	325	87	280	57	298	66	22	20	10	42	52	0	1	0	1264	14.0	64
Common Goldeneye	0	14	1	0	0	0	0	3	53	0	0	2	0	0	0	73	0.8	20
Barrow's Goldeneye	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.0	1
Hooded Merganser	0	197	11	6	82	13	0	6	19	18	50	144	0	0	0	546	6.0	46
Common Merganser	0	12	203	0	0	0	0	12	290	0	0	2	16	0	0	535	5.9	17
Red-breasted Merganser	0	418	0	0	0	2	32	3	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	461	5.1	20
Ruddy Duck	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	26	0.3	3
American Coot	0	3	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	7	0.1	5
<b>TOTAL NUMBER</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>4100</b>	<b>788</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>977</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9044</b>		
% of Total	0	45	9	4	11	5	3	1	5	3	4	8	0	1	0			
Number of Species	5	18	14	5	14	8	8	8	13	11	10	11	1	4	0	23		
Number of Ponds Censused	11	36	18	10	44	20	20	21	27	30	29	11	19	2	0	298		
Birds per Pond	3	114	44	38	22	24	14	6	17	8	13	67	1	34	NA	30		
Number of Observers	2	11	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	4	1	1	1	0	38		