

## REGION 5 – ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

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The December temperature was 28.7°F, just 0.1° above the average, and the 2.84” of precipitation was 0.28” below normal. It was a cold January, with an average temperature of 18.8°, 3.9° below normal, with a stretch of 22 consecutive days when the thermometer failed to reach 32°. There was only 1.42” of precipitation, 1.18” below average. In February the average temperature was 21.6°, 2.8° below normal, and there was 2.58” of precipitation, 0.46” above normal. In the Adirondacks, Gary Lee reported zero degree or below temperatures on 33 days, above freezing weather on only seven days, and snow, sleet or rain on 40 days during the period.

The official snowfall total of 121”, as recorded at the Syracuse Airport, was low compared to most areas in the Region. The higher elevations to the south received heavy snow from several coastal storms and the snowbelt north of Oneida Lake was pummeled by lake effect snow. The first 11 days of December were very cold, with 25” of snow. In our southern highlands, lakes were frozen by 10 December. The weather moderated for the rest of the month although it rained on 14-15 December, the first two days of CBCs, and 10” of snow on Christmas day were unpleasant. Oneida Lake was just about iced over by 2 January and the only waters not frozen by the middle of January were small portions of the Oswego and Mohawk rivers and Onondaga Lake. A cold winter pattern developed on 12 January, resulting in strong winds and lake effect snow through 20 January. A flood gate on the Seneca River in Baldwinsville collapsed on 18 January, allowing a swifter flow through the Seneca and Oswego rivers, which may have contributed to the large number of gulls feeding at dams on the river. Oswego Harbor was frozen from 25 January through 20 February, and as the season ended many areas still had 2-3 feet of snow on the ground. There was little evidence of spring migration.

No loons were reported after mid January and there was only one Red-necked Grebe until the upper Great Lakes froze in late February. The only comparable winter numbers were from 1994 under similar circumstances. The usual handful of Turkey Vultures wintered in the Dewitt area, although observers reported that they were not easy to locate this year.

Fair Haven hosted a **Ross's Goose**, several Trumpeter Swans and two Barrow's Goldeneyes at times. Another Barrow's Goldeneye was on Lake Ontario. Waterfowl numbers dropped rapidly by mid January as much of the Lake Ontario shoreline froze, although that may have contributed to an increase in White-winged Scoter sightings on the Oswego River.

As a result of the deep snow, there were few wintering Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls were not reported after December. Rough-legged Hawk numbers were quite good, especially in the Mexico-Richland area, despite the snow. There was one Golden Eagle and several Merlins and Peregrine Falcons. Snowy Owl was found at two inland locations.

There were two shorebird species for the season, both unexpected. Two **Purple Sandpipers** at Fair Haven were a first for January, while two Red Phalaropes spent much of December near an outflow at Oswego Harbor. Bonaparte's Gulls lingered into January, while Iceland, Lesser Black-backed and Glaucous gulls could be found along the Oswego River in January and February.

American Robins, European Starlings and Cedar Waxwings all fed on a bumper crop of European buckthorn fruit. A record number of Gray Catbirds were found and Eastern Bluebirds persisted through the season. Other unusual species included **Eastern Phoebe**, Winter Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Chipping, Field and Fox sparrows and Rusty Blackbird. Horned Larks and Snow Buntings remained through the season but Lapland Longspurs were scarce. Given the good fruit crop, it was surprising that Yellow-rumped Warbler was missed.

Throughout most of the Region, it was a very poor winter for finches. Purple Finch and American Goldfinch were common in the Adirondacks but quite scarce elsewhere. A few Evening Grosbeaks showed up in February, first in Old Forge and, at the end of the season, in southern Madison County. House Finch, in small numbers, was the only other finch reported.

Finally, there was the possible **Northern Hawk Owl** reported near Canastota in Madison County. There were three secondhand reports and one first person report on a birding listserv as well as another secondhand report communicated to me. The only written report I received would be unlikely to pass review by the NYSARC, but the person who at least took the trouble to submit it knew that the details were sketchy, given that the bird was seen at last light. Many other observers who would have submitted reports spent many hours searching the area but did not find the owl. Since Northern Hawk Owl is a NYSARC review species and no reports have been submitted, it is not in the species account. However, in this era of the Internet I do feel something should be said in *The Kingbird*, since there is already some public record concerning the owl.

For the season, a total of 118 species was found, lower than recent years and

more in line with totals from other severe winters. The highlights were **Ross's Goose**, Trumpeter Swan, Barrow's Goldeneye, **Purple Sandpiper**, Red Phalarope, **Eastern Phoebe**, Gray Catbird and Fox Sparrow.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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## ABBREVIATIONS

Bvllc – Baldwinsville; CM – Clay Marsh; FH – Fair Haven, Little Sodus Bay and vicinity; HIWMA – Howland I WMA; LOL – L Ontario Littoral; OneiL – Oneida L; OnonL – Onondaga L; SFWS – Spring Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, Paris; SSSP – Selkirk Shores SP; SVB – Sylvan and Verona Beach; Syr – Syracuse.

### LOONS – DUCKS

**Red-throated Loon:** max 7 FH 12 Dec; Oswego to 12 Jan.  
**Com. Loon:** 2 FH 12 Dec; 1-2 Oswego to 12 Jan; Skaneateles L 12 Jan; low numbers.  
**Pied-billed Grebe:** on small mill pond W. Eaton 8 Jan; 2 Bvllc & 2 Fulton thru.  
**Horned Grebe:** max 10 Dempster Beach 5 Jan; OnonL 25 Jan, partial breeding plumage.  
**Red-necked Grebe:** Oswego 12 Jan; 9 Phoenix 28 Feb, result of upper Great Lakes freezing.  
**Double-crested Cormorant:** max 32 Oswego R 12 Jan; OnonL Jan-Feb, front lower mandible broken off but seemed to be able to feed itself.  
**Great Blue Heron:** several Oswego R thru; Sangerfield 31 Dec; Oneida 14 Jan; T Western 3 Feb.  
**Turkey Vulture:** 1-3 Fayetteville-Dewitt area thru, seen irregularly, as in recent years; Cazenovia 27 Feb.  
**Snow Goose:** 2 FH 11 Dec, 1 white & 1 blue morph.  
**ROSS'S GOOSE:** FH 8-12 Jan (TC, KM ph, mob).  
**Canada Goose:** Limekiln L outlet 8

Jan; max 3500 FH 12 Jan.  
**Mute Swan:** singles FH & Bvllc; 2 Bridgeport 14 Jan.  
**Tundra Swan:** max 36 FH 13 Dec; 14 OnonL 12 Jan, 2 Bridgeport 14 Jan, 7 Phoenix 19 Jan, all late.  
**Trumpeter Swan:** 2 FH most of Dec (mob).  
**Wood Duck:** Fulton 23 Dec; max 4 New Hartford 15 Jan; CM 19 Jan.  
**Gadwall:** max 33 Oswego 12 Jan.  
**Am. Wigeon:** max 6 FH to 1 Jan; none after 5 Jan.  
**Am. Black Duck:** max 120 OnonL 12 Jan; 100 Sherrill 14 Jan, good inland count.  
**Mallard:** 500 Vernon 14 Jan.  
**N. Pintail:** FH to 5 Jan, only report.  
**Green-winged Teal:** 3 Syr to 12 Jan; last Phoenix 17 Jan.  
**Canvasback:** Skaneateles L 12 Jan; 3 Oswego 19 Jan; only reports.  
**Redhead:** max 52 Skaneateles L 12 Jan.  
**Ring-necked Duck:** max 364 Skaneateles L 12 Jan; 2 Oswego & 2 FH 19 Jan, unusual LOL after early Jan.

**Greater Scaup:** max 310 Oswego 19 Jan.  
**Lesser Scaup:** max 22 Oswego 19 Jan.  
**Surf Scoter:** Oswego 28 Dec, only report.  
**White-winged Scoter:** max 49 LOL 12 Jan; 10-12/day Oswego R Jan-Feb, due to L Ontario near-shore ice.  
**Black Scoter:** FH 20 Dec; 2 off SSSP 5-12 Jan.  
**Long-tailed Duck:** max 1200 LOL 5 Jan.  
**Bufflehead:** max 120 Oswego 19 Jan.  
**Com. Goldeneye:** max 330 FH 19 Jan.  
**Barrow's Goldeneye:** 2 males FH 13 Dec (GP); male LOL off SSSP 5 Jan (KM).  
**Hooded Merganser:** max 52 Bville 8 Dec & Fulton 15 Dec; to 25/day Oswego R thru Jan falling to 10/day in Feb.  
**Com. Merganser:** max 2100 OnonL 25 Jan.  
**Red-breasted Merganser:** max 600 SVB 7 Dec.  
**Ruddy Duck:** FH 10 Dec; FH 10 Jan; Oswego 26 Feb.

#### HAWKS – ALCIDS

**Bald Eagle:** max 7 Phoenix 16 Feb, usually 3-5/day Oswego R after mid Jan freeze-up; 2 Big Moose thru; Cross L 10 Jan; Poland 21 Jan; Mohawk R to mid Jan.  
**N. Harrier:** 2 OnonL 14 Dec; Cross L 10 Jan; OnonL 25 Jan; Canastota 22 Jan; N. Chittenango 6 Feb; typical low numbers with heavy snowfall.  
**N. Goshawk:** max 3 New Woodstock CBC 15 Dec; singles at 4 other locations.  
**Red-tailed Hawk:** max 21 Richland 16 Feb.  
**Rough-legged Hawk:** max 21 Richland-Mexico 1 Feb & 20 along same route 16 Feb; small concentrations SW MAD1, Griffiss AFB, Sangerfield, Verona.  
**Golden Eagle:** SW MAD1 15-18 Dec (MY).

**Merlin:** Liverpool 14 Dec; Van Buren sporadic Jan-Feb; none Onondaga P Syr where 1-2 had wintered since 1991.

**Peregrine Falcon:** Syr after 16 Dec; ad & imm Oswego various times after 30 Dec, Georgetown 5 Jan (DW, ph), unusual site.

**Wild Turkey:** max 140 Orwell 1 Feb; large flocks on manure spreads as deep snow brought them out of woods.

**Am. Coot:** max 4 Bville 12 Jan; 2 Oswego 12 Jan.

**PURPLE SANDPIPER:** 2 FH 15 Jan (DN), first Jan record and remarkable given that there was little open water.

**Red Phalarope:** 2 Oswego 10-26 Dec, first Dec report since 1977.

**Bonaparte's Gull:** max 6 Oswego 21 Dec; last LOL 11 Jan.

**Herring Gull:** max 1900 Oswego R 2 Feb.

**Iceland Gull:** 3-4/day Oswego R after Dec, all 1st winter plumage.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull:** 2 ad & 1 imm Oswego R Jan-Feb.

**Glaucous Gull:** ad Oswego 12 Jan; up to 3 1st winter Oswego R Feb; fewer reports than Iceland.

**Great Black-backed Gull:** max 750 Oswego 2 Feb.

#### DOVES – WOODPECKERS

**Mourning Dove:** max 122 CM 14 Dec; 120 Fulton 2 Feb.

**E. Screech-Owl:** on eggs SFWS 9 Feb (MP), early, later predated upon.

**Snowy Owl:** 1-2 Fenner after 5 Jan; Sauquoit after 12 Feb.

**Short-eared Owl:** 3 Sterling thru Dec; Caughdenoy 5 Dec; DeRuyter 29 Dec; none Jan, driven out by deep snow.

**N. Saw-whet Owl:** found dead Old Forge 20 Feb.

**Belted Kingfisher:** 6 reports in Jan & 5 in Feb, possibly concentrated by lack of open water.

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:** Green Lakes SP 14 Dec; HIWMA 1 Jan.

**N. Flicker:** up to 8/day to 14 Jan; 1/day after.

## **FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS**

**EASTERN PHOEBE:** Elbridge 1 Jan (Lois Needham), 4th winter record.

**N. Shrike:** reports from about 14 sites, 3-4 persistent thru.

**Blue Jay:** large numbers Tug Hill, but seemingly normal elsewhere.

**Am. Crow:** numbers down on CBCs, West Nile Virus suspected, but weather and count methodology may be factors as well.

**Fish Crow:** 2 Syr Jan-Feb.

**Com. Raven:** DeRuyter 9 Jan; Williamstown 15 Jan; Nine Mile Pt 30 Jan; Fenner 9 Feb; regular Old Forge.

**Horned Lark:** max 310 Skaneateles 25 Jan.

**Tufted Titmouse:** numbers down on CBCs from previous year's record but still good.

**Red-breasted Nuthatch:** few on CBCs outside breeding areas.

**Carolina Wren:** remains strong in lower elevations; Hannibal 15 Dec, unexpected site; wintering at Georgetown feeder at 1700', out of range.

**Winter Wren:** Oneida 19 Dec, only report.

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** SFWS 1 Dec; Syr 14 Dec.

**E. Bluebird:** many reports of 2-8 thru season, sustained by good fruit crop, but even in less productive years this species seems to be wintering farther north.

**Hermit Thrush:** FH 10 Jan (KM, GP).

**Am. Robin:** max 700 Skaneateles 4 Jan; 15-30/day not uncommon in Feb; despite deep snow able to winter on European buckthorn fruits; Williamstown 13 Jan, out of expected range.

**Gray Catbird:** CM 4 Dec; SFWS to 10 Dec; 3 Syr 14 Dec; Oswego 15 Dec; Camillus 4 Jan; Manlius Center 1 Feb and 2 there 16 Feb; record winter count.

**European Starling:** max 14,500 Marcellus 4 Jan.

**Cedar Waxwing:** max 422 CM 28 Feb; widespread, eating buckthorn fruit.

## **WARBLERS**

None.

## **TANAGERS – WEAVERS**

**Am. Tree Sparrow:** max 100 Camillus 4 Jan; to 70/day SFWS Jan-Feb.

**Chipping Sparrow:** DeRuyter 15 Dec; SFWS to 20 Jan.

**Field Sparrow:** New Harford 14 Dec; N. Syr 1 Jan.

**Fox Sparrow:** Van Buren 12 Dec; New Harford 14 Dec; SFWS 14 Dec; last winter record was 1989.

**Song Sparrow:** max 3 Camillus 4 Jan; numbers rapidly declined in Jan.

**Swamp Sparrow:** Syr 14 Dec; SVB 21 Dec; 2 CM 19 Jan.

**White-throated Sparrow:** max 33 CM 9 Dec.

**Dark-eyed Junco:** daily max 10-15.

**Lapland Longspur:** 5 at 4 sites to 10 Jan.

**Snow Bunting:** max 300 Lincoln-Fenner 3 Feb.

**N. Cardinal:** 14 Fulton 15 Dec, large flock for OSWE.

**Red-winged Blackbird:** scattered 1-5 to 5 Jan; 1 Durhamville 21 Feb may have been a survivor as no migrant flocks noted.

**Rusty Blackbird:** Clinton after 9 Feb; Camillus 14 Feb.

**Com. Grackle:** to 4/day Dec; last N. Syr 5 Jan.

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** max 7 Skaneateles 4 Jan; 1-2 various sites thru.

**Purple Finch:** common Adirondacks; outside Adks max 12 Fulton 28 Jan; about 6 other reports of singles.

**Am. Goldfinch:** flocks in Adirondacks; low numbers elsewhere; max 22 Durhamville 26 Jan.

**Evening Grosbeak:** arr Old Forge in Feb; 7 Georgetown 27 Feb.