

REGION 5 — ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

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Dec was wet, lacked even mild freezing spells, and had a negligible amount of snow; Clay Swamp was unfrozen until Dec 30 and Oneida Lake was unfrozen until Jan 3. The mild weather induced many half-hardies to linger and the Dec 22 Syracuse Christmas Count of 71 species, an all-time high, attests to this. However, Jan and Feb brought severe, continued cold, frequent blizzards, and persistent deep grown snow with no breaks or thaws until mid-Mar. The severity of the winter produced marked effects on the composition of winter birdlife; by late Jan the severe cold and snow had nearly wiped out all half-hardies; by mid-Feb the snow had covered both mice and weed seeds forcing out the winter "mousers" (Short-eared Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike) and the ground birds (Snow Buntings, Tree Sparrows, Horned Larks) respectively. Ice formation on Lake Ontario reached memorable proportions, e. g. a mile-plus ice pack in Mexico Bay; extensive freezing-over along the Oswego River created sharp reductions in the number of wintering gulls and concentration of those that remained. In the last two weeks of Feb, a rash of "grounded" grebes plus "inland" reports of other grebes and scoters indicated more severe freezing to the north of us.

The outstanding features of the winter were 1) the numerous winter finches, literally everywhere, with Redpolls and Evening Grosbeaks vying for first place, and 2) the number of Cardinals sighted, indicating a population explosion, probably made more conspicuous by the birds' necessary patronage of feeders.

The latter half of Mar produced very gradual thawing, such that little flooding occurred; most marshes and lakes were largely ice-bound to the end of the period. Spring migration so far has been a grossly retarded affair with all migrants one to two weeks late; particularly notable, to date, were the low counts of ducks and the almost complete absence of Bluebirds, Hermit Thrushes, and Fox Sparrows.

Loons — Ducks: Common Loon: first is Mar 12 (very early), five in spring plumage on the Salmon River, Selkirk Shores State Park. Red-necked Grebe: reported from Oswego, Jan 11-19, one; also singles seen at Baldwinsville and Phoenix, Feb 27-Mar 9, following severe cold weather (Mrs. Estoff, Mrs. Propst, Spofford). Horned Grebe: high of 50, Jan 5, Skaneateles Lake; from Feb 16 to Feb 23, five were found grounded; one at Clyde sent to Cornell University; three at Syracuse released in open-water areas (Burt). Pied-billed Grebe: one grounded, Feb 23, Baldwinsville, placed in the Seneca River (Ernst). Great Blue Heron: arrival date is Mar 23, one (late).

Canada Goose: first record is a flock of 13, Mar 4; flight to date very poor. Mallard and Black Duck: steady drop, eventually greater than 50%, in numbers at Oswego and Baldwinsville thru the winter; 600+ Blacks and 300+ Mallards, seven Pintails, and a male Shoveler stayed thru the winter at Howland's Island G. M. A. on the largesse of the N. Y. S. Conservation Dept. food provided for the captive breeding stock there; a pair of Pintails remained in the river at Oswego from Dec 15 to Feb 16 but were driven out by the ice conditions of the last half of Feb. Green-winged and Blue-winged Teals: first noted on Mar 26, one, and Mar 30, one, respectively, Clay Swamp; both late. Wood Duck: wintering birds present at Manlius, two, Baldwinsville, two, and Howland's Island G. M. A., five. Redhead and Canvasback: the pre-spring influx, usually occurring in mid-Feb, was not noted until late Feb this year.

High winter counts for diving ducks this winter were: Greater Scaup—6443;

Golden-eye—909; American Merganser—6470; Red-breasted Merganser—183. Bufflehead and Oldsquaw: despite slightly higher counts on the Jan Waterfowl Census (129 and 171 respectively), counts thru the winter were very low and concentrations of either were nil. White-winged Scoter: from Feb 23 to mid-Mar, singles and small groups (up to 11/ flock) reported from open-water areas of the Oswego River (Fulton, Minetta) and the Seneca River (Baldwinsville), apparently forced out of more northern wintering grounds by the Feb freezing much as were the grebes mentioned earlier. Ruddy Duck: two males wintered in Oswego Harbor, the second year in succession. Hooded Merganser: two Jan records; a pair, Jan 5, Skaneateles Lake; two females, Jan 19, Oswego.

Hawks — Owls: Turkey Vulture: first reported on Mar 30, one, Howland's Is. G. M. A. Goshawk: a spate of records; one, Dec 12, Rome (Brockner); singles on Dec 15, Mar 9, Mar 30 (Spofford); an adult migrating, Mar 2, near Texas. Red-shouldered Hawk: one, Feb 25, Three Rivers G.M.A., is a record arrival date (Earnst). Rough-legged Hawk, Harrier, Kestrel: Dec numbers very good (highs of 31, 22, and 13 respectively); with heavy snow of Jan, a complete disappearance of Harriers and a marked drop in the numbers of both Kestrels and Rough-legs which reduction persisted until early Mar with good counts of Rough-legs (19/day) in late Mar; spring Kestrel flight very light to date.

Pheasant: many reports of starving birds, especially in the snow-buried flat country north and east of Syracuse. Killdeer: one on Feb 23, Tully, is remarkably early in view of the snow on the ground (20+ inches) at the time. Woodcock and Wilson's Snipe: arrival dates are Mar 30, one, Three Rivers G.M.A., and Mar 27, one, Skaneateles respectively, both late but in keeping with the sluggish Mar migration. Red Phalarope: one, well-studied, Dec 29, Oswego Harbor, is a very rare and fantastically late occurrence (Rusk, Scheider).

Glucous and Iceland Gulls: very few in Dec but up to ten/day in Feb (high of four and six respectively); the severe freezing in Feb forced the gulls to the falls in the Oswego River; on Feb 16, eight individuals of the three forms (Glaucous, Iceland, and Kumlien's) were in view at once; **not one adult** "white-winger" was observed this winter. Bonaparte's Gull: one, Jan 1, Oneida Lake, is evidence of the mild Dec; two were reported in Oswego Harbor, where they are always unusual, in early Feb (Watertown group).

Mourning Dove: wintered widely (Bridgeport, Port Byron, Manlius) in unprecedented numbers with a high of 150 at one farm, Fayetteville; wintered for the first time at Westernville (Mrs. May). Barn Owl: one, heavily oiled, found Dec 31 at Syracuse, was washed, dusted, fed, banded, and released; one, found dead, Jan 20 near Fayetteville; one, found dead, near Cedarvale in the last week of Mar (all fide Burt). Horned Owl: six nests currently under observation near Syracuse. Snowy Owl: two records; one killed, Dec 5, near Cato (fide Burt); one on ice floes at Oswego, Mar 2, (Spofford, Nisbet, et al). Long-eared Owl: single individuals found in four pine plantations between Syracuse and Bridgeport in late Feb and early Mar (Mrs. Estoff, Mrs. Propst). Short-eared Owl: up to 14/evening at Bridgeport in Dec; a marked fall in numbers in snowy Jan; all later reports (two - five birds) from a single roost near East Syracuse. Saw-whet Owl: one reported from Onondaga Hill, Jan 29 (Spofford); one, Jan 26, near Westernville (fide Mrs. May).

Swifts — Shrikes: Red-headed Woodpecker: an immature from mid-Dec to early Feb near Pompey (Mrs. Maxwell) and an adult seen several times in mid-Feb near North Syracuse (fide Burt) are very unusual in view of the rugged winter. Red-bellied Woodpecker: adults reported from Sterling, Cayuga Co., thru the winter and from Marietta near Otisco Lake, Feb 11-18, (fide Burt); both reports would suggest new stations away from the "Seneca River distribution" this bird seems to have locally. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: an immature at local Oneida feeding stations, Jan 11 to Feb 9, (Mrs. Ackley, Paquette) is a rare half-hardy.

Phoebe: one, Mar 28, is first arrival. Blue Jay: steady fall in numbers thru Jan and Feb; by late Feb reports were consistently scarce and low in numbers (less than ten/day). White-breasted Nuthatch: high of 130 on Syracuse Christmas Count, Dec 22; winter counts of this species along with those of Black-capped Chickadees and Brown Creepers have remained high thru to late Mar. Red-breasted Nuthatch: about 25 reports, almost all of singles or pairs at feeders or in large groves of conifers. Winter Wren: a few Dec records, **no** Jan or Feb records. Carolina Wren: a pair reported from New Woodstock, Madison Co., in Feb (fide Mrs. Hoyt) and a

single reported in Syracuse for a few days in late Jan; none reported at Oneida (Mrs. Ackley) or Rome (Mrs. Aspinwall) where they had been seen thru the fall. Long-billed Marsh Wren: four reported on Syracuse Christmas Count; none seen subsequently.

Catbird: one in ragged condition visited the Hiscock's feeder at Skaneateles in mid-Jan. Robin: few wintering records, all of single birds. Bluebird: **one** Mar report, a single, Mar 30; none reported so far in April. Where are they? Ruby-crowned Kinglet: one at a feeder near Jamesville in mid-Jan (fide Burt). Northern Shrike: high of 14 on Dec 22; marked reduction in Feb reports; a flurry of records in the first two weeks of Mar probably indicates returning migrants.

Warblers — Sparrows: Myrtle Warbler: singles reported in early Jan from feeders at Oneida (Mrs. Ackley) and Skaneateles (Hiscock) are probably half-hardies forced to such food by the cold weather. Yellowthroat: an immature male reported Dec 22 at Clay Swamp is phenomenally late and points up the mildness of Dec.

Wintering Icterids: a handful of reports of Red-winged Blackbirds and Cowbirds; most Dec records from swamps and cornfields, all Jan and Feb reports from feeders and dumps. Wintering Meadowlarks, present in good numbers thru Dec, were hard hit by the deep snow of Jan; the lack of Feb reports shows how rough the winter was on this species. Rusty Blackbird: one, Feb 28, Westernville is probably a very early migrant.

Cardinal: an amazing population burst this winter; possibly the hard winter forced them to feeding stations but in many cases, greater numbers were seen where no feeders were available; flocks of up to 20 birds reported at feeders and corncribs; reported in numbers from Mexico, Mexico Point, Pulaski, and Selkirk Shores St. Pk., areas famous for their lack of Cardinals, and from Chittenango, Oneida, Oriskany, and Rome. This neat split of reports, i. e. one parallel to Lake Ontario, the other along the Oneida Lake — Mohawk River axis, is probably dependent on the concentration of observers and is somewhat offset by reports from Camden, north of Oneida Lake, and Lacona, on the western edge of the Tug Hill Plateau. Evening Grosbeak: hundreds of reports with a majority of Jan and Feb reports from feeders; strangely enough, many seed-bearing box elders remain untouched; a sharp decrease in numbers in the last week of Mar. Pine Grosbeak: small flocks (3-29) reported from Rome (Mrs. Aspinwall), Oneida (Mrs. Ackley), north shore of Oneida Lake (Rusk, Scheider), along Lake Ontario (Paquette), and in the hills south of Syracuse but chronically scarce around Syracuse; last reported on Mar 1. Redpoll: this winter saw a heavy Region-wide flight of this species; flocks of 80 - 600 reported; some decrease in Jan and Feb when deep snow covered the abundant weed seeds but late Feb and all Mar saw heavy concentrations comparable to some spring flights of Snow Buntings. Hoary Redpoll: one male, Feb 23, with a group of 80 Redpolls in a large weed patch at Oswego Harbor is a new species for the Region.

Purple Finch and Pine Siskin: aside from a few sporadic Dec records, both species were absent thru the remainder of the winter; no spring movement of Purple Finches noted by end of period. White-winged Crossbill: one report, a single, Dec 1, Selkirk Shores St. Pk. Towhee: two winter records, one, Dec 22, Fayetteville; one, Dec 28, Tully (Mrs. Estoff, Mrs. Propst). Junco and Tree Sparrow: good counts thru Dec but the heavy snow of Jan forced the great majority of them out of the area and reports of **flocks** (12-20) of Tree Sparrows at feeders were frequent. Field and White-throated Sparrows: records of these species up to Dec 22 and Jan 5 respectively and the complete absence of records of them after mid-Jan reflect the weather pattern of the winter. Song Sparrow: reduced numbers present thru Dec; by early Feb the wintering population appeared to be wiped out; the major influx of Song Sparrows had not occurred by the end of the period.

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