

REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

RICHARD C. ROSCHE

The region was under the influence of some of the most severe winter weather conditions of the century. While December began with a series of days likened to "Indian summer", winter moved in during the second week and stayed without loosening its grip until mid-March.

December, January and February were all characterized by having lower temperatures than average; while snow depths during the period were generally greater than in most winters, especially in areas to the south and east of Buffalo, the total amount of precipitation for the three months was also below average. The first major snowstorm occurred during the second week of December; unforgettable blizzards occurred on January 14 and 23-24; the usual January thaw did not materialize; it was the coldest February since 1936.

The severity of this winter caused a marked contrast in bird-life compared with the preceding two winter seasons. Many of the half-hardy species moved out in late November as if in anticipation of a rough winter. The numbers and occurrence of many of the icterids, some of the sparrows and others, were notably lower than was the case during 1960-61 and 1961-62. Early and persistent ice formations on all parts of the Niagara River caused a general dispersal of wintering waterfowl and gulls into other areas where they usually do not congregate in such numbers (see below). Mid-winter saw all of the Lower Niagara River jammed with ice and up to three-fourths of the Upper River ice bound at times. Lake Erie became almost 100% ice covered except for small areas. Nevertheless, Dunkirk Harbor remained open in parts and produced its usual variety of wintering waterfowl.

Landbirds in general, especially in late January and February appeared to be fewer than in the average winter. Many feeding station reporters remarked that they were feeding lower numbers of birds than in the preceding two years. Reports of dead birds, especially House Sparrows, were much more frequent this winter than ever before. That the severe weather took its toll of small landbirds appears rather evident.

All birds of prey were generally more scarce than in most winters, perhaps due to the deep snow cover and low population of small rodents (see below under Sparrow Hawk). Good feeding conditions in the north apparently induced winter finches to remain there, with only a minor movement occurring in this region in late February and March (see below).

March was almost five degrees warmer than usual; precipitation again was below normal. Winter continued through the first week but then was followed by mild conditions that persisted through the end of the month. While early migrants began appearing during the second week, the first major movement of typical March migrants, i.e. swans and geese, hawks, killdeer, icterids, song sparrows, etc., developed on March 16-17. This was a general movement throughout the region. Conditions conducive to good movement from the south were not generally favorable again until March 24 when a mass movement was evident through and into the region. The last week produced many reports of first arrivals such as greater yellowlegs, tree swallow, phoebe, savannah, vesper and field sparrows and towhee.

Highlights of the season include: Barnacle Goose, King Rail, Laughing Gull, Hawk-Owl and Northern Three-toed Woodpecker.

Abbreviations used below are as follows: Alleg. SP — Allegany State Park; BAS — Buffalo Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count; BOS — Buffalo Ornithological Society Christmas Bird Count; Chaut. L — Chautauqua Lake; Forest Lawn — Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo; imm. — immature; ISP — Island State Park; JAS — Jamestown Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count; Nia. R. — Niagara River; OCC — Olean Christmas Bird Count; OOGMA — Oak Orchard Game Management Area; OO—Wolcottsv. — Oak Orchard - Wolcottsville region; Squaw Island — Squaw Island dump area, Buffalo; T. — Town of; WW — Winter Waterfowl Count.

Contributors: KPA — Kenneth P. Able; RFA — Robert F. Andrie; RA — Ruth Avery; HHA — Harold H. Axtell; AMB — Anna Mae Bacon; NB — Nina Bates; TLB — Thomas L. Bourne; SB — Sylvia Brockner; WWB — Winston W. Brockner; LB — Lois Buck; GB — George Buckland; LLB — Lou L. Burton; HC — Helen Creighton; AD — Adrian Dorst; SWE — Stephen W. Eaton; MLE — Mary Louise

Emerson; AF—Arthur Freitag; HF—Harold Freund; DGG—David G. Greene; JG—Joe Grzybowski; GG—Gerald Guenther; FTH—Fred T. Hall; EH—Mrs. Ethel Hartloff; BH—B. Hochmuth; WHK—Walter and Harriette Klabunde; WL—Walter Listman; WAM—Willard and Alice McKale; HDM—Harold D. Mitchell; CM—Carl Mrozek; BN—Bernard Nathan; EP—Elizabeth Pillsbury; FR—Frances Rathbun; FMR—Frances M. Rew; RCR—Richard C. Rosche; AS—Arthur Schaffner; ELS—Edward L. Seeber; GMS—George M. Smith; WAS—William A. Smith; WFS—Willard F. Stanley; JFT—Joseph F. Thill; EAU—Edward and Alice Ulrich; HBV—Henning and Beulah von Arnim; GGW—Gertrude G. Webster.

Loons — Ducks: Red-necked Grebe: one, Jan 22 (LB, NB) through Mar 24 (EP), Dunkirk Harbor — apparently wintered; early spring migrants are indicated by single birds found grounded in the snow Feb 21 or 22 at Holland (GG rep RCR) and Feb. 28 at Lancaster (BH rep HHA) — most of Lake Erie and other waters 100% frozen at this time. Horned Grebe: one with injured wing, picked up Dec. 31 near Curriers, Wyo. Co. — extremely late inland record (RCR et al); few wintered with two Jan 29 at Dunkirk Harbor (LB, NB), the only reports. Pied-billed Grebe: one remained on the Nia. R. near Niagara Falls until Jan 6 (BN et al); another was noted in the Olean area in late Dec (SWE); March migrants were rather scarce, the first not being reported until late in the month. Double-crested Cormorant: one imm., Dec 23, Nia. R. off Beaver ISP (KPA et al) — always uncommon in the region. Great Blue Heron: none reported after late Dec — none apparently wintered; March migrants generally more scarce than in the average year with Mar 24-26 being peak period of movement through area. Black-crowned Night Heron: one, Dec 16 (RCR et al), one Dec 23 (KPA et al) and two, Jan 5 (FMR et al) at Beaver ISP — all immatures. American Bittern: one, Mar 30, near Lyndonville (WAS, GMS) — unusually early. Whistling Swan: 35, Dec 1, Chaut. L. (EP et al) — fall migrants; one occurred Jan 26 (FMR) through Mar 10 (KPA et al) at Dunkirk Harbor; the March flight was the largest in the memory of many local observers throughout the region. Peak periods of movement occurred about Mar 16 and Mar 24-27; maximum count of 414, Mar 27 on the "sinks" near Wolcottsv. (AS et al). Perhaps ice conditions on Lake Erie, 100 miles to the west of Buffalo where large numbers usually congregate at this time of the year, prevented the swans from doing so this year and caused them to disperse eastward into less favorable feeding areas in smaller groups. Canada Goose: two flocks totaling about 155 birds, Dec 30, over the Hamburg area (HDM, HC et al) — extremely late migrants; one rather small individual wintered with the dabbling ducks at Buckhorn ISP (RCR et al); first spring movement occurred Mar 16 when several flocks were reported migrating overhead; maximum count, about 35,000, Mar. 31 in the OO - Wolcottsv. (KPA et al). **Barnacle Goose:** one, Mar 31, on the "sinks" near Wolcottsv. with Canada Geese (RCR et al) — light sides, grayish back, white forehead, dark lores, black breast all carefully seen — fifth record for the region. Snow Goose: one, Mar 20-31, on the "sinks" near Wolcottsv. (many observers). Blue Goose: 17, Mar 25 on the "sinks" Wolcottsv. (WL rep AS) — unusually high count. Mallard and Black Duck: 778 and 1922 respectively, Dec 23, Nia. R. area (BOS) — highest counts in 34 years. Gadwall: three, Dec. 16, Beaver ISP (KPA et al); two, Dec 26, Nia. R. opposite Beaver ISP (KPA et al); one, Jan 13, Nia. F. (RCR et al) — only reports. Pintail: 15, Jan 13, Nia. R. area (WW) — higher than average number. Green-winged Teal: one-two, all winter, Forest Lawn (AF et al) — second consecutive season to be found here; one, Dec 19, Beaver ISP (AS); one, Mar 2 and 9, T. Clarence, Erie Co. (CM, JG) — probably an early migrant. Blue-winged Teal: one, Dec 2, Buckhorn ISP (RCR, KPA) — second Dec record for region; two, Mar 9-10, T. Clarence, Erie Co. (CM, JG) — rather early migrants. American Widgeon: 275, Dec. 1, Chaut. L. (EP et al); 52, Dec 23, Nia. R. area (BOS) — highest count in 34 years. Shoveler: one, Mar 24, Dunkirk Harbor (WWB) — few reports from this area. Redhead: very scarce during Dec and early Jan; 78, Jan 13 in Nia. R. area (WW) — second highest count in nine years; more numerous during Feb and Mar than in recent years with maximum count of 156, Mar 13 at Dunkirk Harbor (AS et al). Ring-necked Duck: one, Dec 16, Buckhorn ISP (KPA et al); one, Dec 23, Beaver ISP (KPA et al); one, Upper Nia. R., Jan 13 (RCR et al). Canvasback: maximum count of about 8,000 Dec. 19, Nia. R. at Beaver ISP and Buckhorn ISP (AS); 7,088, Dec 23, Nia. R. area (BOS); 3,644, Jan 13 (WW) — numbers of wintering birds way down over previous

years on Nia. R. Greater Scaup: two, Feb 10, Alleg. SP (GGW) — rare in winter in this locality. Common Goldeneye: 2,717, Dec 23, Nia. R. (BOS) — lower than usual number; five, Feb 20, Conewango Creek near Balcom (AS) — winter reports from inland areas such as this are rare. Flocks of over 100 Goldeneyes, Common Mergansers and a few Buffleheads wintered on the Genesee River between Belmont and Scio (LLB). King Eider: one (basic plumage), Dec 23 and Jan 13, Upper Nia. R. (RCR et al). Ruddy Duck: four, Dec. 19, Beaver ISP (AS); one, Dec 23, Beaver ISP (FMR et al). Hooded Merganser: more common during Dec. on Nia. R. than usual with maximum count of 15 on the Lower River and 19 at Buckhorn ISP, Dec. 8 (KPA et al); only three reports of single birds for Jan through Mar — fewer wintering individuals than usual. Common Merganser: 6,636, Dec. 23, Nia. R. (BOS) — highest count in 34 years. Red-breasted Merganser: unusually low wintering numbers; 91, Jan 13 (WW) — lowest count in nine years.

Hawks — Owls: March hawk flights over south shore of L. Erie: Mar 14 (KPA et al): Goshawk-1, Cooper's 2, Red-tailed-49, Red-shouldered-7, Rough-legged-1, (total 60); Mar 15 (KPA et al): Sharp-shinned-1, Red-tailed-19, Rough-legged 2 (total 22); Mar 16 (KPA et al): Sharp-shinned-3, Cooper's-1, Red-tailed-77, Red-shouldered-47, Rough-legged-7, Marsh-1, Sparrow-8 (total 143); Mar 17 (KPA et al): Sharp-shinned-2, Cooper's-2, Red-tailed-41, Red-shouldered-28, Rough-legged-1, Marsh-1 (total 75); Mar 24 (FMR et al): Turkey Vulture-2, Sharp-shinned-2, Red-tailed-23, Red-shouldered-59 (total 86); Mar 26 (RCR): Turkey Vulture-20. Sharp-shinned Hawk: one, Feb 14 and 18, Hamburg (TLB) — rare in winter. Cooper's Hawk: slight increase in frequency of reports during Feb and early Mar in urban areas and near feeding stations coinciding with period of deepest snow cover. Red-shouldered Hawk: Unlike the preceding two winters, when a number of these raptors were reported, especially from areas along the south shore of Lake Erie, only one was reported this year between the time one would expect a late migrant and early Mar; one was reported Dec 31 in the Jamestown area (JAS); 21 and 12, Mar 24 and 26 respectively, over Lyndonville, Orleans Co. (WAS, GMS). Rough-legged Hawk: scattered individuals reported throughout the period with no notable winter concentrations — a poor winter for this bird. Bald Eagle: an unprecedented number of reports compared with recent years involving six-seven individuals as follows: one imm., Jan 13, Grand Island (EAU et al) — probably this same bird was observed in the Grand Island-Navy Island (a pair formerly nested on the latter) area Jan 30 (AS), Feb 24 (FMR et al) and Mar 24 (RFA); two imms. were noted in this area Mar 5 (JFT). One Imm., Feb 12, over Gerry, Chaut. Co. (CGW); one adult feeding on deer carcass, Feb. 26, Zoar Valley, Catt. Co. (FTH et al); one adult, Feb 28, Dunkirk Harbor (rep WFS); one adult, Mar 9, over T. Hamburg (WWB); one imm., Mar 24, over Hamburg (RFA); one imm., Mar 30, OOGMA (MLE et al). Sparrow Hawk: "During Jan the Buffalo Museum of Science received more telephone calls regarding Sparrow Hawks in the vicinity of feeding stations about metropolitan Buffalo than during the entire preceding 15 year period. At the same time Mr. and Mrs. Walter Klabunde reported an unusual dearth of these falcons on the Lake Ontario Plain, where there are ordinarily a considerable number of them. It could be that the prevalent low ebb in the meadow mouse cycle plus the deep snow have mostly eliminated the ready availability of mice and have driven many of the Sparrow Hawks to the congregating places of House Sparrows and other small birds. Many of the hawks were observed to have captured House Sparrows at feeding stations" (HHA). Ring-necked Pheasant: 431, Dec 30, Hamburg-East Aurora area (BAS) — highest count in 17 years; poor feeding conditions due to the deep snow resulted in unusually large numbers occurring at feeding stations. Chukar: one, Dec 21, Olcott, Nia. Co. (RCR) — in area where some 400 birds had been released earlier in 1962 — we still do not know if this bird is becoming established in the region even though it has been known to nest under natural conditions and occasionally an individual is observed or heard. Turkey: seven feeding in corn stubble, Jan 17, Meservey Hill, T. Alma, Alleg. Co. (LLB); 30, Jan 17, Fords Brook Road, T. Alma (LLB) — we seldom hear of high counts like this in the region. **King Rail:** one, early Dec-Feb 19, Belmont, Alleg. Co. (LLB) — see note in "Field Notes" Section. American Coot: 500, Dec 1, Chaut. L. (EP et al); no reports after Dec 25 — apparently none wintered. Killdeer: one, Dec 23, Grand Island (EAU et al); one, Dec 31, Jamestown area (JAS); no other reports until spring migrants arrived.

Common Snipe: no winter reports. Glaucous Gull: rather scarce in Nia. R., maximum numbers of three-four occurring from late Dec to mid Feb at Squaw Island (RFA et al); two, Jan 22, Dunkirk Harbor (LB, NB) — few reports from this locality. Iceland Gull: three, Jan 28, Squaw Island (AS) — maximum count. Iceland Gull (**L.g.glaucoides**): one, Mar 10, Dunkirk Harbor (KPA et al) — few reports from this locality. Iceland Gull (**L.g.kumlieni**): two, Jan 30 (RFA) and one, Feb 17 (KPA et al), Squaw Island. Great Black-backed Gull: far more common than usual all winter, ice conditions on the Niagara River and the Great Lakes causing, in all probability, two major concentrations: 40, Jan 28 (AS) and 52, Jan 30 (RFA), Squaw Island; 100, Feb 1 (LB, NB) and 75, Feb 12 (GGW), Dunkirk Harbor. One observer who has visited Dunkirk Harbor regularly for years stated that he "couldn't recall seeing more than 18 there at one time" (WFS). Herring Gull: 3,027, Dec 23, Nia. R. region (BOS) — lower than usual. Ring-billed Gull: 9,019, Dec 23, Nia. R. region (BOS) — highest count in 34 years. **Laughing Gull**: one adult in breeding plumage with Bonaparte's Gulls, Dec 1, Nia. R. at Lewiston (KPA, RCR). Bonaparte's Gull: 6000, Dec 1, Nia. F.-Lewiston area (KPA et al) — maximum count; numbers steadily decreased through Dec and early Jan with last one reported Jan 13 on Upper Nia. R., 400, Dec 3, Gowanda (WWB) — a noteworthy inland concentration, especially this late in the season. Little Gull: two-three adults, Dec 1-16, Nia. F.-Lewiston area of Nia. R. (KPA et al); two, Dec 23, Nia. F. (AD et al) — last report. Mourning Dove: about average number of wintering birds; 40, Jan 20, near Wilson (KPA et al) and 25, Jan 1, Millersport (RCR et al) — maximum counts. Barn Owl: two, Dec 30, Hamburg (EH) — only report. Great Horned Owl: several reports indicate that this bird now occurs where it has been absent in recent years in the metropolitan Buffalo area. **Hawk-Owl**: one, Dec 28, Millersport, Nia. Co. (KPA, CM et al)—this individual remained here through Feb 10 (WWB) and was studied by many interested persons; first record since 1945 and about the fourth record for the region. Long-eared Owl: scarce, continuing the trend of recent winters, with none reported from the usual winter concentration areas on the lake plains; one, Jan 24, Village of Allegany — brought to doorstep by cat Jan 25 (SWE); one, Feb 5, Eden, Erie Co. (TLB); one, Mar 30, Point Gratiot, Chaut. Co. (KPA et al). Short-eared Owl: numbers low compared with last two years with no major concentrations on the lake plains; ten and eight, Jan 3 and 26 respectively, Lancaster (CM) — maximum counts for period. Saw-whet Owl: one, Mar 31, Buffalo (DGG) — only report.

Goatsuckers - Starling: Yellow-shafted Flicker: more wintering birds than usual; five, Dec 30, Hamburg-East Aurora area (BAS) — highest count in 17 years; five, Feb 18, Portland, Chaut. Co. (LB, NB) — unusually high count for southern tier. Red-headed Woodpecker: one, Dec. 31, Jamestown area (JAS) — few winter reports from the southern tier; five, Jan 6, near Fort Niagara (WAM et al) — maximum count here — single birds reported from this area all winter; one, all winter visiting feeding station in Hamburg (AMB et al); one, Mar 16, Forest Lawn (AF). Hairy and Downy Woodpecker: 9 and 31 respectively, Dec. 29, Olean area (OCC) — highest counts in 14 years; about average elsewhere during winter. **Northern Three-toed Woodpecker**: one, Dec 16, Beaver ISP (HF) — this male remained here through Mar 3 (RCR et al) and was observed by most all interested local field observers; first record for the region. Blue Jay: more common than during the average winter with many more than usual visiting feeding stations; 172, Dec 29, Olean area (OCC) — highest count in 14 years. Common Crow: less common than usual during winter, especially in hilly southern tier areas. Tufted Titmouse: one, Dec 29, Olean area (OCC); eight, Dec 31, Jamestown area (JAS); one, Dunkirk, Feb 18 (LB, NB); several Mar records of single birds from usual areas along south shore of L. Erie. Red-breasted Nuthatch: relatively few wintered — scattered reports of one-two birds throughout region. Brown Creeper: less common than usual during winter. Winter Wren: one, Feb 18, Angola (TLB) — only report. Carolina Wren: no reports. Mockingbird: one, Feb 4, Lewiston (WHK) — only report. Catbird: one, Dec 30, at feeder in Orchard Park (rep AMB). Brown Thrasher: two, Dec. 30, at feeders in Orchard Park area (BAS). Robin: about average number of wintering birds. Eastern Bluebird: one, Mar 9, Derby (WWB) — first report; more reports during remainder of month than in past four-five years; seven, near Shadagee, Orleans Co., Mar 24 (WAS, GMS) — maximum count. Golden-crowned Kinglet: less common than during the average winter. Cedar Waxwing: about

average numbers through Feb; decided influx of birds during Mar which usually does not occur in most years; 138, Mar 15 and 383, Mar 16, migrating over T. Evans, Erie Co. (KPA et al) — many other reports throughout region especially in southern tier areas. Northern Shrike: a rather poor winter for this species with only scattered reports of single individuals; one, Jan 23-25, Belmont (LLB) and one, Feb 10, Alleg. SP (GGW et al) — noteworthy because of locality. Loggerhead Shrike: one, Mar 30, Belmont (LLB) — this species continues to become more scarce each year. Starling: less common during the winter than average especially south of Buffalo — 117, Dec 29, Olean area (OCC) — lowest count in 14 years; 321, Dec 30, Hamburg-East Aurora area (BAS) — lowest count in 17 years.

Vireos - Warblers: Myrtle Warbler: three, Dec 23, Grand Island (ELS et al); one, Jan 5, Batavia (GB); one, Jan 6, Fort Niagara (BN et al); six, Jan 7, bayberry area near Brocton, Chaut. Co. (LB, NB) — unusually high winter count.

Blackbirds - Sparrows: Wintering icterids were noticeably less common compared with the previous two years, both of which were preceded by unusually mild and prolonged fall seasons; the majority of reports of Red-winged Blackbirds, grackles and cowbirds came from feeding station operators, there being almost no reports of concentrations of any size anywhere. Rusty Blackbird: one, Dec 23, Buckhorn ISP (FMR et al); one singing, Feb 15 to at least Mar 12, St. Bonaventure Uni. campus near Olean (SWE). Common Grackle: one, Dec 29, Olean area (OCC); one, Dec 31, Jamestown area (JAS); 35, Jan 17-Feb 1, Meservey Hill Road, T. Alma, Alleg. Co. (LLB) — probably a record high number of wintering birds for the region; two, Jan 18-19, and seven, Feb 1, Belmont (LLB) — all wintering grackles in the southern tier counties are of special note in as much as few reports come to our attention. Cardinal: continues to appear to be very much on the increase throughout the region — 30, Dec 29, Olean area (OCC) — highest count in 14 years; 180, Dec 30, Hamburg-East Aurora area (BAS) — highest count in 17 years. Evening Grosbeak: no reports until one was noted Feb 25 at Hamburg (TLB); slight movement evident during Mar with maximum count of 19, Mar 11, Hamburg (HC). Purple Finch: "One of the largest mid-winter invasions of this species on record began to develop about the middle of February. The numbers of these birds increased rapidly until some persons reported as many as twenty or thirty at their feeding stations". These birds probably came from the north as an above average food supply began to dwindle in late winter (HHA). This same theory might explain the presence of a few Evening Grosbeaks and Redpolls concurrently with the Purple Finch increase. Common Redpoll: no reports until two and eight were noted Feb 19 and 20 respectively, Kenmore (FR); slight movement evident Mar 1-16 with maximum counts of 43, Mar 1, Grand Island (RCR et al) and 35, Mar 16, Java, Wyo. Co. (RCR). Pine Siskin: a few scattered reports of small numbers during Dec; no reports during Jan; Noticeable but small movement during Feb and Mar with maximum counts of 20-25, Feb 24, Youngstown (WHK) and 15, Mar 28, Hamburg (TLB). Crossbills: no reports. Rufous-sided Towhee: one, Dec 29, Olean (HBV); two, Dec 31, Jamestown area (JAS) — no other winter reports. Oregon Junco: one, Dec. 23, T. Tonawanda (RFA et al); two, Dec 30, Hamburg (at feeder) — these remained here through the end of the period (AMB et al). White-crowned Sparrow: fewer wintering birds compared with previous two years; one, Dec 30, Hamburg (AMB); one, Jan 22, Bear Lake, Chaut. Co. (LB, NB); one, Feb 10, Lewiston (WHK); two, Feb 24, Lockport (WHK). White-throated Sparrow: far fewer wintering birds compared with previous two years. Fox Sparrow: one, Jan 31-Feb 1, Hamburg (RA). Song Sparrow: about ten, all winter, Belmont (LLB) — we need to know more about the winter distribution of many common birds like this one. Snow Bunting: generally scarce during Dec and Jan; moderate movement during Feb and Mar with maximum counts of 1500, Mar 13, Sturgeon Point, Erie Co. (TLB) and 1100, Mar 24, Wethersfield, Wyo. Co. (RCR).

Addenda: Loggerhead Shrike: one, Nov 4 and 26, Derby (SB) — banded — rather late. Fox Sparrow: one, Dec 26, Busti, Chaut. Co. (EP).
48 Dartmouth Avenue, Buffalo 15, New York