

REGION 5 — ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

FRITZ SCHEIDER

Winter was like a filter cigarette—long, white, and mild, mild, mild—and like that packaged carcinogen went on to produce a malignant March and even metastases of winter in April. The somewhat reduced snowfall of December thru February was augmented by heavy snow in the latter half of March and, though Oneida Lake opened from its icy bondage on March 23 (a record early date), it froze again in early April, chilling evidence of the severity of the cold of that time. Conversely, the lack of icing-up in early winter coupled with the December-early January waterfowl hunting season precluded waterfowl concentrations, and the usual Greater Scaup—Common Goldeneye aggregates on the Oswego River and at Oswego Harbor never developed.

A fantastic spruce cone crop and heavy seed crops, especially Box Elder and White Ash, went almost totally unused as virtually no winter finches invaded. The only winter fringillid to appear in numbers was the Evening Grosbeak which ignored native foods, only to promptly descend on the local feeder largesse and by early February everyone was reporting these fat feasting flocks foraging for feeder fodder. The numerous wild berries sustained large numbers of American Robins and Cedar Waxwings and these species fared (pun intended) very well thru the winter. The array of half-hardies served as ample testimony to the mildness of the winter but the March snow and cold may have done in many of these individuals and may have a significant impact on the area's Carolina Wren numbers (*q. v.*).

Positives for the winter include 1) a variety, though not in numbers, of half-hardy waterfowl; 2) an excellent Rough-legged Hawk incursion; 3) good numbers but no concentrations of Glaucous and Iceland Gulls; 4) a modest flight of Snowy Owls; 5) increasing numbers of wintering Common Flicker and continued spread of Red-bellied Woodpecker; 6) Carolina Wren expansion and, less so, of Tufted Titmouse; 7) an impressive array of half-hardies; 8) a very large population of wintering American Robin; 9) late but large Evening Grosbeak invasion; and 10) excellent counts of wintering half-hardy sparrows.

Negatives for the winter are 1) reduced numbers of the regular wintering waterfowl with a drop in counts of even the local welfare state Mallards; 2) a very poor Goshawk winter; 3) continued decline in Ring-necked Pheasant; 4) no incursion of Red-breasted Nuthatch; 5) minimal numbers of wintering Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, and Pine Grosbeak despite superb local seed and cone crops; and 6) with few exceptions reduced numbers of wintering Horned Lark and Snow Bunting.

Rarities for the winter—Eared Grebe, Northern Fulmar, Whistling and Mute Swans, Barrow's Goldeneye, King Eider, Hawk Owl, Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, and Northern Three-toed Woodpecker.

Abbreviations: LOL—Lake Ontario littoral; WFC—New York State Waterfowl Census Jan. 11-19, 1975; DH—Derby Hill; max.—Maximum (*a*).

My thanks to Bill Brosseau, Gene Huggins, and Jean Propst in the compilation of this report.

LOONS—DUCKS: Eared Grebe: one Dec. 14-26 Onondaga L. (B. Brosseau, FGS, mob) is the sixth record in nine years but the third from Onondaga L. Northern Fulmar: light phase bird Dec. 19 just east of Oswego (D. W. Crumb, P. A. DeBenedictis, FGS) is second regional report and the first record of a live individual (details on file). Double-crested Cormorant: an imm. Feb. 14-Mar. 10 at Oswego Harbor is only the third wintering record in 21 years.

Great Blue Heron: winter numbers up—total of seven, about double the usual number.

Winter duck counts, all spectacularly low, are as follows—Canada Goose 151 WFC, Mallard 1422 WFC, Black Duck 175 WFC, Gadwall 13, Redhead 11 (ridiculously low), Canvasback 49, Greater Scaup 1228 WFC, Lesser Scaup 8 (very low), Common Goldeneye 572 WFC, Bufflehead 90 (very low), Oldsquaw 154 WFC, White-winged Scoter 3 (lowest in ten years), Common Merganser 625 WFC, Red-breasted Merganser 170 (early Dec. birds). Half-hardy ducks for the winter include four Pintail, two Blue-winged Teal, one American Wigeon, one Northern Shoveler, and three Wood Duck; of the last the only Jan. bird was an injured male at Oneida (L. Schultz). Rare waterfowl for the season are an imm. Whistling Swan Fair Haven Beach State Park Jan. 12-18 (M. S. Rusk), and a Mute Swan Mar 22-Apr. 20 Selkirk Shores State Park (first record in five years), two Barrow's Goldeneye Mar. 30 Dempster Beach and Pleasant Point, and a female King Eider Feb. 15-Mar. 29 LOL.

HAWKS—OWLS: Goshawk: total of five for entire winter (excluding DH Feb. migrants)—a miserable season. Rough-legged Hawk: an extremely heavy incursion along LOL with a max. of 54 (60% light phse.) Mar. 1 Richland and Mexico Townships. Harrier: total of four for winter, very low for such an open winter.

Ring-necked Pheasant: local Christmas Count tallies six-15/count—very scarce and going fast.

Killdeer: winter max. seven DeWitt Jan. 4; spring max. only 48 Mar. 18 DH.

Glaucous Gull: max. ten Feb. 2 Oswego River axis; a good flight but no concentration because of the mild winter weather. Iceland Gull: max. eight, less common than the Glaucous, and similarly no concentrations developed. Great Black-backed Gull: counts 100-175/day along Oswego River axis and Oswego Harbor, somewhat less than the previous winter max., probably again a function of the very mild winter.

Mourning Dove: high tallies in Dec. and early Jan. (100-150/day); most late Jan. and Feb. tallies strikingly lower, a pattern matched in some measure by feeder tallies.

Snowy Owl: total of 15 birds for period, primarily from the Oswego area and Onondaga L.; however only one Mar. bird reported. **Hawk Owl:** one present at North Gage, Oneida County Dec. 20 (E. VanDresar) thru the period; the second bird in two years; though two birds were never seen at once, there may have been two birds involved (M. Stooks).

CAPRIMULGIDS—SHRIKES: Common Flicker: count of 18-20/Christmas Count with a whopping max. of 86 on the Syracuse Christmas Count Dec. 14. Red-bellied Woodpecker: has expanded east along the south shore of Oneida L. to the wooded swamps between Bridgeport and Lakeport. **Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker:** a most accommodating female present at Oneida Jan. 14-Mar. 15 (P. R. Paquette, D. W. Ackley), the only winter report away from the Adirondacks. **Northern Three-toed Woodpecker:** a female at Marietta, Otisco L. Dec. 29 (D. Muir, mob) was not seen there thereafter despite repeated checking.

Tufted Titmouse: increasing numbers of reports—three at Marietta, two at S. Onondaga, one at Pleasant Point on L. Ontario with most other established stations persisting. Red-breasted Nuthatch: abundant in the Adirondacks (51 on the Old Forge Christmas Count Dec. 15); however, extremely scarce (one-three/day only) away from that sittine bastion. Carolina Wren: expanding explosively in the area—at least 25 different birds recorded, mainly from the protected valleys along the Onondaga Escarpment and creek bottoms and wooded hillsides along L. Ontario. Half-hardies were in unprecedented numbers (an expression of the mild winter and good food crops) including a Brown Thrasher (Clockville Jan. 28), a Gray Catbird (Oswego Mar. 11), three Hermit Thrushes, two Long-billed Marsh Wrens at Fox Ridge (G. A. Smith), six Ruby-crowned Kinglets, ten Yellow-rumped Warblers, and three Yellowthroats (of the last, one per three winters is more usual!).

American Robin: wintered by the hundreds in the valleys south of Syracuse; counts of 200-600/day were regularly reported at S. Onondaga, Marietta, and Camillus with smaller numbers in protected woods about Fair Haven and south of Oswego.

Northern Shrike: 12 individuals in Dec., 12 in Jan., 10 in Feb., and 10 in Mar.—a fair flight with no impressive Mar. return flight.

ICTERIDS—SPARROWS: Eastern Meadowlark: winter max. 48 (high) Skaneateles Christmas Count Dec. 29; many lesser counts from farmlands south of Oneida L. and the wind-cleared fields around Pompey.

Evening Grosbeak: moderate numbers thru Dec. followed by an invasion of these sunflower seed pigs in Oneida and Oswego Counties in late Jan. and early Feb.—counts there in the hundreds/day and in some areas (Rome, Westmoreland, Verona) more common than House Sparrows or Starlings; Burt's feeder survey showed the highest Mar. tally ever—2350 individuals. Pine Grosbeak: small numbers (one-four/day) in northern Herkimer County in Dec.; unreported elsewhere. Purple Finch: only small numbers on the various Christmas Counts; however, Adirondack tallies considerably better—30-35/day thru season. House Finch: increasing numbers at Syracuse with winter max. 31. Pine Siskin: incredibly scarce—only four reports totalling less than 20 birds for the entire winter.

Rufous-sided Towhee: total of five wintering birds, mostly males and mostly feeder sustained. Wintering sparrow numbers seemed to parallel the better numbers of the numerous half-hardies, to wit, White-throated Sparrow max. 77, Swamp Sparrow max. 17, and Song Sparrow max. 80, all from the Syracuse Christmas Count Dec. 14; numerous smaller counts of these species thru winter with Song Sparrow and White-throated Sparrow reported from Westmoreland and North Gage, areas properly considered "snowbelt country" and most inhospitable to half-hardy sparrows. Field Sparrow: total of 11 individuals for season with max. six Oneida Christmas Count Dec. 28. Tree Sparrow: abundant thru winter with some stellar Christmas Count numbers—992 Oneida, 707 Syracuse, 612 Skaneateles, 379 Howland's Island sector; however, only 31 on the Old Forge Christmas Count where winter living, even for a Tree Sparrow, is tough. Snow Bunting: max. 3000 Mar. 8 Vernon (P & S Peebles); much smaller numbers in most areas with only small flocks (6-20/day) reported, a pattern especially evident on the various Christmas Counts.

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REGION 6 — ST. LAWRENCE

LEE B. CHAMBERLAINE

Winter of 1974-75 was another relatively mild one. Snow depths were minimal on the Lake Plain and temperatures were not extremely low. Tug Hill and the Adirondack portions of the Region experienced more snow and lower temperatures with extremes in both coming in February and particularly in March. Tug Hill snow depths were still 30+ inches and Adirondack 20+ inches at the end of reporting period.

Large bodies of water remained open late into the winter and accounted for many excellent waterfowl observations with wintering birds.

High *Microtus* populations and relatively open snow conditions resulted in many good observations of hawks and Snowy Owls.

Some winter finches and Evening Grosbeaks in particular were very abundant the latter half of the winter. However, redpolls, Pine Siskins, both crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks were scarce.