

REGION 3 – FINGER LAKES

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Winter started mild with little snow. Those who wanted a "white Christmas" got their wish. Christmas dawned with up to fifteen inches of the white stuff on the ground. Winter then set in with dead seriousness. Snow and below average temperatures, including some below zero days continued to January 20. Then the sun disappeared and it was eternally cloudy though mild. February brought the sun back but the temperature plummeted. From the 10th-20th it was below zero every day getting down into the minus twenties. The last week of the month was warmer with southerly breezes. Overall February averaged 11.3 degrees below normal at Ithaca. Cayuga Lake, except for a small area at Milliken Station, froze over but for a few days only.

The common question of the winter was "Where are the birds?" Hawks were rather scarce aside from some Sharp-shinned and Cooper's that took advantage of the concentration of small birds around feeders. Icterids were largely absent, especially after the Christmas snowstorm. Kinglets were very scarce. Some contributors mentioned a scarcity of Black-capped Chickadees, Cardinals, Dark-eyed Juncos and Tree Sparrows.

But there were compensations. This was the winter of the American Robin. Numerous flocks, some up to 100 birds, overwintered in several parts of the Region.

Eastern Bluebirds had their best winter in several years. A total of 80-100 individuals were found wintering in various parts of the Region. Five years ago Col. Morgan Jones, while stationed at the Seneca Army Depot, set up a bluebird box trail on the Depot grounds with considerable success. Since his departure two years ago, others have maintained the boxes. Could it be that the increase in overwintering bluebirds is the result of this effort?

Winter finches were a mixed bag, as usual. Evening Grosbeaks came in excellent numbers; Purple Finches, Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins in small numbers, only one report of Pine Grosbeaks and no crossbills.

The number one rarity of the period, and a first for the Region, has to be the Black Guillemot near Phelps, with the Gray Jay at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge a close second.

Rarities: Glaucous Gull, Iceland Gull, Black Guillemot, Gray Jay, Water Pipit, Northern Oriole.

Abbreviations: Cay–Cayuga; CC–Christmas Count (Elmira Jan. 1, Geneva Dec. 30, Ithaca Jan. 1, Montezuma Jan. 1, Watkins Glen Dec. 30); Co–County; L–Lake; MNWR–Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge; Sen–Seneca; WFC–Waterfowl Count (Cayuga Lake Jan. 7 and 12, Elmira Jan. 14); * (starred)–details on file.

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LOONS-DUCKS: Com. Loon: numerous reports thru early Jan. One wintered at the south end of Sen. L. Red-necked Grebe: one Sheldrake Cay L. Feb. 4; two that crash landed were brought to the Laboratory of Ornithology Feb. 19. They were released on open water at Milliken Station. Horned Grebe: found in small numbers only thru the period. Pied-billed Grebe: three on Ithaca CC and three wintered at Watkins Glen. Great Blue Heron: several thru Dec. with one wintering at Elmira. Whistling Swan: one on the west side of Cay L. Jan. 16 and Feb. 7; two flying north over Milliken Station Feb. 22. Canada Goose: on Jan. 7 an estimated 18,000 with their backs covered with snow sat out a snowstorm on Cay L. south of Canoga. The following week many flocks were noted going south over Ithaca. Only a few hundred remained to winter. At Elmira a flock was seen going north on Feb. 13 during the sub-zero spell. Snow Goose: two blue and one white-phase birds were at Canoga Jan. 28; one at Phelps Dec. 6-11. Gadwall: 45 on Sen L. Geneva CC; 31 Cay L. WCC; 12-15 on Sen L. near Dresden during Feb. Pintail: two Cay L. WFC. Green-winged Teal: a single bird on the Elmira CC and WFC. Redhead: 1,200 on Keuka L. until it froze over in Jan.; 977 Cay L. WFC. Ring-necked Duck: one Ithaca CC. Canvasback: 60 Cay L. WFC. Com. Goldeneye: 133 Geneva CC; 150 Cay L. WFC; 100 Dresden during Feb. Oldsquaw: one Aurora Dec. 3. White-winged Scoter: female at Milliken Station Feb. 22. Ruddy Duck: three at Canoga Jan. 29; one at Watkins Glen Feb. 28. Com. Merganser: relatively few reported; maximum 31 Elmira CC.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Goshawk: reported from Ithaca and Geneva during Dec. Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks: found principally around feeders throughout the winter. Eight Cooper's sighted on four CCs. Red-tailed Hawk: several observers commented on the relative scarcity of this species. Red-shouldered Hawk: only report was one at Ithaca Feb. 16 (R. Fischer *vide* DM). Rough-legged Hawk: light incursion with most reports from the southern part of the Region. Total of seven on the Ithaca and Elmira CCs. Marsh Hawk: one Penn Yan in Dec.; two Geneva CC. Am. Kestrel: lower counts on the Geneva, Ithaca and Montezuma CCs reinforce observers' comments about this bird. The Elmira CC was up. Ring-necked Pheasant: rapidly disappearing; only 19 reported on four CCs. Turkey: two toms at the Tompkins Co. airport in Feb.; a flock at Wellsburg and one at Horseheads. Am. Coot: more wintering each year at Watkins Glen with up to 80 in late Feb.; 112 Ithaca CC. Killdeer: two on Geneva CC; one South Lansing Jan. 7. Common Snipe: one Geneva CC. Am. Woodcock: arrived at Ithaca College Feb. 28. **GLAUCOUS GULL:** a second year bird at Watkins Glen Dec. 15-Feb. 25 (Straths *vide* JB). **ICELAND GULL:** a pure white bird at Myers Jan. 28 (Gooding & Melin) and an adult at Myers Feb. 3 (Guarnaccia & Lewis) both *vide* DM. Great Black-backed Gull: 23 Ithaca CC; up to 50 (high) along with 400 Herring and 50 Ring-billed Gulls at the Waterloo Dump Feb. 15. **BLACK GUILLEMOT:** a winter-plumaged bird seen by four observers on a pond at the Ditmer Boy Scout Camp south of Phelps Dec. 23 (Paris, Pepper, Mathew Trail & Joseph Braun)*.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Screech Owl: a gray phase bird was at a feeder on Ellis Hollow Road, Ithaca, at 9 A.M. on Feb. 9. Snowy Owl: a bird, probably a female, was seen feeding on a Canada Goose carcass on the ice on Cay L. near Canoga Feb. 13. Short-eared Owl: fewer reports this winter; two at Penn Yan in Dec.; two Geneva CC; one at Lansing Jan. 15 and at Ithaca Jan. 22. Saw-whet Owl: one Ithaca near where they were heard during the spring and summer. Belted Kingfisher: nine found on four CCs. Common Flicker: several observers thought it to be more common this winter; maximum 24 Ithaca CC. Pileated Woodpecker: seven on four CCs. Red-bellied Woodpecker: 61 on three CCs. Red-headed Woodpecker: singles at Clyde, Penn Yan and Second Milo; two at a feeder south of Phelps. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: one wintered at Penn Yan; singles on the Ithaca and Montezuma CCs; a male at Ithaca Jan. 8; singles at Trumansburg, Aurora Feb. 12 and Phelps Feb. 23.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: while most observers reported very small numbers, the Geneva CC turned up 457, the second highest total for a count going back to

1901. Blue Jay: while some considered there were fewer, the Ithaca CC hit a high of 553 and four CCs totaled 1105. GRAY JAY: a single bird was well observed by the Refuge personnel at MNWR Feb. 20 (V. Dewey & G. Hocutt). Com. Raven: no reports from the Watkins-Monterey area where the species has been seen in recent years. Black-capped Chickadee: while the Elmira CC was down to 152 the Ithaca CC recorded a high of 1,260. Red-breasted Nuthatch: scarce; maximum five at Lettie Cook Memorial Forest, Union Springs, Nov. 10. Winter Wren: a single report from Penn Yan. Mockingbird: maximum 13 Ithaca CC with several at new locations. Brown Thrasher: one at Phelps Dec. 26-Jan. 2.

Am. Robin: widespread reports of large flocks overwintering; the warm southerly breezes of late Feb. brought out many robins as 100 plus at Penn Yan, 30 Etna Feb. 20, 47 MNWR Feb. 22 and many at Ithaca the same day. Hermit Thrush: one Elmira CC; one Ithaca Jan. 20; an emaciated bird with a broken leg was brought to the Laboratory of Ornithology Feb. 20 but did not survive. Eastern Bluebird: an unusual number of winter reports were received. At Penn Yan six reports of four to eight birds each; at Clyde six on Jan. 1; at Watkins Glen eight on the CC and a few in late Feb.; at Ithaca two on Jan. 7 and four on Jan. 11 and Feb. 5; at Elmira four on Jan. 14; at Seneca Falls six on Jan. 21; six near MNWR in Feb. and 30-35 wintering in the Guyanoga Valley. Kinglets: both species very scarce. One Golden-crowned was found at Ithaca Dec. 5, also one at Phelps Dec. 6 and 13, six on the Ithaca CC and one at Elmira Jan. 28. The Geneva CC turned up three Ruby-crowned. WATER PIPIT: very rarely found in the winter in Region 3 but two were located this year. One was on the beach of Keuka L. near Hammondsport the last week of Dec. and the first week of Jan. (ML). The other, for which a very detailed verification report was submitted, was at Horseheads Jan. 1 (Ostrander & Clements)*. Cedar Waxwing: high numbers in the southern part of the Region. Northern Shrike: a good flight well distributed over the Region. Starling: no large roost located at Ithaca this winter.

VIREOS-WARBLED: Yellow-rumped Warbler: three Dittmer Dec. 6 and 13; nine Geneva CC; ten Ithaca CC. Com. Yellowthroat: one Montezuma CC.

WEAVERS-SPARROWS: NORTHERN ORIOLE: immature male at Cayuga Heights from Christmas to Jan. 17 (DM). Evening Grosbeak: a big flight year but, as usual, somewhat unevenly distributed over the Region with reports of 100 plus at some feeders. Ithaca CC had a high count of 1,253. Purple Finch: widely distributed in small numbers only but Ithaca CC had a high of 68. House Finch: continues to multiply; Ithaca CC jumped 400% to 453. Pine Grosbeak: four Elmira Jan. 28 only report. Com. Redpoll: 25 Ithaca CC; Elmira CC two; one at Ithaca feeder Feb. 18. Pine Siskin: 40 at Brooktondale feeder in early Dec. and 147 Geneva CC, otherwise scattered reports of a few individuals only. Am. Goldfinch: another good winter for this species with up to 45 at an Ithaca feeder. Crossbills: no reports of either species. Rufous-sided Towhee: two Geneva CC; one Ithaca CC; one at E. Sullivanville feeder all winter; one at Dilger feeder Ithaca Jan. and early Feb.; one Trumansburg early Feb. Tree Sparrow: down in numbers at some feeders and few large roadside flocks seen. Field Sparrow: one Phelps Dec. 22; two Geneva CC; one Elmira CC; six Montezuma CC; one to four at Dondaro feeder Ithaca from late Dec. thru the period. White-crowned Sparrow: one each on the Geneva and Montezuma CCs. White-throated Sparrow: 32 Geneva CC; 97 Ithaca CC; 24 Elmira CC. Swamp Sparrow: three Ithaca CC but none thereafter. Song Sparrow: usual small numbers totaling 97 on four CCs; 12-15 Phelps Feb. 17. Lapland Longspur: two reports of two to four birds at Penn Yan; one Geneva CC; four Lowman Feb. 8; four Seneca Co. Feb. 15. Snow Bunting: widely reported in flocks varying from a few individuals to 500 birds mostly from Seneca and Ontario Cos.

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