

REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

VIVIAN MILLS PITZRICK

One man's food is another's poison, but even so, this season's persistent snow drought was a welcome change from the past three rugged winters. Total precipitation averaged 1.1 in. (2.8 cm) below normal, highway departments realized substantial savings and birding was a breeze—except, of course, for the “out-sight” gasoline prices. Until the final week of January, during which Lake Erie finally froze on the 28th, over three weeks late, the jet stream stayed over Canada, resulting in temperatures above normal by 4° to 5° F. (2.2° to 2.8° C). From then until the end of the period, its path was well south of us, reversing from warm to cold and plunging the average reading to 2.7° F. (1.5° C) below normal.

Variety of bird species was good, with several over-wintering, but total numbers were low, the season being in most cases “rather birdless” (Eaton). At Farmersville Station the Clarks banded 2700 birds in the winter of 1975-'76 but only 900 this season, while Elizabeth Brooks at Alfred Station netted 652 birds four years ago and only 193 this winter. With few exceptions, both field and feeder yielded discouragingly low counts in spite of nearly bare ground, much open water and a fair wild food crop. While acorns and fruits of the box elder and sumac were abundant and squirrels were plentiful, mice and voles appeared infrequently, there were few hemlock or cherry seeds and no beechnuts, wild grapes were soon depleted and rabbits continued scarce.

Winter positives include 1) widespread reports all season of one or two Great Blue Herons; 2) better numbers of the Black Duck and Redhead, and strong spring flight of the White-winged Scoter; 3) a few more accipiters; 4) excellent Ruffed Grouse and Turkey populations and a modest expansion for the Ring-necked Pheasant; 5) a fine larid season—with a new species for Chautauqua County; 6) record count for the Belted Kingfisher, many wintering Common Flickers and the Red-bellied Woodpecker doing very well; 7) high tally for Blue Jays, and adult Common Crows returning early, January 22, to old nesting site (Eaton); 8) thriving Black-capped Chickadees, the Tufted Titmouse doing better, a fair Red-breasted Nuthatch flight, and the Brown Creeper well-reported; 9) a few wintering mimic thrushes, with the Mockingbird making a comeback; 10) a host of robins throughout the season, especially near the Great Lakes, and numerous Cedar Waxwings, 11) a winter record-breaker for the Yellow-rumped Warbler; 12) good reports of the Evening Grosbeak but smaller flocks than usual; 13) continued increase in House Finch numbers; 14) a junco conundrum; and 15) lots of White-throated Sparrows.

Negatives for the winter include 1) scarcity of loons and grebes; 2) a poor flight of Whistling Swans, and not many Common Goldeneyes or Hooded Mergansers; 3) a disappointing Rough-legged Hawk flight, the Red-tailed Hawk population continuing low, and only scattered reports of the American Kestrel and Marsh Hawk; 4) almost no coots; 5) Rock Doves thriving; 6) a poor Snowy Owl year; 7) Horned Larks practically nonexistent; 8) pitiful numbers of Winter and

Carolina Wrens, and Golden-crowned Kinglets; 9) a minuscule shrike flight; 10) the Eastern Meadowlark hardly reported at all; 11) a continued slightly reduced Cardinal population; 12) absence of most "winter" finches, in particular: Pine Grosbeaks, redpolls and crossbills; and 13) very low numbers of Tree Sparrows, only a sprinkling of Song Sparrows, no longspurs, and few Snow Buntings.

The splendid array of rarities and out-of-season birds includes Blue-winged Teal, Barrow's Goldeneye, Goshawk, Bald Eagle, Virginia Rail, Red Phalarope, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Sabine's Gull, Saw-whet Owl, Common Raven, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Waterthrush, Northern Oriole, Dickcissel, Chipping Sparrow, Fox Sparrow and Lincoln's Sparrow.

Abbreviations: ACC—Allegheny County Bird Club Census, Dec. 29, of birds outside the Scio Audubon Census circle; BOS—Buffalo Ornithological Society; CC—Audubon Christmas Census (St. Bonaventure [St. Bon, hereafter], Dec. 15; BOS, Dec. 16; Scio, Dec. 29; H+=Record High, H=Second Highest ever, L=Second Lowest ever, and L=Record Low—or tied for each); GMA or WMA—Game or Wildlife Management Area; NC, NP or NS—Nature Center, Preserve or Sanctuary; NWR—National Wildlife Refuge; Res—Reservoir; SF or SP—State Forest or Park.

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LOONS—DUCKS: Almost absent this season, only three Com. Loons were noted, all during Dec. in the Niagara Falls area. Grebes, too, were scarce with single Red-necked Grebes at Youngstown Jan. 5, and at Niagara Falls Jan. 20, and the max of Pied-billed, a dismal four at Dunkirk Harbor Jan. 5 and 6. Unusual in winter was the imm. Double-crested Cormorant found at Dunkirk Harbor Jan. 9. Highest of the few Whistling Swan reports was 12 at Fluvanna Jan. 1. Once more Canada Geese appeared all season with max 4000 at Iroquois NWR Jan. 1-30 (JM) while the wild pair at Farmersville Sta. has now been with the Clarks four years. A Snow Goose (blue morph) was seen irregularly at Iroquois NWR Jan. 8-23 (Olsen, JM). Unusual duck counts on the BOSCC are: Mallard, 1338 (H+); Black Duck, 150 (L-); Gadwall, 78 (H); Pintail, 78 (H); Green-winged Teal, three; Wood Duck, two; **BARROW'S GOLDENEYE**, one; and Com. Merganser, 7578, highest since 1970. Other noteworthy duck reports include: Black Duck, appearing all season with max 40 on the Allegheny R. in Dec. and 27 on the Genesee R. in Feb.; Gadwall, two at Goat Island Dec. 3, 30 at Iroquois NWR Dec. 9, up to 11 at Niagara Falls Jan. 1 and 13, and two at Dunkirk Harbor Feb. 17; Pintail, max 26 at Goat Island Dec. 3; Green-winged Teal, two at Goat Island Dec. 3, up to four at Niagara Falls Jan. 1 and 13, and one at Scio Jan. 19 and 29; a single **BLUE-WINGED TEAL**, late, at Dunkirk Harbor Jan. 6 (FR); a **BARROW'S GOLDENEYE** at Niagara Falls irregularly Dec. 20 thru Jan. 27 (DF, RA, HA+), and another at Celoron regularly from Jan. 8 thru Feb. (RS, Gagne+); Wood Duck, a male on the Allegheny R. near Portville Feb. 4 and 13 (JV, RV, SE); Redhead, max 50 at Niagara Falls Jan. 1; Com. Goldeneye, as many as 11 on the Allegheny R. (Vandalia to Portville) from late Jan. thru Feb., and six on the Genesee R. at Caneadea Jan. 16; White-winged Scoter, a big flight of 400 near

the mouth of the Niagara R. on Lake Ontario Feb. 15 (HA); **Black Scoter**, one in Niagara Falls gorge Dec. 3 and 20; **Ruddy Duck**, max 60 at State Power Authority Res. Jan. 1, two in Niagara gorge Jan. 5 and one at Dunkirk Harbor Feb. 19; **Hooded Merganser**, only 12 totaled from five areas; **Com. Merganser**, totaling at least 41 on the Genesee and Allegheny Rivers with high counts after Lake Erie froze; and a single **Red-breasted Merganser** at Celoron Feb. 10.

HAWKS—ALCIDS: Once more only a single **GOSHAWK** appeared this winter, on the BOSCC in the Tonawanda area, while the 14 Sharp-shinned and 23 Cooper's Hawks were widespread and usually reported as one to an area throughout the season except for Sharpies which were absent in Feb. Also noteworthy are: **Red-shouldered Hawk**, one in Wales Feb. 6 (Rosches), unusual in winter; **Rough-legged Hawk**, almost absent with only ten widely scattered singles reported; **BALD EAGLE**, an adult at Onoville, Cattaraugus Co. Feb. 17 (Woodward, Carlson *vide* RS); and **Marsh Hawk**, a measly six birds! Because of the mild weather, **VIRGINIA RAILS** tried to winter: one was car-killed on Haskell Road, near Cuba, Jan. 13 (MF), and two were spotted at Iroquois NWR Jan. 31 and Feb. 1 (Olsen). Highest count for the Am. Coot was 14 at Dunkirk Harbor Feb. 17, very low. Staying three weeks later than usual were two **Purple Sandpipers** at Niagara Falls Feb. 9 (RA+) and a **RED PHALAROPE** frequented Dunkirk Harbor Jan. 9 thru Feb. 19 (RS, Sterling, FR+). Interesting from the fine larid season are: **Glaucous Gull**, no less than 23 along the Niagara R. during Dec. and Jan., and singles at Cuba L. Jan. 4 (AnS) and at Dunkirk Harbor Feb. 19 (RS); **Iceland Gull**, max eight at Niagara Falls Feb. 9; **Great Black-backed Gull**, 560 (H+) on the BOSCC; **LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL**, one irregularly in the Niagara Falls area Dec. 24 thru Jan. 1 (HA, RA, HK, WK); **Ring-billed Gull**, 10,056 (H+) on the BOSCC; **Franklin's Gull**, one in Niagara Falls gorge Dec. 3 (AS, ARC); **Bonaparte's Gull**, 8488 (H) on the BOSCC and max 2000 over the Niagara R. Jan. 5; **Little Gull**, one at Ft. Niagara Dec. 31, four at Dunkirk Harbor Jan. 9, and one at Lewiston Jan. 27; and **SABINE'S GULL**, an imm. at Dunkirk Harbor, discovered by B. Chapman Dec. 1 and still there Dec. 2 (RS, Gagne+)—the first record for Chautauqua Co.

PIGEONS—WOODPECKERS: **Rock Doves** numbered 1672 (H+) on the BOSCC. (Think of their food consumption!) As usual, except for the **Great Horned Owl**, owl reports were few: **Screech Owl**, ten on the BOSCC, two on the ScioCC+ACC and singles in Amity Twp. Jan. 21 (road kill) and at Farmersville Sta. Feb. 5; **Snowy Owl**, singles on the BOSCC, at Buffalo Harbor, on Grand Island (same as on CC) and at Wheatfield; **Long-eared Owl**, now at Somerset Dec. 31 (DF, DW); **Short-eared Owl**, one on the St. Bon CC and one in Portland Twp. Feb. 29 (DF); and **SAW-WHET OWL**, one on Grand Island Dec. 22 thru 25 (RA+). The **Belted Kingfisher** numbered 12 (H+) on the BOSCC. The two **Red-bellied Woodpeckers** on the St Bon CC were found near Allegany near the Allegheny R (SE), an unusual area for these birds, and a **Red-headed Woodpecker** was sighted on the BOSCC in addition to two at Youngstown Feb. 20 and one in Porter Twp. Feb. 24 (HK, WK+). A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** was seen in Hume Twp. Dec. 2 and 15 (KP). The count for the **Hairy Woodpecker** on the BOSCC was only five (tied for lowest in 20 years).

FLYCATCHERS—STARLINGS: **Horned Lark** numbers were w-a-a-a-y down with max: unidentified subspecies, 10 in Amity Twp. Jan. 27; *Eremophila alpestris alpestris*, 13 in Conewango Feb. 17; and *E. a. praticola*, one in Poland Twp. Feb. 10. Noteworthy among the corvids are: **Blue Jay**, 387 (H+) on the BOSCC; **COMMON RAVEN**, two in Willing Twp. Dec. 28 (Johnson *vide* HG); and **Com. Crow**, flocks of up to 200 in the Alfred area from mid-Jan. thru Feb. (CK). Two **Tufted Titmice** appeared on the BOSCC, two on the St Bon CC, three on the ACC as well as 13 birds, total, from seven scattered field reports. While two **Winter Wrens** were found for the BOSCC and three for the ACC, the only report of the **Carolina** was one at Shelby Dec. 3 (Schrader). Ten **Mockingbirds** were counted from six locations, a **Gray Catbird** appeared on the BOSCC, and single **Brown Thrashers** were seen on Grand Island Jan. 1 and at Cuba Jan. 16. Max of the many wintering Am. Robins was 164

at Iroquois NWR Jan. 14, while here also four **EASTERN BLUEBIRDS** were found the same day (Olsen). Other than 21 on the BOSCC, one on the St Bon CC and 12 on the ACC, reports of the Golden-crowned Kinglet totaled but 12 birds from four areas, but a Ruby-crowned Kinglet was discovered, over a week late, at Newstead Dec. 9 (AM, WM). The Cedar Waxwing numbered 155 (H+) on the BOSCC. This was definitely not the year of the shrike; there were only two Northern found for the BOSCC in addition to singles from seven scattered locations. On the BOSCC Starlings tallied 96,341 (H).

VIREOS-WARBLEDERS: Single Yellow-rumped Warblers were found during the winter at Scio, Belmont, Friendship, Hume Twp. and Ellery Twp. but a whopping 31 were counted in Portland Twp., feeding on bayberries Feb. 17 (AS, ARC)—the highest ever winter flock for our region. A wintering (?) **NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** was identified at Tift Farm NC Jan. 5 (Daniels, Karl).

WEAVERS-SPARROWS: A partial albino House Sparrow appeared regularly at an Al-lentown feeder Feb. 1 thru 28 (DH). The Red-winged Blackbird numbered 114 (H+) on the BOSCC. Well observed for about five minutes was a female **NORTHERN ORIOLE** at Green-hurst Dec. 15 (RS). There were single Rusty Blackbirds at Orchard Park Dec. 1-5 and at Limestone Dec. 9, and six at Gerry Jan. 1. A **DICKCISSEL** came to the Holland feeder Dec. 1 where it had been reported in the fall (Beckers). Most observers commented on the small flocks of Evening Grosbeaks compared with some other years, the max congregation being 150 at Friendship Jan. 13 (SB); of the species, tallied were 1152 on the ScioCC+ACC and 33 on the St Bon CC, while winter bandings totaled 54 at Alfred Station (EB), 114 at Farmersville Sta. (DC) and 115 at Limestone (RV). The House Finch broke the BOSCC record with 22 (H+) and tallied 106 on the ScioCC+ACC, while the max other report was 135 at Jamestown Jan. 1 (RS, Gagne). The only Pine Siskin for the season was one at E. Amherst Dec. 8 and Jan. 27 (DF). Noteworthy sparrows include: Rufous-sided Towhee, singles at Kent Switch Feb. 18 (FR, Buck) and at the Nicholson feeder, Wellsville, all season (*vide* NI); an oddball Dark-eyed Junco, banded at Limestone Jan. 3 and at the feeder thru Feb., *tentatively* identified, with the help of skins from Dr. Eaton of St. Bonaventure, as the subspecies *Junco hyemalis cismontanus*, a western form (RV); Tree Sparrow, 300 (L) on the BOSCC, and an eye-popping 165 at Kent Switch Feb. 18 (FR, Buck), especially with the next highest count 38 at Cuba L. Feb. 9 (SB); a **CHIPPING SPARROW** at Belmont Jan. 2 thru Feb. (DB, LB), banded in Feb. (EB); Field Sparrow, six on the ScioCC+ACC, and singles at Middleport Feb. 9 thru 29, irregularly, and at Orchard Park Feb. 29; White-crowned Sparrow, one at Middleport Feb. 9 thru 29 (Krogs), the only report; White-throated Sparrow, 85 (H) on the BOSCC, with many areas reporting one to four birds wintering; **FOX SPARROW**, one on the BOSCC, first time ever; and a **LINCOLN'S SPARROW**, on the ScioCC, the same bird appearing in Wellsville regularly Dec. 19 thru 31 (EL, DB), and on thru Jan. 17 (EL). Max from the few Snow Bunting reports was 200 at Hermitage Jan. 26 (Barber).

Amity Lake, Belmont, New York 14813

REGION 2 — GENESEE

ROBERT SPAHN

The first half of the winter season was warmer than normal with little snow-fall. The remainder saw below average temperatures, though not approaching the severity of the past two winters, and still little snow for the Region. Through