

REGION 6 - ST. LAWRENCE

KENNETH L. CROWELL and GERALD A. SMITH

With the exception of a dramatic incursion of Great Gray Owls, this was a dull winter for birders. Oddly, it was the coldest and snowiest in recent years. Much of this report is based on Christmas Bird Count reports, with a decided dearth of information for January and February. It was a winter when birding in the North Country may best have been done at the window by the feeder, but for those who ventured afield, rewards were found along Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. A total of 88 species was reported in comparison with 93 for the same period in 1983. Temperatures averaged 3° F below normal for December while precipitation was 3.6 in. above normal. There was heavy rain 13-14 December and snow 28-30 December. During the last two weeks of the month temperatures were more than 10° below normal. The monthly high was 44° on the 16th followed by the extreme low of -24° on the 20th. Rough weather for Christmas Counts! In January temperatures were also below normal, but precipitation was normal. The period of 8-22 January was especially cold, with the heaviest snow on the 14-15th. Monthly extreme temperatures ranged from -29° to 40°F. We had March weather in February. The first two weeks were cold, with a monthly minimum temperature of -14° on the 2nd. The period 11-22 February was exceptionally warm with a monthly high of 61° the 14th. Heavy rains took the ice out of the rivers. The month ended with a blizzard during the last two days. Species counts for all three regional Christmas Counts were down 15-20%; with both Massena and Thousand Islands logging 55 while Watertown reported 43 species. Individuals were down as well. Massena totaled 9,653 on 27 December; Thousand Islands had 7,669 the 18th, and Watertown tallied 6,815 on 17 Dec.

On the positive side, there were good numbers of waterfowl, an increase in reports of Bald Eagle and Gray Partridge. In addition to the Great Gray Owl invasion there was a good Snowy Owl flight. Shrikes were up from last year. Both Northern Cardinal and Tufted Titmouse show increases. Other noteworthy sightings included Boreal Chickadee and Bohemian Waxwing. On the downside was the continued increase of the Canada Goose and large gull populations. Rough-legged Hawk numbers were only fair. For all the cold there was a dearth of winter finches. Does that reflect a good cone crop in boreal forests or our own frigid conditions? Not surprisingly, there were fewer half-hardies this year, fewer Song Sparrows and icterids, and no Northern Mockingbirds. Interesting birds out-of-season included Hooded Merganser, Turkey Vulture, Red-shouldered Hawk, Killdeer, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Northern Oriole and Field Sparrow.

For rarities, we had a first regional record for Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Abbreviations: Jeff. Co.-Jefferson County; MCC-Massena Christmas Count; MSPD-Moses Saunders Power Dam, Massena; St. Law. Co.-St. Lawrence County; SLR-St. Lawrence River; TICC-Thousand Islands Christmas Count; WCC-Watertown Christmas Count.

Contributors: Joanne Akerman, Marilyn Badger, Stewart Brown, R. Cerwonka, Lee B. Chamberlaine, K. Crowell, S. Coyne DeGhett, Michael Digiorgio, M. & E. Howard, Collins Kellogg, Lorena McLeod, Peter O'Shea, Gerald A. Smith, J. VanRiet, Robert Walker, James Winterbottom.

LOONS-DUCKS: Com. Loon: one each WCC and TICC. Great Blue Heron: six TICC is very high, could conceivably involve duplication; imm found dead Renshaw Bay Rd., Ellisburg 6 Jan (LMcL). Mute Swan: two with a flock of Canada Geese, Ellisburg 26 Jan (SS), a most unusual mid-winter record. Canada Goose: 770 WCC; 87 TICC; 67 MCC; 600 Pillar Pt, Jeff. Co. 11 Dec; 12 Watertown 24 Feb, probably spring migrants. This species continues to increase in frequency and abundance locally at all seasons; it is now to be expected year round in small numbers except during the most severe winters, when they are absent from late Dec to late Feb. Am. Black Duck: 67 MCC; 36 TICC, of which 55 were in Black R. Bay; 28 Robert Moses Power Dam 14 Jan; 5-15 per day in open water areas along the SLR thru. Mallard: 200 MCC; 115 TICC; 67 WCC; only scattered records of one to two per day in open water pools along the SLR; 50 RMPD 14 Jan. Gadwall: 25 SLR near Massena (JVR), a high count for so late in the season. Canvasback: four RMPD 14 Jan. Ring-necked Duck: one TICC; two 28 Dec RMPD (JVR). Greater Scaup: 1,098 TICC; 226 WCC; 5,000 Sherwins Bay, Jeff. Co. (RJW) 11 Dec; 500 Tibbetts Point, Lake Ontario, 15 Jan; small numbers, ten per day or less in open water pools along the SLR. Oldsquaw: two MCC; four TICC; one WCC; 30 Pillar Pt 11 Dec; 80 Stony Pt., Jeff. Co., 15 Jan. White-winged Scoter: 4 TICC. Com. Goldeneye: 1,400 MCC; 1,098 TICC; 100 WCC; 200 Sherwin's Bay 11 Dec; 100-220 per day Stony Pt.-Pt. Peninsula, Jeff. Co. Dec-Feb; 300-600 per day in open water pools along the SLR Dec-Feb. Barrow's Goldeneye: one MCC; one thru Feb RMPD; should now be considered rare but regular on the SLR east of the power dam in winter. Bufflehead: three MCC; 12 Sherwin's Bay 11 Dec; seven Star Pt. 15 Jan; thru season RMPD. Hooded Merganser: one MCC (JVR); two Dexter 13 Dec (RJW); rare in this region in winter. Com. Merganser: 4,000 MCC; 2,765 TICC; three WCC; 500-1,000 per day in open water pools along the SLR thru. The river is a major fall migration staging and wintering area for this species; they are often the most common waterfowl present. Red-breasted Merganser: three MCC.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: one verified report of one WCC (Stewart Brown, Nick Leone); unverified reports of two TICC, and two feeding at Town Dump, Clare, in Jan (JW); this species is very rare in our area in winter and all reports require careful verification. Bald Eagle: frequency of sightings and total numbers definitely up along the SLR and northeastern Lake Ontario; SLR reports include: two to four per day Chippewa Pt. to Morristown thru; one to two per day near Ogdensburg thru; one Pollys Gut 28 Dec and 15 Jan, two TICC, max an extraordinary 7! (3 adults, 4 imm) feeding on a deer carcass near Big Island on 1 Jan (GAS); adult and imm near Sackets Harbor 11 Dec (RJW); adult feeding on a deer carcass along the Racquette R near Black Falls 2-5 Feb, an unusual inland report. No. Harrier: one to three per day thru period Pt. Peninsula, Jeff. Co., where they are regular in winter; no other confirmed winter reports; singles Henderson 17 Feb and Massena 18 Feb are probably early spring migrants. Sharp-shinned Hawk: three MCC; singles 17 Dec Pt. Peninsula; one Ellisburg 18 Dec one Watertown 8 Dec; at feeder in Canton thru. Cooper's Hawk: "pair" Henderson 21 Jan (LBC), only report. No. Goshawk: scattered reports of one to two per day thru, total 12 reports. Red-shouldered Hawk: one at suet feeder in Potsdam during two weeks in Jan, photos taken, (C. Horton *fide* JVR); another unverified report. This species is extremely rare at this season and all reports require full verification. Red-tailed Hawk: numbers up this winter in many areas: four MCC; two TICC; 12 WCC; six Chaumont area 4 Feb; one to four per day from all sections of region at lowlands including the fringe of the SLR, where this species is infrequent during many winters. Rough-legged Hawk: three MCC; eight WCC; five to ten per day Pt. Peninsula thru; two to six per day in other areas of western Jeff. Co.; less frequent

elsewhere. Am. Kestrel: one MCC; one TICC; five WCC. Scattered reports of one per day elsewhere thru. Gray Partridge: 13 MCC, 23 TICC, 63 WCC; one 23 Jan Brownville, Jeff. Co.; five thru Feb N of Massena; six S. Hammond, St. Law. Co. 31 Dec; seems to be doing well in many lowland areas of the region. Ring-necked Pheasant: three PRWMA 17 Dec; one female DOR Canton. Ruffed Grouse: 16 MCC; nine TICC. Am. Coot: four TICC; one Rensselaer Falls 22 Jan (JVR); most unusual in winter in this region. Killdeer: Canton during thaw late Feb. Ring-billed gull: 18 MCC; five TICC; 283 WCC; migrants by 5 Feb, in Massena area (JVR). Herring Gull: 600 MCC; 179 TICC; 38 WCC. Iceland Gull: 14 MCC; one to two per day western SLR in Jan and Feb. **LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL**: adult near Big Island on the SLR 1 Jan, may be first regional record (GAS). Glaucous gull: ten MCC; one TICC; one to two per day in western SLR Jan and Feb. Great Black-backed Gull: 530 MCC; 101 TICC; 1 WCC; 50-100 per day in the western SLR Jan-Feb; this species now regularly outnumbers the Herring Gull in many parts of this region during winter.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Rock Dove: max 1,054 WCC. Mourning Dove: max 150 TICC. E. Screech-Owl: one calling 28 Dec Henderson (LC). Great Horned Owl: 20 reports: max six TICC. Snowy Owl: none on Christmas Counts; 12 reports 21 Dec thru 22 Feb. **GREAT GRAY OWL**: over 40 reports for as many as 30 individuals in St. Law. Co. with concentration in Massena-Potsdam area 31 Dec thru, but marked decline after mid-Feb thaw; eight reports for six individuals in Jeff. Co.; one Croghan, Lewis Co. 19 Jan. Long-eared Owl: one found dead Carthage 26 Dec (SB). Short-eared Owl: two 7 Jan and one 15 Jan Pt. Peninsula (RW). Belted Kingfisher: one TICC. Red-headed Woodpecker: one outer Massey St., Watertown 3 Jan (SB). Red-bellied Woodpecker: one TICC; two males Henderson thru; one Sandy Creek. Downy Woodpecker: 76 reported. Hairy Woodpecker: 56 reported. No. Flicker: one TICC. Pileated Woodpecker: only 7 reports.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: max 177 WCC. Gray Jay: two on deer carcass above High Falls, Town of Fine 5 Dec. Blue Jay: abundant this year, two to eight at feeders; max 181 TICC. Am. Crow: 56 WCC; small numbers thru Jan; max 200 Canton 11 Feb. Com. Raven: three Star L 21 Jan; two Cranberry L 19 Feb (Po'S); seven at deer carcass near Blake Falls, Colton 3 Feb. Black-capped Chickadee: even more than last year; 43 banded at my feeder, 15-24 thru; max 380 MCC. **BOREAL CHICKADEE**: two Potsdam 10 Feb thru (JA). Tufted Titmouse: increased numbers and distribution in Jeff. Co.; two at feeder in Henderson thru (LC); two thru Dec (LMcC); four WCC at feeder (LG); two Adams Cove 12-16 Dec (LG); two Elm St., Canton (JW). Red-breasted Nuthatch: one MCC only one on counts; reports of one and two from Canton, one Massena. White-breasted Nuthatch: max 37 TICC; 11 others from seven regular observers. Brown Creeper: none. Golden-crowned Kinglet: one MCC. Am. Robin: 2 MCC, 1 WCC, 20 Potsdam 4 Jan. **BOHEMIAN WAXWING**: 1 Robt. Moses State Park 11 Dec (JVR); 11 TICC; one with 11 Cedar Waxwings Stony Pt., Henderson 7 Jan (LC); five 21 Feb, two 21 Feb Watertown (RW). Cedar Waxwing: only two flocks during period (LC); 9 MCC; none WCC, TICC; 75 on 21 Feb and 50 Watertown 28 Feb. No. Shrike: three TICC; 11 others for Jeff. Co.; 7 MCC, 5 other reports for St. Law. Co. Eur. Starling: max 1,810 WCC.

VIREOS-WARBLEDERS: none.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: No. Cardinal: 21 WCC; 8 TICC; 13 MCC, far more than in the past; one to two pairs Dry Hill, Watertown thru; 3 pairs Massena thru (MB); three thru, max seven Canton 1 Dec (MEH); one to two Potsdam 10 Dec thru 26 Jan (SCDeG); four males, two females Lisbon; also reported from Waddington and Dekalb. Am. Tree Sparrow: 200 WCC; 207 TICC; max 11 at feeders. Field Sparrow: one MCC. Song Sparrow: one TICC; one feeder at Pillar Pt., Brownville 11 Dec. White-throated Sparrow: 200 WCC; one MCC. Dark-eyed Junco: max 22 WCC; Watertown thru Feb. Lapland Longspur: "in area" week of WCC. Snow Bunting: 2,000 Sherwin's Bay 11 Dec (RW); on all CC and smaller numbers throughout region thru period. Red-winged Blackbird: three TICC; four MCC; one Parishville thru Jan; returning flocks 20-24 Feb, very early. E. Meadowlark: one TICC.

Rusty Blackbird: one at feeder, Pillar Pt. 11 Dec (RW); one Potsdam 9 and 14 Feb (SCDeG). Com. Grackle: two Pillar Pt. 11 Dec; eight WCC. Brown-headed Cowbird: 12 MCC; ten Mannsville 17 Dec. No. Oriole: one Colton in Feb (JW). Pine Grosbeak: 73 MCC; none WCC, TICC; 44 others in seven reports, few and far between. Purple Finch: 16 WCC; five TICC; three Canton early Dec; three Massena thru. House Finch: 31 WCC, down from last year; one Canton early Dec (MEH). Com. Redpoll: four MCC; none WCC, TICC; max 60 Rensselaer Falls 22 Jan; a few other reports. Pine Siskin: 14 MCC; none WCC, TICC; 14 Massena 19, 21 Jan; 15 Potsdam and 20, 31 Jan, 1, 19, 20 Feb; three other reports. Am. Goldfinch: max 48 TICC; flocks of up to 18 at feeders thru. Evening Grosbeak: max 658 MCC; otherwise spotty, some report lots at feeders thru, others had few.

Dept. of Biology, St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York 13617

REGION 7 - ADIRONDACK-CHAMPLAIN

JOHN M. C. PETERSON

This winter's flight of Great Gray Owls illustrates both the wider appeal of birds and the changing nature of avian records. Not only are many more observers submitting records, but they are also gathering and passing along increased numbers of secondhand sight records. Many of these newer observers and most of their network are unknown to the editor, and at the same time few of them see *The Kingbird*. In the era when taxidermists and collectors supplied information on northern owls, there was little doubt about accurate identification (although a study skin of a Boreal Owl in the Middlebury College collection was originally mislabeled as a Northern Saw-Whet Owl). Every effort is made to obtain details of rarities, yet the fact remains that of *eight* Great Gray Owls reported in the region this winter, only three were actually seen by observers of known reliability. Most, if not all, of the others are undoubtedly correct, but the lingering uncertainty, especially with secondhand, verbal records, draws attention to a problem that increases along with the widening interest in birds.

The winter season from December through February was the sixth coldest on record nationwide, the coldest in 53 years, with fuel requirements 2% higher than normal. Yet within the Adirondack-Champlain Region, fuel needs were actually 7% lower than average. By early December, seasonal snowfall at Newcomb had reached 9 inches, while Piseco had a foot. Mid-month saw heavy rains, with 24-hour totals of 1.7" at Ray Brook on 13 December and 2.0" at Elizabethtown 14 December. By 16 December, after almost four inches of rain had fallen, Lake Champlain had risen to 99.88', or over five feet higher than a year earlier. Each inch added to the lake level represents 149,750,000,000 gallons of water. Many of the usual feeding and resting areas for waterfowl and gulls had been largely abandoned by the morning of the Ferrisburg and Plattsburgh Christmas Bird Counts (FCBC and PCBC) on 17 December. Happily, the ground