

## REGION 5 – ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

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All contributors agreed that the winter 1985-1986 was best finished and forgotten as quickly as possible. Numbers of birds generally were low, with few rarities to chase, but most observers ended the season with close to normal species lists. Perhaps the weather partly was responsible. All three months averaged just below normal in temperature, without prolonged spells of very cold or unseasonably warm weather. Almost constant overcast conditions continued from last November. Total snowfall was slightly below normal at the season's end. An ice storm in early February marked the disappearance of many half-hardy species from the Region.

The season began with expectations of a good Bohemian Waxwing and winter finch flight. Two Bohemian Waxwing were at Derby Hill on 7 Dec, and another was nearby the next day. Scott Harris found up to 134 near Poland during December and January; Gary Webb saw six there on 23 Feb. Otherwise waxwings of either species were scarce. Winter finches brought similarly mixed findings. Counts of up to 60 Pine Grosbeak per day in December diminished to 20 per day in January and February, but the species remained widespread in the Region. Purple Finch, both crossbills, and Pine Siskin were very scarce. Most reports of Common Redpoll were under 30 per day, and they generally were erratic in appearance but quite widespread. A group of 300 east of Jamesville in February contained a **HOARY REDPOLL**, as did another group of 100 at Dorothy Crumb's home in Pompey at the same time. Lower than average numbers of Evening Grosbeak were reported all winter, with the best numbers in December.

Irruptive raptors remained as scarce as the fall had suggested they would. Only about four Northern Goshawk were reported, and the midwinter maximum for Rough-legged Hawk, seen irregularly all winter, was three. American Kestrels were found more irregularly than in most winters. Few of the rarer owls were reported. In contrast, Northern Shrike were found fairly consistently and at many sites after December, and about seven Bald Eagle, of all age classes and reported from four sites, are about three times normal for this Region. The largest group was three at Cross Lake in early January.

The lack of really cold weather kept water moderately open. Otisco Lake froze after mid-January, but some smaller ponds partially reopened during the late January and mid-February thaws. Most of the ducks that regularly overwinter here were scarcer than normal. An exceptionally good count about 30 of White-winged Scoters arrived in Oswego about 23 Feb; spring migrants are most often found in April. In contrast, several waterfowl which irregularly overwinter here were present this season. A pair of Wood Duck overwintered in Manlius, and two or three more overwintered along the Oswego River. At least six Northern Pintail overwintered at several localities; this species often disappears locally in January. A male Northern Shoveler remained in Manlius after its 18 Jan arrival. There were almost no signs of spring migrant ducks at the season's end.

Other unusual winter waterbird reports included a Red-necked Grebe found in the snow on the Thendara golf course near Old Forge 24 Dec and successfully released on the Big Moose River by Gary Lee. Another late waterbird from the Adirondacks was a Great Blue Heron at Big Moose on 28 Dec. At least one Double-crested Cormorant overwintered at Oswego, about the fourth such Regional record. Very few wintering Killdeer or Common Snipe were found, none persistent. Great Black-backed, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were present in good numbers, but Ring-billed and Herring Gull numbers were unexceptional; few landfills between Syracuse and Oswego were still operating this season.

Half-hardy landbirds were mixed. Neither Hermit Thrush nor Winter Wren was reported. American Robins were widespread, even on the Lake Ontario plains north of Syracuse, but the highest count was only 104 at Pumpkin Hollow on 18 Jan. The two warblers reported were unexpected species. Most icterids disappeared in January. Sparrows were mixed. American Tree Sparrow were up somewhat in numbers, but once again no wintering Field or Swamp Sparrow were found. The other species were found in fairly typical numbers. Especially notable were single Song and White-crowned Sparrow (the latter for the second consecutive year) that overwintered at feeders on Derby Hill in the heart of the snow belt.

A total of 118 species was reported, about average. The great rarities included Gyrfalcon, Com. Black-headed and Thayer's Gull, Pine Warbler, American Redstart and Hoary Redpoll. Otherwise the season was enriched mainly by an assortment of unseasonable records.

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Abbreviations: BBFS – Ben Burt feeder survey; DH – Derby Hill, Oswego Co.; FH – Fairhaven, Little Sodus Bay and vicinity, Cayuga Co.; LOL – Lake Ontario littoral, Oswego Co.; NPT – northern Pompey township; SSSP – Selkirk Shores State Park, Oswego Co.; Syr – Syracuse.

LOONS-DUCKS: Red-throated Loon: last Oswego 19 Jan, late. Com. Loon: at least one apparently overwintered Oswego. Pied-billed Grebe: two or three overwintered Oswego River. Horned Grebe: last LOL 19 Jan. Red-necked Grebe: last four Skaneateles Lake 18 Jan. Great Blue Heron: last Oswego River 19 Jan; arr Oneida 28 Feb. Tundra Swan: four Bridgeport 7-8 Dec only report. Mute Swan: birds on Lyons Pond all pinioned. Canada Goose: migrants past DH to 24 Dec, last Regional counts >100 on 18 Jan. Green-winged Teal: last Otisco L first week of Dec. Am. Black Duck: max 155 mid-Jan, low. Gadwall: to ten per day to 16 Jan, then one Brewerton 7 Feb. Am. Wigeon: last FH 5 Dec. Canvasback: midwinter max 22 Oswego 16 Jan, only two counts >10. Redhead: midwinter counts to six per day Oswego. Ring-necked Duck: two stragglers in Jan, last Phoenix 25 Jan. Greater Scaup: midwinter max 1400 Oswego 1 Feb. Lesser Scaup: midwinter counts to five per day. King Eider: one or two birds Oswego to 15 Feb. Oldsquaw: midwinter max 102 Oswego 16 Jan, next highest count about 30. Surf Scoter: last Oswego 22 Dec. White-winged Scoter: midwinter counts to five per day Oswego. Com. Goldeneye: max 756 Oswego 11 Jan. Bufflehead: midwinter max 100 16 Jan, most counts <40. Hooded Merganser: last 1 Feb. Com. Merganser: max 1100 Oswego 23 Feb, next highest count 400. Red-breasted Merganser: midwinter max 30. Ruddy Duck: last Onon L 21 Dec.

**HAWKS-ALCIDS:** N. Harrier: last central Oswego 12 Dec, then a male "migrating" by DH 18 Jan. **GYRFALCON:** light bird seen briefly near Bridgeport 21 Dec (*vide* GH, NYSARC). Ring-necked Pheasant: male at feeder in Thendara to 28 Dec, first there in at least 20 years (GL). Am. Coot: last Oswego 22 Dec. Killdeer: one DH 15 Dec, two near Marcellus 3 Jan only reports. Com. Snipe: four DeWitt 23 Feb. Bonaparte's Gull: last LOL 12 Dec. **COM. BLACK-HEADED GULL:** one Oswego 29 Dec (GW, brief description), tenth Regional record. Ring-billed Gull: midwinter max 4400 mid-Jan. Herring Gull: midwinter max 1100 mid-Jan. **THAYER'S GULL:** im Minetto 25 Jan (MSR). Iceland Gull: to seven per day Oswego River. Glaucous Gull: to 12 per day Oswego River. Great Black-backed Gull: record max 635 Oswego 7 Jan (MSR).

**PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS:** Snowy Owl: second-hand reports only. Long-eared Owl: two Mattydale 21 Dec (JL) only report. Short-eared Owl: one near Phoenix 8-16 Dec; up to six near Utica 30 Dec-1 Jan only reports. N. Saw-whet Owl: one Nick's Lake 23 Jan, only report. N. Flicker: last 4 Jan, often overwinters.

**FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS:** Horned Lark: to 30 per day midwinter; arr DH 19 Feb. Tufted Titmouse: numbers comparable to recent years, probably increasing slowly. Red-breasted Nuthatch: one or two per day midwinter. Brown Creeper: one or two per day through Jan, none in Feb. Carolina Wren: two or three at feeders in Syr and DeWitt. Golden-crowned Kinglet: to five per day, including one Old Forge 28 Feb. E. Bluebird: arr seven Pompey 23 Feb.

**VIREOS-WARBLED:** **PINE WARBLER:** one at feeder near Bridgeport 30 Nov-15 Dec (BBFS, ph), third Regional winter record. **AM. REDSTART:** im male at feeder N. Syr first week of Jan (BBFS, ph), record late and first for winter period.

**TANAGERS-WEAVERS:** Rufous-sided Towhee: male overwintered DeWitt. Am. Tree Sparrow: somewhat better numbers than recent winters. Swamp Sparrow: last near Marcellus 3 Jan. White-throated Sparrow: small numbers only overwinter. Dark-eyed Junco: midwinter max ten per day. Lapland Longspur: one DH 2 Jan only report. Snow Bunting: midwinter max 250 mid-Jan. E. Meadowlark: one near Phoenix 3 Jan, only report. Red-winged Blackbird: last Skaneateles Lake 18 Jan. Com. Grackle: last three Liverpool 30 Jan. Brown-headed Cowbird: last 30 Jan, usually overwinters here. Purple Finch: only two reports, last Howland's Island 1 Jan. Red Crossbill: six SSSP 10 Dec, seven 20 Feb, only reports. White-winged Crossbill: three at a Fayetteville feeder in Jan; 2 SSSP 20 Feb, only reports. Pine Siskin: only two singles reported, last 3 Jan.

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