

REGION 6 – ST. LAWRENCE

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December was decidedly cold and snowy, but the remainder of the winter was unremarkable. Mean December temperatures were about three degrees below normal, but the snowfall was extraordinary. Even areas beyond the lake effect zone had 50% more snow than usual. Total snowfall for the period ranged from 75 in. at Canton to 185 in. on Tug Hill. Although January temperatures were slightly above normal, ice formation in the St. Lawrence River was two weeks earlier than last year. Heavy rain fell during a marked thaw 17 to 20 Jan, when the mercury reached 52. February was colder than normal and on the dry side. A thaw the end of the third week sent temperatures well into the 40's and brought chipmunks out of dormancy.

Was the prolonged cold and heavy snowfall the reason for some raptors being up and others down? The deep snow cover may have been responsible for Northern Harrier being scarce. None were reported from their usual wintering area on Pt. Peninsula, and the last of four reports totaling six individuals came in mid-January. Rough-legged Hawk was scarce for the second consecutive winter, the maximum being six along Rt. 81 between exits 47 and 50, Jefferson Co., on 9 Feb. It was virtually absent from many sectors, including traditional concentration areas in nw Jefferson Co. Am. Kestrel also was very scarce. The high count was two in Henderson on 11 Jan, and only four others were reported. There were only three reports of Snowy Owl, two unconfirmed. A Barred Owl hunting in daylight 4:00 PM outside Canton on 2 Jan reflects a hard winter. Another was a roadkill near Massena on 16 Jan (spm SLU). Buteos often are scarce in central St. Lawrence Co. during the period of heaviest snow cover. However, the scarcity of Rough-legged Hawk and Snowy Owl may owe to a good lemming year in the Arctic.

In contrast, an unusually many Accipiters and shrikes were reported at feeders. A total of 15 Sharp-shinned Hawk was reported with a maximum of three on the MCBC. Seventeen Cooper's Hawk was reported, the most at a time three on the TICBC. A total of 20 Northern Shrike was reported, with five found on two CBCs.

Extraordinary numbers of Bald Eagle wintered on the St. Lawrence River between Chippewa Pt., Hammond and Brockville, Ont. At least four birds wintered here for most of January and February. A maximum of 18 birds, including nine adults, one near adult, six subadults and two immatures, were recorded 16 Jan by Gerry Smith. Eagle counts on the St. Lawrence have been increasing for the past three years. This is the second largest wintering population in the state.

Other birds found during this period in the open water pools on this stretch of the St. Lawrence River included daily counts of 700-1200 Common Goldeneye and 3000-5000 Common Merganser. Unexpectedly, the 1-3 Glaucous Gulls were outnumbered by the 6-12 Iceland Gulls seen on most visits.

This was a banner year for Bohemian Waxwing and the best since 1981 for winter finches. There were 1302 Bohemian Waxwing reported. The maximum was 400 at Brasher Falls on 2 Feb (P. Kelly). Only 751 Cedar Waxwing were reported. Pine Grosbeak was reported through the period with an all-time record of 269 on MCBC. About 400 Com. Redpoll were tallied on MCBC, and single sightings of 1-200 were reported elsewhere. As many as five Hoary Redpoll were present at Mildred and Everett Howard's feeder in Canton in February; one which struck a window was confirmed (spm SLU). Pine Siskin was frequent in December, the best count 30 at Joe VanRiet's feeder in Massena on 2 Dec, but none were reported in January or February. Am. Tree Sparrow was unusually abundant with a max of 476 on TICBC. It was only a fair year for Snow Bunting, but TICBC reported eight Lapland Longspur.

Several species continue to expand their populations in the North Country. A Red-bellied Woodpecker at Tucker Terrace in Massena was new to the MCBC and the third confirmed sighting for St. Lawrence Co. One Tufted Titmouse was a new species for the TICC and one daily 13 Jan to 22 Feb at Bob and June Walker's feeder on Dry Hill, Watertown was new for that area, while Chamberlaine found two as usual in Henderson. Numbers of N. Cardinal are up on all CBCs and in outlying towns. House Finch out-numbered Purple Finch 95:6 on the MCBC. Lee Chamberlaine reports 30 per day at Henderson with a max of 60 on 15 Dec.

Peter O'Shea reports five Ruffed Grouse feeding on bare ground of deer beds in Colton 28 Feb, and five Wild Turkey feeding similarly as well as on heavily budding on Red Maple in boreal habitat near Cranberry Lake 10 Jan.

Rarities include Harlequin Duck, Thayer's and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and Hoary Redpoll. Clearly out-of-season was a Gray Catbird at Richard Brouse's Watertown feeder on 28 Dec. Half-hardy species on the TICBC included two Belted Kingfisher, three N. Flicker, one White-crowned Sparrow, three Com. Grackle and four Brown-headed Cowbird. WCBC had a Song Sparrow. On the negative side, there were no reports of loons, pelagics or unusual raptors. All told, 18 species of waterfowl, 11 raptors and 43 passerines for a total of 90 species were reported.

Contributors: Marilyn Badger, R. Bracken, Richard Brouse, Sheila & Bob Cerwonka, Lee Chamberlaine, Ken Crowell, Stephanie DeGhett, C. Gaskel, Mark Gawn, John Green, Mildred & Everett Howard, Paul Kelly, Peter O'Shea, B. Penney, Fiona Reed, Gerald Smith, Joe VanRiet, Bob & June Walker, Brian Watson.

Abbreviations: Hen – Henderson, MCBC – Massena CBC, MSD – Moses-Saunders Dam, SLR – St. Lawrence R, SLU – St. Lawrence University; TICBC – Thousand Islands CBC, WCBC – Watertown CBC.

LOONS-DUCKS: Great Blue Heron: one TICBC only report. Canada Goose: max 300 on 8 Dec, 20-40/day scattered to early Jan, none thereafter. Wood Duck: singles WCBC and TICBC; two Hen Pd thru period (LBC) are even more extraordinary given the severe winter. Am. Black Duck: max 200 MCBC, numbers much lower on other CBCs; scarce in Jan and Feb except 40 Jefferson Park, Town of Ellisburg 13 Feb; 13 wintering in open water near American I, SLR, are unusual. Mallard: max 150 MCBC. N. Pintail: two MCBC only report. Gadwall: eight MCBC and two-three near MSD to 25 Dec (MB) only reports. Canvasback: 20 TICBC only report. Redhead: four TICBC only report. Greater

Scaup: max 100 Pt. Peninsula area 31 Dec. Lesser Scaup: one MCBC only report. **HARLEQUIN DUCK**: im male Hawkins Pt, SLR near MSD 11-12 Jan (JVR), first StLa record. Oldsquaw: max 300+ Stony Pt area. Com. Goldeneye: max 3500 MCBC. Barrow's Goldeneye: pair MCBC (JVR), one or two females Hawkins Pt near MSD 18 Jan-2 Feb. Bufflehead: pair MCBC to 18 Jan, seven TICBC and female near American I, SLR, Jan only reports. Com. Merganser: max 10,000 MCBC. Red-breasted Merganser: max 11 MCBC, unreported after Dec.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Red-tailed Hawk: max 20 along Rt. 81 between exits 47 and 50, Jeff, 9 Feb (GAS); good numbers on all CBCs; most counts one to four per day from lowland sectors. Gray Partridge: numbers up Jeff and StLa along SLR; max 24 TICBC and 15 Hen 25 Dec (LBC). Ring-necked Pheasant: still scarce, max six WCBC, otherwise singles only. Ruffed Grouse: max 21 TICBC. Wild Turkey: increasing Jeff, max 19 TICBC; other good counts include nine Theresa-Redwood 8 Feb (LBC) and nine Pierrepont 4 Jan (KC). Ring-billed Gull: max 120 MSD 21 Dec, virtually absent after late Dec. Herring Gull: max 2000 MCBC. **THAYER'S GULL**: ad MCBC at MSD (JVR, BP, RB, CG, MG). Iceland Gull: max 25 MCBC. **LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL**: ad MCBC at MSD (JVR, BP, RB, CG, MG). Glaucous Gull: max 10 MCBC; only 1-3 per day open water pools SLR Jan-early Feb. Great Black-backed Gull: max 500 MCBC.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Mourning Dove: widely reported through period; max 83 TICBC. E. Screech Owl: one TICBC; one Massena 31 Dec; one found in a closed barn in Henderson 13 Feb attempted to catch birds on feeding platform on release. Great Horned Owl: one hooting Pierrepont 4:00 AM 9 Dec; two hooting Morely 3 Feb; seven others reported. Downy Woodpecker and Hairy Woodpecker: ratio for all reports 101:64. N. Flicker: three TICBC. Pileated Woodpecker: 15 total, max nine TICBC.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Com. Crow: wintered in Fine and Star Lake for second year (PO's); seemed unusually numerous near Canton with roosts of 150-200 observed 4 and 9 Jan. Boreal Chickadee: one TICBC was out of nesting range. Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 17 MCBC.

VIREOS-WARBLED: none.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: Song Sparrow: one WCBC. White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco and Brown-headed Cowbird were reported by all three CBC's. Red Crossbill: just one on TICBC and MCBC.

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