

REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

STEPHEN W. EATON

December 1986 was dull and damp in Region 1 but a bit warmer and more snow free than normal. Only 4.8 inches of snow was logged at Buffalo International Airport, a marked change from the 68.4 inches in December 1985. Most of the month's foul weather occurred during the first week when a lake effect snow burst hit towns in the lee of Lake Erie on 4 Dec. The **Rock Wren** in Fredonia found last season was not seen after this storm. There was only one other day, 8 Dec, when any appreciable amount of snow fell. After 15 Dec temperatures were above normal but sunshine was scarce, only 11 compared to the normal 27 percent of possible sunlight.

January 1987 was mild, cloudy and a bit snowier than average. Twenty-eight and a half inches of snow at Buffalo International Airport was just above the normal 25.7 inches. The average temperature for the month was 26.1°F, almost 3° above normal. Lake Erie remained largely unfrozen. Fortunately, five winter storms struck to the south of the Region and did not produce snow bursts here. They must have had terrible effects on birds wintering in Tennessee, Virginia and the Carolinas. Dunkirk Harbor birders, however, wished for colder weather to freeze Lake Erie and concentrate water birds in their backyard. A midwinter storm on 23 Jan with peak gusts up to 43 mph in Buffalo drove six Little Gulls and 3,000 Bonaparte's Gulls into Dunkirk Harbor. The coldest day of the month at Buffalo was -2° on 27 Jan, -17° at Chaffee in southern Erie Co., and -21° in Franklinville, the icebox of the Region, in central Cattaraugus Co.

February was dry and sunny, the sunniest winter month since 1970. The sunshine was an amazing 54 percent of the possible, well above the normal 38 percent. Heavy rains moved into the Region on 28 Feb and opened most of the ice-bound streams. Only 7.6 inches of snow was recorded at Buffalo International Airport, well below the normal 18.6 inches. On 8 Feb up to eight inches of snow fell to the north of Buffalo as the wind blew from the southwest over a mostly open Lake Erie.

The mild winter is reflected in the presence of many species which normally winter further south. Apparently Great Blue Heron, Northern Harrier, American Coot, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, unusually many American Robin, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Rufous-sided Towhee and White-crowned Sparrows all survived the winter in Region 1. **Four** species of warblers in Region 1 this winter is certainly unusual and also reflects the mild December. Only Yellow-rumped Warbler was reported after 7 Jan. The others apparently succumbed to winter's wrath or moved out. In some cases this was due to well stocked feeders, in others to open water, and in others to the lack of snow.

Terry Mosher reported "a plague of woodpeckers" at the feeders of Keven and Daun Jaynes near Barcelona on the Erie Lake Plain. Almost daily their backyard, bordering Chautauqua Creek near Lake Erie, was visited by two Red-headed, two Red-bellied, six Downy, two Hairy and two Pileated Woodpeckers, several

Northern Flicker and two Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. The Jaynes must have a good source of suet to keep their feeders filled!

The winter finches and other northern birds helped swell the numbers of birds at feeders and in the woods and fields. It was a good winter for Snow Bunting, Purple Finch, Common Redpoll, Pine Siskin and Evening Grosbeak. Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee and Red-breasted Nuthatch also wintered in good numbers.

The first movement of hawks along the escarpment in the town of Sheridan was on 19 Feb, when Joe Gula, Jr. noted a kettle of six Red-tailed Hawks. These were followed by nine on 21 Feb and 15 at Forsythe Road in Chautauqua Co. on 22 Feb. The pair of Bald Eagles which nested last year at Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge returned to the nest site near the end of the period. Migrating blackbirds were first seen along the Erie Lake Plain on 22 Feb, but further away from the lake they had not appeared by the end of the period. The unusual amounts of snow and cold to the south of New York appeared to have slowed migration as only one Common Grackle and one Killdeer were reported from lake plain areas by the Buffalo Ornithological society before the end of February.

No great rarities were found in the Region during the period except the Rock Wren, which probably didn't survive beyond the storm of 3-4 Dec.

Contributors: Allegany County Bird Club, Robert Andrie, Tim Baird, Bellerby, Elizabeth Brooks, Lois Buck, Lou and Doris Burton, Buffalo Ornithological Society, Cattaraugus County Bird Club, Bruce Chilton, Don and Jane Clark, William D'Anna, Steve Eaton, the Elderkins, Don Enders, Joe Gula, Joe Gula Jr., Jamestown Audubon Society, Tom Jurczak, Walter and Harriet Klabunde, Erma Larsen, Terry and Judy Mosher, Neveu, Vivian and Raymond Pitzrick, Fran Rew, Olga Rosche, Art Schaffner, Helen Shear, Robert Sundell, Joe Thill.

Abbreviations: BOS-Buffalo Ornithological Society; DH-Dunkirk Harbor; FCBC-Fredonia Christmas Bird Count; INWR-Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge; JCBC-Jamestown Christmas Bird Count 21 Dec; NF-Niagara Falls; SBCBC-St. Bonaventure Christmas Bird Count 20 Dec; SCBC-Scio Christmas Bird Count 3 Jan.

LOONS-DUCKS: Red-throated Loon: one DH 24 Feb only report. Com. Loon: one Niagara Power Res 28 Dec, rare in winter. Pied-billed Grebe: one Ft Niagara SP 4 Jan; seven DH 7 Feb. Horned Grebe: arr? Frewsburg 4 Feb. Great Blue Heron: successfully over-wintered on lake plains and plateau. Tundra Swan: last five over Chau L 24 Jan. Snow Goose: one Barcelona H 10 Jan, 7 Feb, uncommon in winter.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Bald Eagle: ad Lewiston 26 Dec; one lower Niagara R 11 Jan; *intro*. N. Harrier: max seven Porter, Niag, 28 Dec, three 14 Feb; six INWR 1 Jan; unusual numbers for winter. Sharp-shinned Hawk: continues a Regional winter visitor. Rough-legged Hawk: max five Lake Ontario Plain 11 Jan; eight other Regional reports in Jan, nine in Feb, a good flight year. Wild Turkey: large flocks S Tier Cos, max 44 Allegany 7 Feb. Am. Coot: max 31 DH 11 Jan. Purple Sandpiper: max seven NF 13, 29 Dec; Goat I 11, 14 Jan. Dunlin: one NF 13 Dec; one Goat I 1 Dec, rare inland in winter. Franklin's Gull: one NF 1 Dec. Little Gull: continues increase, max 22 at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont; *intro*. Bonaparte's Gull: max 15,000 at Niagara-on-the-Lake; *intro*. Iceland Gull: one Adam Beck Hydro 14 Dec. Lesser Black-backed Gull: one NF 21 Dec, only report. Glaucous Gull: one NF 8 Dec, five other reports Niagara R and Buffalo area.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Snowy Owl: singles Buffalo H, DH, Bennington, Stillwater during period. Long-eared Owl: max two Porter, Niag. Short-eared Owl: max six Darien 16 Feb; four Java 31 Dec; five other reports on the lake plains and two in central and s Chau 3 and 17 Feb; apparently a good Meadow Vole supply. Red-bellied Woodpecker: eight sites mostly on lake plain during period (BOS). Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: one Lewiston most of Dec-Jan; *intro*. N. Flicker: max 13 Sheridan 17 Jan, unprecedented number in winter; two Salamanca 26 Dec, 1 Jan, feeding on wild grape.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLING: Horned Lark: arr 34 INWR 14 Feb. Com. Raven: two Ten Mile Hollow, Catt, 2 Feb (SE). Blue Jay: 12/party SCBC, 10/party SBCBC, 435 JCBC indicate influx in S Tier Cos. Black-capped Chickadee: 33/party SCBC, 39/party SBCBC, 18/party Fredonia CBC, 435 JCBC suggest influx S Tier Cos. Tufted Titmouse: four SBCBC, five each SCBC and JCBC; BOS reported three more sites, continuing slow increase from winter 1976-77 decline. Red-breasted Nuthatch: five SBCBC and 17 JCBC indicates a good flight year. **ROCK WREN**: *intro*. Carolina Wren: two Vandalia through period, two Barcelona 22 Feb (*vide* TM), three pairs near Jamestown, one Allegany Bird Count, two Houghton 2-12 Jan indicate recovery well underway from winter 1976-77 decline. Ruby-crowned Kinglet: one BOS refuge 26 Dec; one INWR 14 Jan; rare in winter. E. Bluebird: four Eden 27 Dec; par S Dayton 21 Jan, wintering birds? Hermit Thrush: one INWR 14 Feb, rare in winter. Am. Robin: max 120 Lake Erie SP, many reports throughout in unprecedented numbers. N. Mockingbird: BOS reports from four sites; one SCBCB; slowly increasing after "winter of their discontent" 1976-77. Cedar Waxwing: max 160 Sheridan. N. Shrike: ten reports from lake plain (BOS), a good flight year.

VIREOS-WARBLERS: Yellow-rumped Warbler: one Pomfret 5 Feb; seven or eight Lake Erie SP 21 Feb. Palm Warbler: one Times Beach, Buffalo, 20 Dec, 6 Jan (RA), not seen in Feb. Ovenbird: one Wellsville 4-7 Jan (HS, EL), very late. Com. Yellowthroat: one W Seneca 27 Dec, very late.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: N. Cardinal: numbers about half 1985 totals on most Regional CBCs; 15 in 10 acres feeding on wild grape Allegheny R bottoms during period (TB). Rufous-sided Towhee: one Pomfret 11-14 Dec; one Tonawanda 1-28 Feb; becoming a feeder bird. Fox Sparrow: one Pomfret 6 Dec, late. White-crowned Sparrow: two Pomfret 6 Dec; one Eden 26-28 Dec, another sparrow now wintering. Dark-eyed Junco: large flocks of 1985 absent this winter s Catt. Snow Bunting: max 550 Shelby 30 Jan; seven reports BOS Feb. Purple Finch: max ten Amity 15 Feb; fewer numbers five other areas (BOS). White-winged Crossbill: two Porter, Chau, 14 Jan, only report. Com. Redpoll: max 400 INWR 29 Jan and Porter, Niag, 21 Feb; 11 other reports BOS. Pine Siskin: max 28 Silver Creek, Chau, 16 Jan; seven other Jan reports, four Feb (BOS). Am. Goldfinch: so ubiquitous not reported except on CBCs. Evening Grosbeak: max 60 Wales; smaller flocks throughout, a good flight year.

Ten Mile Road, Allegany, New York 14706