

REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

STEPHEN W. EATON

The unusually warm fall continued on through December and January because of the positions of two storm tracks. One which went up the east coast was too far east to bother Region 1 and another which traveled up through the central Great Lakes brought us only warm rains. In December there were consistently mild temperatures and only four days remained below freezing. In Buffalo the only general snowfall of 2-4 inches came on 28-29 December and 30 Dec was the coldest day of the month. The sun was out during 37% of daylight hours, 10% above normal. January was mild, too, and dry and sunny. Snowfall totaled only 6.9 inches in Buffalo with one lake-effect storm on 26 Jan in Buffalo and heavy lake effect snow-falls south of Buffalo on the 4 and 9 Jan. Through much of the Region the ground soon became bare. There were three January thaws instead of the usual one, a thunderstorm on 20 Jan and a record 62° the 31 Jan. At the end of the month only half of Lake Erie was frozen over. Winter returned with a vengeance, however, in February as open waters of Lake Erie produced two lake-effect snow storms. The average temperature was 24.3 degrees, just about normal and Lake Erie, being still open, produced measurable lake-effect snows daily from 2-13 Feb. The middle stretch of the month was mild, wet and cloudy but it turned cold from the 24 Feb to the end of the month.

Although the weather during the winter season usually is thought to be the primary influence on presence or absence of birds here, there are many other reasons. These include the success or failure of reproduction during the previous breeding season and the availability of open water and/or food (such as the abundance of mast or other species-specific requirements for survival as worms for Am. Woodcock) in an area. Northern species escaping the rigors of the arctic and cyclic food shortages elsewhere also can account for the numbers of some species.

The open water and available aquatic food was probably responsible for Common Loon, Double-crested Cormorant, Tundra Swan and American Coot present from December to early January. None were reported in February. Great Blue Heron appeared to winter through the entire winter in sheltered places. January Purple Sandpipers were topped by a Dunlin on Goat Island on 14 Feb. The Niagara River with its resident, superiorly trained gull watchers, as usual turned up the Region's show of larids, including Common Black-headed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

Raptors also seemed to reflect an open winter. A Turkey Vulture was seen by Don and Jane Clark over Farmersville Station on 27 Dec, five weeks beyond the previous record late, and Red-shouldered Hawks were seen in Arkwright Twn on 4 Feb, Stockton Twn 14 Feb, and Hanover Twn on 17 Feb. All three of these Townships are contiguous along the Portage Escarpment in Chautauqua County. One was also probably present about the first of the month. Northern Harriers and Rough-legged Hawks were unusually common on the lake plains. After the February snowstorms the Rough-legged Hawks appeared to move south into northern Chautauqua County. Snowy Owls, Short-eared Owls and Long-eared Owls were found in good numbers along the lake shores or on the lake plains

but there was no indication that many moved south after the February snows.

Although two Eastern Phoebes were reported at Westfield on 10 Jan, it is inconceivable they could have survived through February. However, Eastern Bluebirds did overwinter in the Genesee Valley in unprecedented fashion. The fact that they roost in boxes and can switch to sumac fruits during severe weather perhaps accounts for their survival. Stoneflies hatching from the streams and available on the snow in February and March also can help add to their diet in this area of dendritic streams. There were only two species of warblers reported in December this year compared with last year's four species, though temperatures were much the same. Some other factor than weather perhaps was operating here. It has certainly been the winter for Pine Siskins, particularly on the Allegheny Plateau where an abundant supply of Eastern Hemlock seed supplied them with food on the tree and on the ground. Most seed was on the ground or on the snow surface after January. They also flocked to feeders, usually favoring the niger seed. Almost all the smaller woodland birds, such as Black-capped Chickadee and Dark-eyed Junco, also fed on hemlock seed. The great increase in well stocked feeders in the Region has apparently resulted in the more winter reports of Rufous-sided Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Pine Siskin and Rusty Blackbird. It is probable that these species are hidden in unexplored habitats but when they find feeders they are brought to human viewing. Perhaps the most unusual passerine was the **Bohemian Waxwing** spotted in Weathersfield Township, Wyoming Co, on 7 Dec by Dave Junkin and his wife.

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Abbreviations: ASP-Allegany State Park; BH-Buffalo Harbor; BOS-Buffalo Ornithological Society; ChL-Chautauqua Lake; DH-Dunkirk Harbor; FCBC-Fredonia Christmas Bird Count; INWR-Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge; JCBC-Jamestown Christmas Bird Count; NF-Niagara Falls; NR-Niagara River; SBCBC-St. Bonaventure Christmas Bird Count; SOCBC-Scio Christmas Bird Count; TFNP-Tifft Farm NP.

LOONS-DUCKS: Com. Loon: two NF 1-31 Dec, three Goat I 8 Dec, six NF 17 Dec; one Mayville, ChL 22 Dec; one DH 2 Jan; one Salamanca 17 Jan, grounded and released Allegheny R (TB); no Feb records. Pied-billed Grebe: max four DH 2 Jan. Horned Grebe: max four DH 2 Jan. Red-necked Grebe: two BH 5 Dec; two DH 29 Feb, apparently wintering. Double-crested Cormorant: one Bird I Pier, Buffalo, 9 Dec; one ChL 24-29 Dec; one DH 1-5 Jan; one Olcott 3 Jan; no Feb reports. Great Blue Heron: max 26 Grand I 16 Jan, many other records wintering lake plains; one Quaker Run, ASP, 17 Jan. Tundra Swan: max 75 Mayville, ChL 22 Dec; 12 DH 10 Jan, three other reports Jan, none Feb. Mute Swan: one Buffalo area during period. Snow Goose: one DH 10-13 Jan. Canada Goose: max 1200 INWR 16, 31 Jan; 230 DH 22 Jan. Wood Duck: one Cassadaga 2, 9 Jan, 1 Feb; few winter records. Green-winged Teal: one BH 1 Jan; two Kiantone 23 Jan; three Wheatfield, NIAG, 24 Jan, unusual winter. N. Pintail: three Eden 26 Dec; max nine NF 12 Jan; arr four DH 26 Feb. N. Shoveler: seven DH 6 Jan, rare in winter. Canvasback: max 2500 Beaver I SP, NR; 300 Mayville, ChL, 22 Dec. Redhead: max 50 Mayville, ChL,

22 Dec; 18 DH 19 Feb. Ring-necked Duck: max four DH 1 Jan. Surf Scoter: one La Salle Park, Buffalo, 6 Dec; one DH 6 Jan. White-winged Scoter: six reports NR (BOS) and DH 1-31 Jan, max four. Hooded Merganser: max 150 Mayville, ChL, 22 Dec; eight reports NR (BOS) and DH 1-31 Jan. Com. Merganser: throughout period S Tier Cos. Ruddy Duck: one Mayville, ChL, 22 Dec; one Pt Gratiot, L. Erie, 2 Jan; one NR 10 Jan.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: *intro*; arr Arkwright Twn, CHAU, 29 Feb. Bald Eagle: one INWR 5 Dec and two ad, one imm on 13 Dec; one (Canadian) Jan and no Feb reports. N. Harrier: Dec max eight Shelby Twn, ORLE, 14 Dec; Jan max ten Porter, NIAG, 24 Jan, nine other Jan reports (BOS); nine reports from lake plain Feb (BOS). N. Goshawk: one Ripley Twn, CHAU, 28 Feb, migrant? Red-shouldered Hawk: *intro*. Rough-legged Hawk: Dec max six Shadigee, NIAG, 18 Dec; 12 reports Jan (BOS); max 18 CHAU 6 Feb include seven in one field Charlotte Twn. Am. Coot: max 78 DH 2 Jan. Killdeer: singles NF and Goat I, apparently wintering; one Quaker Run, ASP, 17 Jan; arr Elma 20 Feb. Purple Sandpiper: up to four NF 1-29 Jan. **Dunlin:** *intro*. Com. Snipe: five Gerry Twn, CHAU, 23 Jan, unusual in winter. Red Phalarope: one DH and Canadaway Creek NS 23-28 Dec. Little Gull: max seven mouth NR 4 Feb. **Com. Black-headed Gull:** one mouth NR 27 Dec. Bonaparte's Gull: max 18,500 mouth Niag. R. 19 Dec; 1,200 DH 2 Jan. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** one Adam Beck Hydro, NR, 2 Jan. Glaucous Gull: arr mouth NR 6 Dec. Great Black-backed Gull: max 150 Grand I, NR.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Snowy Owl: seven reports lake plains 1-31 Dec (BOS); five Buffalo waterfront 3 Jan; one Charlotte Twn, CHAU, 21 Feb, unusual away from lakes. Long-eared Owl: three Porter Twn, NIAG, 3 Jan; one INWR 10 Jan; max seven Cambria Twn, NIAG, 7 Feb. Short-eared Owl: arr nine Shelby Twn, ORLE, 7 Dec; two lake plain reports Jan and six Feb (BOS). Belted Kingfisher: max ten Genesee R, SOCBC; eight JCBC; two FCBC; one Allegheny R, SBCBC. Red-headed Woodpecker: one Ft Niagara SP 17 Jan, 7 Feb; two 19 Feb; one Beaver I SP 18 Feb. Red-bellied Woodpecker: five Dec reports nine reports Jan: six reports Feb, mainly from lake plain, Genesee and Allegheny Valleys and CHAU, increasing and attending feeders (BOS). N. Flicker: singles Salamanca 24 Jan, Grand I 18 Feb, unusual winter.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLING: E. Phoebe: *intro* (L&DV *vide* RS). Horned Lark: 50 Sheldon Twn, WYOM, 15 Jan; ten NIAG and ORLE 31 Jan; 14 Kiantone 23 Jan; max 60 Cambria Twn, NIAG, 14 & 27 Feb. Black-capped Chickadee: max/participant 22 SOCBC, 20 SBCBC, 20 JCBC; 11 FCBC. Tufted Titmouse: one to four Amity L, ALLE, through period; two Pomfret, CHAU, Dec-Jan; two Vandalia, CATT, through period; max 12 SOCBC; six SBCBC. Red-breasted Nuthatch: singles Pomfret Twn, CHAU, 1-31 Jan; Lewiston Twn, NIAG, 2,20 Jan; Porter Twn, NIAG 21 Feb, scarce. Carolina Wren: one Buckhorn I SP 19 Dec; two Portland Twn, CHAU, 16 Jan; one Beaver Meadow Wildlife Refuge, WYOM, 20 Feb; two Vandalia, CATT, through period. Winter Wren: one Bay State, ASP, 7 Feb. Golden-crowned Kinglet: 11 JCBC, seven SOCBC, seven FCBC, six SBCBC. E. Bluebird: max four Amity L, ALLE, 28 Dec, one 31 Jan, two 18 Feb (VP), unprecedented wintering on Allegheny Plateau. Am. Robin: three TFNP 17 Jan; six reports BOS region 7-29 Feb, scarce compared to 1986-87. Gray Catbird: one Jamestown 8 Jan, died next day (spm). N. Mockingbird: five reports BOS region Dec, three reports Jan. **Bohemian Waxwing:** *intro*. Cedar Waxwing: max 75 Lake Erie SP 3 Jan, five other reports BOS 1-31 Jan; 26 Dunkirk 20 Feb. N. Shrike: three reports Dec, six reports Jan, two reports Feb (BOS).

VIREOS-WARBLED: Yellow-rumped Warbler: one Bemus Pt, ChL, 5 Jan, only report. Pine Warbler: one at feeder Wilson 3 Jan; one Newfane Twn, NIAG, 24 Jan.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: N. Cardinal: max 100 Salamanca, feeding on Wild Grape *Vitis riparia* fruits (TB); slightly up on four S Tier CBC's. Rufous-sided Towhee: one at feeder Ellery, CHAU, Jan-Feb. Am. Tree Sparrow: near normal numbers four So. Tier CBC's. Chipping Sparrow: one at feeder Williamsville, ERIE, 9 Jan. Field Sparrow: one Pomfret

Twn, CHAU, 14 Jan, unusual in winter. Fox Sparrow: one Jamestown 1-4 Dec. Swamp Sparrow: max three INWR 14 Dec; one Tonawanda Twn, ERIE, 3 Jan, one TFNP 17 Jan, unusual in winter. White-crowned Sparrow: one at feeder Kennedy 3-24 Dec; two Lewiston Twn, NIAG, 17 Jan; one Yates Twn, ORLE, 29 Feb. Lapland Longspur: max three Cambria Twn, NIAG, 27 Feb. Snow Bunting: max 350 Barre Twn, ORLE, several other large flocks lake plain and open areas Allegheny Plateau. Red-winged Blackbird: up to 30 Weatfield Twn, NIAG, 7-31 Jan. E. Meadowlark: four Porter, NIAG, 12 Dec; one Hamburg 30 Jan, unusual in winter. Rusty Blackbird: ten Burgeson NS 22 Dec and two on 23 Jan; seven Fentonville, CHAU, 31 Dec., 1-31 Jan; unusual in winter. Com. Redpoll: two Ellicott, CHAU, 2 Jan, one Beaver Meadow Wildlife Refuge, WYOM, 28 Jan, only reports. Pine Siskin: max 75 Amity L, ALLE, Dec, 65 Jan, 75 Feb; many other reports wooded Allegheny Plateau. Evening Grosbeak: max 200 Beaver Meadow Wildlife Refuge 16 Jan and Wales, ERIE, Dec; many other reports throughout Region.

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REGION 2 – GENESEE

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Overall, the winter proved to be a rather mild one. Temperatures on the whole were above average, precipitation was down and there was a scarcity of major storms. This provided us with a diverse set of reports. December was very mild with an average of 32.6°, eclipsing the average by a rather healthy 3.6°. Precipitation came mostly as rain and was totaled at 1.98", 0.61" below average. January's average temperature was 1.4° above normal at an even 25°. Precipitation was 1.58" below normal with a total of 0.72. Although the warm and dry trend had continued, January was characterized by cold spells and intermittent thaws. The month's end even brought some near record high temperatures. February broke the trend only slightly. The average temperature was 23.7°, which was a paltry 0.7° below normal. Snowfall was above average, but the total precipitation was just barely below normal at 2.18".

This weather was favorable for some birds. There was much open water in the Region. This helped during the Christmas Bird counts. Total snow cover was down. Thus, there were good feeding opportunities for field hunting raptors as well as the ground feeding birds. The lack of major storms made life easier all around. With such conditions you might expect the highlights of the season to be very good. Yet, as is usually the case, there were some very definite minuses to go along with the pluses.

Loons and grebes seemed to be pretty plentiful. Red-throated Loon in January is notable for the Region. Pied-billed Grebes were found in good numbers. While waterfowl were in general more notable for their variety, some species were found in noticeably above normal numbers. These included Oldsquaw, White-winged Scoter and Common Merganser. A real highlight was a record number of Wood Ducks with a high count of 51 in Perinton on 24 Jan. Turkey Vultures also appeared in record numbers with a record maximum of 15 individuals sighted 24 Feb in Letchworth State Park and other observations that month.