

REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

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This was the coldest December ever recorded in Buffalo, according to the *Buffalo News*, but the only wintery month of the period. The ice boom in Lake Erie was put in place on 7 Dec, when the lake temperature reached 39°, the earliest since 1977. On 19 Dec Lake Erie reached 32°, three weeks earlier than normal. "The culprit," according to the *Buffalo News* was a strong northwest flow of frigid air locked in by a jet stream that stayed south of Buffalo. Snowfall at Buffalo International Airport totaled 35 inches but more than 50 inches fell in the lee of Lake Erie. At Amity Lake, the ground was snow covered all month and even Buffalo had a white Christmas, their first in four years. This weather made great birding in Dunkirk Harbor and at feeders but curtailed the laridophile's search for strange gulls along the Niagara River. Gerald Rising (*Prothonotary* 56:2) wrote, "The reduction in gulls is probably related directly to the earlier than usual buildup of ice in the Niagara River, especially below the falls where the ice bridge formed at a record early date...By the end of the month gull numbers were declining still further with the number of Bonaparte's Gulls very low." In contrast, January was a "kinder gentler" month. It was the sixth warmest January on record. The average temperature was 33.4° at Buffalo, almost 10° above the normal 23.5°. Precipitation was a third of an inch below normal, coming mostly as rain, and only 11.8 inches of snow fell at Buffalo, less than half the normal 25.7 inches. This respite from winter saved many species which normally winter further south, such as Eastern Bluebird and American Robin, which wintered in large numbers. Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler, Rufous-sided Towhee, Field Sparrow also appeared to survive winter with some help from feeders, but generally birds left feeders. Waterfowl in Dunkirk Harbor retired to openings of the ice on Lake Erie. February averaged almost 5° above normal at Buffalo, and higher temperatures were reported away from the cooling effect of Lakes Erie and Ontario. It was the wettest February in Buffalo's history with 5.9 inches of rain, over twice normal, and 28 inches of snow. More fell in the snow belt where skiers rejoiced. Each snow fall brought feeder birds back but then they dispersed as temperatures climbed and snow melted.

Raptors seem to be prospering. The pair of Bald Eagles at Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge came back to their nest, a Merlin wintered

along Lake Erie shore and an adult and an immature Peregrine found the Rock Dove population at the Power Plant in Dunkirk Harbor a good source of food for a while. At least two pairs of Red-shouldered Hawks began courtship flight two weeks early. Sharp-shinned Hawks winter much more commonly than in the past and found food by hunting at feeders. Rough-legged Hawks were well represented this winter and Short-eared Owl found good mouse hunting on the lake plain fields later in the winter.

It was a good winter for Red-breasted Nuthatch, probably coming mainly from the north but perhaps, too, from birds nesting successfully in our mature spruce stands. Of the four species of warblers reported, probably only two, Yellow-rumped and Pine, survived the winter. It seems every year another species of sparrow starts to spend the winter, lured to the high calorie feeders of affluent Americans. The Chipping Sparrow is joining the ranks of Rufous-sided Towhee, Field, Song, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows which overwinter at feeders.

The carduline finch show this winter was better than last year but not spectacular. There was one report of Red Crossbill, only a few of Pine Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Common Redpoll and Evening Grosbeak but fair numbers of White-winged Crossbill, apparently attracted by a good crop of White Spruce cones in the plantations of the plateau. The Pine Siskin was certainly the dominant carduline often accompanied by lesser numbers of American Goldfinch. An European Goldfinch, seen by many observers at a feeder in Arcade, Wyoming County, in January, was almost certainly an escaped cage bird (G. Rising, *Prothonotary* 56:13).

With the growing number of well manned feeders and sophisticated observers many interesting birds are being reported in winter. The Varied Thrush, Yellow-throated Warbler and European Goldfinch, all seen this winter are good examples.

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Abbreviations: ACBC - Allegany CBC 16 Dec; ARes - Allegheny Reservoir; BCBC - Buffalo CBC 17 Dec; BOS - Buffalo Ornithological Society; DFCBC - Dunkirk-Fredonia CBC 31 Dec; DH - Dunkirk Harbor; INWR - Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge; NF - Niagara Falls; NR - Niagara River; PTwn - Pomfret Township, CHAU: SCBC - Scio CBC 16 Dec; SBCBC - St. Bonaventure CBC 16 Dec; TWMA - Tonawanda Wildlife Management Area.

LOONS-DUCKS: Red-throated Loon: last mouth NR 1-14 Dec. Com. Loon: last two DH 9 Dec. Horned Grebe: max four DH 2-23 Jan. Red-necked Grebe, one DH 23 Jan; one ARes 4 Feb. Double-crested Cormorant: one Fort Niagara SP 18 Feb, rare in winter. Great Blue Heron: max 34 Motor I, NR, 27 Jan. Tundra Swan: four Beaver I SP 21 Jan., rare in winter; arr 75 INWR 22 Feb; four TWMA 24 Feb. Canada Goose: 1770 BCBC, max in 61 years; 329 DFCBC; 322 ACBC; arr INWR 22 Feb.: max 4,760 around INWR 24 Feb. Snow Goose: one DH Dec-4 Feb, wounded? Wood Duck: two Tonawanda 14 Jan, unusual in winter. Green-winged Teal: one DH 30 Dec, unusual in winter. N. Shoveler: one DH 29 Dec, rare in winter. Canvasback: max 325 NR 7 Jan, pitiful numbers compared to 1950's. Oldsquaw: max 4,000 mouth NR 26 Jan. White-winged Scoter: max 75 mouth NR 2 Dec; 12 Golden Hill SP 10 Feb. Black Scoter: max 17 mouth NR 2 Dec, last five DH 23 Dec. Surf Scoter: max 5 DH 23 Dec. Com. Goldeneye: max 1,000± DH 4 Dec. Com. Merganser: max 500± DH 25-31 Dec; courtship ARes 16 Jan. Red-breasted Merganser: 25 ARes 4 Feb, unusual away from Great Lakes in winter.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: one Sheridan 8 Feb (JG,Sr.), early migrant or wintering bird from Letchworth SP (*Kingbird* 39(2):74-79). Bald Eagle: one Youngstown 30 Dec; one at nest tree INWR 30 Jan, two on 31 Jan.(staff), present all Feb; ad, imm ARes 4 Feb. Sharp-shinned Hawk: nine BCBC, highest in 61 years. N. Goshawk: one wintering near feeders Sheridan (R&CB). Red-shouldered Hawk: one Sheridan wintered near feeders, single pairs in courtship flight there and Vandalia CATT, both 18 Feb, latter earliest in 40 years (SE). Rough-legged Hawk: 12 BCBC, second highest, max 27 in 1948 (Rising, *Prothonotary* 56:2); 12 reports Jan, five reports Feb (BOS). Merlin: female Pt Gratiot and Sheridan wintering as two previous winters (*fide* TM). Peregrine Falcon: ad male DH 7 Jan (Watson, Rew mob); imm DH Jan. (TM). Wild Turkey: good numbers on CBCs, 15 INWR 1 Dec in marginal lake plain habitat. Am. Coot: max 45 DH 31 Dec. Killdeer: two reported ACBC 16 Dec. Purple Sandpiper: max 10 NF 18 Feb. Dunlin: one NF 30 Dec. Com. Snipe: three SCBC. Little Gull: five reports NR 2-31 Dec. Bonaparte's Gull: max 10,800 mouth NR 2 Dec; 42 on 23 Dec. Iceland Gull: one NF 2 Dec; max three NF 7 Jan. Lesser Black-backed Gull: one Adam Beck Hydro, NR, 2 Dec. Glaucous Gull: max three NF 7 Jan. Black-legged Kittiwake: one NF 3 Dec.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Mourning Dove: 338 BCBC, 268 SCBC, 102 DFCBC, 127 SBCBC, still wintering well throughout. Long-eared Owl: one Wilson 10 Feb. Short-eared Owl: max 16 INWR 27 Jan. N. Saw-whet Owl: specimen L Erie SP 31 Dec, powerline casualty. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: one Lewiston 19, 20 Dec; one Silver Creek 29 Dec (*fide* RS). N. Flicker: six Lewiston &

Porter Twn NIAG 23 Dec; nine BCBC, 25 DFCBC in grape country; one SCBC: one SBCBC.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: good numbers through winter, 100± PTwn 1 Dec; 30 BCBC, 55 SCBC, 75 Amity Twn ALLE; 100 Java Twn 27 Feb. Blue Jay: 61 at feeder attracting raptors Sheridan Twn 29 Dec. Com. Raven: one Alfred Twn 16 Jan; one Carrollton Twn 31 Jan. Tufted Titmouse: five reports Dec, three reports Jan, four reports Feb (BOS); doing well in Allegany Hills, three singing in our valley Feb. Red-breasted Nuthatch: max 23 Ward Twn ALLE 1-31 Dec; high numbers State Forests Charlotte Twn Jan (TM); 13 BCBC, three DFCBC, 16 SCBC, 11 SBCBC, a good winter show. Carolina Wren: three ACBC, one DFCBC, one SBCBC, still in low numbers since 1976. E. Bluebird: six reports BOS Dec; 29 DFCBC, from six areas, must be all-time high; ten Sheridan Twn 28 Dec, all roosting in one box (R&CB); four Amity Twn ALLE 15,20 Jan; two Poland Twn CHAU 16 Jan; two Amity Twn ALLE 22 Feb. Hermit Thrush: two DFCBC. Am. Robin, 223 BCBC: 289 DFCBC, another grape lover; two ACBC: one SBCBC, max 400± Cherry Creek 7 Jan (*fide* RS); 70 E. Aurora 9 Jan; 90 Somerset Twn 3 Jan; 150 Lewiston 26 Feb; many other areas with smaller counts. **Varied Thrush:** male at feeder Fredonia 15-31 Feb (SP, *fide* TM). Brown Thrasher: one BCBC. Bohemian Waxwing: one Lewiston 23 Dec.

VIREOS-WARBLEDERS: Yellow-rumped Warbler: one E. Aurora 6 Dec; one Elma Twn 23 Dec; four DFCBC; six L Erie SP 31 Dec; max nine Portland Twn 3 Jan; one Hamburg 8, 12 Feb. **Yellow-throated Warbler:** imm female? at feeder Dunkirk Twn 1-8 Dec (D&JG, *fide* TM). Pine Warbler: one Orchard Park 4 Feb. Ovenbird: one at feeder Williamsville 1, 7 Dec.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: N. Cardinal: 321 BCBC most in 61 years, 37 DFCBC, 27 SCBC, 117 ACBC, 33 SBCBC, first of southerners to invade, first to recover from winter 1976. **Dickcissel:** one at feeder E. Aurora irregularly 2 Dec-7 Feb. Rufous-sided Towhee: one-three at feeders PTwn 8-24 Dec; one Sheridan 28 Dec; one at feeder Warsaw 13 Jan, 5-25 Feb. Am. Tree Sparrow: 446 BCBC, 341 DFCBC, 145 SCBC, 123 SBCBC. Chipping Sparrow: one Jamestown 6 Dec; singles at feeders PTwn 4 Dec, Burgeson Sanctuary 17 Dec; one Fredonia 31 Dec, not reported Jan and Feb although it frequents feeders. Field Sparrow: singles at feeders Darien 1 Dec-28 Feb, PTwn 8-28 Jan. Lapland Longspur: 20-25 PTwn 1 Dec; 20 SBCBC; two Strykersville 27 Dec; four Albion 14 Jan; one Sheridan Twn 31 Jan; five localities Feb.(BOS). Snow Bunting, max 1300 Porter Twn NIAG 1 Jan, large flocks n and e Buffalo. Rusty Blackbird: arr two at Williamsville feeder 18, 24 Feb. Pine Grosbeak: seven Orangeville Twn WYOM 15 Jan; three Charlotte Twn CHAU 28 Jan. Purple Finch: four reports BOS Dec; max six Alfred Twn 1-3 Jan; six Charlotte Twn 14 Jan; four reports BOS Feb. Red Crossbill: 11 Allegany SP 14 Jan.(TB). White-winged Crossbill: 68 Alma 10 Dec.(Griswald *fide* VP); 34 Alfred Twn 17 Dec; 25 Charlotte Twn 23 Dec; nine Ward Twn ALLE 30 Dec; 60 Charlotte Twn 30 Dec, feeding on White Spruce seeds. Com. Redpoll: one Newfane Twn 14 Jan, only report BOS. Pine Siskin: ten reports BOS Dec; 358 banded Alfred Twn during Jan (EB); 125 Wales 5-31 Jan; many reports e and s of Buffalo during Jan; up to 200 at feeder Wales Twn 1-28 Feb; up to 75 Amity L

ALLE 1-28 Feb; 50-75 Vandalia CATT 1-28 Feb, to be watched for nesting, almost a repeat of 1987-88 influx. Am. Goldfinch: 99 banded Alfred Twn 1-31 Jan, with siskin flocks at feeders though not as numerous. European Goldfinch: *intro*. Evening Grosbeak: six reports throughout Region Dec (BOS); max 100 Java 13 Jan, ten other reports e and s of Buffalo in Jan, four reports in Feb.

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