

## REGION 3 — FINGER LAKES

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December of 1989 was the coldest ever in New York State and the fifth coldest of any month on record. The statewide average temperature for December was 14° below normal, and total precipitation (rain and the liquid equivalent of snow) totalled just 45% of normal. Ithaca's coldest December temperature was 14.2°, breaking a record set in 1917. In the Finger Lakes Region, temperatures were 11-13° below normal and precipitation was below normal for December, although there were 10 to 20 inches total snowfall in the Finger Lakes. December's frigid temperatures and snow persisted from 2 Dec through the holiday week, when the coldest temperatures of the month occurred. By the New Year, temperatures moderated to a more seasonable level and milder temperatures from 2-3 Jan brought welcome relief after December's extreme cold. January temperatures were above normal, making it New York's fourth warmest January on record and the warmest since 1950. The warmest temperatures of the month were from 16-18 Jan with temperatures 15-25° warmer than normal. In the Finger Lakes Region, average January temperatures were 32-36° and precipitation was near normal. February saw a continuation of the warm temperature trend that was established in January. Temperatures were above normal nearly every day until the last four or five days of the month, when cold temperatures and up to 15 inches of snow blanketed the Finger Lakes. It was the warmest February since 1984, with temperatures about 7° above normal and near normal precipitation for the month. By the end of February, numbers of Icterids were moving into the Region and there were reports of Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, Common Grackle, and Brown-headed Cowbird at a number of locations in the Region.

Christmas Bird Counts in the Region produced about 60 species each. Highlights on Christmas Counts were Long-eared Owl, Lapland Longspur, abundant winter finches and Rough-legged Hawk, several Northern Shrike, Snow Bunting and Lapland Longspur, Wild Turkey, and many new "high counts" for waterfowl. The cold and snowy weather during the Count period concentrated birds at feeding stations, resulting in high numbers of nuthatches, sparrows, finches, and woodpeckers. Finger Lakes Christmas Counts confirmed peak numbers of Carolina Wren throughout the Region, with 3 to 6 Carolina Wren in

most reporting localities and a max of 11 at Queen Catherine Marsh.

Waterfowl counts in the Region produced a variety of common winter residents including Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Canada Goose, Mallard, American Black Duck, Common Goldeneye, Scaup, Redhead, Canavasback, and Common and Red-breasted Merganser. There were single reports of Brant, Northern Pintail, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, White-winged Scoter, and Mute Swan.

Maximum numbers of waterfowl were at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, as expected, although the Finger Lakes had the greatest variety of species. Peak numbers reported at MNWR were: 20 Tundra Swan, 32,000 Canada Goose, 13,000 Mallard, 3,200 Am. Black Duck, 30 Hooded Merganser, and 110 Common Merganser. Maxima of other species at MNWR included 33 Great Blue Heron, 20 Ruffed Grouse, 725 Ring-billed Gull, 100 Herring Gull, and 80 Great Black-backed Gull. Three Bald Eagle were present all season, and Refuge staff comment that, since the Bald Eagle nest site was discovered in 1987, there is little evidence that the three adult eagles leave the immediate MNWR area for any length of time. This would include even the coldest periods prior to the onset of breeding season in December and January.

Harsh December weather concentrated birds at feeding stations. There were many reports of winter finches throughout the Region including Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Evening Grosbeak, and White-winged Crossbill. It was a good winter for numerous observations of Red-breasted Nuthatch, Rough-legged Hawk, and Long-eared and Short-eared Owl. There were no reports of Snowy Owl or redpoll this season. There were numbers of species at the northern limits of their winter range, including Eastern Bluebird, Northern Mockingbird, and Carolina Wren.

Finger Lakes National Forest (formerly Hector Land Use Area) was the site of many interesting observations this winter. The patchwork of hayfields, pastures, hedgerows and tree rows, conifer plantations, and woodlands there include a superabundance of food including cones, sumac, and fruits of multiflora rose, crab apple, hawthorn, and apple. Hundreds of American Robins and at least one Northern Mockingbird were present all season, and numbers of winter finches including Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Evening Grosbeak, Pine Grosbeak, and White-winged Crossbill were reported throughout the season. Also present were Ruffed Grouse, Wild Turkey, and Northern Goshawk. Both Long-eared and Short-eared Owls were seen and heard for confirmation. Northern

Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, and Rough-legged Hawk were present in numbers, and a single Northern Shrike was reported as well. The highlight was two **Common Raven** observed on several dates near the radio tower.

Highlights for the season included **Western Grebe**, **Common Raven** and **Dickcissel**.

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Abbreviations: ACBC - Aurora Christmas Bird Count; CL - Cayuga Lake; FLNF - Finger Lakes National Forest; ICBC - Ithaca Christmas Bird Count; MNWR - Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge; SL - Seneca Lake; WG - Watkins Glen.

LOONS-DUCKS: Com. Loon: widespread all season. Red-throated Loon: one WG 3 Jan. Horned Grebe: max eight ICBC. **Western Grebe**: one CL 24 Jan (AR!). Great Blue Heron: max 33 MNWR. Tundra Swan: *intro*; ten CL 2 Dec, four SL 15 Dec. Snow Goose: present CL Jan-Feb. Brant: imm CL Myer's 8 Dec. Wood Duck: singles only. Oldsquaw: single report, nine ACBC. Hooded Merganser: max ten CL Myer's 8 Dec. Ruddy Duck: one Elmira 10 Dec.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Bald Eagle: *intro*; ad Old City Pier SL 21 Jan. Sharp-shinned Hawk: widespread all season. Cooper's Hawk: widespread all season. Red-shouldered Hawk: reported without details Ithaca during CBC period. Merlin: one Cornell 5 Dec. Dunlin: last Myer's CL 25 Nov. Bonaparte's Gull: one WG 4 Dec.

PIEGONS-WOODPECKERS: Great Horned Owl: nesting Queen Catherine Marsh 8 Feb. E. Screech-Owl: scattered throughout Region. Long-eared Owl: max five Dodge Road Ithaca entire season; one near FLNF throughout Dec (Gregoire). Short-eared Owl: five Scipioville Jan-Feb, one Big Oak Golf Course Dec, scattered other reports including FLNF. N. Saw-whet Owl: one Dodge Road Ithaca 18 Feb. Red-bellied Woodpecker: max ten WG CBC. Red-headed Woodpecker: single report, one ACBC. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: scattered reports throughout Region.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Am. Crow: large roosts Ringwood Road Ithaca and 500+ w WG. Fish Crow: four Stewart P Ithaca 8 Dec. **Com. Raven**: *intro*; one Horseheads 8 Dec, two East Hill Elmira 9 Dec. Red-breasted Nuthatch: *intro*. Carolina Wren: *intro*. Winter Wren: single report; one Ithaca Larch Meadows 22 Feb. Am. Robin: widespread; *intro*. Hermit Thrush: single report, one Tanglewood Nature Center 31 Dec. N. Mockingbird: *intro*. Gray Catbird: single report, Sapsucker Woods Sanctuary 4 Dec (DN). Water Pipit: single report, one Burdett Dec present at a farm for 10 days (EG). Cedar Waxwing: widespread all season. N. Shrike: one FLNF 2, 8 and 14 Feb; also one Chemung Valley CBC, one Eaton CBC, two ICBC.

VIREOS-WARBLED: Yellow-rumped Warbler: singles throughout Region.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: **Dickcissel**: male Taughannock Falls SP 19 Jan, (DN, NYSARC); also one at a Geneva feeder during January but no details available. Field Sparrow: singles ACBC, Ithaca during count period. Fox Sparrow: one 26 Feb Ithaca HHR (Confer). Red Crossbill: female Elmira 12 Jan only report. Pine Siskin: *intro*; abundant throughout Region all season.

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