

## REGION 5 — ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

GENE HUGGINS

The early part of the 1989-90 winter season broke all kinds of weather records. We were in a deep freeze and birders witnessed the coldest and snowiest December on record. The average temperature at Syracuse was 14.7° surpassing the old record of 17.8° set in 1917 and 13.6° below the monthly average. With daily temperatures averaging 13.3° below normal, Oneida L was completely frozen over by 13 Dec, the first time since 1933. The month also set a record for most days (26) with a high at or below 32°F and tied the record for most days (6) with a low at or below zero. The first day with any warmth was the last day of December when the thermometer soared to 45°. At the end of December, 64.6 inches of snow had fallen for the month, surpassing the old record of 52.5 inches set twenty years earlier. Seasonal snowfall at the end of December was 77.5 inches, exceeding the previous October to December record of 71.5 inches set in 1944. In contrast, the monthly average temperature for January and February was 7.7° above normal, melting most of the seasonal snowfall by mid January. Only two significant snowfalls occurred for the remainder of the season to remind us that winter was here. A total of 10.4 inches fell on 28 and 29 Jan. and 14 inches on the last six days of February. An interesting fact about December's snowfall was that only 1 inch of precipitation had fallen by 27 Dec, making it very easy to shovel. Afterwards the amount of

moisture began to increase especially when a brief, but severe thunderstorm helped to bring the day's total to 1.62 inches on 15 Feb. Later that same evening as the rain turned to ice, countless trees and shrubs were damaged in Onondaga and Oswego Counties. At the end of February the total yearly precipitation was over 6 inches compared to the previous winter's drought of 2.77 inches.

What effect did this season's weather have on bird life? Unfortunately, five hundred waterfowl were found dead at Woodman's Pond near Hamilton in mid December. Heavy snowfall covered their natural food, forcing many Canada Geese, Mallard and Am. Black Duck to find food elsewhere. The next best food source were piles of corn and grain that area farmers had stored in open or bunker-style silos to feed their cattle. The suspected cause of their demise was aspergillosis - a mold that had grown on the surface of the silage. December's deep snow practically eliminated access to berry and seed crops, thereby providing the Region with some unusual records at feeders. The area's first Dickcissel in ten years along with Chipping and Savannah Sparrows highlighted some of this season's feeder birds. Lastly with temperatures averaging 6° above normal for the first fifteen days in January, birds became more widely dispersed. Two examples of this were the one-two day stays of Red-throated Loon and King Eider at Oswego Harbor.

Other winter highlights include a record early arrival for Snow Goose when B. Purcell observed six from Derby Hill on 22 Feb, surpassing the old record by two days; this was only the fourth Regional winter report. Although there are approximately twelve records for Am. Wigeon in the winter, and one at Wright's Landing in Oswego Harbor on 12 Feb may have been an early arrival too. A **Turkey Vulture** seen at Scott Swamp on the 27 Jan by R. Knight and on the next day near Selkirk Shores State Park, Oswego Co, by S.F. Kahl (possibly the same bird), was the area's first January sighting and our fifth winter record. Eight reports of Bald Eagle continue to demonstrate this species' increase in numbers over previous winters. Two reports of Red-shouldered Hawk, the first winter reports since 1983, were encouraging for this declining raptor. Rough-legged Hawk reports were widely scattered across the Region with the highest maximum near L Ontario. **Fish Crow** continues its presence at the western end of the Mohawk Valley. Another corvid that made news was Oswego County's first winter record for a Com. Raven. Three of these birds, along with a Bald Eagle, were observed flying over County Rt. 17 near Redfield on 10 Dec by M.S. Rusk. Toward the end of

December observers were both delighted and surprised to find **201** Bohemian Waxwing north of Rome 29 Dec. This is the highest number ever recorded for the Region and a surprise away from the L Ontario Plain, where the previous max of 115 was recorded at Port Ontario in 1976.

A small variety of half-hardy species were found, but never in large numbers. Eastern Bluebirds persisted through the winter in several localities east of Oneida L. American Robin overwintered where staghorn sumac was abundant primarily near the Erie Canal and in the Camillus Valley.

Among winter finches, impressive numbers of White-winged Crossbill were found in both the Adirondacks and the Appalachian Plateau. One observer commented that they were everywhere, with a maximum of 320 on a trip between Old Forge and Big Moose on 1 Feb. In the southern highlands of Madison Co., up to 200 were observed feeding on the cones of Norway and White Spruce. Pine Siskin also began to appear in large numbers. An estimated 300 were counted toward the end of February in Oneida, reminiscent of a similar invasion two years ago. The first **Hoary Redpoll** in two years appeared at a feeder in Cazenovia, especially unusual considering that only seven Com. Redpoll were reported. Evening Grosbeak was common in the Adirondacks and to a lesser extent in southern Madison Co, but nowhere near the abundance a decade ago.

Negatives for the season include no Killdeer after 1 Jan, no Common Snipe reported and very few white-winged gulls observed along the Oswego River. Two one-day reports of Snowy Owl were the lowest in years. Gray Jay was not reported, and Carolina Wren may have been hard hit by December's weather. There was no Swamp Sparrow and even White-throated Sparrow appeared less conspicuous. Lastly, Purple Finch just simply vanished from our Region with just one report.

Observers in the region reported 113 species during the winter. The most unusual of these were King Eider, **Turkey Vulture**, **Dickcissel** and **Hoary Redpoll**. Other notable species reported were Red-throated Loon, Snow Goose, Red-shouldered Hawk, N. Saw-whet Owl, Fish Crow, Common Raven, Bohemian Waxwing, Chipping and Savannah Sparrow.

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Abbreviations: DH - Derby Hill, OSWE; FBSP - Fairhaven Beach State Park, CAYU; LOL - Lake Ontario littoral, OSWE; NPT - northern Pompey township, ONON.

**LOONS-DUCKS:** Red-throated Loon: one Oswego 11 Feb. Com. Loon: last two Oswego 1 Jan. Pied-billed Grebe: two Oswego entire period, one Otisco L 24 Feb. Horned Grebe: two Scriba 18 Feb, one Oswego H 2 Dec-20 Jan, one Noyes Sanctuary 18 Jan-18 Feb. Double-crested Cormorant: seven Oswego all winter. Great Blue Heron: max 16 Oswego R 14 Jan. Tundra Swan: two ad, three imm Oneida L 4 Dec. Snow Goose: intro. Canada Goose: max 600 Otisco L 4 Dec. Wood Duck: two Manlius 14 Jan. Green-winged Teal: max eleven Hookway Tract 13 Jan, present all season. Am. Black Duck: max 137 Onondaga L 28 Feb. N. Pintail: max 15 Seneca R flats 24 Feb. N. Shoveler: one Manlius 6 Jan. Gadwall: eight Oswego 1 Jan. Am. Wigeon: *intro*. Canvasback: four Oswego 28 Jan, eleven reported for the period. Redhead: five Brewerton until 18 Feb. Ring-necked Duck: last nine Skaneateles L 13 Jan. Greater Scaup max 860 Skaneateles L & Oswego 1 Jan. Lesser Scaup: six Oswego 31 Dec, last one 28 Jan. King Eider: one Oswego 15 Jan, 12 Feb. Oldsquaw: max 51 Oswego 11 Feb. White-winged Scoter: one Nine Mile Pt 8 Dec, one Noyes Sanctuary 9 Dec, one Oswego H 1-20 Jan. Com. Goldeneye: max 342 Oswego R 11 Feb. Bufflehead: max 148 Skaneateles L & Oswego R 1 Jan. Hooded Merganser: max 30 Otisco L 6 Dec, five Phoenix 27 Feb. Red-breasted Merganser: max 33 LOL & Oswego R 15 Jan.

**HAWKS-ALCIDS:** **Turkey Vulture:** *intro*. Bald Eagle: one Big Moose, Dart L, Bald Mt 15 Dec-28 Feb, ad Toad Harbor 14 Jan, ad Oneida 2 Jan; two ad Fulton & Selkirk Shores SP 24 Feb, imm Fulton 20 Jan-27 Feb. N. Goshawk: five reports. Red-shouldered Hawk: one Whitestown 24 Feb, two North Bay, Oneida L 26, 27 Feb. Rough-legged Hawk: max five LOL 22 Feb. Am. Kestrel: twelve reported for the season. Ring-necked Pheasant: seven near Verona 18 Jan. Wild Turkey: max 20 near Rome 26 Dec. Am. Coot: one FBSP 2 Dec, one Baldwinsville 20 Jan, two Oswego through period. Killdeer: one Seneca R flats 23 Dec, one Carpenter's Brook Fish Hatchery near Martisco 1 Jan, none afterwards. Herring Gull: departed Old Forge 10 Dec. Iceland Gull: three Oswego R 6 Jan-27 Feb. Glaucous Gull: one FBSP 12 Jan, two Oswego R 13 Dec-27 Feb.

**PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS:** Snowy Owl: one DH 2 Jan, one at Griffis AFB, very scarce. Barred Owl: seven reports. Short-eared Owl: one Lenox 10 Dec, two T Vernon 17 Dec, one DH 13 Feb. N. Saw-whet Owl: one NPT 23 Dec, two Limekiln L 7 Feb. Red-headed Woodpecker: two Oneida 1 Jan. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: one Carpenter's Brook near Martisco 7 Jan. N. Flicker: 13 reports.

**FLYCATCHERS-STARLING:** Horned Lark: max 150 Wampsville 27 Feb. Blue Jay: max 85 Old Forge to Big Moose 1 Feb. Am. Crow: max 300 near Rome. **Fish Crow:** one New York Mills 1 Jan (G. Webb). Com. Raven: *intro*. Black-capped Chickadee: max 92 Old Forge to Big Moose 1 Feb. Carolina Wren: two Camillus 4 Jan, one Hookway Tract 25 Feb. Golden-crowned Kinglet: three/day until 15 Jan, none afterwards. E. Bluebird: eight T Vernon 8 Jan. Hermit Thrush: one NPT entire period. Am. Robin: max 65 Kasson Rd Syracuse all winter. **Bohemian**

**Waxwing:** *intro*. Cedar Waxwing: max 80 Otisco L 10 Jan, very scarce afterwards. N. Shrike: ten reports for the period.

**VIREOS-WARBLEDERS:** None.

**TANAGERS-WEAVERS:** **Dickcissel:** female at feeder Sandy Creek 6-12 Dec, first report since 1979 (R. Connell). Am. Tree Sparrow: max 35 Rome, very scarce by the end of the season. Chipping Sparrow: two imm at feeder NPT until 3 Dec, with one persisting to end of period (DWC). **Savannah Sparrow:** one at a feeder Otisco L 8 Dec-1 Jan, third winter record (RLP). Song Sparrow: nine reports. White-throated Sparrow: max four Dewitt 7 Jan, very scarce. White-crowned Sparrow: one NPT 20 Jan to end of period. Dark-eyed Junco: max 12 Rice Creek Biological Station, Oswego 13 Jan. Lapland Longspur: max 21 DH 8 Dec, one Erieville 30 Dec-30 Jan, one near Pratts Falls 31 Jan. Snow Bunting: max 300 T Vernon 26 Feb. Red-winged Blackbird: four/day until mid Feb, arr Baldwinsville 11 Feb. Rusty Blackbird: three Fayetteville 10 Jan. Com. Grackle: three Old Forge 20 Dec, one NPT 1 Jan, arr Camillus 23 Feb. Pine Grosbeak: max 20 Nine Mile Pt 19 Dec. Purple Finch: one Erieville 3 Dec-23 Feb, only report. Red Crossbill: two Tug Hill 25 Jan, one Georgetown MADI 11 Feb, four Fabius 20 Feb. White-winged Crossbill: *intro*. Com. Redpoll: four Erieville 5 Dec, three Holland Patent 3 Feb, last there 15 Feb. **Hoary Redpoll:** one at a feeder Cazenovia 19, 29-31 Jan (N Lange, *fide* DWC). Pine Siskin: *intro*. Evening Grosbeak: max 90 Old Forge to Big Moose 1 Feb, 40 Erieville 2 Jan, scarce elsewhere.

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