

REGION 3 — FINGER LAKES

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December was warm and wet with temperatures and rainfall generally above historical averages for the month. Winter weather was not seen until the third week of December, when seasonably cold temperatures and snowfall returned to the Region. Temperatures actually plummeted to 5-15° below normal, but returned to unseasonably warm levels by the end of the month when 50° temperatures and more rainfall returned to melt the snows of Christmas. The warm weather of December continued into January, but average temperatures for the month were only slightly above normal, with precipitation totals for the month near normal. February was among the ten warmest Februaries on record, with temperatures throughout the Region averaging 5-6° above normal. Precipitation for February was consistently below normal. In general, the period from December through February was the sixth warmest in 96 years of record-keeping (weather information provided by the Northeast Regional Climate Center, Cornell University).

A **Sandhill Crane** flying north-northeast over Fish Road between Enfield and Mecklenburg on 5 Feb is noteworthy (B. Evans). The crane was flying low and riding warm southwesterly winds, linked to a high pressure area over the Mississippi Valley which produced near-record warm temperatures for the Region. It was a good winter for Short-eared Owl throughout the Region, with groups of as many as 25 birds reported from some localities. It was not, however, a "finch winter." There were only scattered reports of Red Crossbill and no reports of Pine Siskin for the period.

Careful scrutiny of large concentrations of gulls at Stewart Park at the south end of Cayuga Lake by Ned Brinkley, Adam Byrne, Bill Evans, Sue Seely, and others produced some interesting observations. Among them were Glaucous, Iceland, **Lesser Black-backed**, and **Thayer's Gull**, and a possible Glaucous x Herring hybrid. More than 8,000 gulls were present at Stewart Park on 9 Feb, and the highest count ever of both Ring-billed (2,400) and Herring (1,400) Gull was reported for the Ithaca Christmas Bird Count. The high Ring-billed Gull numbers may be a reflection of the warm weather, as well as the continued growth of the Lake Ontario breeding gull population. Likewise, the occurrence of 1-3

wintering Double-crested Cormorant on both Cayuga and Seneca Lakes also may be the result of the population growth of this species at summer breeding colonies on Lake Ontario. J. Brubaker and B. Hilfiker report that Great Black-backed Gull also appears to be increasing in winter on Seneca Lake.

Waterfowl reported from Cayuga and Seneca Lakes included Gadwall, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Wood Duck, American Black Duck, Mallard, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Canvasback, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, and Red-breasted Merganser.

The relatively warm weather may have contributed to winter reports of Chipping Sparrow and a number of Rufous-sided Towhee at feeders, as well as some apparent early "spring" arrivals. B. Evans reported a Chipping Sparrow that lingered at a feeder near Enfield through 24 Dec and N. Brinkley found an early (or late?) **Eastern Phoebe** at Hog Hole at south end of Cayuga Lake on 6 Feb. Queen Catharine Marsh at the south end of Seneca Lake provided winter shelter for an estimated 50 American Robin on 25 Jan and J. Brubaker found as many as 50 Song Sparrow, along with Carolina Wren, Winter Wren, Field Sparrow, and Swamp Sparrow throughout the winter.

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Abbreviations: CL - Cayuga Lake; FLNF - Finger Lakes National Forest; MNWR - Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge; QCM - Queen Catharine Marsh, Watkins Glen; SL - Seneca Lake; StP - Stewart Park, Ithaca; WGSP - Watkins Glen State Park.

LOONS-DUCKS: Com. Loon: only scattered reports of single birds from SL in Dec and Jan (JB, BH) and CL in Feb (NB). Horned Grebe: CL Jan and Feb (NB). Pied-billed Grebe: three Ithaca throughout period (NB). Tundra Swan: north end SL 13 Jan (no numbers reported, BH), 25-75 on CL and MNWR early Feb (NB). Snow Goose: two MNWR Dec (TG) and singles CL Jan and Feb (NB). Canada Goose: 105,835 CL 29 Jan (TG). Green-winged Teal: male StP 27 Feb (NB). Great Blue Heron: CL and SL through early Jan, with 30-40 MNWR 1 Jan (BH).

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Red-shouldered Hawk: one near Ithaca 19 Jan (NB). Bald Eagle: four-five MNWR throughout period (TG); 3 ad, 2 imm MNWR 1 Jan (BH); ad Canandaigua L 2 Feb (BH). Peregrine Falcon: one SL 3 Feb (BH), one along Rt. 352 between Elmira and Corning 3 Feb (DC). **Merlin**: one Sundown Farms, near Ithaca, 15-16 Jan (NB), one Horseheads 3 Feb (DC). **Sandhill Crane**: *intro*. Am. Woodcock: one displaying near Dryden 24 Feb. Ring-billed Gull: *intro*; max 6,070 StP 9 Feb (NB). Herring Gull: *intro*; max 3,589 StP 9 Feb (NB). Iceland Gull: one-three StP 1 Jan to end of Feb (CBC, NB). **Thayer's Gull**: one StP 27 Feb (NB, mob).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: ad StP 6 Jan (NB). Glaucous Gull: first-year bird StP throughout Feb (NB). Glaucous X Herring Gull: one StP 15, 21, 28 Feb (NB, mob). Great Black-backed Gull: *intro*; max 798 StP 9 Feb (NB); record high of 14 SL 17 Feb (JB).

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Short-eared Owl: numerous reports from throughout the Region, with as many as 50-100 wintering between CL and SL (BE). Long-eared Owl: roost of six near Ithaca 10 Feb; on nest near Canoga 24 Feb (all NB). N. Saw-whet Owl: two found dead (road-kills) near Ithaca 11 Dec (BE); two calling near Ithaca 9 Feb (NB, mob).

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: **E. Phoebe:** *intro*. Com. Raven: two Horseheads 13 Feb (DC). Carolina Wren: numbers (20) recovered on Ithaca Christmas Count for first time since cold winters of 1977-78. N. Shrike: Geneva, Waterloo, and Junius in Dec (BH); one Reading Center 1 Jan (JB), and FLNF 7 Dec, 1 Jan, and 26 Jan (JB).

VIREOS-WARBLED: Yellow-rumped Warbler: none, in spite of the unseasonably mild winter.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: Rufous-sided Towhee: several reports of singles at feeders. Chipping Sparrow: *intro*. Field Sparrow: *intro*; one near Enfield 3 Jan (BE). Song Sparrow: *intro*. Swamp Sparrow: *intro*. Red-winged Blackbird: flock of 250 Montour Falls 1 Feb (JB); several migrating flocks throughout Region last week of Feb. Pine Siskin: none. Red Crossbill: 12 WGSP 27 Dec (JB), one near WGSP 1 Jan (JB), and two Yellow Barn State Forest 7 Jan (NB).

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