

REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

GERALD R. RISING

Once again the winter was generally mild. According to the National Weather Service Forecast Office in Buffalo, all three months enjoyed above normal average temperatures: December +2.5° at 31°F, January +3.6° at 27°F, and February +3.0° at 28°F. Precipitation continued at or below normal and much of it fell as rain during warm spells. As a result snowfall for the period in Buffalo was 20 inches below average. Despite November's 18 inches, at the end of this season the total winter snowfall was a foot less than normal. Open ground was the rule, with snow depth over two inches on only eight days in December, eight in January and none in February. There were periods of especially mild weather: 7-14 Dec, 2-14 Jan (a good period for listers), and 15-28 Feb. There were cold periods as well: 15-20 Dec, 15-20 Jan, and 9-13 Feb. On 13 of those 17 days the temperature dropped below 10°, falling below 0°F only on 10 Feb and 12 Feb. The heaviest snow fell on 4-5 Dec, 20 inches in bands across the Southern Tier; 7-12 inches fell on 15 Dec, and 16 inches fell 14-20 Jan. It snowed on 22 of the 29 days in February, but never as much as two inches. As Vivian Pitzrick remarked that month, "My snow plow had a good rest."

Mrs. Pitzrick went on to say, "Wild food was still so abundant (even crab apples) that birds didn't need feeders." My own February observations made while hiking in the Southern Tier support this. What appeared in November to be an encouraging year for winter finches fell flat, with continuing low numbers of all expected species except American Goldfinch.

Over 200 observers took part in nine Christmas Bird Counts across the Region, providing another good snapshot of bird populations. Among the 115 species recorded were Red-necked Grebe, Eared Grebe, Snow Goose, Turkey Vulture, Black-legged Kittiwake, Common Tern, Common Raven, Gray Catbird, American Pipit, Bohemian Waxwing, Rufous-sided Towhee, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, and Common Redpoll. An interesting contrast occurred on 15 Dec. On that day the Buffalo Christmas Count reported fair weather, whereas the Jamestown Count had a driveway clogging, foot deep, early morning snowfall.

Winter Black-crowned Night-Heron is recorded only sporadically in this Region, but last and this year some roosted in evergreens in Bob Brock's Buffalo yard. In his report he says: "Unlike last season's visits, which were

daily from October through January, this season the birds were here only five days during that period." He then adds counts of one to nine birds from 14-19 and 27-29 Feb. The 15 Dec Jamestown CBC Turkey Vulture found by Anita Seaberg (verification details supplied to National Audubon Society *fide* R. Sundell) is the second winter record or month late straggler for this Region; however, since this species winters in Letchworth State Park within a few miles of the eastern Region boundary (*Kingbird* 39(2): 74-79), such a record is to be expected. The first Region 1 winter record was 8 Feb 1990 in the Town of Sheridan.

Evidence of the success of Wild Turkey restocking continues to mount. On recent Regional counts, turkey populations have equaled the sum of pheasant and grouse numbers. This year's combined Christmas Counts incremented that proportion to over 3.7:1. with 42 Ruffed Grouse, 37 Ring-necked Pheasants, and 293 Wild Turkeys.

The most exciting bird of the season was the **Great Gray Owl**, found by Charles Hodges near the Jamestown Airport, reported by Bob Sundell, seen and photographed by hundreds of observers. Remarkably, another of these extremely rare visitors was first spotted within about ten miles of this bird a few days earlier in Warren, Pennsylvania. Notable, too, were the ten, and quite likely far more, Snowy Owl distributed along the Buffalo waterfront.

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Abbreviations: BCBC – Buffalo CBC, 15 Dec; BISP – Beaver Island State Park; BMCBC – Beaver Meadow CBC, 28 Dec; BOS – Buffalo Ornithological Society; BWS – Burgeson Wildlife Sanctuary; DH – Dunkirk Harbor; JCBC – Jamestown CBC, 15 Dec; NF – Niagara Falls; NFCBC – Niagara Falls CBC, 22 Dec; NR – Niagara River; OOCBC – Oak Orchard Swamp CBC, 27 Dec; SPt – Sturgeon Point; WTSP – Wilson Tuscaraora State Park.

LOONS-DUCKS: Com. Loon: last three WC 12 Jan. Pied-billed Grebe: CBC total 21. Horned Grebe: max 54 Sturgeon Pt-DH 1 Jan (WD). Red-necked Grebe: one DH 7

Dec (FR, mob); one Fort Niagara SP 21, 23 Dec (WD, WW); one T Hanover 1 Jan (WD), only observations. Eared Grebe: one DH 7-8 Dec (mob); one NR 15 Dec, only observations. Double-crested Cormorant: max seven NR 19 Jan (RA, JT). Great Blue Heron: CBC total 69; 43 on Motor I NR 27 Feb (WW), high. Black-crowned Night-Heron: max seven ad, two imm Buffalo 16 Feb, *intro*. Tundra Swan: CBC total 53; five on waterfowl count 12 Jan; arr 34 T Amherst 22 Feb (D&DS), 30 WTSP (BP). Mute Swan: one continues to winter in Buffalo Harbor. Greater White-fronted Goose: one BWS 12 Dec (RS), only record. Snow Goose: one DH 7,8 Dec (mob), unusual so late; three Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge 13,14 Dec, 11 Jan (OOCBC, WW); one to two DH 7 Dec to 2 Feb (mob); one BISP 7 Feb (WW); two T Stockton 29 Feb (AB, FR). Brant: six NR 1 Jan (WC, MG, GR, WW). Canada Goose: wintering numbers continue to increase, CBC total 4226, 2229 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Wood Duck: CBC total 32, high, two on waterfowl census 12 Jan. Green-winged Teal: CBC total two, none on waterfowl census; six BWS 12 Dec (RS); one DH 1, 22 Jan (mob). N. Pintail: one DH 22 Dec (JF), 18-25 Jan (mob), 5 Feb (LH); one T Amity 19 Jan, two there 2 Feb (VP); arr 19 T Porter 22 Feb (WD), 58 T Stockton 29 Feb (AB, FR), one Goat Island NR 29 Feb (TB). N. Shoveler: only report 12 JCBC. Gadwall: CBC total 156, 14 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Am. Wigeon: 60 T Mayville 1 Dec (JF), late migrants; 40 BCBC, only CBC report; 29 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Canvasback: CBC total 8466, 3273 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Redhead: CBC total 107, 15 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Ring-necked Duck: 16 BCBC, seven JCBC; 65 on waterfowl count 12 Jan; arr four T Celeron 23 Feb (RS), six DH 23 Feb (AB, FR). Greater Scaup: CBC total 2391, 127 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Lesser Scaup: CBC total 131, 38 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Oldsquaw: 250 NFCBC; 2555 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Black Scoter: one T Evans 1 Jan (WD), only record. White-winged Scoter: 242 NFCBC 22 Dec, 15 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Com. Goldeneye: CBC total 2154, 2401 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Bufflehead: CBC total 514, 209 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Hooded Merganser: CBC total 324, 25 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Com. Merganser: max 4200 NR 14 Dec (WD); CBC total 1796, 2458 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Red-breasted Merganser: CBC total 78, 11 on waterfowl count 12 Jan. Ruddy Duck: 15 T Mayville 1 Dec (JF), CBC total 11, none on waterfowl count; one DH 23 Feb (AB, FR).

HAWKS—ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: *intro*. Bald Eagle: imm T Cold Spring 13 Dec (SE), imm T Lyndonville 25-31 Jan (PS), ad T Irving 3 Feb; possible arr imm T Lackawanna 27 Feb (DD). N. Harrier: CBC total 12. Sharp-shinned Hawk: CBC total 29. Cooper's Hawk: CBC total 30. N. Goshawk: CBC total . four. Red-shouldered Hawk: only reports one T East Aurora 6 Dec (LH), one T Amity 5 Jan-16 Feb (VP); three T Stockton 18 Jan (DK), "unprecedented"—RS; arr one 22 Feb T Sheridan (C&RB), one 23 Feb Evangola SP (DD). Rough-legged Hawk: CBC total 15. Merlin: probable return to last winter's territory one ne Buffalo 16 Dec-12 Feb (D&DS, ES). Virginia Rail: one T East Aurora 5-12 Feb (LH), very rare winter visitor. Purple Sandpiper: last four NF 9 Dec (GB); arr seven NF 22 Feb (MG, WW, GR). Dunlin: last NF 23 Dec (WW). Com. Snipe: three JCBC; three T. Amity 19 Jan (M&VP), unusual in winter. Little Gull: low CBC total five. Bonaparte's Gull: max 40,000 NR

8 Dec (GB); CBC total 12,849. Ring-billed Gull: CBC total 12,179. Herring Gull: CBC total 16,165. Iceland Gull: max three NR Dec (mob). Lesser Black-backed Gull: max three NR 11 Dec (LH). Glaucous Gull: max four NR 2 Jan (RA), 29 Feb (WD). Black-legged Kittiwake: arr NF 8 Dec (RA); two BCBC. Com. Tern: one NR 1,8 Dec, BCBC, late. Black Tern: one NR 1 Dec (FR), late.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Snowy Owl: max 10 NR 4 Jan (RC, KC). Barred Owl: unusually high CBC total ten. **Great Gray Owl:** *intro* Long-eared Owl: max two T of Porter 22 Dec (WD); two on CBCs. Short-eared Owl: CBC total 19. N. Saw-whet Owl: max two WTSP 23 Feb (BP, WD). Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: one LESP 1 Jan (JF), unusual in winter.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: CBC total 592, rebounding from low numbers last spring. Com. Raven: one St. Bonaventure CBC 14 Dec; one T Carrollton 24 Feb (SE), only reports. Carolina Wren: CBC total 14. Winter Wren: two T Ward 27 Dec (EB). E. Bluebird: CBC total 37. Am. Robin: CBC total 325, widespread; 350 Ontario Lake plains 20 Jan (WD). Gray Catbird: one T East Aurora 31 Dec-25 Jan (LH); one Four Mile Creek SP 20 Jan (WD), unusual in winter. Brown Thrasher: one Joseph Davis SP 2 Feb (BBR), unusual in winter. Am. Pipit: one JCBC, only one previous Dec record. Bohemian Waxwing: only one NFCBC. N. Shrike: unexpectedly high CBC total 34.

VIREOS-WARBLEDERS: Yellow-rumped Warbler: only records one LESP 25 Dec (JF), six LESP 17 Feb (D&DS). Pine Warbler: one T Somerset 17 Feb (WD), unexpected. Am. Redstart: one BISP 1 Dec (PB), over a month late. Ovenbird: one T Cheektowaga 15,16 Jan (WB), first Regional winter record.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: Rose-breasted Grosbeak: one T Boston through mid-Jan (GR, MG, WW), unusual in winter. Rufous-sided Towhee: one Hamburg-East Aurora CBC 21 Dec (unconfirmed); one T Elma 26 Jan (JD), unusual in winter. Chipping Sparrow: 12 JCBC (unconfirmed!), unusual in winter. Field Sparrow: one BMCBC (MG, GR, mob). Fox Sparrow: one JCBC 15 Dec (unconfirmed), late. Lapland Longspur: CBC total 11. Snow Bunting: CBC total 520. Pine Grosbeak: one T Porter on NFCBC (WD, BP); one T Porter 26 Feb (DD, WD). Red Crossbill: only one Fredonia 16 Jan (DK), with House Sparrows at a feeder. White-winged Crossbill: only four BMCBC (unconfirmed). Com. Redpoll: only record 30 OOCBC (unconfirmed). Pine Siskin: CBC total 24. Evening Grosbeak: CBC total 183, continuing low numbers.

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