

REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

GERALD R. RISING

This winter was characterized by brightness following gloom. Two warm, overcast months preceded a record cold and mostly clear February. Mean temperatures with departures from historic averages provided by the National Weather Service Forecast Office in Buffalo are: December 32.1°F (+3.3°), January 29.5°F (+5.9°), and February 20.6°F (-3.8°). The temperature rose above 50° on 15 and 16 Dec and 3, 4 (62°F) and 5 Jan, and fell to 10°F only on 27 Dec. In February, on the other hand, the temperature fell below 10°F on 14 days and dropped below zero on 6, 7 and 27 Feb; it rose above freezing on only 12 days. Precipitation peaked in January when 4.4 inches fell, mostly as rain during warm spells, and leaving the snowfall of 13 inches a foot below average for that month. December had 16 inches and February 20 inches of snow, six and one inch more than normal, respectively. Most of December's snow fell on 10 and 11 Dec, but it rapidly melted and there was little snow cover a week later. There was little cover through January as well, but snow accumulated in February and from 17 Feb on, there was a half foot on the ground. No wonder! Despite much cold clear weather in February, it snowed every single day. But despite the snow, that February brightness dispelled an extended period of mostly gloomy, sunless days that ran from late November to the end of January.

In the Southern Tier, Vivian Pitzrick reported bountiful spruce, hemlock, Box Elder, sumac, and buckthorn fruits, but other wild food such as mast and Multiflora Rose hips was scarce. Steve Eaton noted Pine Siskin and Purple Finch eating White Ash and hemlock seeds off the snow after storms.

About 300 observers took part in nine Christmas Bird Counts across the Region, again providing a good snapshot of bird populations. Several compilers characterized this year's count as bland, but as always there were some interesting records. Among the 106 species (down nine from last year) were Northern Goshawk, **Gyr Falcon**, **Slaty-backed Gull**, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Common Raven, Winter Wren, Rufous-sided Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak, and Common Redpoll. The overall count total of 118,798 was down a third from 1991, but native passerines were off only 12%. The major

decrements were in waterfowl, always a concern, and in gulls and introduced species, the latter groups subject to widely varying estimates from year to year. Happily the January Waterfowl Count produced contrasting results. Compared with the most recent six year average, the total was up a third with dabblers up 24% and divers up 31%.

The appearance of two or possibly three **Gyr Falcon** excited the birders of western New York. A dark brown bird which may have been an immature was seen by Debbie and Dave Suggs and Bob Andrie at the east end of Lake Erie. Then a gray morph bird was identified by Dean DiTommaso, Willy D'Anna, Betsy Potter and others near the same location, all these observations from 1 to 6 January. Andrie and others even had the great good fortune to watch one of these birds fly past a perched Peregrine Falcon on 2 Jan. That ought to win them the exciting-birds-in-the-binocular award. Then on 20 Feb still another Gyr Falcon turned up in the Town of Yates, where it was observed by many birders through the end of the month. Of interest is that close range descriptions of this individual range from gray to brown (the breast streaking appeared dark cinnamon to me), which again suggests the possibility that more than one bird was present. One may have been trapped and banded in the area. As one serendipitous result of the search for this northern falcon, birders found a **Harris's Sparrow** at a Yates feeder. It was observed by many from 26 Feb through the end of the period, and for some it partially made up for missing the elusive hawk.

The three exotic gulls that first appeared in the Niagara River gorge at the end of the fall season all were recorded in New York State early in December: the **Mew Gull** in Dunkirk Harbor on 3 Dec by Bob Sundell; the **California Gull** still in the gorge on 1 and 6 Dec by Bob Andrie, Fran Rew and others, and the **Slaty-backed Gull** on 4 Dec by the Van Tursts and on 15 Dec by Dick Byron and Dick Collins (corroborative details are still lacking for the last species).

A few Red Crossbill were located in the Town of Ward by Elizabeth Brooks on 12 Jan and a dozen more were found in Phillips Creek State Forest by Willy D'Anna and others on 23 Jan. A pair in this latter flock was observed nest building so Brooks revisited the area on 24 and 29 Jan. On the last date the nest was more complete but she observed no crossbills nearby. Despite these and a trickle of other winter finches, this was once again a very poor year for them. Of particular note is the dearth of Evening Grosbeak.

There was no hint of a return migration by the end of the period.

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Abbreviations: BCBC - Buffalo CBC, 15 Dec; BMCBC - Beaver Meadow CBC, 28 Dec; BH - Buffalo Harbor; CCBCs - (nine) combined Christmas Counts, 20-29 Dec; DH - Dunkirk Harbor; FWC - Federation Waterfowl Count, 16-24 Jan; GI - Goat Island at Niagara Falls; HCBC - Hamburg-E. Aurora CBC, 21 Dec; JCBC - Jamestown CBC, 20 Dec; NF - Niagara Falls; NFCBC - Niagara Falls CBC, 22 Dec; NR - Niagara River; OOCBC - Oak Orchard CBC, 27 Dec; SBCBC - St. Bonaventure CBC 14 Dec.

Winter reports: **Com. Loon:** last three BCBC. **Pied-billed Grebe:** max nine FWC. **Horned Grebe:** max two CCBCs, none in Jan; only one Celoron 11 Feb (RS), one DH 19, 28 Feb (BC, TM), scarce. **EARED GREBE:** one DH 31 Dec (BR); one DH 19 Feb (TM!). **Double-crested Cormorant:** max 21 CCBCs. **Great Blue Heron:** max 51 CCBCs; 50

roosting NR 19 Jan (RA, WW, mob). **Black-crowned Night-Heron:** two DH 12 Dec (CB, RBu), late; two Buffalo 25 Dec (RBr); one Buffalo 7, 9 Feb (RBr), early. **Tundra Swan:** max 154 Celoron 1 Jan (RS). **Mute Swan:** only record one DH 30-31 Jan (DK, WDA, DDT). **Snow Goose:** only record one DH through period (FR, mob). **Canada Goose:** max 4915 CCBCs, 4288 FWC, up 92% from last year and 125% from the six year average. **Wood Duck:** five CCBCs; one Jamestown 10 Jan (WDA, mob); only one FWC at Amherst 17 Jan (BBu). **Green-winged Teal:** only one JCBC; one DH 20 Feb (FR, RS), early. **N. Pintail:** last six NR BCBC, four FWC; arr four T Cold Spring (RS). **N. Shoveler:** last T Medina 3 Dec (GR), T Pomfret 18 Jan (TM!), DH 3 and 31 Jan (JG, JS; DK, WDA, DDT). **Gadwall:** max 42 FWC; only eight CCBCs. **Am. Wigeon:** six FWC; only other report one T Cold Spring 13, 14 Feb (RS). **Canvasback:** max 3621 FWC, up 10% from last year and 50% from six year average. **Redhead:** max 194 FWC, up from 15 last year and twice the six year average. **Ring-necked Duck:** max 14 FWC, down from 64 last year but near the six year average. **Greater Scaup:** max 6731 FWC, up from recent low of 127 last year and recent max of 3579 in 1991. **Lesser Scaup:** max 82 FWC, slightly above the six year average. **King Eider:** only one BH 1, 3 Jan (RC, D&DS, mob). **Oldsquaw:** max 1655 FWC, half of the six year average. **Black Scoter:** three FWC Lake Ontario, first on FWC since 1988; only other record NR 1 Jan (WDA, DDT). **Surf Scoter:** only record one DH 20 Feb (RS). **White-winged Scoter:** max 300 Pt Breeze 2 Jan (WL). **Com. Goldeneye:** max 3080 FWC, 18% above six year average. **COM. GOLDENEYE X HOODED MERGANSER:** one Black Rock Canal 23 Jan (BC!). **Bufflehead:** max 306 FWC, slightly above six year average. **Hooded Merganser:** max 23 FWC. **Com. Merganser:** max 3500 NR 2 Jan (BE, mob). **Red-breasted Merganser:** max 465 CCBCs; reduced to 331 FWC, up from 11 last year but still 16% below six year average. **Ruddy Duck:** last two DH 3 Dec (RS).

Bald Eagle: five reports of singles through the period. **N. Harrier:** max 21 CCBCs, up from 12 last year. **Sharp-shinned Hawk:** max 29 CCBCs, same as last year. **Cooper's Hawk:** max 25 CCBCs, 30 last year. **N. Goshawk:** only records singles Cassadaga L 4 Dec (LDF, LP), HCBC, BMCBC, Eggertsville 4 Feb (AMK!). **Red-shouldered Hawk:** only records singles T Harmony 12, 13 Dec (JFJ, B&LOB), T Pomfret 13 Dec (FR!), T Gerry 16 Dec (TM), NF 19, 20 Dec (WDA, DR, mob!), T Westfield 20 Dec (JL), T Otto 2 Jan (RS!). **Rough-legged Hawk:** max 15

CCBCs, same as last year. **Merlin**: one Buffalo 5 Jan-24 Feb (ES, DS, mob!), third winter at this location; only other record T Ripley 30 Jan (FR!). **Peregrine Falcon**: only records ad BH 1, 2 Jan (D&DS, mob!); imm BH and Tiff Nature Preserve 3, 7 Jan (WDA, D&DS, mob!). **GYRFALCON**: *intro*. **Wild Turkey**: max 98 CCBCs, down from last year's spectacular 293, but still almost twice the number of pheasants and grouse together. **Am. Coot**: max 65 CCBCs, also down from last year's 387; 58 FWC near the six year average. **Killdeer**: one DH 4 Dec (WDA, DDT) late. **Purple Sandpiper**: two GI 8 Dec (GB) only December record; max and only others five GI 1, 17 Jan (WDA, BE, mob). **Dunlin**: only records two GI 1, 17 Jan (B&RaE, WDA, DDT!). **Com. Snipe**: only record two T Pomfret 20 Feb (LB, FR!). **Jaeger species**: one Fort Niagara SP 1 Jan (DDT, WDA!). **Little Gull**: max five NR and DH 31 Jan (mob). **Bonaparte's Gull**: max 9600 lower NR 16 Dec (GB); last count 5250 lower NR 26 Feb (GB), numbers down from last year but present later. **MEW GULL**: *intro*. **CALIFORNIA GULL**: *intro*. **Iceland Gull**: max four NR 1 Jan (WDA, TH, WW). **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: max three NR 13 Dec (WDA, mob) and CCBCs, last 10 Jan. **SLATY-BACKED GULL**: *intro*. **Glaucous Gull**: max three CCBCs; January max two Bird Island Pier BH 23 Jan (BC); two T Celoron 17 Feb (RS). **Black-legged Kittiwake**: only records singles NR 12 Dec (WDA, mob!), NR 30 Jan (DDT!).

Snowy Owl: max and last three BH 2-9 Jan (mob). **Barred Owl**: only reports three CCBCs. **Long-eared Owl**: max six T Porter 3, 23, 26 Jan (WDA, BE, DR). **Short-eared Owl**: arr two T Carlton 9 Dec (WL); max seven T Somerset 13 Dec (B&RaE); seven T Porter 6 Jan (BE). **N. Saw-whet Owl**: arr NFCBC, six other records along Lake Ontario through period. **Red-headed Woodpecker**: only reports one Lakeside Beach SP 31 Dec (WL, MD) and three there 9 Jan (WDA, mob).

Horned Lark: max 300 T Yates 27 Feb (WW, MG, others), similar numbers through period. **Com. Raven**: one SBCBC; two Allegany SP 31 Jan (FL), only reports. **Hermit Thrush**: one HCBC, three other reports, none in January; last but, given the preceding weather, surely not a migrant T Somerset 20 Feb (WDA, mob). **Gray Catbird**: only record four HCBC. **N. Mockingbird**: max 30 CCBCs, twice last year's total. **Brown Thrasher**: one Mayville 31 Jan (NL). **N. Shrike**: arr T Carlton 19 Dec (WL); max 11 CCBCs, down from 34 last year; last T Ellery 20 Feb (RS). **LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE**: one CHAU 8 Dec (LDF, LP), very late.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: one wintering T Ransomville 19 Dec-14 Feb (BE); four Pt Gratiot and L Erie SP 18 Jan (WDA, DDT, TM). **Pine Warbler:** one T Alfred 2 Dec (EB!), late. **Ovenbird:** one Jamestown 5-6 Dec (PD, spm) found dead latter date.

Rufous-sided Towhee: at feeders Maple Springs 14 Jan and 14 Feb (BH); max two T Pomfret and T Sheridan 16 Jan (TM; FR, LB); one T Busti 19 Jan (S&SA). **Chipping Sparrow:** late migrant T Poland 14-22 Nov (JuH); max four CCBCs; last T E Aurora (WDA, DDT, M&SR!). **Field Sparrow:** one wintering T E Aurora after 6 Dec (LH). **Savannah Sparrow:** one T Lewiston 9 Jan (DDT, WDA, BE!), late, only report. **Swamp Sparrow:** max six CCBCs. **HARRIS'S SPARROW:** *intro*. **Lapland Longspur:** max ten T Yates 20 Feb (WDA, WW, mob). **Snow Bunting:** max 140 T Charlotte 5 Feb (FR). **Red-winged Blackbird:** max 29 CCBCs, down from 61 last year. **E. Meadowlark:** max eight CCBCs, none last year. **Rusty Blackbird:** last and only record T Stockton 3 Dec (RS). **Com. Grackle:** max 35 CCBCs; last T Tonawanda 31 Dec (PH). **Brown-headed Cowbird:** max 185 CCBCs, double last year. **Pine Grosbeak:** only record two OOCBC. **Purple Finch:** max 215 CCBCs, double last year. **House Finch** max 4205 CCBCs, down from 4894. **Red Crossbill:** *intro*. **White-winged Crossbill:** only record one Golden Hill SP 20 Feb (WDA). **Com. Redpoll:** only records five HCBC; three Fredonia 16 Jan (AB). **Pine Siskin:** max 20 CCBCs. **Evening Grosbeak:** max 20 CCBCs, down even from last year's 189; only other reports three and one T Great Valley 13 and 28 Feb respectively (BS).

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