

REGION 3 — CAYUGA LAKE BASIN REGION

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Memories of the winter of 1993-94 will long be with us. Characterized by record breaking snowfall and cold temperatures, it was a tough time for birds and birders alike. Overall, the winter season was the fifth coldest for New York State in the past 99 years. December began deceptively mild, with temperatures near or above normal for the Region until near Christmas, when an Alberta Clipper brought record breaking cold temperatures. Minimum temperatures dropped to -12 to -15°F across the Region on 27 Dec, following passage of the strong cold front, leaving us with the coldest December since 1989. December precipitation remained normal to slightly below normal for the Region. However, snowfall averaged 5 to 10 inches above normal, setting the stage for January. This was the second coldest January in 100 years of record keeping (the coldest was 1918) and the wettest in the last 15 years. For the Region, temperatures ranged from 8 to 11°F below normal 30-year averages. January snowfall ranged 10 to 20 inches above normal for the Region. Major snowfalls occurred on 4 and 5 Jan, when 12 to 16 inches covered the Region. February's temperatures were average to slightly below average for the Region. From 18 to 21 Feb, an unseasonably warm period brought a welcome, spring-like respite from the bitter winter weather, with 55 to 65°F temperatures ranging 15 to 25° above normal for Region 3. February precipitation also was average to slightly below average for the region. The month closed with another 5 to 9 inches of fresh snow on 26 Feb. By the end of February, total seasonal snowfall amounted to 50 to 75 inches across the Region, averaging 30 inches above expected values (weather information for the

Region summarized from monthly reports provided by the Northeast Regional Climate Center at Cornell University). The season's heavy snowfall contributed to a wetter than average winter, with precipitation totals ranging from 90 to 130% of normal values.

The results of the cold winter and heavy snows on resident species with increasing populations, like Wild Turkey, Carolina Wren, and Black-capped Chickadee, remain to be seen. Half-hardy species remained in the region through December. CBCs from Elmira, Ithaca, and at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge reported Carolina and Winter Wrens, a *House Wren*, and Field, Song, Swamp, and White-throated Sparrows. Hermit Thrush was reported from Ithaca and Geneva. Good numbers of Horned Lark and Snow Buntings and a scattering of Lapland Longspur were evident in fields, especially before the heavy snows. However, after the heavy snowstorm of early Jan many of these species were not seen, or were seen in dramatically reduced numbers. Also disappearing from the Region at this time were Belted Kingfisher and Great Blue Heron.

Wild Turkey was reported during the CBCs in record numbers. The Ithaca CBC observed 229, a number that is 4 times higher than their past high. As the season progressed and the snow cover increased, Wild Turkey flocked in larger groups, and were commonly seen in manure fields, or even coming to feeders.

There was a small gull invasion in the Town of Ulysses as first noted by Bill Evans in late Feb. The gulls seemed to be attracted to the unusual manure being spread on some fields in the area. Several immature Iceland Gull, and at least one immature Glaucous Gull, were seen in the larger flock of Herring, Ring-billed, and Great Black-backed Gulls.

Overwintering hawks were seen in good numbers throughout the region. Very late Red-shouldered Hawk were seen on the Ithaca CBC. Several observers commented on the high numbers of dark morph Rough-legged Hawk in the area. These birds generally nest in the western Arctic regions and usually are not seen in high numbers in the Region. Red-tailed Hawk was prevalent throughout the Region. Bernie Guirey reported that during his winter Raptor Survey between Cayuga and Seneca Lake there was a 30% increase in Red-tailed Hawk numbers between this year and last. Accipiters appeared to be stressed by the weather conditions in the Region. For example, Cooper's Hawk was commonly seen hunting near feeders, and in late Jan. an adult Northern Goshawk was observed catching a rat in broad daylight in front of

several startled shoppers in downtown Ithaca. Northern Harrier was present in decent numbers during the Region's CBCs, but Bernie Guirey reported a 90% decline in their numbers during his Raptor Survey conducted in late January and early February. This decline most likely is due to the snow cover prevalent after mid Jan. Several Bald Eagle overwintered in the Cayuga Lake Basin. Snowy Owl made its appearance in low and scattered numbers throughout the Region, especially north of Cayuga Lake, and in the Chemung Valley. Short-eared Owl populations continued to be low in comparison to the numbers reported 2 winters ago.

Numbers of wintering finches and other northern passerine invaders were mixed this year. This was an invasion year for Common Redpoll. They were present in high numbers throughout the entire winter period. A single *Hoary Redpoll* was observed. Evening Grosbeak was present, but only in widely scattered flocks. Pine Grosbeak was erratic with occasional small flocks briefly appearing for very short periods. Only a single White-winged Crossbill was reported. The few numbers of Crossbills reported may be due to the light conifer cone crop. Finally, there were several reports of Northern Shrike with several being fairly site specific.

Waterfowl numbers seemed to remain about average. On Cayuga Lake, American Black Duck numbers were lower this year than the previous 2 years during the Federation's Waterfowl Count, while Greater Scaup were seen in higher numbers. Large numbers of Canvasback and Redhead appeared in Seneca Lake in mid February, and remained through the period. Of special interest and concern was the occurrence of duck viral enteritis (DVE) on Keuka, Seneca and Cayuga Lakes. The disease spreads when waterfowl congregate in large numbers. The cold temperatures this winter, reduced open water in the Region which concentrated the population. It was estimated by the DEC that between 3000 and 4000 ducks, primarily Mallard and American Black Duck would die from DVE.

One of the most noteworthy events of the season was the grebe fallout that occurred throughout most of the Northeast and coastal mid-Atlantic States. Due to the unusually frigid weather, most of Lakes Superior, Huron, Erie and Ontario froze. Many Red-necked Grebe overwinter in the centers of the Great Lakes. With the freeze up, grebes overwintering on the Great Lakes were forced to move. In Region 3

evidence for a fallout of Red-necked Grebe began on 10 Feb. Numbers of Red-necked Grebe on both Seneca and Cayuga Lakes increased rapidly after this date, and remained extremely high throughout the rest of the winter season. A maximum of 105 Red-necked Grebe were counted by Ned Brinkley and Bill Evans on 19 Feb between Myers Point in Lansing, and Aurora. Numbers of Horned Grebe were also high due to the Great Lakes freeze. Over 100 Horned Grebes were counted on Cayuga Lake in mid February, and their numbers continued high through the rest of the period. Finally, another grebe that most likely made its appearance in Region 3 due to the freeze up of the Great Lakes was an *Eared Grebe*.

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Abbreviations: CL - Cayuga Lake; FWC - Federation Waterfowl Count, 20 Jan; CV - Chemung Valley; ECBC- Elmira CBC, 1 Jan; FLNF - Finger Lakes National Forest; KHF - Kestral Haven Farm, Burdette; ICBC - Ithaca CBC, 1 Jan; MCBC - Montezuma CBC, 1 Jan; SLFWC - Seneca Lake Federation Waterfowl Count, 22 Jan; SL - Seneca Lake; WG - Watkins Glen.

Winter reports: **Com. Loon:** max three CL, SL, overwintered. **Red-throated Loon:** one SL 4-14 Feb. **Pied-billed Grebe:** singles overwintered CL, SL. **Horned Grebe:** max 100 CL 20 Feb, *intro*; five SLFWC, one Elmira 12 Feb. **Red-necked Grebe:** max 105 Meyers Pt 19 Feb, 36 WG 13 Feb, two Elmira 19 Feb, *intro*. **Eared Grebe:** single WG 15 Feb. **Tundra Swan:** four MCBC, 15 SL 28 Feb- 4 Mar. **Mute Swan:** single all winter WG. **Greater White-fronted Goose:** two SL SP 23 Dec. **Snow Goose:** single Aurora after 30 Jan. **Canada Goose:** max 29,162 FWC, 374 SLFWC. **Wood Duck:** overwintered WG. **Green-winged Teal:** single Mill Street Pd Elmira 1-29 Jan. **Am. Black Duck:** max 1598 SLFWC, 580 FWC, 43 Horseheads 12 Feb. **Mallard:** max 1614 FWC, 1159 SLFWC. **N. Pintail:** two SL 21 Dec-22 Jan, two Meyers Pt 9 Jan. **Gadwall:** max 28 FWC, 11 SLFWC. **Am. Wigeon:** one WG 17 Dec. **Canvasback:** max 1800 SL SP 10 Feb; overwintered CL, SL. **Redhead:** max 2500 SL SP 10 Feb; CL, SL all winter. **Ring-necked Duck:** two ICBC, two FWC. **Greater Scaup:** max 201 ICBC; overwintered CL. **Lesser Scaup:** 15 Sheldrake 18 Feb, two Union Springs 21 Feb. **White-winged Scoter:** three Sheldrake 17 Feb.

Com. Goldeneye: three Elmira 13 Dec; overwintered CL, SL. **Bufflehead:** three Elmira 1-16 Jan; overwintered CL, SL. **Hooded Merganser:** all winter CL. **Com. Merganser:** 41 ECBC, more than usual; overwintered CL, SL. **Red-breasted Merganser:** small numbers overwintered CL.

Bald Eagle: max three MCBC, all winter CL. **N. Harrier:** max seven MCBC, no reports after mid Jan. **Sharp-shinned Hawk:** overwintered Elmira, Ithaca; five between SL and CL Jan- Feb. **Cooper's Hawk:** overwintered Elmira, Ithaca, CV; 21 between SL and CL Jan-Feb. **N. Goshawk:** two ICBC, one KHF 16 Jan, one Ithaca 26 Jan, one Elmira 8 Feb, one Kings Ferry, 19 Feb, one Geneva 13 Feb, six between SL and CL Jan-Feb; *intro*. **Red-shouldered Hawk:** four ICBC, late. **Red-tailed Hawk:** max 117 ICBC, 31 ECBC, good numbers overwintered. **Rough-legged Hawk:** max 26 ICBC, both light and dark morphs overwintered Ithaca, Elmira, MNWR, CV. **Am. Kestrel:** max 13 ICBC, overwintered CV. **Merlin:** one Elmira 9 Dec, one KHF 25 Feb [*?details-The Editor*]. **Great Blue Heron:** overwintered CV, six Cayuga 9 Jan. **Ring-necked Pheasant:** low numbers overwintered Ithaca, CV, MNWR. **Ruffed Grouse:** eight ICBC, four ECBC, one MCBC. **Wild Turkey:** max 229 ICBC, 138 ECBC, 150 Middlesex 10 Feb; *intro*. **Am. Coot:** overwintered CL, SL. **Ring-billed Gull:** max 424 ICBC. **Herring Gull:** max 621 MCBC. **Iceland Gull:** three imm Ulysses 22 Feb. **Glaucous Gull:** imm Ulysses 22 Feb. **Great Black-backed Gull:** max 64 MCBC.

E. Screech-Owl: 18 ICBC, ten ECBC, four MNWR 1 Jan. **Great Horned Owl:** 10 ICBC, 7 ECBC, 2 MCBC. **Snowy Owl:** singles Elmira 10-13 Dec, Tyre mid Dec, Horseheads 1-14 Feb, Seneca Airport Feb. **Barred Owl:** one ICBC. **Long-eared Owl:** last CV 15 Jan. **Short-eared Owl:** five Scipioville all winter, three Fayette 16 Dec, two Seneca Airport mid Feb. **Belted Kingfisher:** Ithaca, CV to 15 Jan. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:** four ICBC. **N. Flicker:** max 14 ICBC, four ECBC, six MCBC, last 15 Jan. **Pileated Woodpecker:** max 22 ICBC, four MCBC.

Horned Lark: max 500 Kings Ferry 28 Dec, 110 MCBC, 52 ICBC, 100 Pine Valley 30 Jan. **Com. Raven:** overwintered KHF. **Red-breasted Nuthatch:** many reports from Geneva and WG, few reports from Ithaca and CV. **Carolina Wren:** max 14 ECBC; overwintered CV, Ithaca. **House Wren:** one ICBC [*?details-The Editor*]. **Winter Wren:** singles Ithaca, CV, WG before 1 Jan. **Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** single KHF 30 Jan. **Golden-crowned Kinglet:** scattered overwintered Ithaca, CV, WG. **E. Bluebird:**

max 25 Ithaca 1 Jan, scattered reports WG, Geneva all winter. **Hermit Thrush:** singles Geneva 19 Dec, Ithaca 9 Feb. **Am. Robin:** max 37 MCBC. **N. Mockingbird:** max 31 ECBC, 22 ICBC. **Cedar Waxwing:** max 69 ICBC, 17 MCBC, one ECBC, scarce all winter WG. **N. Shrike:** singles Freeville 23 Dec to mid Jan, Caroline after 22 Jan, Veteran 29 Dec, KHF 29 Jan.

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 122 ICBC, 94 MCBC, 69 ECBC. **Field Sparrow:** two ECBC, one ICBC. **Song Sparrow:** last Ithaca, Elmira, MNWR, Geneva 1 Jan. **Swamp Sparrow:** two ICBC, one MCBC, one ECBC. **White-throated Sparrow:** max 25 ICBC; one FLNF 12 Dec; single Elmira until 22 Jan. **Lapland Longspur:** six Canoga 9 Jan, one Pine Valley 29 Jan. **Snow Bunting:** max 523 MCBC, 300 Kings Ferry 9 Jan, 75 CV 28 Jan. **Red-winged Blackbird:** max 120 MCBC, scattered reports all season. **Rusty Blackbird:** two ICBC, two Canoga 9 Jan. **Brown-headed Cowbird:** one Canoga 9 Jan. **Pine Grosbeak:** two Ithaca mid Dec, eighth Ithaca 14-21 Feb, one Southport 24 Jan. **Com. Redpoll:** max 200 FLNF 12 Dec, 75 ICBC, 73 MCBC, 125 Gorham entire winter, 160 Ovid 11 Feb, 96 Romulus 20 Feb. **Hoary Redpoll:** one Virgil 18 Jan [?details-The Editor]. **Pine Siskin:** scattered and scarce all winter CV, none elsewhere. **White-winged Crossbill:** one Aurora 9 Dec. **Evening Grosbeak:** max 200 ICBC, 60 Caroline all winter, 50 Mecklenburg all winter, scattered reports all winter CV, Naples.

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