

REGION 3 — FINGER LAKES

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Winter conditions during the past season in the Finger Lakes were considerably milder than those of the previous year. Temperatures remained above or near normal and precipitation was below normal. To most this was a welcome relief from the past two winters. December's weather was a continuance of November's. Temperatures were 5°F above normal, the eighth warmest December on record, and precipitation was slightly below normal. There were no significant weather events in our region until 29 Dec, when strong, blustery northerly winds prevailed. Unfortunately, this also was the day when Watkins Glen had their Christmas Bird Count. January's weather conditions made people wonder if winter was ever going to arrive in the Finger Lakes. Average temperatures were 8°F above normal, the ninth warmest on record. While precipitation was near normal, snowfall was 10 inches below normal. Smaller Regional lakes remained open and most fields lacked significant snow cover. February finally brought a return to more seasonable weather conditions. Interestingly, February's

-2°F departure from normal temperatures was the largest negative temperature departure since May 1994. The only significant storm that passed through the Region was on 4 Feb, and precipitation for the month was around an inch below normal. Snow cover varied widely across the Finger Lakes, and was between 1 and 24 inches for the period.

The Fall migration of waterfowl continued into December. Common Loon, whose migration typically ends around Thanksgiving, continued moving until 10 Dec, when Bill Evans recorded over 200 heading south down Cayuga Lake. Ruddy Duck and Northern Pintail were also seen in unusually high numbers and very late. Canada Goose numbers were down by a third on Cayuga Lake during the Federation's Waterfowl census, but numbers were up in areas away from the lakes. This may have been due to the lack of ice or snow cover in the area. Mallard populations exploded in the Region in January. Estimates of up to 50,000 Mallard were made by several observers in the Region. Tundra Swan also overwintered in unusually high numbers on the north end of Cayuga Lake.

The mild weather of the past winter provided the flavor for the bird sightings as did the brutal weather of the previous year. Instead of being invaded by grebes and winter finches as we were last year, many half-hardy species such as Field, Song, Swamp and Savannah Sparrows remained in impressive numbers in the Region. Christmas Bird Counts in Ithaca and the Chemung Valley reported high numbers of both individuals and species. The Chemung Valley Audubon Society reported record numbers of Canada Goose, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and Ring-billed Gull and reported their first ever Common Raven. Ithaca reported record numbers of American Coot, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Robin, European Starling, and Rusty Blackbird and recorded their first ever Greater White-fronted Goose.

The numbers of overwintering raptors were much higher than the previous year. Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk and Red-tailed Hawk were reported in high numbers throughout the Region. Merlin, a falcon which typically passes through our Region in September and October, was reported from three locations in late December and early January. Short-eared Owl returned to the Region in numbers that have not been observed for several years.

The typically scattered reports of Iceland, Glaucous, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were enhanced by the report by a *Ross's Gull*, which despite an intense effort by numerous individuals was only observed by one person.

Several warbler species were reported. In particular, a *Yellow-throated Warbler* was observed at an Ithaca feeder for several days in early December. A Pine Warbler also overwintered at a feeder in Freeville, and Common Yellowthroat remained in the area into January. Yellow-rumped Warbler were scattered throughout the Cayuga Lake Basin.

A total of 116 species were seen during the winter season in the Finger Lakes. Highlights of the season were Red-throated Loon, Greater White-fronted Goose, **Merlin**, **Ross's Gull**, Iceland Gull, Glaucous Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and *Yellow-throated Warbler*.

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Abbreviations: AB - Aurora Bay, Cayuga Lake; CL - Cayuga Lake; CLB - Cayuga Lake Basin; CLFWC - Cayuga Lake Federation Waterfowl Count, 22 Jan; CV - Chemung Valley; CVCBC - Chemung Valley Christmas Bird Count, 30 Dec; EL - Elmira; GE - Geneva; ICBC - Ithaca Christmas Bird Count, 1 Jan; KF - King's Ferry; MNWR - Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge; MPt - Myers Point, Lansing; StP - Stewart Park, Ithaca; SL - Seneca Lake; SSLFWC - South Seneca Lake Federation Waterfowl Count, 15 Jan; US - Union Springs; WG - Watkins Glen; WGCBC - Watkins Glen Christmas Bird Count, 29 Dec.

Winter reports: **Com. Loon:** 200 MPt 10 Dec (BE); singles SL, CL entire period. **Red-throated Loon:** two MPt 20 Dec (CD); one StP 1 Jan-22 Jan. **Pied-billed Grebe:** overwintered SL, CL. **Horned Grebe:** overwintered SL, CL; max 11 AB 21 Jan. **Double-crested Cormorant:** last WG 1 Dec. **Great Blue Heron:** overwintered CL, SL, CV. **Tundra Swan:** 282 MNWR 4 Dec (DR); 60-80 Canoga 6 Jan- 25 Feb. **Mute Swan:** overwintered WG. **Greater White-fronted Goose:** imm StP 15 Dec- 5 Jan. **Snow Goose:** overwintered SL, CL. **Canada Goose:** 10,975 CLFWC; 13 SSLFWC; 179 CVCBC. **Green-winged Teal:** two WG 15 Dec; one CLFWC. **Am. Black Duck:** 330 CLFWC, 14 SSLFWC. **Mallard:** ca. 20,000-50,000 overwintered in Region. **N. Pintail:** period CL; max eight StP 12 Jan; one CV 14 Jan; two SL 14 Feb. **N. Shoveler:** 25 Canoga 11 Dec. **Gadwall:** five US 14 Jan; eight WG 15 Jan; 12 Waneta L 15 Jan. **Am. Wigeon:** 15 Canoga 11 Dec; two MNWR 14 Jan. **Canvasback:** 65 ICBC; 250 Sampson State Park 22 Feb. **Redhead:** 18

ICBC; 550 Keuka L 15 Jan; 21 CLFWC; two EL 20 Feb. **Ring-necked Duck**: singles CL; 58 Lamoka L 15 Jan. **Greater Scaup**: 26 ICBC; 15 GE 15 Dec. **Lesser Scaup**: two ICBC; several GE. **Surf Scoter**: three WG 1 Feb-18 Feb (JB). **White-winged Scoter**: three WG 5 Jan-17 Feb (JB). **Com. Goldeneye**: three EL 1 Feb; 483 CLFWC; overwintered SL, CL. **Bufflehead**: four EL 27 Feb; 135 CLFWC; 19 SSLFWC; overwintered SL, CL. **Hooded Merganser**: two Canandaigua L 15 Jan; 17 Waneta L 1 Jan; 33 ICBC. **Com. Merganser**: 31 CLFWC; winter SL, CL, CV; 36 Waneta L 1 Jan. **Red-breasted Merganser**: 39 CLFWC; overwintered SL, CL. **Ruddy Duck**: 28 MNWR 4 Dec.

N. Harrier: numerous. **Bald Eagle**: max three MNWR 19 Feb. **Sharp-shinned Hawk**: five ICBC; five CVCBC; singles widespread. **Cooper's Hawk**: seven ICBC; two CVCBC; singles widespread. **N. Goshawk**: two CLB 9 Jan (CD); one Mecklenberg all winter. **Red-shouldered Hawk**: arr Ithaca 22 Feb, early. **Red-tailed Hawk**: 90 ICBC; 40 CVCBC; 15 WGCBC; numerous all winter. **Rough-legged Hawk**: 16 ICBC; 11 WGCBC; 28 Seneca Falls 27 Feb; up to a third that overwintered were dark morphs. **Am. Kestrel**: max four ICBC; three CVCBC; four WGCBC. **Merlin**: singles ICBC, WGCBC, Geneva 23 Dec-1 Jan. **Ring-necked Pheasant**: max nine ICBC; three WGCBC. **Ruffed Grouse**: max 15 ICBC; two WGCBC. **Wild Turkey**: max 38 ICBC. **Am. Coot**: 368 CLFWC; 223 SSLFWC. **Killdeer**: singles MPt 20 Dec, CV 14 Jan. **Bonaparte's Gull**: one GE 15 Dec. **Ring-billed Gull**: 500 ICBC; 568 CVCBC; 489 WGCBC. **Herring Gull**: 300 ICBC; 95 WGCBC; 2500 Seneca Falls 7 Feb. **Iceland Gull**: one Seneca Falls 21 Jan-19 Feb; one MPt 10 Feb. **Glaucous Gull**: two StP 8 Feb (BE, AB); two Seneca Falls 19 Feb; one MNWR 19 Feb. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: one StP 10 Dec (KR); three ICBC; one Seneca Falls 23 Jan. **Great Black-backed Gull**: 63 StP 22 Jan; regular SL, CL all winter. **Ross's Gull**: ad MPt, StP 12 Jan (CH, NYSARC).

Mourning Dove: 1210 ICBC; 312 CVCBC; 76 WGCBC. **E. Screech-Owl**: 12 ICBC; eight CVCBC. **Great Horned Owl**: 22 ICBC; seven CVCBC. **Snowy Owl**: one ICBC; four GE 21 Dec-26 Dec; one MNWR 14 Jan. **Barred Owl**: five ICBC. **Long-eared Owl**: 2 Ithaca winter. **Short-eared Owl**: max up to 50 KF Jan. **Belted Kingfisher**: six ICBC; two CVCBC. **Red-bellied Woodpecker**: 56 ICBC; six CVCBC. **Downy Woodpecker**: 256 ICBC; 48 CVCBC; 28 WGCBC. **Hairy Woodpecker**: 71 ICBC; eight CVCBC; three WGCBC. **N. Flicker**: 44 ICBC; five CVCBC; four WGCBC. **Pileated Woodpecker**: 26 ICBC; two WGCBC.

Horned Lark: numerous, max 300 KF 8 Jan. **Blue Jay**: 618 ICBC; 290 CVCBC; 62 WGCBC. **Am. Crow**: 1599 ICBC; 552 CVCBC; 800 WGCBC.

Fish Crow: eight ICBC. **Com. Raven:** one CVCBC; three Finger Lakes National Forest all winter; two Hammond Hill State Forest all winter; one Ithaca Jan. **Black-capped Chickadee:** 2397 ICBC; 488 CVCBC; 383 WGCBC. **Tufted Titmouse:** 209 ICBC; 69 CVCBC; 33 WGCBC. **Red-breasted Nuthatch:** 18 ICBC; six CVCBC; four WGCBC. **White-breasted Nuthatch:** 226 ICBC; 41 CVCBC; 34 WGCBC. **Brown Creeper:** 37 ICBC; six CVCBC; one WGCBC. **Carolina Wren:** 10 ICBC; two CVCBC; one WGCBC. **Winter Wren:** one-two Ithaca all winter. **Golden-crowned Kinglet:** 39 ICBC; 15 CVCBC; 17 WGCBC. **Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** two ICBC; one Horseheads 14 Jan. **E. Bluebird:** 27 ICBC; on WGCBC; widespread all winter. **Hermit Thrush:** single ICBC, Cornell Univ. 5 Feb. **Am. Robin:** 328 ICBC; 24 CVCBC; 36 WGCBC. **N. Mockingbird:** 22 ICBC; 10 CVCBC; several Geneva all winter. **Cedar Waxwing:** 519 ICBC; 15 CVCBC; 58 WGCBC. **N. Shrike:** two ICBC; one CVCBC; one WGCBC; scattered reports all winter. **European Starling:** 14753 ICBC; 1320 CVCBC; 718 WGCBC.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: six+ Aurora all winter; scattered reports all winter. **Yellow-throated Warbler:** one Ithaca 8-10 Dec (DH, NYSARC), supercilium entirely white as typical of western subspecies *albiflora*. **Pine Warbler:** one Freeville all winter. **Com. Yellowthroat:** singles ICBC, WG 23 Dec- 13 Jan.

N. Cardinal: 299 ICBC; 84 CVCBC; 32 WGCBC. **Rufous-sided Towhee:** one Southport 5 Feb. **Am. Tree Sparrow:** 323 ICBC; 150 CVCBC; 54 WGCBC. **Field Sparrow:** two Caroline 27 Dec. **Savannah Sparrow:** one Caroline 1 Jan; one Mecklenberg 3 Jan; late. **Song Sparrow:** 38 ICBC; ten CVCBC; one WGCBC. **Swamp Sparrow:** one WG 1 Jan; two Caroline 1 Jan. **White-throated Sparrow:** 74 ICBC; 11 CVCBC; eight WGCBC. **White-crowned Sparrow:** one ICBC; three CV 11 Feb. **Dark-eyed Junco:** 410 ICBC; 266 CVCBC; 108 WGCBC. **Lapland Longspur:** two Dryden 12 Jan (KD). **Snow Bunting:** scattered, max 200 Southport 14 Feb. **Red-winged Blackbird:** four Caroline all winter. **E. Meadowlark:** one Danby 28 Dec (SK). **Rusty Blackbird:** two CVCBC; 18 ICBC. **Com. Grackle:** 50 Union Springs 3 Jan (BE). **Brown-headed Cowbird:** nine ICBC; 20 WGCBC. **Purple Finch:** singles widespread. **Am. Goldfinch:** 226 ICBC; 52 CVCBC; 19 WGCBC. **Evening Grosbeak:** one Mecklenberg 17 Dec; one WG 1 Jan, scarce.

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