

REGION 5 — ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

DOROTHY W. CRUMB AND JIM THROCKMORTON

We are beginning to wonder what a normal season is in Central New York. Last winter had too much snow, this winter practically none. December and January had above normal temperatures. The average December temperature of 31.9°F was 3.6° above normal. Snowfall at 5.6 inches was 20.3 inches below normal!, with only one day of the month receiving more than one inch. Only one previous winter had less snowfall. This small amount of snow was balanced somewhat by a record rainfall on 5 Dec of 1.05 inches. This brought total precipitation of 2.52 inches to only 0.68 inches less than normal. December 1994 was the sunniest on record with 47% of possible sun. Braced for a January that would make up for December, we were pleasantly surprised when it didn't happen. January temperatures averaged 8° above normal. The 13.4 inches of snow was 14.5 inches below normal and the total precipitation of 1.80 inches was a half inch below normal. Next we looked forward to February which, as it turned out, was more like February. The average temperature of 20.7°F was 3.3° below normal. A low of -10° on 26 Feb equaled the previous low temperature for that date. Snowfall totaled 32.5 inches which is 7.3 inches above average. This melted down to 2.19 inches of precipitation, just 0.04 inches more than usual.

The result of this warm temperature was much more open water. Waterfowl were spread out and difficult to locate. Although Common Loon was numerous on the Oswego Christmas Count, few were found thereafter. One Common Loon landed in a small quarry in South Onondaga and was unable to fly out. When the quarry froze, the loon was rescued, fed, and released on a larger body of water. Double-crested Cormorant was scarce, despite much open water. The highest count ever of American Coot was found on the January waterfowl count, and they were seen in smaller numbers, but regularly, throughout the season. Tundra Swan set a midwinter record maximum. Although a nice variety of duck stayed in Oswego Harbor, numbers were very low. Only one rare waterfowl, Harlequin Duck, was found, and these birds disappeared when we finally got a freeze in February. A *Sandhill Crane* was the first winter record for a bird that is rare in any season. There have been only 15 sightings over the years in the Onondaga Lake Basin. Great Blue Heron would have been expected to stay with many places to

feed, but almost none were found after December. The same was true for Belted Kingfisher. Also unexpected were only two reports of Killdeer and only one report of Common Snipe. A possibility is that with so much open habitat, these birds were scattered in areas not normally covered in winter by observers. "White-winged" gulls were scarce, but an immature *Thayer's Gull* was reported.

The open winter did provide feeding areas for raptors. Numbers of Rough-legged Hawk and Short-eared Owl shared one location in Oswego County, where the change of guard from Rough-legged Hawk during the day to Short-eared Owl hunting at dusk could be observed. There were at least four other locations for Short-eared Owl but only one or two individuals were present at them, and two were turned into rehabilitator Cindy Page. Other raptors turned over to Cindy this winter were single adult and one immature Cooper's Hawk, both apparently hit by cars, an Eastern Screech-Owl and a belated Turkey Vulture. Other Turkey Vulture were reported for only the second winter ever in Region 5. An injured Red-tailed Hawk, found in Little Falls, had been banded at Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania in October, 1975. This year, for only the third year in Region 5 in 18 years, Red-shouldered Hawk was reported. Merlin overwintered in Syracuse, and Bald Eagle was widely reported. Only one Snowy Owl was reported for the entire winter. but two Long-eared Owl were found.

Before snow covered the mast crop, Wild Turkey tended to stay in the woods where they had plenty of cover. As snow came in February, more were seen in open fields. On 23 February, Gene Huggins saw a record number of 218, including 194 in one flock in MADI, the largest number ever recorded in one flock. He also saw smaller groups of 6 to 18 that same day in adjacent ONEI.

American Robin saved their energy and did not bother to migrate. Most observers noted their abundance. The 1 January 1995 Montezuma Christmas Count in the Howland Island area in Cayuga County turned up a remarkable number of land birds that are rarely seen in this period, no doubt the result of very open conditions that had prevailed until then. The list includes Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Marsh Wren, Hermit Thrush, Field Sparrow and Rusty Blackbird. American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, American Tree, White-throated and Song Sparrow were present in larger numbers than usual. There were two later reports of Hermit Thrush elsewhere. Other half-hardy species reported were Common Yellowthroat in December, and Rufous-sided Towhee. A few Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle and Brown-headed Cowbird were present all winter.

There was an invasion of Red Crossbill in the Adirondacks where spruce trees had abundant cones. Pine Siskin were also in large numbers in evergreens and larches. A few White-winged Crossbill were also located. There was no echo flight of Common Redpoll from last winter. In contrast, hardly any Snow Bunting and Horned Lark were found during the winter. There were no reports of Lapland Longspur.

Highlights of the season were Harlequin Duck, the large number of Red Crossbill and Pine Siskin in the Adirondacks, a good variety of passerines wintering at Howland Island, the number of raptors remaining in the north and *Sandhill Crane*. The negatives were the lack of species that would normally stay in open winters, such as Double-crested Cormorant, Common Loon, Killdeer and Common Snipe. Carolina Wren still hasn't recovered from two disastrous winters. For the first time, modern technology entered into the Region 5 report with four observers submitting their material via E-mail.

Contributors: Sue Adair, Sue Boettger, Joe Brin, David Cesari, Dorothy Crumb, Paul DeBenedictis, Mary Dreiling, Dave Eichorn, Robert Evans, Craig Fosdick, Bill Gruenbaum, John Hanyak, Gene Huggins, Mary Alice Koenekke, Gary Lee, Bob Lockett, David Nash, Cindy Page, Wayne Powell, Bill Purcell, Steve Rulison, Marge Rusk, Maureen Staloff, Molly Thompson, Jim Throckmorton, Adrienne Wolfe-Lockett, Glenn Wolford, Judy Wright, Ken Zoller.

Abbreviations: Adks - Adirondacks; DH - Derby Hill Oswego; LSB - Little Sodus Bay, Fairhaven, and vicinity; MCBC - Howland Island sector of Montezuma Christmas Bird Count, 1 Jan; NPT - northern Pompey Township; OnonL - Onondaga Lake; SkCBC - Skaneateles CBC, 31 Dec; SyCBC - Syracuse Christmas Count, 17 Dec.

Winter reports: **Red-throated Loon:** only three reports. **Com. Loon:** max 13 Oswego CBC 18 Dec; four OnonL 21 Dec disappeared when that part of the lake froze; two Fourth L near Old Forge HERK 14 Dec, late date for Adks; *intro.* **Pied-billed Grebe:** only two reports. **Horned Grebe:** none. **Double-crested Cormorant:** 14 Oswego 3 Dec; 8 Oswego CBC 18 Dec; only one found after 1 Jan, none on the waterfowl count for the second year in a row. **Great Blue Heron:** five MCBC, scarce. **Tundra Swan:** seasonal record max eight Bridgeport 14-16 Jan; five LSB 13 Dec; five Bridgeport 13 Dec. **Snow Goose:** two LSB 22 Jan (PD), one Holland Patent 29 Dec-2 Jan, unusual in winter. **Wood Duck:** four SyCBC, none on waterfowl count for first time since 1987. **Green-winged Teal:** max 25 SyCBC. **N. Pintail:** max three OnonL 11 Jan. **Gadwall:** max 44 OnonL 10 Jan. **Canvasback:** max three Oneida L 12 Dec. **Harlequin Duck:** one near DH 19-22 Jan (JH, mob); one OnonL 23 Jan (JH).

Oldsquaw: missed on waterfowl count for first time ever, max only 16 Oswego Harbor 19 Feb. **White-winged Scoter:** record winter max 160 DH 22 Jan. **Com. Goldeneye:** max 230 LSB 31 Jan. **Bufflehead:** max 88 Oswego Harbor 26 Feb. **Com. Merganser:** max 6200 OnonL 10 Jan, highest in 38 years.

Turkey Vulture: one with a broken wing Kirkville 2 Jan; present near Jamesville through mid January, where they roost in a quarry in the summer; one T Lysander 22 Jan. **Bald Eagle:** one SkCBC, first ever; ten reported throughout the season. **Red-shouldered Hawk:** ad Pumpkin Hollow, T Marcellus ONON 29 Jan (MSR!); imm Mattydale 1 Feb (SR!). **Red-tailed Hawk:** *intro*. **Rough-legged Hawk:** max 12 Prior Road T Schroepfel Oswe 17 Jan. **Merlin:** male found fairly regularly at dusk going to roost in Onondaga P Syracuse; ad male Solvay 5 Feb (SR), same individual? **Wild Turkey:** *intro*. **Sandhill Crane:** one flying over OnonL inlet 1 Feb (SR). **Am. Coot:** 125 on Waterfowl Census, most ever. **Killdeer:** only two reports. **Com. Snipe:** one Weedsport 29 Jan. **Thayer's Gull:** imm Baldwinsville 14 Dec (JH); one there 15 Jan, same individual? **Iceland Gull:** only three reports. **Glaucous Gull:** one ad, two imm OnonL 15 Jan (MSR); one Oswego Harbor throughout Feb (mob).

Snowy Owl: very dark imm Oswego Harbor after 8 Jan, only report. **Long-eared Owl:** two roosting in pines Beaver L Nature Center Baldwinsville 15-20 Jan (MT); one found injured T Pompey 27 Dec, turned over to CP. **Short-eared Owl:** max eight Prior Road T Schroepfel Oswe 17 Jan; roosting in the pines Beaver L Nature Center Baldwinsville (MT); two, probably hit by cars, one from New Hartford and one from S. Onondaga, sent to CP for rehabilitation. **N. Saw-whet Owl:** one report, Adks 22 Feb (GL). **Belted Kingfisher:** scarce, only five locations for the entire winter. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:** one MCBC. **N. Flicker:** max five Clay Marsh 28 Dec.

Horned Lark: scarce. **Brown Creeper:** max three MCBC. **Carolina Wren:** only two reports, Syracuse 17 Dec, Clay Marsh 25 Jan. **Winter Wren:** only two Dec reports, none later. **Marsh Wren:** one Clay Marsh 17-21 Dec, one MCBC. **Hermit Thrush:** max two MCBC; one Camillus 28 Jan; one Clay Marsh 8 Feb. **Am. Robin:** 229 Oswego CBC, 10 times its previous max there; 400 MCBC; very numerous near Baldwinsville. **Cedar Waxwing:** more than usual. **N. Shrike:** singles at six locations.

Com. Yellowthroat: one Baldwinsville 27 Dec; one Camillus SkCBC.

Rufous-sided Towhee: pair T Spafford SkCBC, first on SkCBC since 1976; one at a feeder Baldwinsville during Feb. **Field Sparrow:** one MCBC. **Snow Bunting:** max flock of 500 Sangerfield ONEI 23 Feb.

Lapland Longspur: none. **Rusty Blackbird:** one MCBC. **Brown-headed Cowbird:** max 100 Fabius 29 Jan. **Purple Finch:** only sighting outside Adks, Howland I CAYU 16 Jan (BP). **Red Crossbill:** mainly in Adks, max 80 near Old Forge 11 Feb. **White-winged Crossbill:** three reports, 30 NPT 6 Jan (DC), two Adks 29 Jan (BP), seven Adks 18 Feb (BP). **Com. Redpoll:** almost none. **Pine Siskin:** max 200 near Old Forge 11 Feb. **Evening Grosbeak:** only reported from Adks.

3983 Gates Road, Jamesville, New York 13078

EMail: DWCrumb@aol.com

REGION 6 — ST. LAWRENCE

The Region 6 report had not arrived in time for inclusion in this issue of *The Kingbird*.