

REGION 1 - NIAGARA FRONTIER

Willie D'Anna

Drought, deluge, and snow squalls were three disparate events which marked the weather this fall. The long-term drought continued into September making it the seventh month in the last eight with a substantial precipitation deficit. Only 1.32 inches of rain fell which was more than two inches below normal. One of the effects of the drought was the continued drying up of wells in ALLE, as noted by Pitzrick. The month's average temperature was 60 degrees, 1.9 below normal. A cold front on the seventh spurred a strong movement of neotropical migrants. Twenty species of warbler were recorded by Morgante at Tifft Nature Preserve on the ninth, an excellent fall total, while 13 species were found the same day near Lake Ontario in NIAG. Other significant flights were noted on the second and the fifteenth.

October reversed the drying trend by deluging Buffalo with 6.07 inches of precipitation, nearly three inches above normal. Of that total, the remnants of Hurricane Opal deposited a record 1.89 inches on the fifth. At Amity Lake, ALLE, Pitzrick noted nine inches of rainfall for the month, which was six inches above normal! October was mild with the average temperature of 54.4 degrees being 3.3 degrees above normal.

November was cold and snowy. The average temperature of 36.4 degrees was four degrees below normal, making this the coldest November since 1976 and the fifth coldest in 60 years. While precipitation was just slightly above average, snowfall was five inches above the norm at 15.4. Even with all that, Buffalo escaped much of the lake effect snow which hit the snowbelts south of the city. A nor'easter on the 15th dumped eight inches of snow at Buffalo and 15-20 inches in the Southern Tier. Along with the hard weather, poor mast and wild fruit crops reported from ALLE and CATT could portend a winter with few half-hardies. Of course, we must wait to check on that prediction. The wintry weather brought the large gulls into the Niagara River earlier than in other recent years. With the smaller gulls present as usual, numbers and variety were excellent through most of the month.

In a season known for great birding, autumn 1995 was one of the most exciting ever. One of the rarest finds, however, was also the

most disappointing. The Region's first **Boreal Owl** was a road kill picked up by Schnell (ph) in the Town of Somerset, NIAG, within a mile of Lake Ontario. Only the Region's second ever, an immature **Least Tern** was documented by Mahoney at Dunkirk Harbor. Interestingly, an adult with the immature had been reported by others but, unfortunately, was not documented sufficiently. Incredibly, on the same day as this Least Tern sighting, another immature was being seen by many on the north shore of Lake Erie in Ontario, only 40 miles west of Buffalo.

On the Niagara River, it was a November to remember. The excitement began with the Region's second **Pacific Loon** below Niagara Falls, well described by Kelling, Wells, and Nix, who studied the bird in a cold rain for three hours. They had to periodically retreat to their van to warm up and dry off their optics. Their persistence in the desire to obtain quality written documentation is highly commendable. Glen Coady was birding the Niagara River the following day in the hopes of seeing the Pacific Loon. No loon, so he had to settle(!) for the Region's first ever **Ross' Gull** which he found on the water at Fort Erie, Ontario. He then watched it fly toward Lake Erie, crossing over to the Buffalo side as it did so. He described the bird as being the pinkest one he had ever seen (he has seen Ross' Gull in Churchill and elsewhere). One week later, possibly a different bird, judged as being less pink, was discovered in Town of Lewiston at the Robert Moses and Adam Beck power plants 19 Nov. This bird was seen on the lower river sporadically until 25 November when, on that date, over 100 birders ogled it at the "whirlpool". While watching the Ross' Gull, an announcement that the **California Gull** was back at the rocks above the power plants gave several birders a great start on their way to *a record 14 species of gulls* on the Niagara! A Laughing Gull in October upped the river's seasonal total to 15.

The 60th annual B.O.S. October Bird Count was conducted on 15 Oct and compiled by Mike Hamilton, Gerry Rising, and Terry Yonker. A total of 138,564 individuals of 136 species were counted in Region 1. The species count was ten below average but the individuals were over a third above average, largely due to a huge count of Red-winged Blackbird. Among species that average over 100 individuals, 19 were above average and 32 were below. The comments that follow refer to Region 1 only unless in parentheses () when they refer to the entire area including the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario, about 10% of the total count

area. Note that Region 1 comparisons are made over seven years only, those for the entire area (in parentheses) are made over 60 years. Seven year highs included Pied-billed Grebe (high since 1955), Double-crested Cormorant (count high), Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck (third highest ever), Turkey Vulture (count high), Wild Turkey (count high), Am. Coot, Am. Crow (count high), Common Raven (count high), Tufted Titmouse (count high), and Red-winged Blackbird (second highest ever influenced by 44,000 at Iroquois NWR). Seven year lows were, Great Blue Heron, Rock Dove, Hairy Woodpecker, N. Flicker (low since 1960), E. Phoebe, Blue Jay (low since 1968), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (low since 1960), Hermit Thrush, Cedar Waxwing, Chipping Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow (low since 1959), Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow (low since 1953), and House Sparrow (low since 1950). Since anomalous counts are possible for any species, it may be more representative to list which of the above have shown a consistent upward or downward long-term trend (over 20 years), which is reinforced by this year's data. Those species are Double-crested Cormorant, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Turkey Vulture, Wild Turkey, Am. Crow, Common Raven, and Tufted Titmouse on the upside and N. Flicker, Savannah Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, and House Sparrow on the downside. These data seem to support the impressions that I and other birders have had about most of these species. However, Ring-necked Duck and, especially, White-throated Sparrow are surprising to me and bear further monitoring. One last comment on these data concerns Canada Goose which had the third highest count ever in a year when the hunting of the migratory flocks was banned due to low numbers. The count could be an anomaly or, perhaps, the local birds have become that numerous.

Shorebird habitat was restricted to the state lands adjacent to Iroquois NWR, the Batavia Sewage Lagoons, and Quaker Lake at Allegany SP, the latter site where shorebirds are rare. The Batavia Sewage Lagoons again hosted large numbers and good variety of waterfowl, including most of the Ring-necked and Ruddy duck seen on the B.O.S. October Count. After the dearth of winter finches last year, birders were heartened somewhat by movements of Pine Siskin, Evening Grosbeak and Common Redpoll this fall.

Rarities not yet mentioned include **Northern Gannet**, Cattle Egret, Harlequin Duck, Gyrfalcon, Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Red-

necked and Red phalaropes, Connecticut Warbler and **Summer Tanager**.

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Abbreviations: Batavia SL-Batavia Sewage Lagoons GENN; BIP-Bird Is. Pier on Niagara River, Buffalo; BOSOC-Buffalo Ornithological Society October Count, 15 Oct; BRBA-Buffalo Rare Bird Alert; INWR-Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge; NF-Niagara Falls; NPP-Niagara Power Project on Niagara River, Town of Lewiston; NR-Niagara River; Tift NP-Tift Nature Preserve, Buffalo.

Fall reports: **Red-throated Loon:** NF 12 Nov, only report. **Pacific Loon:** NF 11 Nov (SK,JW,TN), intro. **Common Loon:** arr Tift NP 16 Sep; 230 over Tom's Point Chautauqua L CHAU (fide RS), record count away from the Great Lakes and third highest ever. **Pied-billed Grebe:** intro. **Horned Grebe:** arr. two BOSOC. **Red-necked Grebe:** arr T Somerset 21 Oct; 2-3 NR 19 Nov thru, only reports. **N. Gannet:** NR-Buffalo 17 Nov (CM!,BP!,ph). **Double-crested Cormorant:** max 1046 Buckhorn I SP 2 Sep (WW), another record for this species; intro. **Great Egret:** max. eight INWR 2 Sep; last four INWR 12 Oct. **Cattle Egret:** Strykersville WYOM 1 Oct (DJ!,CB), first autumn record outside 4-24 Nov range; T Portville CATT 9 Nov (RW!). **Green Heron:** last one Buffalo BOSOC. **Black-crowned Night-Heron:** Allegany SP 2 Oct (WW), rare away from the Great Lakes and NR; 1-6 return to Buffalo backyard spruce tree 29 Oct through (RBr). **Tundra Swan:** arr 82 T Charlotte CHAU 4 Oct; max 141 T Dayton CATT 5 Nov. **Snow Goose:** arr INWR 24 Sep (WW!), earliest ever; 46 white 1 blue Batavia SL 7 Oct (MM) and

150 over T Sheridan CHAU 30 Oct (RB), high counts. **Brant**: T Somerset 28 Oct, only report. **Canada Goose**: one *hutchinsi* subspecies T Yates ORLE 8 Oct (WD!,DT); intro. **Green-winged Teal**: max 200+ Tonawanda WMA 1 Oct (WD), record count; intro. **Northern Shoveler**: max 94 Batavia SL 18 Nov (WW), continuing high counts at this site. **Canvasback**: arr seven Batavia SL 7 Oct. **Redhead**: arr eight Batavia SL 7 Oct. **Ring-necked Duck**: arr 25 Batavia SL 24 Sep (GS), early; max 300 Batavia SL 22 Oct (MM), record count; *intro*. **Greater Scaup**: arr five Batavia SL 10 Sep, early (GS). **Lesser Scaup**: Amity Lake ALLE 15 Sep, summering bird; arr four T Wilson 16 Sep. **Harlequin Duck**: female returned to last year's wintering site NR-Buffalo 25 Nov (WD). **Oldsquaw**: arr four T Somerset 28 Oct. dark-winged scoter (**Black or Surf**): seven 16 Sep T Wilson (WD!), early for either species. **White-winged Scoter**: arr five T Wilson 9 Sep (WD!), early; two Batavia SL 24 Sep (MD,GS); four Allegheny Res 29 Oct (BS); rare away from Great Lakes and NR. **Common Goldeneye**: arr six T Somerset 29 Oct. **Bufflehead**: arr 11 BOSOC. **Hooded Merganser**: max 114 Allegheny Res 5 Nov (BS). **Com. Merganser**: 20 Salamanca 4 Oct, new arrivals or from breeding areas downriver. Red-breasted Merganser: arr T Wilson 1 Oct. **Ruddy Duck**: arr 22 Batavia SL 7 Oct; max 150 Batavia SL 22 Oct (MM), continuing high counts at this site.

Turkey Vulture: *intro*. **Bald Eagle**: up to 6 Allegheny River most of period; up to six Iroquois NWR complex through Oct; ad Beaver Meadow 13 Oct; T Amity 25 Nov; only reports. **Rough-legged Hawk**: arr five T Yates 28 Oct; seven reports So. Tier Nov; only locations. **Merlin**: Allegany SP 8 Oct (TB!); T Sheridan CHAU 30 Nov (FR!), only reports. **Peregrine Falcon**: imm Batavia SL 22 Oct (MM!); imm NR-NF 26 Oct - 25 Nov (BC!,WD!); only reports. **Gyrffalcon**: ad gray morph Buffalo 17 Nov thru (WD!), fourth year in a row at this site and earliest return. **Wild Turkey**: *intro*. **Common Moorhen**: last one Iroquois NWR BOSOC. **Am. Coot**: *intro*. **Am. Golden-Plover**: max 84 T Oakfield GENE 23 Sep; five Allegheny Res 27 Sep (BS) where rare; last one BOSOC. **Spotted Sandpiper**: last NR-Buffalo 4 Nov (MM!); record late. **Whimbrel**: NR-Buffalo 6-8 Oct (BC!,JB!,MM!), second latest ever. **Hudsonian Godwit**: five Tonawanda WMA BOSOC (RWa!,JF), only two higher counts were at Times Beach, Buffalo in mid-seventies. **White-rumped Sandpiper**: Batavia SL 10 Sep (GS); Tonawanda WMA 23 Sep (WD,MT); only reports. **Baird's Sandpiper**: two Batavia SL 3 Sep (GS);

only report. **Purple Sandpiper**: arr NF 19 Nov (RSp). **Stilt Sandpiper**: two 23 Sep and five 26 Sep Tonawanda WMA (WD,WB), only reports. **Short-billed Dowitcher**: two Tonawanda WMA 23 Sep; Cuba Marsh ALLE 23 Sep, only reports. **Red-necked Phalarope**: Batavia SL 3 Sep (GS); one BOSOC, rare. **Red Phalarope**: NR-Buffalo 22 Oct (BC), rare. **Laughing Gull**: NR-Buffalo 24 Oct (PY!); rare. **Franklin's Gull**: NPP 12-26 Nov (mob); possibly same bird NR-Buffalo 28 Nov (R&MP), only reports. **Little Gull**: arr NR-Buffalo 22 Oct, only other reports were a few on NR through Nov. **Bonaparte's Gull**: high numbers NR in Nov. **California Gull**: ad NPP 25 Nov (WD!,mob); ad NF 29 Nov (WD!), same bird(?); *intro*. **Thayer's Gull**: all ages NPP and NF through Nov. **Iceland Gull**: arr two NPP 12 Nov. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: arr NF 6 Oct and two NF 8 Oct (WW!,WD!), very early; max 8 NPP & NF 19 Nov (WD,DD). **Glaucous Gull**: arr NPP & NF 12 Nov. **Black-legged Kittiwake**: five NR-Buffalo 18 Nov (DSh!,MTe), high count; two NF 24-29 Nov (RA!,WD!). **Ross' Gull**: NR-Buffalo 12 Nov (GC); NPP 19 Nov (BP!,WD!,PY!,BH); NR-Whirlpool 25 Nov (BS!,WD!,mob); *intro*. **Sabine's Gull**: up to three NR-Buffalo 22 Oct-25 Nov (BC,mob); Dunkirk Harbor 4,6,11 Nov where very rare (TM,FR,VP); 1-2 NF 11 Nov-thru (mob); great showing. **Com. Tern**: max 180 NF 16 Sep (AH). **Forster's Tern**: two NF 16 Sep (AH); five T Dayton CATT 29 Oct (BS), highest count ever away from Great Lakes; Dunkirk Harbor 8 Nov (T&JM); only reports. **Least Tern**: imm Dunkirk Harbor 5 Nov (TMa!,SC); *intro*. **Black Tern**: DH 29 Oct (TM) where rare; last NR-Buffalo 23 Nov (MM!), very late.

Rock Dove: *intro*. **Long-eared Owl**: N. Tonawanda 25 Nov (JnT), only report. **Short-eared Owl**: arr T Somerset NIAG 21 Oct; over Tonawanda 18 Nov; two Fort Niagara SP 19 Nov; Buffalo Harbor 19 Nov; more than usual. **Boreal Owl**: road kill T Somerset 23 Nov (PS,ph), *intro*. **N. Saw-whet Owl**: T Somerset 21 Oct (WD), only report. **Common Nighthawk**: max 120 T Tonawanda ERIE 4 Sep (PB); last Buffalo 13 Oct (MM). **Red-headed Woodpecker**: three Fort Niagara SP 2 Sep; one BOSOC; T Cold Spring 29 Oct (BS), more than usual. **Red-bellied Woodpecker**: several reports, doing well. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**: arr away from breeding areas T Wilson 23 Sep; last Buckhorn I SP 24 Nov. **Hairy Woodpecker**: *intro*. **N. Flicker**: *intro*.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: Tiff NP 9 Sep (MM), only report. **E. Phoebe**: Buckhorn I SP 27 Nov (BC!), late. **Horned Lark**: subspecies "*alpestris*" five T Wilson 1 Oct (WD!), earliest ever this subspecies. **N.**

Rough-winged Swallow: last five Buffalo 8 Oct. **Barn Swallow:** Batavia SL 22 Oct (MM!), late. **Blue Jay:** *intro.* **Am. Crow:** *intro.* **Common Raven:** several locations ALLE and Allegany SP; *intro.* **Tufted Titmouse:** *intro.* **Red-breasted Nuthatch:** widespread and numerous. **Brown Creeper:** ten Buckhorn I SP 25 Nov (JS), high count for the date. **Carolina Wren:** six reports, still down but slowly increasing. **Winter Wren:** arr away from breeding areas Fort Niagara SP 16 Sep. **Golden-crowned Kinglet:** arr away from breeding areas two T Wilson 23 Sep. **Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** arr Fort Niagara SP & Wilson-Tuscarora SP 9 Sep. **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher:** last Golden Hill SP 22 Oct (PY!,BH), second latest ever. **Gray-cheeked Thrush:** arr Salamanca 23 Sep. **Hermit Thrush:** arr away from breeding areas two Tiff NP 28 Sep. **Am. Pipit:** arr T Lancaster 28 Sep; max 80 T Wilson 1 Oct. **Cedar Waxwing:** *intro.* **Northern Shrike:** arr T Yates 28 Oct; many reports.

Solitary Vireo: last Goat I 16 Nov (BC!), second latest ever. **Philadelphia Vireo:** last Salamanca 3 Oct. **Orange-crowned Warbler:** arr Tiff NP 2 Sep (PB!), early; last Beaver I SP 25 Nov (JS!), only one later was on 5 Jan 1947. **N. Parula:** arr Tiff NP 9 Sep. **Magnolia Warbler:** max 25 Tiff NP 9 Sep (MM), high count; good numbers CATT first half Sep (TB). **Black-throated Blue Warbler:** max 10 Tiff NP 9 Sep (MM), high count. **Black-throated Green Warbler:** good numbers CATT all Sep (TB). **Pine Warbler:** arr Tiff NP and T Wilson 2 Sep; max five Tiff NP 9 Sep (MM), ties record count; last one BOSOC. **Palm Warbler:** arr Tiff NP 3 Sep (WW!,RV), early; last six BOSOC. **Am. Redstart:** max 20 Tiff NP 9 Sep (MM), high count. **Connecticut Warbler:** Fort Niagara SP 4 Sep and 17 Sep (WB); T Alfred 13 Sep (EB); rarely reported, especially away from migrant hotspots. **Mourning Warbler:** last Amity Lake ALLE 30 Sep. **Hooded Warbler:** last Fort Niagara SP 30 Sep.

Summer Tanager: Jamestown 27,28 Nov (RS,WS,ph), at feeding station, only fourth record ever and first in fall. **Indigo Bunting:** last two T Porter 8 Oct. **Am. Tree Sparrow:** arr two T Somerset 21 Oct. **Chipping Sparrow:** Buffalo 19 Nov (JS); T Alfred 24 Nov (EB), banded; Eden Valley ERIE 26 Nov (RA!); 27, 28 Nov T Tonawanda (BC!); all late sightings. **Vesper Sparrow:** last T Dayton 5 Nov. **Savannah Sparrow:** last four BOSOC; *intro.* **Fox Sparrow:** arr several locations 22 Oct; last 21 Nov. **Song Sparrow:** *intro.* **Lincoln's Sparrow:** arr Fort Niagara SP 9 Sep; last Tonawanda WMA and Golden Hill SP 22 Oct. **Swamp Sparrow:** *intro.* **White-throated Sparrow:** arr away from breeding areas two

Wilson-Tuscarora SP and one Fort Niagara SP 9 Sep; intro. **White-crowned Sparrow**: arr Allegany SP and Four Mile Creek SP 24 Sep; Eden Valley ERIE and L Ontario Plain thru. **Dark-eyed Junco**: arr away from breeding areas Four Mile Creek SP 16 Sep. Lapland Longspur: arr four T Wilson 1 Oct (WD!), early; two T Yates 28 Oct; two 29 Oct and one 5 Nov T Dayton, more reports than usual. **Snow Bunting**: arr 20 Golden Hill SP 28 Oct; max 400 T Charlotte 30 Nov (FR). **Red-winged Blackbird**: *intro*. **Rusty Blackbird**: arr Tiffit NP 16 Sep; last two Amity Lake ALLE 16 Nov. **Pine Grosbeak**: T Porter 26 Nov (WB), only report. **Purple Finch**: arr away from breeding areas Williamsville ERIE 11 Sep; more reports than usual away from Southern Tier. Com. Redpoll: arr T Alma 8 Nov; three T Wales 24 Nov; two Warsaw WYOM 26 Nov, only reports. **Pine Siskin**: arr one BOSOC; four other reports. **Evening Grosbeak**: arr two T Somerset 21 Oct; several reports. **House Sparrow**: *intro*.

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