

REGION 7 - ADIRONDACK-CHAMPLAIN

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The Canadian invasion winter of 1995-96 went from brutal to balmy. The start of the season was cold and icy, with a storm 9-10 Dec adding several inches of fresh snow and bringing the accumulation to a foot at Paul Smiths. A brief, cold high was followed by another 6" snowfall 14 Dec, when Plattsburgh fell to 0°F. By the 23 Dec Elizabethtown CBC, Dec snowfall was already the fifth highest on record, with observers forging 19 miles on skis and three miles by snowshoes through up to 30" of fresh powder to reach Hurricane, Giant, and Jay range territories. Christmas week saw more snow, and the following weekend participants in the Saranac Lake CBC traveled a similar 22 miles on cross-country skis in 18" of snow. January began cloudy and cold, with a 12" snowstorm in southern Essex Co. 3 Jan, followed by a frigid blast of Arctic air: Saranac Lake was -22°F on 4 Jan, -26°F on 5 Jan, -37°F on 6 Jan, -26°F on 7 Jan, not rising to zero until noon on 8 Jan. Hardly a flake of the "Blizzard of '96" fell here, however! After a moderate week of clouds and snow, thermometers plunged briefly 15-16 Jan. Finally, a January thaw provided a respite. Plattsburgh thermometers climbed to a record 65°F on 19 Jan, with thunderstorms in Essex Co. the same day, continuing with rain and severe flooding along rivers into the next week. By 1 Feb, Champlain was 98.54', up over four feet from mid January. The month began clear and cold (-25°F at Saranac Lake 4 Feb), but there were many mild days and little snow. Plattsburgh reached 17°F on 15 Feb and a balmy 50°F on 21 Feb. High winds hit on 25 Feb, with 22" of snow falling at Lake Placid, but none in the shadow of the High Peaks at Elizabethtown. Leap Day was sunny and moderate, closing out what began as a hard winter with expanses of bare ground.

In contrast to the bumper crop of wild food last winter, this year saw trees and shrubs nearly bare. Yet if frugivores and half-hardies were in short supply, their loss was more than compensated for by the continued invasion of birds moving down out of northern Canada beginning in the fall. December began with the surprising sight of a **Northern Fulmar** being harassed by crows along the shoulder of Sentinel Road, Lake Placid. Spotted by David Brant, the bird was rehabilitated by Dr. Nina Schoch, then transported to Tufts U. 11 Dec for evaluation, banding, and coastal release. (Interestingly, yet another fulmar was at Ottawa 6 Dec!)

Other northern visitants included a dark morph Gyrfalcon near Essex

in Dec and a gray morph gyr back at the mouth of the Saranac River in Plattsburgh in Jan-Feb for the **fourth** consecutive winter. Both white-winged gulls were present: the first-winter Iceland Gull at L. Flower stayed into Dec, while a first-winter **Glaucous Gull** was at Westport later the same month, a second ESSE record. A Great Gray Owl appeared at the Inlet golf course in late January. Bohemian Waxwing continued to stage a major invasion, with active observers encountering up to four flocks daily. Some birds visiting a Wadhams yard even ate offerings of dried fruit. Highest densities, as usual, were in the Champlain Valley (672 on the NYS side of the Ferrisburg CBC), although a few wandered as high as Bloomingdale and Lake Flower. Northern Shrike also continued to move down in extremely high numbers for that solitary species. The five Christmas Bird Counts combined for a total of 21 shrikes, only hinting at the numbers undoubtedly present over the four northeastern counties this winter. Lapland Longspur is so infrequently reported that five on the Plattsburgh CBC was noteworthy. This was also a good winter for Snow Bunting, with 606 on the Ferrisburg CBC in Dec and 500+ near Westport later in the month, in addition to other reports of large flocks. More surprising northern visitors to a freshly-manured Wadhams field in mid-Jan were three Pine Grosbeak. Also surprisingly, of the 414 Pine Grosbeak reported on Christmas Counts, 302 were on the Plattsburgh CBC, perhaps drawn to city and campus ornamentals with fruit. Given the failure of the cone crop, crossbills were more difficult to find. There were just three reports of Red Crossbill, from Eighth L, Hurricane Mt, and Tupper Lake, plus only two of White-winged Crossbill from Gabriels and the Saranac Lake CBC. Certainly, the most abundant winter finch was Common Redpoll, with a high of 729 on the Saranac Lake CBC and flocks of 100+ at some feeders by Feb. As expected, Hoary Redpoll showed up among the feeder flocks; several were in Lake Placid during Dec, while others were banded near Elizabethtown during Jan-Feb.

Lake Champlain never completely froze. By the mid Jan Federation Waterfowl Count, open water was only found between Whallon's Bay and Valcour Island, plus a few inland rivers (thus concentrating Bald Eagle), but more open water was available after the late Jan thaw. A Red-throated Loon appeared at Westport in mid Dec, while a late inland Common Loon was on Seventh L earlier in the month. A record-late Double-crested Cormorant lingered at Westport until the end of the year. Four Great Blue Heron stayed in ESSE and HAMI into Dec. As mentioned, eagles became fairly numerous in stretches of open water as Champlain tried to close. An engineer on Amtrak's "Adirondack" counted four adults and an immature between Willsboro Bay and Wickham

Marsh 29 Dec, while observers on the 13-14 Jan FWC similarly noted 4-6 adults and an immature between Valcour Island and Whallon's Bay (with Willsboro Bay frozen by then). There were also inland sightings from Limekiln, Seventh L, and Tupper Lake, where Charlcie Delehanty had two adult Bald Eagle and an immature feeding on a deer carcass on the ice of Big Tupper 22 Feb.

In addition to the aforementioned shrikes, a number of other diurnal raptors frequented feeders, and nocturnal hunters paid daytime visits, as well. Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and Northern Goshawk were frequently observed chasing doves, chickadees, and redpolls. Barred Owl also watched feeders at Elizabethtown, Keene, Lewis, and Tupper Lake during the day, suggesting that microtus populations in the surrounding forests were down, or under deep snow prior to the thaw. Also noteworthy were feeder-watcher Northern Saw-whet Owl at Elizabethtown (found dead after two days) and New Russia (which threw a pellet, suggesting it was eating), plus three taken in for rehabilitation in the Tri-Lakes area in Dec, according to Dr. Schoch.

If northern vistsants dominated the winter of 1995-96, there were a few surprising exceptions. Tom Dudones was amazed to spot a Turkey Vulture crossing the Blue Ridge Road two miles west of the Elk Lake turnoff in early Jan, providing a "nice close view as it flew low over road." Wild Turkey numbers finally took off here, with flocks of 19 near Westport, 24 in a Willsboro Point yard, and 30+ at a Malone manure pile. Trudy McNeil's Ellenburg feeder on Green Valley Rd was the woodpecker hotspot, with a **Red-bellied Woodpecker** present from Dec-Feb, plus an immature **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** spotted there in early Jan by Daphne Kutzer. No less unexpected was the **Field Sparrow** that turned up at Dean Spaulding's feeder in Wadhams, only the second late-Dec ESSE record.

The total of 98 seasonal species (plus a hybrid) was well above the 90 species reported during the bumper food crop of the previous winter and even above the 96 species of 1993-94, another season of severe food shortage. Go figure.

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Abbreviations: CICBC - Champlain Islands CBC, 17 Dec; ECBC - Elizabethtown CBC, 23 Dec; FCBC - Ferrisburg CBC, 16 Dec; FWC - Federation Waterfowl Count; PCBC - Plattsburgh CBC, 17 Dec; SLCBC - Saranac Lake CBC, 30 Dec.

LOONS-DUCKS: **Red-throated Loon:** Westport 16 Dec (LC,TD), a good find. **Com. Loon:** Seventh L 5 Dec (TD), late inland. **Red-necked Grebe:** found alive Cedar R Rd HAMI 7 Feb (GL), died shortly after. **NORTHERN FULMAR:** Lake Placid 2 Dec (DB), *intro*. **Double-crested Cormorant:** Westport 16 Dec (JP,mob) to 30 Dec (MM), record late. **Great Blue Heron:** Seventh L 5 Dec (TD), late inland; Westport 16 Dec (DS), last Champlain. **Snow Goose:** three with yellow neck collars Pt au Roche 1 Dec (BK). **Canvasback:** drake Cumberland Bay 20 Jan (PT), only report of this once abundant diver. **Ring-necked Duck:** 128 PCBC, high. **Red-breasted Merganser:** Whallon's Bay 8 Jan (TD), good find.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: **TURKEY VULTURE:** Blue Ridge near Boreas R 8 Jan (TD); *intro*. **Bald Eagle:** at least 5-7 along lake in CLIN & Essex, plus at least five inland in FRAN & HAMI throughout winter, a strong showing. **Sharp-shinned Hawk:** Inlet, Tupper Lake, and Wadhams feeders; plus five on CBCs. **Cooper's Hawk:** eight reported is high here. **N.Goshawk:** pursuing Mourning Dove Elizabethtown & Inlet feeders; five on CBCs; one rehabilitated Saranac Lake Jan (NS). **Red-tailed Hawk:** Tupper Lake 26 Dec and Utowana L 5 Jan (TD), unusual inland in winter. **Rough-legged Hawk:** 13 on three CBCs relatively low, given the Arctic invasion. **Merlin:** Lake Shore Rd CLIN 2 Dec (BK), usually unreported in winter. **Gyr Falcon:** dk morph flushed Cross Rd ESSE 8 Dec (DS); gr morph mouth Saranac R 19 Jan (GR) and 11 Feb (J&RH), 4th straight winter there where puddle ducks congregate on open water. **Wild Turkey:** 19 Westport 24-26 Dec (J&SP, WP); 24 Willsboro Pt 13 Jan (FWC); 30+ Malone 4 Jan (JT); 26 PCBC, high numbers; plus two inland at an Inlet feeder 1 Dec-29 Feb (GL). **Am. Coot:** four PCBC, noteworthy. **Bonaparte's Gull:** 2 PCBC, only report. **Herring Gull:** L Flower 9 Dec (TD), late inland. **Iceland Gull:** 1st winter L. Flower from late Nov - 4 Dec (RH). **GLAUCOUS GULL:** 1st winter Westport 16 Dec (LC,TD,*et mult al*) to 17 Dec (RW), an excellent find. **Great Black-backed Gull:** max 231 PCBC.

DOVES-WOODPECKERS: **E. Screech-Owl:** one ECBC, only report (rehab Champlain picked up in VT). **Barred Owl:** six daytime sightings - Blue Mt L, Elizabethtown, Keene, Lewis, Plattsburgh, Tupper Lake. **Great Gray Owl:** Inlet golf course 21 Jan (GL). **N. Saw-whet Owl:** ECBC; SLCBC; Elizabethtown feeder 28-30 Dec (when found dead); three rehabs Saranac Lake area Dec (NS); New Russia feeder 9 Jan (SI), extremely high number. **RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER:** Ellenburg feeder 17 Dec (TM) to 13 Feb (J&RH, DK), exceptional here. **YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER:** imm same Ellenburg feeder 7 Jan (DK), no less unexpected. **Black-backed Woodpecker:** "everywhere" HAMI Dec (GL); one SLCBC flushed to imitated Barred Owl call; male Connery Pd Trail, Wilmington, 8 Jan; female Baxter Mt and Keene 2-4 Feb (PT). **N. Flicker:** three FCBC; one PCBC, or about half as many as 1994-95 winter.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLING: **Horned Lark:** 112 FCBC; 20 CICBC; 48 PCBC; count week ECBC; 100+ Westport 24-25 Jan (J&WP); 10+ Westport 13 Jan (JP, RW), exceptional here. **Gray Jay:** fed HAMI Dec (GL); max eight SLCBC; three Bloomingdale Bog 30 Dec (RM, MP, RW); Bloomingdale 1 Jan; pr Raquette L 16 Jan getting grit along highway (TD); two Baker feeder Saranac Inn 9 Feb thru, a strong showing. **Com. Raven:** max 35 ECBC. **Boreal Chickadee:** "hard to find" in HAMI Dec (GL); one ECBC and three SLCBC, only other reports, supporting Lee's experience. **Tufted Titmouse:** a dozen on three CBCs exceptional; plus other Dec reports from Crown Point, Inlet, Tupper Lake, and Westport. **Red-breasted Nuthatch:** max 58 SLCBC; generally scarce in forests, but found at lowland feeders where not regular. **Brown Creeper:** similarly scarce; max eight SLCBC. **Carolina Wren:** one PCBC, only report. **Winter Wren:** MRRR 2 Dec (GL), quite a good find. **Golden-crowned Kinglet:** max 12 SLCBC, generally scarce. **Am. Robin:** Wadhams 8 Dec; plus 15 on four CBC's, the only reports. **N. Mockingbird:** two FCBC at Essex (JP,RW) and Westport, only sightings. **Bohemian Waxwing:** 705+ total recorded on four CBC's hints at numbers present; most records came from eastern ESSE (Essex, Keeseville, New Russia, Wadhams, Westport, Whallonsburg), with others in ne. ESSE (Bloomingdale, L Flower) and se. CLIN (Plattsburgh). **Cedar Waxwing:** 142 with no details PCBC, only report since the last two were seen in Tupper Lake back on 20 Sep; the same count reported 35 "waxwing (sp.)," but only 103 Bohemian. **N. Shrike:** total 21 on 5 CBCs, *intro*; imm Elizabethtown feeder 20-21 Dec, 7 Jan, banded 7 Feb (JP); an exceptional winter.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: **N. Cardinal:** max 78 PCBC. **Am. Tree**

Sparrow: max 129 PCBC. **FIELD SPARROW:** Wadhams feeder 29 Dec (DS), a fortunate find, but seen only one day. **Fox Sparrow:** one PCBC, also unusual. **Song Sparrow:** one each ECBC and SLCBC, low. **White-throated Sparrow:** three PCBC, only report. **Dark-eyed Junco:** max 131 PCBC; a few interior birds lingering at Inlet, Saranac Lake, and Tupper Lake. **Lapland Longspur:** five PCBC, rarely reported. **Snow Bunting:** max 606 FCBC; 500+ Westport late Dec; other large flocks included: 200 Westport 17 Dec, 250 Whallonsburg 8 Jan, and 150 Westport 13 Jan; even seen in HAMI 26 Feb. **Red-winged Blackbird:** max three SLCBC; Wadhams 27 Dec (DS); Albee Rd feeder 1 Jan thru (TD). **Com. Grackle:** max seven PCBC; plus one ECBC, only reports. **Brown-headed Cowbird:** 21 SLCBC, only report! **Pine Grosbeak:** *intro*; a dozen reports in addition to 414 found on four CBC's; a roadkill at Essex 18 Jan had a wing chord 108 mm and bill 10 mm, suggesting it belonged to the more southerly and expected *Pinicola enucleator eschatosus* subspecies (JP,DS). **Purple Finch:** virtually absent, except for 13 with no details PCBC and 2 at a feeder in the forests of Lewis on the ECBC. **House Finch:** max 303 PCBC; a CLIN rehabilitator reported the eye disease in Dec (DF). **Red Crossbill:** flock Eighth L 2 Dec (GL); two on Hurricane Mt. ECBC (J&PT); two Tupper Lake 24 Dec (CD), only sightings. **White-winged Crossbill:** 25 Gabriels 4 Dec (TD); ten SLCBC, only reports. **Com. Redpoll:** max 729 SLCBC; *intro*; 198 banded near Elizabethtown in three days between 17 Jan-15 Feb (JP), suggests magnitude of numbers at some feeders; also seen feeding on tamarack MRRA, yellow birch Connery Pd, and paper birch near Elizabethtown. **Hoary Redpoll:** one SLCBC, with several at Lake Placid count week; two banded Elizabethtown 17 Jan and 7 Feb (JP). **Pine Siskin:** 12 PCBC; eight SLCBC, only reports and illustrate scarcity of this often-abundant finch. **Am. Goldfinch:** total of 229 on five CBC's; plus two other reports from Elizabethtown and Tupper Lake, but nowhere abundant. **Evening Grosbeak:** max 279 ECBC, part of a total of 697 tallied on four CBCs, but absent from many feeders.

Addendum: Lapland Longspur: L Flower ESSE & FRAN 29 Nov 1, 1995 (TD), with 30 European Starling.