

REGION 5 - ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

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Winter 1996-1997 in Region 5 was notable for its mild temperatures, lack of significant snowfall, and depressing lack of sunshine. December's average temperature was 34.8°F making it the third warmest December on record. The high was 61°F on 1 December and the low was -1°F on the 31st. The month's precipitation made it the third wettest December, with 4.45" recorded, but only 21.2" of snow fell, 5.6" below average. January's snowfall made up for December's lack and gave every impression of signalling another long, snowy winter as it accumulated to 38.7", nearly 9.1" over the average. Temperatures averaged 23.8°F, which was 1.4°F above average and kept Lake Ontario ice-free. The high was 56°F on 5 January; the low -8°F on 19 January. February had an average temperature of 30.4°F, approximately 6.4°F degrees above average, which tied for the 7th warmest February on record. The high was 65°F on 21 February, the low 0°F on 13 February. The snowfall for the month was 19.1", 7.1" below normal.

The mild winter weather kept many lakes and ponds open into early January. Seeds, cones, and fruits provided ample natural foods. Gene Huggins noted an abundance of staghorn sumac, common buckthorn, gray dogwood, highbush cranberry, frost grape, and multiflora rose and several birders noted the abundance of cones on many species of conifers. This bounty kept the number of birds down at feeders and most winter finches were absent. The lack of consistent cold and snow cover and the abundance of natural foods also allowed many species to linger into January. A warm front on 21 February brought a quick burst of early March migrants such as robins, Red-winged Blackbirds, grackles, and cowbirds, as well as Tundra Swan, Killdeer, and a few hawks.

Waterfowl and associated species were pretty average for the season, with no great rarities. Only 2-3 Great Blue Herons remained after the CBC's and

loons and grebes were hard to find after mid-January. Late Tundra Swans and Ruddy Ducks were a plus. King Eider was recorded for the first time since 1991 after having been nearly annual back to 1970 and the Barrow's Goldeneye was only the second winter report in the 90's. The five Hooded Mergansers recorded on the Old Forge CBC on 29 December were just a bit too optimistic in their choice of surroundings. White-winged gull numbers were low this season. It was possible to spend a day afield without finding either species.

Turkey Vultures were seen throughout the season in the Dewitt area for the second year and at least one Merlin continued to fly to evening roost in Syracuse's Onondaga Park, where they have been recorded since 1991. Goshawks went unreported in a year that is probably close to the low point in their approximate 10 year cycle. Red-tailed and Rough-legged hawks were both scarce, probably due to either good prey numbers elsewhere or lack of such here. The small population of Fish Crows first found in Syracuse in 1995 seems to have colonized a new site in Liverpool, along Onondaga Lake.

Both American Robins and Cedar Waxwings were scarce after early January, particularly puzzling in the case of robins, since food seemed plentiful and snow depths were below average in normal wintering areas. Some other half-hardy landbirds were well represented by wintering Hermit Thrush and Chipping, Field and Swamp sparrows. Gray Catbird and Eastern Towhee persisted well into January, but Winter Wren was not found after December. **Vesper Sparrow** was recorded for the first time in 37 years. Three warbler species was a very good total for the Region, although Yellow-rumped Warbler is probably the only species which can survive the season. Am. Tree Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco numbers seemed average with no large counts, but they were consistently found.

Purple Finches irrupted in late January, with many reports starting on the 24th. According to Gary Lee, Red and White-winged crossbills and Pine Siskins were common in the Adirondacks, and by season's end all three species were breeding. Only siskins made it to the rest of the Region in any numbers, although most reports were of one or two at feeders for brief stays. Evening Grosbeaks were not reported away from the Adirondacks, and few were found there away from feeders.

A total of 123 species was reported for the season, a very good Regional total. Oddest sighting for the season was 60 Snow Buntings which landed in a suburban Camillus yard during a snowstorm on 17 January where they fed for two minutes before disappearing back into the storm.

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Abbreviations: Bvll - Baldwinsville, CIM - Clay Marsh, DH - Derby Hill, DL - Delta Lake, FH - Fair Haven, Little Sodus Bay and vicinity, HIGMA -

Howland Island GMA, LOL - Lake Ontario Littoral, NH - New Hartford, OnonL - Onondaga Lake, Syr - Syracuse, UM - Utica Marsh.

LOONS-DUCKS: **Red-throated Loon:** singles Oswego 14 Dec & 15 Jan. **Com. Loon:** max nine LOL 5 Jan; last Oswego 15 Jan. **Pied-billed Grebe:** singles DL 2 Dec; OnonL 21 Dec; Bville 11 Jan; max and last five Oswego R 12 Jan. **Horned Grebe:** one DL 2 Dec; one OnonL 26 Jan; one LOL 9 Feb, only reports. **Red-necked Grebe:** two reports, one Oswego 1-4 Feb; one FH 23 Feb. **Double-crested Cormorant:** max 31 Oswego 12 Jan; two Oswego entire period. **Great Blue Heron:** last UM 9 Jan; two OnonL, only birds to winter. **Tundra Swan:** max 14 OnonL 14-18 Jan; three Skaneateles L 19 Dec, record late; arr three Oriskany 24 Feb. **Mute Swan:** one Woodman Pd 18 Dec; two Sherrill Pd 19 Jan. **Snow Goose:** max four LOL 5 Jan (incl 1 Blue); also three Woodman Pd 18 Dec and one Webster Pd Syr 11 Jan. **Canada Goose:** max 2500 FH 23 Feb. **Wood Duck:** singles Bville & OnonL Jan-Feb; one Clay 9 Feb. **Green-winged Teal:** max seven Syr to 13 Jan; last one Bville 26-31 Jan. **Am. Black Duck:** max 207 OnonL 15 Jan. **N. Pintail:** max three Woodman Pd 4 Jan. **Gadwall:** max 29 OnonL 14 Jan. **Am. Wigeon:** four T Granby 22 Dec, only report. **Canvasback:** scattered mid-winter reports of one-two; max 16 FH 23 Feb. **Redhead:** mid-winter max 298 Skaneateles L and 60 OnonL 18 Jan; max 500 FH 23 Feb. **Ring-necked Duck:** one Woodman Pd 26 Dec-4 Jan; one Bville Jan-Feb; pair Oswego Feb. **Greater Scaup:** max 2300 FH 23 Feb. **Lesser Scaup:** max 12 FH 23 Feb. **King Eider:** one Nine Mile Pt 19 Jan, first report since 1991 (SA, MAK). **Oldsquaw:** max 38 Oswego 15 Jan. **Black Scoter:** one imm m dead in the intake canal at James A. Fitzpatrick Nuclear Power Plant. Scriba 24 Feb. **Surf Scoter:** one ad m Oswego 21 Jan-1 Feb. **White-winged Scoter:** max 12 LOL Scriba 1 Feb. **Com. Goldeneye:** max 1200 FH 23 Feb. **Barrow's Goldeneye:** one m Cross L 1 Jan (KM). **Bufflehead:** max 78 Oswego 19 Jan. **Hooded Merganser:** five Old Forge 29 Dec, late; max ten Oswego R 1 Feb. **Com. Merganser:** max 4790 OnonL 14 Jan; 2230 there 22 Feb. **Red-breasted Merganser:** two Chenango R Earlville 21 Dec, unusual; max 13 LOL 9 Feb. **Ruddy Duck:** one female Woodman Pd to 26 Dec; two OnonL 11-14 Jan with one remaining to 6 Feb.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: **Turkey Vulture:** at least two thought to have wintered Dewitt; arr one Pulaski 22 Feb. **Bald Eagle:** one imm Woodman Pd 4 Jan; one imm Cross L 2 Jan; one OnonL 9 Jan; two Oswego R after mid Jan. **N. Harrier:** one W. Winfield in Jan, only report after CBC's; arr one Clay 27 Feb. **Red-tailed Hawk:** low numbers Southern highlands; max 12 Clay 21 Dec. **Rough-legged Hawk:** max three Sangerfield 30 Dec; scarce, when found usually one/day. **Am. Kestrel:** max of two/day; 25 reported for season. **Merlin:** at least one wintered Syr; one Fabius 26 Feb. **Peregrine Falcon:** one Ilion 5

Feb, only report. **Ring-necked Pheasant**: only six reports of nine total. **Ruffed Grouse**: max four Paris 12 Dec. **Wild Turkey**: max 120 T Western 20 Jan; low snow depths did push them out of the woods in many places. **SORA**: two UM 9 Jan & one 11 Jan, second winter record (MP). **Am. Coot**: max 35 Woodman Pd 26 Dec; five singles in Jan; only Feb report one FH. **Killdeer**: no winter reports; arr one NH 21 Feb. **Bonaparte's Gull**: max five Oneida L 11 Dec; last one OnonL 18 Jan, late. **Ring-billed Gull**: max 2300 Oswego 26 Jan. **Herring Gull**: max 2700 OnonL 25 Jan. **Iceland Gull**: scarce, reports of singles after mid-Jan along Oswego R. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: one ad OnonL 12-29 Jan; one third winter Bvllle 14-26 Feb. **Glaucous Gull**: max three DL 24 Dec and Phoenix 29 Jan; most reports of one/day. **Great Black-backed Gull**: max 1150 Oswego R to Oswego Harbor 26 Jan.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: **Mourning Dove**: max 49 Cicero 3 Feb. **E. Screech-Owl**: only three reports, but not actively looked for. **Great Horned Owl**: on nest NH 15 Feb and Kirkland 19 Feb. **Snowy Owl**: one Syr Airport thru Jan 14; one Oswego throughout; one Schroepel 31 Jan; one Sauquoit month of Feb. **Barred Owl**: two pair NH Feb. **Belted Kingfisher**: reported from nine locations; two-three wintered Phoenix, Bvllle, OnonL area. **Red-headed Woodpecker**: one at a Sauquoit feeder thru. **Black-backed Woodpecker**: one Canachagala L 10 Feb, only report. **N. Flicker**: max nine HIGMA 1 Jan; six Kirkland 25 Feb, good late season number.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: **Horned Lark**: mid-winter max 30 Kirkland 26 Dec & 19 Jan; 40 Ava 22 Feb, possibly new arrivals. **Am. Crow**: max 3700 Syr roost 21 Dec. **Fish Crow**: two-three OnonL after mid-Jan, new site; max six Shop City Syr 21 Dec, some there all season. **Com. Raven**: three reports away from Adks; two Remsen 7 Dec; two Boylston 9 Feb; two Redfield 22 Feb. **Tufted Titmouse**: max nine NH 21 Dec; one Old Forge 29 Dec, unusual. **Red-breasted Nuthatch**: reports mostly from breeding locations. **Brown Creeper**: max five NH 20 Dec. **Carolina Wren**: one Holland Patent 2 Feb; one Fayetteville from 11 Feb, only reports. **Winter Wren**: two UM 19 Dec; one Dewitt 21 Dec, only reports. **Golden-crowned Kinglet**: max six HIGMA 1 Jan and NH 8 Feb. **E. Bluebird**: max 10 NH 21 Dec; reports from ten other sites of 23 total. **Hermit Thrush**: one UM 5 Dec; one Syr 1 Jan; one Brookfield 15 Feb. **Am. Robin**: max 244 CIM 12 Dec, only small numbers after early Jan despite available food. **Gray Catbird**: one Dewitt 21 Dec; one Bvllle feeder to 24 Jan. **N. Mockingbird**: max three OnonL 21 Dec. **AM. PIPIT**: one OnonL 21 Dec, record late (BP). **Cedar Waxwing**: max 180 NH 24 Dec; scarce after early Jan. **N. Shrike**: max two Hannibal 22 Dec; other reports of birds at 14 locations, none regular. **European Starling**: *nest in Scriba with at least 3 y 5 Jan*; max 2400 Syr Airport 18 Feb.

VIREOS-WARBLEDERS Cape May Warbler: one Parish feeder to 22 Dec, record late. **Yellow-rumped Warbler**: max three Kirkland 19 Feb; two Green Lakes SP 13 Feb. **Com. Yellowthroat**: one UM 19 Dec.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: **E. Towhee**: one T Onondaga 9 Jan; one Bville feeder to 29 Jan. **Am. Tree Sparrow**: max 70 Bridgeport 8 Feb; many counts of 20-40. **Chipping Sparrow**: one Paris feeder entire period. **Field Sparrow**: one Paris 4 Dec; one at feeder in Pompey to 8 Feb. **VESPER SPARROW**: one Port Byron 1 Jan, first winter record since 1960 (BP). **Song Sparrow**: max nine NH 21; numbers quickly decreased in Jan. **Swamp Sparrow**: one Woodman Pd 18 Dec; one UM 19 Dec & 11 Jan; two Bville 1 Feb. **White-throated Sparrow**: max 35 CIM 4 Dec; scarce in Feb. **Dark-eyed Junco**: max 33 Parish 27 Jan. **Lapland Longspur**: two Clay 17 Jan; two Paris 3 Feb, only reports. **Snow Bunting**: mid-winter max 100 Clay 17 Jan; 10,000 T Stockbridge 24 Feb, "fields on both sides of road solid for a mile" (Leland Fanning *sic* DC). **Red-winged Blackbird**: max 14 Woodman Pd 18 Dec; six Old Forge 29 Dec, unusual; arr one Sangerfield 15 Feb. **E. Meadowlark**: last three T Western 1 Jan. **Rusty Blackbird**: max 13 CIM 8 Jan. **Com. Grackle**: max two Clay 21 Dec; last Clay 9 Jan; arr Fayetteville 21 Feb. **Brown-headed Cowbird**: max 18 Brookfield 30 Dec; last eight Fabius 20 Jan; arr Fayetteville 24 Feb. **Baltimore Oriole**: one Bville 15 Dec; one Syr 21 Dec; one Dewitt 26 Dec; last winter reports from 1980. **Purple Finch**: widespread invasion starting 24 Jan; max 40 Pompey after 26 Jan. **House Finch**: max 60 CIM 26 Jan. **Red Crossbill**: max 12 Old Forge 2 Feb; two Kirkland 19 Feb; two Georgetown 20 Feb. **White-winged Crossbill**: small numbers breeding Adks. **Pine Siskin**: widespread Adks; elsewhere max 30 NH 19 Feb; mostly sporadic reports of 1-4/day regionwide. **Am. Goldfinch**: max 71 Parish 3 Jan. **Evening Grosbeak**: max four Old Forge 22 Feb; no reports away from Adks.

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