

REGION 6 - ST LAWRENCE

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The winter of 1996-97 was overall very mild, however winter conditions extended well into spring. December was very mild after significant snowfalls, particularly in traditional snowbelt areas during the mid two weeks of November. The last three weeks of January were very cold throughout the Region. A few extremely heavy snow bursts occurred, with the Town of Montague in Lewis County recording eight feet of snow in a 48 hour period in January. February resumed the relatively mild temperatures and low snowfall pattern of December.

Highlights of the winter include: 1) a widespread Snowy Owl invasion, 2) good variety of waterbirds and waterfowl, 3) spectacular growth in local Wild Turkey populations, 4) good numbers of gulls particularly along the St. Lawrence, 5) good numbers and increased presence of Bald Eagle, 6) early return of spring migrants in late February, 7) good numbers of many half-hardies, 8) excellent numbers of Lapland Longspur in northwest Jefferson County, and 9) increasing numbers and skill levels for Jefferson County observers, resulting in more data for Regional editors.

Negatives for the winter include: 1) poor numbers of many common waterfowl despite a mild winter, 2) virtual lack of winter finches except Purple Finch, 3) poor numbers of most wintering mouse raptors, and 4) few observers in Lewis/St. Lawrence counties

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Abbreviations: BC -Barnes Corners area Twn Pinckney LEW; CBC-Christmas Bird Count; CV-Town of Cape Vincent JEFF; EDB - El Dorado Beach Preserve Twn Ellisburg JEFF; LOnt - Lake Ontario nearshore waters; LWMA -Lakeview Wildlife Management Area Twn Ellisburg JEFF; MASSLR - St. Lawrence River Town of Massena STLA; MSPD - Moses Saunders Power Dam and Vicinity Twn Massena STLA; NWJ-Towns of Brownville,Cape Vincent and Lyme JEFF; Pillar Pt - Twn Brownville JEFF; Pt Pen - Point Peninsula Twn Lyme JEFF; STLR - St. Lawrence River; StPt - Stony Pt Twn Henderson JEFF; TMPT - Three Mile Point Area Twn Lyme JEFF; WFC - Federation NYS Bird Clubs Waterfowl Count; WHWMA - Wilson Hill Wildlife Management Area Twn Louisville STLA.

LOONS-DUCKS: Red-throated Loon: six to seven per day MASSLR 13-21 Dec (BDL), very high numbers for this Region at any season and remarkable

for Dec. **Com. Loon**: six to nine per day MASSLR 5-21 Dec, many for so late; one WFC SLR. **Pied-billed Grebe**: one Pt Pen 21 Dec; one MASSLR 14 Jan, unusual in winter. **Horned Grebe**: one Pt Pen 3 Dec, only report of this decreasing species. **Double-crested Cormorant**: increasing populations are resulting in increased occurrence in early-mid winter, one to three per day MASSLR to 12 Jan; two TMPT 19 Dec; one Wescott Beach State Park JEFF 4 Jan; still scare in late Jan and Feb. **Great Blue Heron**: one per day LOnt and SLR to dep Pt Pen 4 Jan; one New Boston CBC 30 Dec in the core of the snowbelt was extraordinary. **Tundra Swan**: impressive possibly record number of late migrants in Dec; max 35 to 45 per day Pt Pen and TMPT thru Christmas; 19 still at TMPT 9 Jan, probable; two TMPT 25 Feb.(RJW), may have wintered, but are more likely early migrants. These numbers are unprecedented for Region 6, but reflect a trend of increasing frequency and abundance in northwestern JEFF during late fall early winter. **Mute Swan**: two WHWMA 21 Dec (MB); 4-5 per day LWMA 12-19 Dec; two Massena CBC, reflect increasing local populations. An eradication campaign, including direct killing of adults is needed. **Snow Goose**: 120 CV 27 Dec (NL), late migrants; one LWMA 6-28 Feb (GS), rare wintering bird; both are reflective of increasing populations of this species. **Canada Goose**: widespread along LOnt/SLR in flocks of 15-2500 thru mid Jan; max 4850-5200 MASSLR Dec; 1500-2000 wintered LWMA; arr flocks of 30-50 moving over Watertown 18 Feb. **Wood Duck**: female Pt Pen 5-21 Dec, only report. **Green-winged Teal**: one MASSLR 21-28 Dec, only report, rare in winter. **Am. Black Duck**: 2-22 per day LOnt/SLR to mid Jan; 5-10 per day thereafter; max 140 MSPD 21 Dec; 83 WFC. **Mallard**: max 1587 MASSLR 21 Dec; 900-1000 per day there to mid Jan; fewer thereafter; 30-100 per day elsewhere to late Jan; 10 to 50 per day Feb. **N. Pintail**: singles MASSLR 12 Jan and 20 Feb, probably the same bird; 5-15 per day MASSLR to mid Jan; max 43 MSPD WFC; none after third week of Jan; 11 Pt Pen 21 Dec, only non-SLR report. **Canvasback**: three Wescott Beach State Park, JEFF, only report of this declining species. **Ring-necked Duck**: male Wescott Beach State Park JEFF 4 Dec; male Grass R StLA 21 Dec; three males Henderson Harbor Jeff, presumably late migrants; more unusual are two males MASSLR 22 Jan (BL), high numbers of reports for winter. **Greater Scaup**: very low numbers overall; this once very common species may be declining locally; 2000 Black R Bay Jeff 14 Dec, only significant count; all other counts less than 25 per day scattered LOnt/SLR. **Lesser Scaup**: three MASSLR 12 Jan, only report. **Oldsquaw**: max 3000 EDB 5 Feb; 200 Henderson Harbor JEFF 13 Dec; only a few other scattered reports of two-ten per day LOnt; virtually none reported on SLR. **Black Scoter**: one to four per day MASSLR thru 14 Jan, unusual, all females or imm. **White-winged Scoter**: two per day MASSLR 12-15 Jan. **Com. Goldeneye**: widespread as 50-250 per day LOnt/SLR thru; max 1280 MASSLR 8 Feb; with declines in both Greater

Scaup and Oldsquaw this species is now the most widespread and common wintering diving duck in our Region. **Barrow's Goldeneye**: male Oak Pt Twn Hammond STLA 3-29 Dec (NL); pr MSPD 15 Jan-8 Feb (mob); probably rare but regular in most years on SLR and now being detected by increasing observation. **Bufflehead**: 20-75 per day LOnt/SLR thru mid Jan; max 165 NWJ 12 Dec; less than 10 per day late Jan-Feb, scarce. **Hooded Merganser**: one to five per day NWJ and MASSLR thru mid Jan, excellent numbers; max 10 MSPD 21 Dec (MB); male MASSLR 8 Feb, only report thereafter. **Com. Merganser**: as with Greater Scaup, this formerly more common species was present in reduced numbers, than <100 per day most LOnt counts; max 450-530 per day MASSLR Dec, quite in contrast to several thousand per day in that area a few years ago; only 10-100 per day scattered in Jan; fewer Feb. **Red-breasted Merganser**: max 19 WFC; all other counts one to four per day LOnt/SLR thru late Jan; none thereafter.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: **Turkey Vulture**: one Watertown CBC, report rejected for lack of sufficient details. Despite this species increasing populations all winter reports at these northern latitudes must be fully verified. **Bald Eagle**: one to three per day at several scattered locations along LOnt, increasing; highest numbers still along SLR between Wellsley Island and Morristown where 6-12 a day now normal; max 19 there 14 Jan. **N. Harrier**: one to four per day NWJ thru Jan two per day Feb; max nine Pt Pen 1 Jan (LE); unreported away from NWJ and Twn Ellisburg Jeff. **Sharp-shinned Hawk**: total nine thru, primarily singles. **Cooper's Hawk**: total ten thru, primarily singles. **N. Goshawk**: total six, including five MASSLR; one New Boston CBC. **Red-tailed Hawk**: one to six per day widespread; max 20 Watertown CBC; 15 NWJ 11 Feb; ten New Boston CBC, high count for snowbelt area and included two in Twn Montague LEW with several feet of snow on ground; presumably these adults were hunting superabundant red squirrels. **Rough-legged Hawk**: most counts one to seven per day NWJ thru Jan, mediocre numbers; some increase in Feb to 10-16 per day; scarce elsewhere. **Am. Kestrel**: total 6 singles to mid Jan, **very scarce**. **Gray Partridge**: scarce in usual haunts in NWJ, three coveys of 8-12 only. **Ring-necked Pheasant**: a few singles thru, probably stocked birds. **Ruffed Grouse**: one to four per day thru, fair numbers; max 14 New Boston CBC; ten twn Louisville STLA 21 DEC, good non-CBC count. **Wild Turkey**: flocks of 10-25 widespread; max 64 each New Boston CBC and Twns Harrisburg and Lowville LEW 4 Jan. **Bonaparte's Gull**: one MSPD 5 Dec, only report. **Ring-billed Gull**: 100 to 250 per day MASSLR Dec; few thereafter there; scarce everywhere mid Jan-mid Feb; arr in flocks Henderson JEFF 21 Feb. **Herring Gull**: max 3759 MASSLR 5 Dec; 1000-1550 per day there to early Jan; 200 or less per day thereafter; < 10 per day Lake Ontario, scarce. **Iceland Gull**: one to five per day eastern SLR thru; none elsewhere. **Glaucous Gull**: one to four per

day eastern SLR thru; max 12 MSPD 14 Jan (BDL). **Great Black-backed Gull**: max 3295 MASSLR 14 Jan, may be Regional record; 1000 plus per day regular there Dec; fewer thereafter; LOnt counts mostly less than 20 per day.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: **Mourning Dove**: 10 to 40 per day in lowlands thru; max 141 Watertown CBC; six New Boston CBC, unusual; some wintered in the snowbelt at feeders in Twn Lorraine JEFF(DSL) reflecting continued population expansion. **E. Screech-Owl**: total three singles. **Great Horned Owl**: total 11; max four Towns of Louisville and Massena 21 Dec. **Snowy Owl**: widespread as one to four per day in all areas including open Tug Hill Plateau, a large invasion involving a minimum of 50 plus individuals. **NORTHERN HAWK OWL**: one Daly Rd near Brasher STLA 8-28 Feb (DDTI,mob), about 1.5 miles from last winter's sighting, possibly the same individual. **Barred Owl**: total three singles. **Short-eared Owl**: one to two per day scattered NWJ Dec-Jan, scarce; none Feb. **Belted Kingfisher**: total four singles to mid Jan; none thereafter. **Red-bellied Woodpecker**: still scarce in our Region with most record from southwestern JEFF; one Southwick Beach State Park Twn Ellisburg 13 Dec (GS); one Henderson 8 Jan (LBC), conform to this pattern. **Downy Woodpecker**: one to five per day widespread; max 12 New Boston CBC. **Hairy Woodpecker**: one to two per day in lowlands; two to four per day in highlands; max eight New Boston CBC. **N. Flicker**: one to two per day scattered in lowlands; max six Pt Pen 13 Dec; one there 8 Feb, only Feb record. **Pileated Woodpecker**: total four singles.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: **Horned Lark**: 5-25 per day NWJ thru third week of Jan; 70-100 per day NWJ after 28 Jan, reflects arrival of migrants; six males on territories in CV 9 Feb (GS). **Tree Swallow**: six Wilson Bay CV 12 Dec and one Merchant Rd CV 14 Dec (MBW,FM),extremely late migrants. **Blue Jay**: widespread 5-20 per day; max 214 new Boston CBC. **Am. Crow**: scarce NWJ 3-8 per day thru; 10-25 per day elsewhere in lowlands; winter max 111 Watertown CBC; arr in flocks in NWJ and Henderson 14 Feb; 100-440 per day thereafter. **Com. Raven**: max four New Boston CBC; one to two per day BC and Lorraine thru, reflect relatively mild winter on Tug Hill Plateau as species abandons this area in severe winters; remains scarce in lowlands. **Black-capped Chickadee**:10-30 per day, widespread; max 314 New Boston CBC. **Tufted Titmouse**: one 7-19 Feb in snowbelt at Lorraine (DSL); seven twn Louisville STLA 21 Dec (MB), extraordinary; continued slow expansion in our area. **Red-breasted Nuthatch**: one to three per day scattered thru; in contrast to last year when species abandoned the high country, counts on Tug Hill were normal; max 19 New Boston CBC. **White-breasted Nuthatch**: one to three per day widespread; max nine Watertown CBC. **Brown Creeper**: several counts of one to four per day to mid Jan; only scattered singles thereafter.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: one to four per day at scattered locations; max 17 New Boston CBC. **E. Bluebird:** several small groups of two to eight persisted thru at lowland locations primarily along LOnt; at least a total of 22-30 individuals, high numbers for winter. **MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD:** male Pt Pen 19 Feb thru (FM,DP, mob), incredibly, the second Regional record in four years at a site less than three miles from the 1993 record. **HERMIT THRUSH:** one wintered at the Potsdam STLA feeder of John Carvill (*fide* NA). **Am. Robin:** widespread in lowlands as 10-20 per day at areas such as StPt, Pt Pen and western SLR; fewer 5-10 per day Feb. **Cedar Waxwing :** 15-50 per day at widely scattered locations thru. **N. Shrike:** widely scattered as one to four per day thru; a fair year that pales only in contrast to last year's massive invasion.

VIREOS-WARBLED: none.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: **N. Cardinal:** two to six per day thru in lowlands; max 10-12 several areas; still scarce in the highlands. **Am. Tree Sparrow:** 15-25 per day, widespread; max 170 Watertown CBC. **CHIPPING SPARROW:** one wintered at CV feeder (MBW). **Song Sparrow:** total eight, one to two per day Watertown and NWJ Dec; none thereafter. **White-throated Sparrow:** one to five per day NWJ and Watertown thru Dec; max one to ten per day at CV feeder. **Dark-eyed Junco:** 5-20 per day scattered thru. **Lapland Longspur:** 5-30 per day NWJ Jan-Feb, good numbers; max 75 CV 4 Feb. **Snow Bunting:** 40 to 100 per day NWJ; max 400-500 per day NWJ several dates in Jan-Feb. **Red-winged Blackbird:** scattered one to two per day Dec; winter max 13 Massena Center STLA 21 Dec; arr widespread JEFF 21-23 Feb. **E. Meadowlark:** four Pt Pen 15 Jan (DP), only record. **Com. Grackle:** three singles Dec; three Watertown CBC; one Pt Pen 15 Jan, definite wintering birds; one Pt Pen 18 Feb and one Chaumont 22 Feb may be migrants. **Brown-headed Cowbird:** four Massena Center STLA 21 Dec; one Pt Pen 7-17 Jan, only records. **Purple Finch:** one Lorraine Jeff 11 Dec, only record prior to 15 January; significant invasion after mid Jan, 10-70 per day widespread thru; max 100 Morristown 2 Feb (DMB). **House Finch:** Numbers continue decline particularly in urban areas where most exhibit eye infection; most counts 5-30 per day scattered; many areas have none. **Red Crossbill:** two Town of Montague LEW on New Boston CBC (Bill Purcell), only report. **Pine Siskin:** widely scattered reports of 2-12 in Feb. **Am. Goldfinch:** 10-30 per day Dec-Jan in lowlands; fewer in Feb; Tug Hill dep five New Boston CBC. **House Sparrow:** max 201 Watertown CBC.