

REGION 7 - ADIRONDACK-CHAMPLAIN

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Meteorologically, this was a dreary winter, marked more by clouds and rain than by snow. A blocking front off the Atlantic Coast 7 December resulted in 3" of snow at Ellenburg the next day. The 15 December Plattsburgh CBC was held on bare ground, with the greatest monthly snow depth 8" on High Peaks trails during the Elizabethtown CBC on 21 December. Gary Lee reported that at Inlet, "The first week of January it was 50° with rain and two days later we had 18" of snow." Keene Valley, in the shadow of the High Peaks, received just 32" in the same 9-10 January snowstorm. Plattsburgh reached 38° on 16 January, before temperatures plunged to -20° at Malone the next day. Coldest day of the winter was 19 January, with Inlet -36°, Newcomb -34°, and Lake Placid -26°, but by 22 January Plattsburgh was back to 41°. The following weeks were snowy, with 6" falling at Newcomb 5 February and an accumulation of three feet at Inlet by that same week. After several more inches on Valentine's Day, a thaw set in at the end of the season, with Plattsburgh in the 40°s. The sun even came out for a few days.

Ornithologically, the winter wasn't as dismal as the view at most feeders suggested. In spite of the usual, plaintive chorus of, "Where are all the birds?", a record 99 species (plus a hybrid and a morph) was recorded. Lake Champlain never entirely froze, the wild food crop was good, and woods and fields were relatively free of snow for most of the winter.

Waterbirds took advantage of the open water and mild conditions. A late inland Common Loon lingered on Upper Saranac Lake into mid-December, and a Pied-billed Grebe was on Coll Bay, ESSE, in early January. A Double-crested Cormorant on Raquette Pond 1 December was late inland, with others at Westport in mid-December and Willsboro Bay in January. Westport still had **three** Great Blue Herons in December, and the species was found on an incredible *five* CBCs that month, lingering at Westport into January; Hollis White found the last in mid-January on the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation. An Am. Wigeon stayed at the Plattsburgh city beach until late December. Ausable Point had a drake Barrow's Goldeneye from 3 December, while a hen was near a flock of Common Goldeneyes on Whallon's Bay 11 January; by the next day Ausable Point (some 20 miles to the north) still had a drake among a similar raft of Commons, plus two pairs of Barrow's nearer shore! This exceeds the Regional maxima of three at Ausable Point on 10 November 1954 (Bull 1974).

Numbers of wintering Bald Eagles continued to increase, admittedly helped by the expanse of open water. Some high counts included five on the Ferrisburg CBC, six counted between Ticonderoga-Westport by the Amtrak "Adirondack" crew in late Dec, four tallied by the trainmen from Port Henry-Wickham Marsh

in late January, a total of **13** on the NYS Waterfowl Count/Bald Eagle Survey, and a Regional record of **eight** in one location around Whallon's Bay on 9 February. And away from Champlain, there were inland sightings at Big Tupper Lake, Forked Lake, Raquette Lake, and Saranac Lake. **Golden Eagles** appear to be enjoying a similar renaissance, albeit on a lesser scale. Following sightings of a Golden at Wadhams and Westport in the winter of 1994-95, there were **four** records in winter 1996-97: feeding in a meadow on Crown Point peninsula; at Jenkins Mt., FRAN; at Wadhams (all December); and at Split Rock with an adult and an immature Bald Eagle in late February. Falcons also put in rare winter appearances, with Am. Kestrel, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon reports from Clinton County.

Half-hardy landbirds, in spite of the favorable conditions, were something of a mixed bag, with reports of just three N. Flickers, a single Carolina Wren, and a total of only 20 E. Bluebirds. The Elizabethtown CBC located a record **285** Am. Robins, but other counts found only 20 of the overwintering birds. Cedar Waxwings were found as far inland as Tupper Lake, and sizeable flocks wintered in the Champlain Valley; Bill Krueger counted over a hundred on the SUNY Plattsburgh campus with its fruiting ornamentals in late February. The two waxwings are largely exclusive here in winter, and Bohemian Waxwings were absent for only the third winter since 1979-80, unless some should show up by April. Five Song Sparrows, a December. **Swamp Sparrow** found by Dean Spaulding in the Webb Royce Swamp, eight White-throated Sparrows, and an overwintering **White-crowned Sparrow** at the White's feeder in Hogsburg, was a good showing for this Region.

Among the winter finches, 13 Pine Grosbeaks on the Plattsburgh CBC provided the only report. Purple Finches had their best winter since the invasion of 1976, with 123 on the Elizabethtown CBC (but still far short of the '76 explosion of 610). Bob Yunick drove 112 miles in ESSE-HAMI 11 January, and 130 miles in HAMI 2 February, without finding any crossbill roadkills. (Gary Lee commented, "The ravens and crows stayed around deer feeders and patrolled the highways for crossbills and siskins," so perhaps they were just ahead of Bob!) But Yunick did see Red Crossbills at four spots along Rt. 30, HAMI, on 11 January. On 2 February, he had two on Rt. 8, one in Sabael, and four in Wells. Ted Mack noted Red Crossbill pairs about every five miles near Paul Smiths by late January, with other reports from the Saranac Lake CBC and Bob Hagar. At Inlet, Lee reported, "The Red and White-winged crossbills were everywhere, singing and feeding on the abundant cone crop." White-winged were found on both the Elizabethtown and Saranac Lake CBCs, and Steve Hall and Matthew Perry had "lots of singing" at Ferd's Bog in mid-December. By mid January, the Thaxtons found them eating spruce cones above Marcy Dam and along the Heart Lake Road. Richard Clements counted 200 around Lake Placid in mid-February, with three singing males up the Chubb River and small flocks of 15-20 along Rts. 28 and 30 south of Saranac

Lake. Not as spectacular as 1985, but a good crossbill winter, with evidence of nesting by both species. The 503 Pine Siskins on the Saranac Lake CBC and 431 Am. Goldfinches on the Plattsburgh count give a suggestion of the numbers present. Both finches were abundant where cones and seeds were available, piling into feeders only during the few storms. In contrast, the Saranac Lake count had but 53 Evening Grosbeaks, and they were similarly scarce elsewhere, the thirty-something at the Lee feeder being an exception. Even when found, they were often received with comments like, "The first one of the winter!" (Charlcie Delehanty), "My only ones of the entire winter." (Bob Yunick), and "Only ones all year." (Pat Thaxton), all experienced observers. Near Elizabethtown these once maligned, now longed-for grosbeaks are more frequent as family groups at feeders in summer than as winter visitants. After accepting winter as a seemingly endless series of 50 lb. bags of sunflower seed for several decades, we may be learning that our largess was only happenstance created by a spruce budworm outbreak in Canada. Which in turn prompts the question of what is "normal," healthy forests or lots of budworm-eating birds?

Contributors: Tom Baker, Richard Clements, Charlcie Delehanty, Dave Franzi, Robert Hagar, Steve Hall, Judy Heintz, Candy Hess, Selma Isil, Suzy Johnson, Hal Klein, Russ Koch, Bill Krueger, Richard MacDonald, Theodore Mack, Larry Masters, Jeff Meyers, Charles Mitchell, Edith Mitchell, Nancy Olsen, Lydia & Paul Osenbaugh, Matthew Perry, John & Susan Peterson, Mary Purcell, Judy Ross, Dean Spaulding, Trisha Spaulding, Carol Spierto, John & Patricia Thaxton, Robert Wei, Cap & Uta Wister, Robert Yunick.

Abbreviations: CICBC - Champlain Islands CBC, 22 Dec; ECBC - Elizabethtown CBC, 21 Dec; FCBC - Ferrisburg CBC, 21 Dec; FWC - Federation Waterfowl Count, 11-15 Jan; PCBC - Plattsburgh CBC, 15 Dec; SLCBC - Saranac Lake CBC, 28 Dec.

LOONS-DUCKS: **Com. Loon:** Upper Saranac L 13 Dec (TB); max 12 PCBC. **Pied-billed Grebe:** Coll Bay 4 Jan (RM,JP,DS), unseasonal. **Horned Grebe:** max 71 PCBC and 52 FWC, extremely high numbers. **Red-necked Grebe:** two FWC, only report. **Double-crested Cormorant:** Raquette Pd 1 Dec (EM); Westport 16 Dec (JP,DS); Willsboro Bay 11 Jan (TM,JP,RW)-12 Jan (RM,JP,MP,DS), record late. **Great Blue Heron:** three Westport 6 Dec; two Westport 4 Jan (RM,JP,DS); last St. Regis Mohawk Reservation 15 Jan (HW). **Snow Goose:** 83 CICBC; two Port Henry 4 Jan (RM,JP,DS), late. **Canada Goose:** max 1,666 FWC, a few overwintered. **Am. Wigeon:** three PCBC; Plattsburgh city beach 17-23 Dec (BK,CM), late CLIN by eight days. **Canvasback:** max 4 FWC, typical of years following crash. **Redhead:** max three drakes Ausable Pt 23 Feb (NO), ditto. **Greater Scaup:** 480 FWC, a response to zebra mussels? **Lesser Scaup:** 22 FWC, ditto? **Oldsquaw:** six Wickham Marsh 11-12 Jan (JP), good here. **Surf Scoter:** Plattsburgh Bay 15

Dec (BK,CM), late CLIN by 22 days. **White-winged Scoter**: Ausable Pt 3 Dec; Wilcox docks 8 Dec (BK,CM), good finds. **Barrow's Goldeneye**: drake Ausable Pt 3 Dec (BK); hen Whallon's Bay 11 Jan (RM,MP,DS); Ausable Pt had drake 24 Dec (BK,CM) and two pair plus an ad drake 12 Jan (CH,JR), for a total of **six** on the FWC, counting the ESSE hen! **Hooded Merganser**: 35 FWC on Heart Bay, L George.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: **Bald Eagle**: two Westport 7 Dec; six Ti-Westport 23 Dec (Amtrak crew); five FCBC; one SLCBC; ad Big Tupper 23 Dec, 5 & 26 Jan, 24 Feb, where imm was harrassed by crows 24 Feb (CD); Forked L late Dec; feeding on dead deer Raquette 1 (GL); **13 FWC**; four Westport 6 Jan; four Port Henry-Wickham Marsh 17 Jan (Amtrak crew); Chazy R 23 Dec and ads Ausable Pt area 23 Dec-26 Feb; max **two ads, 6 imms** Whallon's Bay 9 Feb (RM,JP,DS); plus various newspaper reports, an exceptional showing. **N. Harrier**: seven reports between 21 Dec-23 Feb with two on the CICBC, an exceptional showing. **Golden Eagle**: Crown Pt 18 Dec (C&UW), feeding in meadow near bridge; Jenkins Mt, FRAN, 22 Dec (TM); Wadhams 25 Dec (MG); Split Rock 22 Feb (JP,DS), with ad & imm Bald Eagle. **Am. Kestrel**: Plattsburgh 17 Dec. **Merlin**: Plattsburgh 19 Jan, apparent window-kill. **Peregrine Falcon**: ad male Jarvis & River Rds. CLIN, 10 Dec (BK,CM). **Wild Turkey**: max 50 daily Sciota barnyard. **Iceland Gull**: PCBC, a good find. **Glaucous Gull**: 1st winter Westport 4 Jan (RM,JP,DS), similarly good.

DOVES-WOODPECKERS: **E. Screech-Owl**: Wadhams 9 Jan (DS), mobbed by jays and crows. **Snowy Owl**: bird injured Ray Brook Federal Prison 18 Nov rehabilitated, banded, and released Essex 8 Dec (JP,DS,CS); another was at Chazy R 5-7 Dec (BK,CM,JM). **Short-eared Owl**: Essex 21 Dec (Carole Slatkin); Jay 18 Jan (L&P0), rarely reported. **Three-toed Woodpecker**: male Ferd's Bog 17 Dec (SH,MP); two Avalanche Pass 3 Feb (J&PT), "attracted to our squeaky ski bindings." **Black-backed Woodpecker**: SLCBC; three Ferd's Bog 17 Dec (SH,MP); male Mt. Van Hoevenberg x-country trail 16 Feb (RC). **N. Flicker**: FCBC; ECBC; Westport 4 Jan (RM JP,DS).

FLYCATCHERS-STARLING: **Gray Jay**: five Ferd's Bog 17 Dec; six SLCBC. **Com. Raven**: max 21 ECBC. **Boreal Chickadee**: Ferd's Bog; four ECBC; five SLCBC. **Tufted Titmouse**: four Westport feeder 4 Jan; Jay 18 Jan. **Carolina Wren**: one ECBC, only report. **E. Bluebird**: 12 FCBC; eight ECBC. **Am. Robin**: max 285 ECBC; one Tupper Lake 2-7 Dec (CD), feeding on winterberries. **Cedar Waxwing**: max 100+ SUNY Plattsburgh 24 Feb. **N. Shrike**: 11 reports, an unexpectedly strong showing in the wake of last winter's invasion.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: N. Cardinal: max 26 PCBC. Am. Tree Sparrow: max 168 FCBC; flock of 56 Webb Royce Swamp 11 Jan (TM,JP,RW). Song Sparrow: CICBC; PCBC; SLCBC; Hogansburg & Plattsburgh feeders. Swamp Sparrow: Webb Royce Swamp 18 Dec (DS), record late. White-throated Sparrow: seven SLCBC; one Tupper L 25 Feb (CD). White-crowned Sparrow: Hogansburg feeder 24 Dec thru (Denise & Hollis White). Dark-eyed Junco: max 203 ECBC; wintered Inlet for first time (GL), abundant and widespread for a bird not always present here in winter. Lapland Longspur: five CLIN reports of 1-6 birds 16 Jan-10 Feb (BK), remarkable for this Region. Snow Bunting: max 93 SLCBC unexpected, as were 25 Riverside Drive horse barn on the outskirts of Lake Placid 15 Feb. Red-winged Blackbird: max 60 FCBC; arr Upper Saranac L & Wadhams 22 Feb; eight arr Tupper L feeder 28 Feb. Pine Grosbeak: 13 PCBC, only report. Purple Finch: max 123 ECBC. House Finch: max 102 PCBC. Red Crossbill: nine SLCBC; pairs about every 5 mi. Paul Smiths 22 Jan (TM); two males McMaster & Forest Home Rds 21 Feb (RH); undoubtedly nested. White-winged Crossbill: ECBC; 54 SLCBC; max 200 Lake Placid 15 Feb; three singing males Chubb R and small flocks of 15-20 along Rts. 28 & 30; 12 Ferd's Bog "lots of singing" 17 Dec; ten eating spruce cones above Marcy Dam 17 Jan; four Heart Lake Rd 18 Jan; undoubtedly nested. Pine Siskin: max 503 SLCBC; 283 ECBC; 250 Lake Placid 15 Feb. Am. Goldfinch: max 431 PCBC; 382 SLCBC; 345 ECBC; 161 FCBC, indicative of widespread invasion. Evening Grosbeak: max 53 SLCBC; 14 ECBC; 2 CICBC; none FCBC or PCBC, indicative of decline. House Sparrow: max 156 CICBC.

Addendum: Canada Goose: white-on-green collar Point au Roche 25 Oct 96 (BK) banded Grand Ledge, Eaton Co., MI (NW Lansing) 6 Jul 95 in study of local Giant Canada Geese by Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources.