

REGION 5 - ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

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The El Niño weather pattern which formed in the Pacific Ocean in late 1997 held its power for the entire winter providing Central New York with a relatively mild winter. El Niño's influence shifted the jet stream which kept the cold arctic air bottled up in Canada. December had an average temperature of 30.7°F, 2.4 degrees above normal, with a high of 52° F and a low of zero°F. A total of 47.8 inches of snow fell, which was 21 inches above normal. Much of that fell on 30 December. Just over 4 inches of precipitation fell during the month. January's average temperature was 29.9 degrees° F, which was 7.5°F above normal. The high was 59°F and the low was -9°F. Precipitation of 4.77 inches was 2.43 inches above average, but snowfall of 31.8 inches was only 2.2 inches above average. The mild weather continued through February with an average temperature of 31.3°F, 7.3°F above normal, with a high of 48°F and a low of 5°F. Snowfall in February was 14.7 inches, which was 11.5 inches below normal, and precipitation was 3.14 inches, 0.99 inches above normal.

By far, the highlight of the season was a **Yellow-billed Loon** found in Oswego Harbor on 21 December during the Oswego Christmas Count. Sue Boettger noted the loon in the lower Oswego River and identification was made by Gerard Phillips. The bird was seen nearly every day until heavy rains and a thaw over 7-8 January melted the snow cover. The snow melt caused the Oswego River to rise to flood stage which brought considerable silt downstream and into Oswego harbor. Many birds, including the loon moved out looking for clearer water for feeding. The **Great Cormorant** originally found in November, also continued to be present in Oswego Harbor. Its presence became more sporadic and it left about the same time as the loon, likely due to the same conditions. Barrow's Goldeneye, never a regular in the Region was present in numbers and consistency as to nearly qualify for classification as an invasion. Three separate males were reported, two of them with persistent frequency.

Areas usually open such as Oswego harbor, Onondaga Lake, and the warm water discharge at Nine Mile Point had lower waterfowl concentrations than usual. Little Sodus Bay remained partially open for most of the season and large stretches of the Oswego and Seneca Rivers were open for much of the winter. In the highlands of southern Herkimer County the Unadilla River only froze several times for a couple of days at a time.

There were first winter records of Black-crowned Night-Heron and Common Moorhen. The night-heron was in a drainage ditch in a restricted area of the Air

National Guard Base in Syracuse while the moorhen was seen daily on the old Erie Canal into mid-December.

Turkey Vultures were not reported from Onondaga County where winter reports have originated for the past couple of years. The February reports were most likely early migrants. Numbers of accipiters were good, as were numbers of Red-tailed Hawks and American Kestrels. Rough-Legged Hawks were much more common east of Oneida Lake than west of the lake, most likely due to prey populations but less farming and creeping development may also be a factor west of the lake. A Golden Eagle was found in the extreme southeastern portion of the Region where there has often been little coverage. A Merlin spent the winter roosting in a Syracuse park.

Wintering gulls were present in good variety, nine species being reported. The common species were seen in smaller numbers than most winters. Gulls did not begin to arrive in large numbers until mid January, and numbers peaked by the end of the month when counts rapidly dwindled. Highlights were several Thayer's Gulls, a Lesser Black-backed Gull, and an immature Black-legged Kittiwake. The latter bird was reported from the Oswego Harbor area for 8 days.

Resident owl species, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl and Eastern Screech-Owl, were well reported in the Region during the period. Only one Snowy Owl was reported from the Lake Ontario shoreline, but two were reported from an upland agricultural area of Herkimer County during the latter half of the winter season.

Half-hardy species were not reported more often despite the milder winter weather. Possible reasons include the heavy snow in late December which moved them out of the region, the lack of abundant food, and/or the abundance of open ground which kept them dispersed. Several observers reported American Tree Sparrow numbers to be barely average and Dark-eyed Juncos to be low in comparison to other years.

Pine Grosbeaks were found on the Tug Hill, Adirondack foothills, and the Lake Ontario shoreline. Despite a small cone crop both crossbill species were also noted in the Region. However, it was definitely the year for Common Redpolls, and, as always in such years, one hopes for Hoary Redpolls among them. In January, Gerard Phillips found a field of unharvested sunflowers in Bethel just north of the Cayuga County line in Oswego County. A great natural food source, the field attracted hundreds of Common Redpolls and American Goldfinches as well as at least four Hoary Redpolls. These were identifiable as the *exilis* subspecies as they perched and preened in the trees surrounding the field. Notable when discussing winter finches was the near absence of Pine Siskin and Purple Finch for the entire season and the general lack of finches in the southern highlands of Onondaga and Madison counties where they are found most years.

The season total was 129 species, an excellent year. Highlights include **Yellow-billed Loon, Great Cormorant, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Brant,**

Barrow's Goldeneye, Golden Eagle, Common Moorhen, Thayer's Gull, Kittiwake, Bohemian Waxwing and Hoary Redpoll. Only one report each of Pine Siskin and Purple Finch was disappointing but overall there was little that could be considered negative for the season.

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Abbreviations: Bvll - Baldwinsville, BLNC - Beaver Lake Nature Center, CM - Clay Marsh, DH - Derby Hill, FH - Fair Haven, Little Sodus Bay and vicinity, LOL - Lake Ontario Littoral, NH - New Hartford, OneiL - Oneida Lake, OnonL - Onondaga Lake, SSSP - Selkirk Shores State Park. StM - Saint Mary's Cemetery, Dewitt, SVB - Sylvan and Verona Beach, Syr - Syracuse, WP - Woodman Pond.

LOONS-DUCKS

Red-throated Loon: 2 Oswego thru 8 Feb.
Com. Loon: max 6 OnonL 20 Dec; up to 4 Oswego thru season.

YELLOW-BILLED LOON: 1 Oswego regular 21 Dec to 6 Jan and last 18 Jan, first NYS record of a live bird (SB, BG, MAK, GP, mob).

Pied-billed Grebe: last FH 4 Jan.

Horned Grebe: max 7 DH 1 Feb; 1 Hinckley Res 21 Jan, normally frozen.

Red-necked Grebe: 1 LOL 11 Jan, only report.

GREAT CORMORANT: 1 Oswego to 6 Jan (mob).

Double-crested Cormorant: max 12 Oswego R and Harbor 1 Jan; 2 Oswego thru season.

Great Blue Heron: one Old Forge thru Dec; 1 wintered OnonL.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON: 1 imm N Syr 10 Dec (BC), first Regional winter record.

Turkey Vulture: singles Scriba 17 & 28 Feb.

Snow Goose: 1 Oswego 29 Dec; arr 8 Schroepel 28 Feb.

Brant: 2 FH 19 Dec with 1 remaining to 1 Feb, record late.

Mute Swan: sharp increase in winter reports, max 11 OnonL 31 Jan; also 7

Dempster Beach LOL during Jan; 3 WP 18 Jan; 2 Leland Pd to 10 Feb; 2 FH Jan.

Tundra Swan: almost wintered with last 10 OnonL 5 Feb; arr 15 Biddlecum 21-26 Feb.

Wood Duck: max 5 Syr 20 Dec; last Bville 31 Jan.

Gadwall: max 23 FH 16 Dec; 12 FH 4 Jan.

Am. Wigeon: max 6 WP 8 Dec; last 3 WP 14 Dec.

Am. Black Duck: max 100 WP 8 Dec; 70 OnonL 31 Jan.

Mallard: max 270 Manlius and 200 WP 14 Dec; low winter concentrations.

N. Pintail: last 1 FH 26 Dec; arr widespread 27 Feb; max 100 Biddlecum 28 Feb.

Green-winged Teal: max 5 Syr 20 Dec; last Bville 11 Jan.

Canvasback: max 16 FH 1 Feb.

Redhead: max 780 FH 1 Feb.

Ring-necked Duck: max 4 FH 2 Feb.

Greater Scaup: max 850 FH 2 Feb; other sites no more than 40 per day.

Lesser Scaup: max 6 FH 2 Feb.

White-winged Scoter: max 9 DH 19 Jan.

Oldsquaw: max 63 Oswego 3 Dec.

Bufflehead: max 55 FH 28 Feb; daily max of 15-30 Oswego, lower than usual.

Com. Goldeneye: max 2500 Sandy Pond 11 Jan.

Barrow's Goldeneye: single males FH from 12 Dec (GP); Brewerton from 11 Jan (JR); Oswego 25 Jan to 12 Feb (BA, DN).
Hooded Merganser: max 30 DL 8 Dec; last 15 there 14 Dec; one Oswego Jan-Feb; 2 FH 18 Jan, only reports after freeze-up.
Com. Merganser: max 4500 Cross L 9 Dec.
Red-breasted Merganser: max 21 Oswego 8 Feb, low numbers.
Ruddy Duck: last 4 WP 14 Dec; 2 Oswego 28 Jan, late.

HAWKS-ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: consistent winter reports of 2 ad & 1 imm Salmon R; ad & imm Oswego R and OnonL; ad & imm Eagle Bay - Big Moose; several sightings of 1-2 adults Cato area.
N. Harrier: 5 scattered winter reports; arr 1 Verona 27 Feb.
Sharp-shinned Hawk: 23 reports of singles.
Cooper's Hawk: 24 reports for season; max 5 OSWE 1 Feb.
N. Goshawk: singles, NH 12 Dec; Oswego 28 Jan; Hastings 7 Feb; Bridgewater 28 Feb; several sightings of an imm SSSP Jan-Feb; an average season.
Red-shouldered Hawk: arr 1 imm DH 27 Feb.
Red-tailed Hawk: max 12 Verona 4 Feb; 1 albino Oriskany Falls 19 Feb.
Rough-legged Hawk: max 13 Verona 4 Feb; 6 Fairfield 22 Feb; scarce w of Oneil.
GOLDEN EAGLE: 1 imm Van Hornesville 7 Feb, second Regional winter record (CM!).
Am. Kestrel: 7 per day S OSWE.
Merlin: fem roosting Onondaga Park Syr thru season; 1 Liverpool Jan-Feb; 1 N Syr 6 Dec; 1 Fabius 6 Dec.
Peregrine Falcon: 1 Oswego 6 & 24 Jan.
Ring-necked Pheasant: 8 reports of 13 individuals for the season.
Ruffed Grouse: max 3 several locations; total 20 from 10 reports.
Wild Turkey: max 125 Fairfield 16 Feb; fewer reports than recent years due to open winter.
COM. MOORHEN: one Erie Canal Fayetteville to 12 Dec (TS, RD); first winter record.

Am. Coot: max 20 WP 2 Dec; 6 still present 25 Jan; 2-3 wintered each of OnonL, FH and Oswego.
Killdeer: no winter reports; arr DH 27 Feb.
Bonaparte's Gull: max 33 Oneil 5 Dec; last Oswego 21 Dec.
Ring-billed Gull: max 4700 Oswego 17 Jan.
Herring Gull: max 1700 Oswego 17 Jan.
Thayer's Gull: 1st Bas Oswego 26 Dec (Mike O'Brien *fide* Bill Evans, NYSARC); 1st Bas Oswego 25 Jan; 2d Bas Bvile 28 Jan (BP, both NYSARC).
Iceland Gull: late Jan peak of 9-12 birds Oswego R; unusual sites included 1 SVB 6 Dec; 3 Phillips Lake Cato 3-9 Dec.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: 1 ad Oswego 25-28 Jan (MAK, mob).
Glaucous Gull: 1 FH 14 Dec; 1 SVB 24 Dec; 1 Oswego 1-11 Jan, 8 Feb; scarce compared with Iceland.
Great Black-backed Gull: max 370 Oswego 17 Jan.
Black-legged Kittiwake: 1 imm Oswego 21-26 Dec (SA, mob), record late.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS

Mourning Dove: max 122 Liverpool 4 Feb.
E. Screech-Owl: 9 reported.
Great Horned Owl: 16 reported.
Snowy Owl: 1 FH 12-16 Dec; 1 imm and 1 ad Fairfield after mid-January, only reports.
Barred Owl: 13 reported including 1 at T Western feeder sporadically 21 Dec - 9 Feb.
Short-eared Owl: singles Oswego 2 Jan, DH 17 Jan.
N. Saw-whet Owl: 1 T Western 25-29 Dec; 1 BLNC 9 Feb.
Belted Kingfisher: 1 Old Forge to 26 Dec, late for Adks; 1 wintered West Winfield, frozen most years.
Red-headed Woodpecker: max 3 FH 4 Dec, 1 remained thru; 1 Barneveld 22 Feb.
Red-bellied Woodpecker: several reports of wintering lower Tug Hill OSWE, may be a slight range extension.
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: 1 Kayuta L 7 Dec; 1 Pompey 15 Jan; 1 NH 29 Jan, more than many winters.
N. Flicker: no reports after CBC's.

FLYCATCHERS-WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 16 for the season with 1 imm Bethel, 1 Fairfield, 1 Bville and 2 ONEI persistent.
Am. Crow: max 6554 Syr roost 20 Dec.
Fish Crow: 1 Syr 19 Dec; up to 4 Liverpool and OnonL Jan-Feb.
Com. Raven: max 11 Remsen 2 Feb; 1 Verona 27 Dec, only other location.
Horned Lark: max 200 Bridgewater 11 Dec; Old Forge 12 Feb and Woodgate 13 Feb.
Tufted Titmouse: max 17 Utica 20 Jan; 8 FH 18 Jan.
Red-breasted Nuthatch: daily maxima of 8-10, some irruptive movement but also remained in breeding areas.
Brown Creeper: max 4 per day several locations.
Carolina Wren: 2 Syr 20 Dec; 1 Fayetteville to 2 Jan; 2 Camillus 6 Jan, slight increase.
Winter Wren: singles NH 18-20 Dec & 19 Jan, only reports.
Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 8 Kirkland 4 Dec; 2 SSSP 22 Jan; 1 West Winfield 4 Feb, only reports after CBC's.
E. Bluebird: numerous reports before storm of 30 Dec; max 8 Skaneateles 3 Jan thru.
Hermit Thrush: 1 West Winfield 4 Feb (KZ), only report.
Am. Robin: max 143 Skaneateles 3 Jan; overall lower than other open winters.
N. Mockingbird: max 4 NYS Fairgrounds 20 Dec; 6 other reports; 1 Oswego throughout.
Bohemian Waxwing: 3 SSSP 21 Jan (DCr).
Cedar Waxwing: max 352 Paris 12 Dec.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 1 Kirkland 20 Dec - 22 Jan; 2 Howland Island WMA 1 Jan; 1 Paris 6 Jan.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS

E. Towhee: single males thru season at Pompey & Liverpool feeders.
Am Tree Sparrow: max 70 Paris 16 Feb; from most reports not especially numerous.
Fox Sparrow: 1 Old Forge to 21 Dec, only report.

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Song Sparrow: max 4 NH 20 Dec; uncommon given mildness winter.
Swamp Sparrow: 1 NH 20 Dec - 6 Feb, only report.
White-throated Sparrow: max 10 CM 20 Dec and Kirkland 17 Feb.
White-crowned Sparrow: max 2 Clinton 20 Dec; 1 Paris 8-24 Feb.
Dark-eyed Junco: max 11 Dewitt 21 Feb; generally low counts.
Lapland Longspur: 2 Oswego 1-6 Jan; 1 Kirkland 1 Jan, only reports.
Snow Bunting: max 400 Kirkland 21 Dec; present in Woodgate 13 Feb; return flight max 240 Mexico 21 Feb when difficult to find in open fields.
N. Cardinal: 36 Liverpool feeder 8 Jan, unusual numbers in Region.
Red-winged Blackbird: winter max 20 Camillus 2 Jan; arr ONON 13 Feb.
E. Meadowlark: singles Mexico 4 Jan, 7 Feb.
Rusty Blackbird: 2 Paris 6 Dec; 1 Clinton 20 Dec.
Com. Grackle: 1 Central Square 3 Dec; 2 Syr 20 Dec, only winter; arr Fayetteville 16 Feb.
Brown-headed Cowbird: max 14 Sangerfield 26 Dec; 1 Fayetteville 12 Jan; 1 T Western thru.
Pine Grosbeak: max 40 SSSP and vicinity 9 Jan.
Purple Finch: 2 Clinton 20 Dec, only report.
House Finch: numbers remain low, some daily maxima of 20-40.
Red Crossbill: max 20 SSSP 6 Feb; 15 Remsen 9 Dec.
White-winged Crossbill: max 8 Verona 27 Dec; only 3 other reports.
Com. Redpoll: max 400 Bethel & 320 Mexico 22 Jan.
Hoary Redpoll: max 4 Bethel 22 Jan-10 Feb; one Pompey 28 Jan & 7 Feb.
Pine Siskin: 10 Utica 10 Jan, only report.
Am. Goldfinch: max 100 Bethel 25 Jan.
Evening Grosbeak: max 100 Nine Mile Point 27 Feb; most reports from highlands HERK, ONEI, & OSWE.