

REGION 6 - ST. LAWRENCE

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The winter of 1997-1998 was one of the mildest on record. Only the beginning in November and the end in March provided significant bursts of real winter. While human inhabitants of northwest Lewis, most of Jefferson, and northern St. Lawrence counties will mark this winter by the great ice storm of the century, evidence of impacts on birds was minimal. While undoubtedly some increased mortality occurred, particularly for smaller species, this was probably more than compensated for by reductions in mortality due to the mild winter. While it might be difficult to convince those human residents who lacked power for up to 33 days that this was a easy winter, it was. For the rugged avian and human residents of northern New York the winter of 1997-98, sans the ice storm of the century, was an easy one.

Positives for the season include: 1) good numbers and diversity of half-hardies, as would be expected for a mild winter; 2) good numbers of most mouse-raptor hawks, although well below a great year; 3) Wild Turkeys everywhere; 4) continued increasing numbers of southern species such as Red-bellied Woodpecker and Tufted Titmouse [Is this really positive?]; 5) increasing frequency of Common Raven everywhere, even in lowland areas; 6) wintering warblers and Savannah Sparrow; and 7) a decent winter finch flight.

Negatives include: 1) awful waterfowl numbers, particularly for *Aythya* species on Lake Ontario, with once common species such as Greater Scaup becoming increasingly rare; 2) a scarcity of all owl species, including the usually conspicuous Snowy and Short-eared owls; and 3) a poor year for northern passerines other than finches.

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Abbreviations: BRB-Black River Bay; CV-Town of Cape Vincent JEFF; ELL-Town of Ellisburg JEFF; HEN-Town of Henderson JEFF; LOU-Town of Louisville STLA; LWMA-Lakeview Wildlife Management Area; MCBC-Massena Christmas Bird Count; MSPD-Moses Saunders Power Dam Area, including Head Pond; NBCBC-New Boston Christmas Bird Count; PILPT-Pillar Point Area; PTPEN-Point Peninsula Area; PTSAL-Point Salubrious Area; PRWMA-Perch River Wildlife Management Area; WFC-Federation of New York State Bird Clubs waterfowl count; WHWMA-Wilson Hill Wildlife Management Area.

LOONS-DUCKS

Red-throated Loon: 1 MSPD 10-28 Dec (MB BD), only report.

Com. Loon: 12 MCBC 28 Dec; max 1-2 per day scattered on large bodies of water to 16 Jan.

Horned Grebe: 1 MCBC 28Dec, only report, now very scarce in winter.

Red-necked Grebe: 2 MCBC 28Dec, only winter report.

Double-crested Cormorant: 1 BRB 5 Dec; 2 MSPD 11 Dec, only reports.

Great Blue Heron: max 6 PTPEN 13 DEC; scattered singles to early Jan.

Turkey Vulture: 1 Watertown CBC 21 Dec (GS), a rare verified winter report.

Snow Goose: 1 WHWMA 7Dec (MB); 2 Watertown CBC 21 Dec, the only true winter reports; spring migrants arrived en masse in late February, with 500 Woodville ELL 28 Feb.

Canada Goose: max 1000 BRB 24 Dec; a few hundred winter's"

Canada x White-Fronted Goose: 1 probable hybrid at Fishers Landing JEFF 15-16 Dec (NL,LBC), photographed and sent to Cornell, SUNYESF for verification.

Mute Swan: 2-3 per day BRB thru Dec, only true winter records; arr 10 PRWMA 26 Feb (BH).

Tundra Swan: max 125 PTPEN 24 Dec (LBC,BH), may be Regional record high and is extraordinary; 7 at PTPEN 21 January, equally amazing. Sometime soon this species may winter through.

Trumpeter Swan: pair PRWMA breeders present by late Feb.

Gadwall: 49 BRB 2 January (BH), high number for winter.

EURASIAN WIGEON: 1 ad male WHWMA 5 Oct (BD), rare regional record.

Am. Black Duck: max 156 WFC; most counts 4-15 per day.

Mallard: max 297 MCBC; most counts 10-20 per day.

N. Pintail: 1 PRWMA WFC, only winter report; arr 1 ELL 28 Feb.

Canvasback: 1 MSPD 16 Jan; 1 Town of Ogdensburg STLA 22 Feb, only reports.

Redhead: 500 Montario Pt ELL WFC, only report.

Ring-necked Duck: 1 male Town of Ogdensburg STLA 16 Dec(NL); 3 Watertown CBC (M.Brown), only winter reports.

Greater Scaup: becoming increasingly scarce, max 150 ELL 31 Jan; few elsewhere, with 7 WFC incredibly low!

Lesser Scaup: 1 MSPD late Jan-Feb (BD), only report.

White-winged Scoter: 100 Wellsley I SP 12 Dec, only report.

Oldsquaw: as with most other diving ducks scarce, max 110 Montario Pt ELL 21 Feb; most reports only 2-10 per day.

Bufflehead: very scarce, max 49 WFC; most 3-6 per day.

Com. Goldeneye: virtually the only common diving duck, 100-400 per day regular; max 1540 WFC.

Barrow's Goldeneye: 1 male mid Dec-mid Feb Fishers Landing JEFF (NL), only report.

Hooded Merganser: many more than a usual winter, 1-3 per day scattered on Lake Ontario and St.Lawrence River thru; max 10 PTPEN 8 Dec (LBC).

Com. Merganser: 100-200 per day most deepwater locations thru; max 1000 Wellsley I SP 12 Dec.

Red-breasted Merganser: 3 PRWMA WFC; 1 MSPD 5 Feb, only reports.

HAWKS-ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: Widely distributed as 1-4 per day around Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, generally open winter resulted in few concentrations.

N. Harrier: Fair numbers abd widely distributed in JEFF, 1-4 per day most areas through, 7 PTPEN and CV 24 Dec, max, few reports from other counties.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: Total 9 reports as 1-2 per day.

Coopers Hawk: Total 12 as 1-2 per day.

N. Goshawk: Total 9 reports as singles, a good seasons total. Red-tailed Hawk: Good numbers present, most counts 10-20 per day NW Jeff, fewer elsewhere, Max 63 PTPEN and CV 1 Feb(GS, MAK).

Rough-legged Hawk: 15-50 per day regularly in NW Jeff thru, Max 75 PT PEN and CV 24 Dec(GS, T.Carolan), very good

numbers but not at levels of 150-200 per day record years.

Am. Kestrel: Scarce, most winter counts 1 per day NW JEFF with many days without them, winter max 3 PTPEN and CV 24 Dec, 5 PTPEN and CV 23 Feb may include migrants.

Gray Partridge: 17, CV 24 Dec, max, most counts in their CV stronghold only 4-6 per day.

Ring-necked Pheasant: Virtually gone even as stocked birds, 5 Total in 4 reports, Most impressive is one male that survived at a feeder in Barnes Corners LEWI, on the Tug Hill Plateau, until being dispatched by a Northern Goshawk in late Jan.

Ruffed Grouse: scattered as 1-4 per day, Uncommon.

Wild Turkey: Population explosion continues as they are now fairly common everywhere including Lake Ontario Plain, most counts 10-20 per day however 40-60 per day counts are not uncommon.

COMMON MOORHEN: 1, probably injured at Beaver Meadows Marsh near Watertown JEFF (DMB, LBC) 28 Dec, Extraordinary here in winter.

Killdeer: Arrival 1 ELL 28 Feb. Red Phalarope: Fall report, 1, Hawkins Pt near MSPD 11 Nov (BD).

Little Gull: Fall report, 1, MSPD 18 Sept, rare in this region.

Ring-billed Gull: 10-30 per day early Dec, scarce thereafter until en masse arrival along Lake Ontario in third week of Feb.

Herring Gull: 3250, MSPD 10 Dec (BD), most high counts from MSPD with numbers elsewhere 15-50 per day.

Iceland Gull: 9 MSPD 29 Jan, max, a few other reports of singles, scarce away from MSPD.

Glaucous Gull: Max, 44 MSPD 29 Jan (BD), most records there 7 per day or less, only 1 report away from MSPD.

Great Black-backed Gull: Max, 1580 MSPD 5 Feb, most counts away from MSPD 5-20 per day.

Black-legged Kittiwake: Fall report, 1, MSPD 29 Oct, infrequent in this region.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS

Mourning Dove: Widespread as 20-75 per day in the Eastern Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River lowlands.

Great Horned Owl: 6, LOU 12 Dec (MB), max.

Snowy Owl: By our standards this was a terrible year, most records occurred during the first half of December as one per day scattered, Only a total of 6 all singles were recorded thereafter, definitely not a flight year.

Barred Owl: four scattered singles only. Short-eared Owl: 6, CV 24 Dec, max, most other records singles all from NW JEFF, a poor year.

Belted Kingfisher: A few scattered singles only, most unusual is 1 at the open outlet of Cranberry L STLA 21 Dec (LBC).

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Total 8 as 1-2 per day in JEFF, excellent number and reflects ongoing increase in this region.

N. Flicker: Total 15 as 1-3 per day mainly in NW JEFF, Good numbers for winter reflecting this mild year.

Pileated Woodpecker: 8, MCBC 28 Dec, max, many reports of 1-2 per day suggest species is doing well in our area.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS

N. Shrike: 1-3 per day widespread, a fair year locally. Gray Jay: 2, Seveys corners STLA 21 Dec (LBC), only report.

Blue Jay: 150, MCBC 28 Dec and 143 NBCBC 30 Dec, max.

Am. Crow: 600, Town of Hounsfield JEFF 3 Dec, max.

Com. Raven: Numbers continue to increase with the species now regularly occurring on the Lake Ontario Plain and in the St. Lawrence River Valley in winter, Max 8 NBCBC 30 Dec, Widespread as 1-2 per day scattered thru.

Horned Lark: Only a few scattered 1-2 per day until arr 21 Jan, 15-50 per day thereafter.

Black-capped Chickadee: Max, 467 NBCBC.

Tufted Titmouse: Total 11 reports are far more than usual, Max 4 MCBC.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Scarce, Only a few scattered reports of 1-3 per day, max 9 NBCBC.

White-breasted Nuthatch: 1-3 per day most areas, Max 56 MCBC is impressive.

Brown Creeper: Total 12 including 7 on MCBC.

Carolina Wren: 1, Kelsey Creek Watertown 2 Dec-5 Jan (DMB), only report.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: a few scattered singles, Max 4 NBCBC.

Eastern Bluebird: Fewer than in recent winters, Total 9 including 6 Wellsley Is. SP 3 Jan (DMB).

Am. Robin: Most reports 2-8 per day at lowland locations thru, max 28 Watertown 16 Feb.

N. Mockingbird: 1, Sacketts Harbor 2 Jan and 1 Deer Lick Rd CV 1 Feb, only reports but in many seasons we have none.

Bohemian Waxwing: 5, NBCBC 30 Dec and 12 Stony Pt 31 Jan, only reports. Cedar Waxwing Few reports, Max 116 NBCBC.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER: one at Brouse's feeder along Kelsey Creek in Watertown through period, late Nov - Mar 98. (DMB, M. Brown, DP, mob). First Winter record for Region.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 1, 1-31 Dec and 2 1-15 Jan all at Kelsey Creek feeder Watertown.

Am. Tree Sparrow: A poor season with all counts in the 15-75 per day range.

SAVANNAH SPARROW: Extraordinary are reports of 3 different individuals from PTPEN and CV 21 Jan-12

Feb (GS, MAK, NL), Species is virtually unknown in winter prior to these reports.

Song Sparrow: Total 4 singles to 19 January, more than usual.

White-throated Sparrow: Total 9 as 1-2 per day from all sectors.

White-crowned Sparrow: 1 Rays Bay Marsh HEN 24 Feb (LBC, BH) is rare report of a successful wintering individual.

Dark-eyed Junco: Most reports 2-8 per day, max 71 MCBC.

Lapland Longspur: 1-2 per day all from NW JEFF scattered thru period.

Snow Bunting: Most reports less than 100 per day, exception is 1000 near Lafargeville JEFF 28 Dec.

Red-winged Blackbird: 1, Kelsey Creek feeder Watertown 24 Dec, only winter report, Springarr 4 HEN 22 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: Max 11 MCBC. Pine Grosbeak: A good but not great flight year, widely distributed as 5-20 per day, maxs 40-70 per day primarily from CBCs. Purple Finch: Scarce few records mostly from CBCs, Max 18 LOU 1 Feb (MB).

Red Crossbill: Scattered records of 1-3 per day, Max 8 MCBC.

White-winged Crossbill: 6, NBCBC (NL, I. Mazzochi), only report.

Common Redpoll: widespread invasion, 50-150 per day all areas; high counts of 250 per day.

Hoary Redpoll: total 15 primarily as singles in large flocks of Common Redpoll. Given the magnitude of the Common Redpoll flight, these numbers are reasonable. Only reports from experienced observers are accepted, given the difficulty of Hoary Redpoll identification.

Pine Siskin: scattered reports of 1-8 per day to mid Jan, none thereafter.

Am. Goldfinch: fair numbers present at 10-50 per day; max 164 MCBC.

Evening Grosbeak: flocks of 15-100 per day present at many locations; max 258 NBCBC.

Late Fall Records

Pied-billed Grebe: 16 WHWMA 11 Oct (DB), excellent report.

Red-necked Grebe: 8 at MSPB 11 Nov (BD).

Gadwall: 660 WHWMA 5 Oct (BD), excellent fall count.

Ring-necked Duck: 3000 WHWMA 5 Oct (BD), extraordinary fall report.

Red Phalarope: 1 Hawkins Pt near MSPD 11 Nov (BD).

Little Gull: 1 MSPD 18 Sep, rare in Region.