

REGION 7 - ADIRONDACK-CHAMPLAIN

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The season began uneventfully enough. Plattsburgh was a sunny 44°F on 17 December, just prior to the Christmas Bird Counts. From bare ground on the Ferrisburg CBC [VT-NY], snow depths increased with time and elevation, reaching 14-28 inches of snow cover on the 28 December Saranac Lake CBC. A storm from the south on 30 December added another 13 inches at Lake Placid.

Inlet was -25°F on New Year's Day. Then on 4 January a warm front moved northward, bringing snow, but carrying a vast tonnage of tropical moisture. Meanwhile, an Arctic high anchored over southern Quebec sent down dense, cold air to wedge under the less dense warm front, setting up a classic temperature inversion. The stage was set for the Great Ice Storm of '98. Freezing rain began on 5 January, but the warm front sagged south and Plattsburgh returned to a foggy 47°F the next day. Then the warm front surged back and stalled for three days of frozen hell. Yet while Plattsburgh only reached 29°F on 7 January, Lake Placid was unscathed at 40°F. The sounds were incredible: the constant high-powered rifle shots of heavy, ice-laden pine boughs being stripped, the giant cracks and larger crashes of falling hardwoods, the background roar of overflowing brooks and rivers. With up to 5 inches of rain exceeding normal monthly totals of under 2 inches, rivers left their banks: the Ausable, Boquet, and Saranac on 8 January; the Salmon during thunderstorms the next day. Raquette Lake was a foot above record and the Forked Lake dam washed out. Up to 3 inches of ice wiped out more forest than the 1938 New England hurricane, Mount St. Helens, or the Yellowstone fires. The end of the millenium may see a subsequent surge of Mourning Warblers and Indigo Buntings.

Redpoll flocks disappeared from feeders in affected areas like Elizabethtown until 11 January, while Black-capped Chickadees flooded in (little wonder, with so many Quebec forests flattened). By early February, with conifers stripped of cones by the ice, White-winged Crossbills had been reported from at least 14 feeders in Clinton, Essex, and Franklin counties; this editor can recall but a single such report in the previous quarter-century.

Flooded roads and downed trees and power lines delayed the Federation Waterfowl Count until the second weekend of 17-18 January, except for an unaffected area around Ticonderoga done right after the ice storm.

The rest of the season was anticlimactic, with Plattsburgh 45°F on 2 February, bitter cold at mid month, a 24-25 February snowstorm, and mild at season's close. This was the third mildest February on record, after 1981 and 1984, and some 9.5°F above normal. At season's end, precipitation for the year was 6.99 inches, with 3.45 inches normal.

Conducted once before, in 1933, the Minerva Christmas Bird Count was revived after 64 years. More species were found in 1997 (22 vs. 9), as well as more individuals (721, up from 319), but this time there were both bird feeders and more observers (6, compared to 3). There are also fewer farmyards and pastures with livestock and logging horses, so Snow Buntings and House Sparrows were missed, along with Boreal Chickadees, which should be found as we grow more familiar with the remaining boreal habitat.

Cedar Waxwings were fairly abundant at lower elevations, with 258 found on the NYS side of the Ferrisburg count circle on 20 December. Bohemian Waxwings arrived later and in more modest numbers, with the first 30 at Peru on 3 January followed by sightings at Elizabethtown, Essex, Keene, Keene Valley, and Westport. Bohemians have now been recorded in all but two winters since 1979-80, although last year they delayed their appearance until the spring season. Among the winter finches, this was a good winter for Pine Grosbeaks, both crossbills, and both redpolls, and even Evening Grosbeaks put on a stronger performance than expected in recent years. Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches continued to decline after December.

In spite of the Great Ice Storm of '98, a total of 95 species was reported, back to more expected numbers after last winter's record 99 species. Rarities included **American Wigeons** on both the Ferrisburg and Saranac Lake counts, **Harlequin Duck** at Ausable Point, **Thayer's Gull** (!) at Plattsburgh, and an overwintering **Eastern Towhee** at Peru. A second winter Glaucous Gull was at Westport on the morning of the 20 December Ferrisburg CBC and eventually lifted off and headed inland with other gulls toward the Essex County landfill. A week later, on the 27 December Elizabethtown CBC, Joan Clark stationed herself outside the dump in late afternoon as the gulls were leaving for the lake, and her prescience was rewarded with what was undoubtedly the same large white-winged gull.

Five Adirondack-Champlain Regional sites have been designated Important Bird Areas (IBAs) by the National Audubon Society: Crown Point State Historic Site, Ferd's Bog, the Four Brothers, Huntington Forest Natural Area, and Spring Pond Bog Preserve.

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Abbreviations: AP - Ausable Point WMA; CH - Cumberland Head; ECBC - Elizabethtown CBC, 27 Dec; FCBC - Ferrisburg CBC, 20 Dec; FWC -

Federation Waterfowl Count, 10-18 Jan; MB Monty Bay; PB - Plattsburgh Bay; PCBC - Plattsburgh CBC, 21 Dec; SLCBC - Saranac Lake CBC, 28 Dec; TL - Tupper Lake; WB - Whallon's Bay.

LOONS-DUCKS

Horned Grebe: max 38 WB 6 Dec (TM), ESSE.

Red-necked Grebe: MB 3 Dec (NO); max 22 CH 18 Dec (BK).

Double-crested Cormorant: TL I Dec (CD), late and unusual inland.

Great Blue Heron: WB 5 Dec; FCBC; 2 PCBC, increasingly late in recent years.

Snow Goose: 5 SLCBC, overhead; arr Chazy 27Feb (H&RB), early CLIN by 7 days.

Wood Duck: 1-3 Westport 5-20 Dec (JP, J&PT); AP 6 Dec (TM); 2 PCBC, rare in winter.

Gadwall: 3 Westport 5 Dec (J&PT)-20 Dec (TB,KM,JP *et al*), late.

AM. WIGEON: 3 FCBC; 1 SLCBC, very rare and late.

Canvasback: 4 PB 4 Dec, typically low.

Ring-necked Duck: max 30, mostly drakes, Westport 5 Dec (JP, J&PT).

Gr. Scaup: max 700 PCBC.

Lesser Scaup: last Westport 24 Jan (RM), late.

HARLEQUIN DUCK: ad drake AP 27 Dec (HK)-3 Feb (BK,CM), second CLIN and third Regional record.

White-winged Scoter: max 7 CH 6 Dec.

Black Scoter: PB 4 Dec (BK,CM), late CLIN by 6 days.

Bufflehead: max 60 Westport 6 Dec (TM)

Com. Goldeneye: max 4,428 FWC.

Hooded Merganser: 10 MB 3 Dec; max 13 FWC; Essex 14 Feb (RM)-28 Feb (JK,WK,JP); AP 21 Feb (BK); Lincoln Pd 28 Feb (MG), a remarkable winter showing.

Com. Merganser: max 2,027 FWC.

HAWKS-ALCIDS

Osprey: Coll Bay 20 Dec (J&PT), highly unexpected, yet the third ESSE record in Dec since 1976.

Bald Eagle: 5-6 wintered TL; 5 FCBC; 3-5 Town of Hope along Sacandaga R; 4 NYS Eagle Survey; other reports from AP, Plattsburgh, West Chazy, and Westport, as well as Amtrak "Adirondack" crew, another strong showing.

Red-tailed Hawk: western dark-morph imm Westport 28 Feb (JK,WK,JP).

Peregrine Falcon: imm Peru 15 Dec (BK,CM); Scomotion Cr 19 Jan (BK); Saranac R mouth 9 Feb (RW), late.

Wild Turkey: widespread reports from a dozen locations in all 4 counties, including several feeder reports.

Am. Coot: Westport 19 Dec (KM,JP), rare in winter.

THAYER'S GULL: 2nd winter Plattsburgh Plaza 6 Dec (J&RH!).

Iceland Gull: Saranac R mouth 9 Feb (GW), 24 days late CLIN.

Glaucous Gull: 2nd winter FCBC and ECBC, *intro*.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: Willsboro 10 Feb (fide GL), only report.

Belted Kingfisher: Point au Roche 4 Jan (HK); WB 10 Feb (RH), late.

Black-backed Woodpecker: 2 SLCBC, only report.

N. Flicker: 3 FCBC; 1 ECBC; PCBC; Point au Roche 3 Jan (CM), late yet increasingly typical.

Pileated Woodpecker: max 13 ECBC, high.

FLYCATCHERS-WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 8 reported, relatively low.

Gray Jay: max 10 SLCBC; Raquette L feeder thru; Rt 28 Long L 24 Feb.

Com. Raven: max 23 ECBC.

Boreal Chickadee: 1 ECBC; 4 SLCBC, only reports.

Tufted Titmouse: max 9 ECBC and PCBC; 4 FCBC; pr reappeared Elizabethtown feeder 17 Jan, after disappearing with ice storm (JP).

Red-breasted Nuthatch: max 165 ECBC, relatively abundant.

Carolina Wren: Westport 6-20 Dec, only record.

E. Bluebird: max 21 FCBC; Adirondak Loj 27 Feb (J&PT), highly unexpected.

Am. Robin: max 21 FCBC, numbers down from winter 1996-97.

Bohemian Waxwing: arr 30 Peru 3 Jan (JD); max 83 Keene Valley 19 Jan (RM); 2 roadkills Essex 7 Feb (DS); other sightings Elizabethtown, Keene, and Westport.

Cedar Waxwing: max 258 FCBC; 78 PCBC; 68 ECBC; 20 Elizabethtown 6 Jan at start of ice storm (JP), more abundant than previous species in most areas.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: count week PCBC, only report.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS

EASTERN TOWHEE: Peru 28 Nov-24 Feb (JD,BH-photo), overwintering.

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 26 FCBC, numbers extremely low compared to 1996-97.

Song Sparrow: 1 FCBC; 2 PCBC, only reports.

White-throated Sparrow: Keene thru 1 Feb (MB,RM), only report.

White-crowned Sparrow: 1 FCBC at Essex feeder, rare here in winter.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 87 PCBC, lower than previous winter.

Lapland Longspur: North Farm Rd, CLIN, 31 Dec (GW), always an excellent find.

Snow Bunting: max 125 TL 12 Jan (CD), excellent for interior; smaller flocks from ECBC, PCBC, Essex, Gabriels, and Whallonsburg.

Red-winged Blackbird: 2 SLCBC, overwintered Speculator; 2 Keene Valley 2 Feb; max 10 Keene Valley 14 Feb (RM), the latter perhaps representing early arrivals.

Com. Grackle: 5 SLCBC, only report.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 11 PCBC; 2 SLCBC; Speculator Dec (PK), numbers clearly down in recent winters.

Pine Grosbeak: max 52 SLCBC; at least a dozen other reports, including some at

HAMI feeders and an ad male at an Elizabethtown feeder with Evening Grosbeaks 16 Jan, in the wake of the ice storm (JP).

Purple Finch: 29 PCBC, only report.

House Finch: 151 PCBC, only report.

Red Crossbill: max 131 FCBC; record 63 ECBC; 15 SLCBC; 24 Elizabethtown 9 Dec; flock Westport 11 Dec; roadkill New Russia 13 Dec, most common in lower elevation areas with bumper white pine cone crop.

White-winged Crossbill: max 446 ECBC; record 73 FCBC; 31 PCBC; 19 SLCBC; 9 CLIN feeders; 4 ESSE feeders; 1 FRAN feeder following ice storm, an unprecedented influx.

Com. Redpoll: The regular flock disappeared from Elizabethtown feeder 6 Jan, where 24 reappeared 11 Jan following ice storm (JP); some dying north end Raquette L. Dec; max 500 Upper Jay 20 Feb (RM); 3000+ Speculator 14 Feb (PK); 301 FCBC; 242 PCBC; 204 SLCBC, extremely widespread and numerous.

Hoary Redpoll: max 3 FCBC and SLCBC; 1 *exilipes* subspecies ECBC returned to the same Elizabethtown feeder 7 Feb (RM,JP,DS); Port Henry 17 Feb (RB).

Pine Siskin: max 219 ECBC, reappeared Elizabethtown 12 Jan following storm.

Am. Goldfinch: max 56 PCBC, increasingly scarce since late autumn.

Evening Grosbeak: max 407 SLCBC; reappeared Elizabethtown 12 Jan in the wake of the Great Ice Storm of '98.

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