

REGION 5 - ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

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December's average temperature was 35.4° F, an amazing 7.1° above normal. Precipitation at only 1.74 inches was 1.46 inches below normal. Participants in the early Christmas Bird Counts on 19-20 December had been concerned about everything being open, but that was no longer the case by the end of the month. The last ten days of December saw a rapid cooling and much open water froze over the last several days of the month. January saw an average temperature of 22.5°F which was 0.1° above normal. There were 5.33 inches of precipitation, 2.99 inches above normal, and of course it was nearly all snow, 50.7 inches, and 47 inches of that fell in the first 15 days of the month. February was quite balmy by local standards, with an average temperature of 29.6°F, 5.6° above normal. On thirteen days the daily high was at least 40°. There were only 1.43 inches of precipitation, 0.72 inches below normal, with 5.7 inches of snow.

Yellow-billed Loon two years running? As hard as that is to believe, it happened when Matt Perry found one on West Canada Creek below Hinckley Dam on 18 January. There was some debate about the age of the bird, second year or full adult, or even if there was an identifiable age difference discernable in the field. Given the species infrequent occurrence in the East, , it would seem to be extremely coincidental for two different birds to show up in the same general area in two consecutive years. What are the odds? Can we stretch them to this bird being the same as the bird of '97?

Two Great Cormorants that showed up at the end of November in Oswego and stayed the winter, with the immature bird beginning to grow

some dark breast feathers by the end of the season. Double-crested Cormorants did not fare as well. Mary Alice Koenke reported six cormorants unable to fly with ice on their wings and two already dead on 2 January. What had been nearly 50 birds on 15 December became zero by 20 January. Koenke also had single Harlequin Ducks, a female and an immature male, at two locations along Lake Ontario on 17 January. Then, three Harlequins were found at the end of Lakeview Road in Scriba on 20 January, and by the 22nd they had become five, three males and two females. This would appear to be the highest count ever in the state away from Long Island.

Snow Geese were still moving through the Region well into December, and, even though their numbers have greatly increased recently, we usually only see stragglers in winter. The warm December allowed a record number of Northern Shovelers as well as high numbers of American Wigeon and Ruddy Ducks to linger well into the month. There were large numbers of *Aythya* ducks that arrived during the worst part of winter in early January. It is likely they were trying to winter even farther north than Region 5 and were pushed to the open water that remained here. [RHed: Or they were scattered all over the Region and/or neighboring Regions and concentrated as open water froze.] Surf and Black scoters, often missed in winter, were seen with some frequency, Barrow's Goldeneye returned to Brewerton for the second year, and American Coot also wintered in the Region in large numbers.

No Turkey Vultures were reported from the Dewitt area, where they attempted to winter in previous years, but Bald Eagles continue to winter along Lake Ontario and the Oswego River system including Onondaga Lake. Harriers were fairly common through December but departed with the heavy January snowfall, while Rough-legged Hawks were scarce until February. Reports from Oneida County indicate that Merlin is on the increase as a winter resident.

Killdeer on the Syracuse and Utica CBC's were a result of the mild fall and December, and Purple Sandpiper was able to linger at two locations into December as the Lake Ontario shoreline didn't begin icing up until later than most years. One Common Snipe wintered at the Harbor Brook wetland in Syracuse where they have wintered before.

Iceland and Glaucous gulls were found on the Oswego River after mid-December. In February both species peaked in Oswego, where two adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls in different plumages were also found. Bonaparte's Gull lingered on open waters in good numbers into December and two remained on Onondaga Lake in January, rather late. A Black-legged Kittiwake in Oswego Harbor in December continued the

recent trend of early winter sightings. One Thayer's Gull was seen on the Oswego River in Phoenix and several other birds whose size and plumage characteristics seemed to fit Thayer's were also seen. On the latter birds it was felt that not every feature could safely be called Thayer's and that these birds could be either darkly marked Iceland Gulls or Thayer's/Kumlien's intergrades (or that they are the same species anyway).

All seven commonly occurring owl species were reported during the season but it was not an owl winter. There was only one sighting of Snowy Owl and despite some checking for Short-eared Owl, only one was found. Two Red-headed Woodpeckers were more than usual while a single Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was just about the norm. A Red-bellied Woodpecker wintering in the Adirondack foothills looks like another small step in that species' range extension.

Horned Larks wintered successfully in the agricultural areas of the Region even with the heavy January snowfall. In the Adirondacks, Black-capped Chickadee and Red-Breasted Nuthatch counts were good indicating adequate food sources near the breeding grounds. Carolina Wren was reported from many locations around Syracuse during the season, and the generally mild winter certainly helped their reestablishment efforts. As in past years, Perry found Yellow-rumped Warblers wintering in Oneida County feeding on poison ivy berries, and they were found on Howland Island as well.

Snow Buntings that remained in Oswego County into January were forced to move by the deep snow and by the 7th many found their way to feeders in the county. Birders received numerous reports of Snow Buntings, usually named but sometimes just described, coming to feeders where they had never been seen in the past. Most of the buntings departed within a week but some stayed until the end of the month.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Gray Catbird, Common Yellowthroat, Swamp Sparrow, White-Crowned Sparrow, Rusty Blackbird and Eastern Meadowlark were all good winter finds, but the big miss in an otherwise fine half-hardy year was Hermit Thrush. It was a disappointing finch year. Crossbills, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin and Evening Grosbeak were all found in the Adirondacks in small numbers, but they were quite scarce elsewhere while Pine Grosbeak and redpolls never irrupted.

A total of 127 species was seen for the season, which is well above average and reflects both the rarities and the lingering birds. The highlights were Yellow-billed Loon, Great Cormorant, Harlequin Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Thayer's Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Red-headed Woodpecker.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

Bvllle - Baldwinsville, CM - Clay Marsh, DH - Derby Hill, DL - Delta Lake, FH - Fair Haven, Little Sodus Bay and vicinity, HIWMA - Howland Island WMA, LOL - Lake Ontario Littoral, Oneil - Oneida Lake, OnonL - Onondaga Lake, SVB - Sylvan and Verona Beach, Syr - Syracuse, TRWMA - Three Rivers WMA, UM - Utica Marsh, WPd - Woodman Pond

LOONS-DUCKS

Red-throated Loon: singles Oswego 20 Dec and WPd 20 Dec.

Com. Loon: max 6 DL 3 Dec; scattered singles LOL into Feb.

YELLOW-BILLED LOON: 1 Hinckley 18 Jan -1 Feb (MP, DJC ph, NYSARC).

Pied-billed Grebe: max 3 Phoenix 17 Jan; last 1 Brewerton 30 Jan.

Horned Grebe: max 24 Nine Mile Pt 17 Jan.

Red-necked Grebe: 2 OnonL to 19 Dec, only report.

GREAT CORMORANT: ad and juv Oswego all season (mob).

Double-crested Cormorant: max 48 Oswego 15 Dec; 6 ice coated birds Oswego 2 Jan, incapable of flight; none after 20 Jan.

Great Blue Heron: max 9 OnonL 19 Dec, 6 still present late Feb.

Turkey Vulture: 1 Camillus 7 Feb, only report.

Snow Goose: max 1000 Bridgewater 19 Dec; at least 3 other flocks of 200-500 late Dec.

Canada Goose: max 3500 WPd 20 Dec.

Mute Swan: max 4 Leland Pond 7 Jan; 5 other singles reported.

Tundra Swan: 10 WPd 24 Jan, where unusual; 5 FH after 30 Jan, continues recent trend of late migrants.

Wood Duck: max 4 UM 16 Dec; last OnonL 24 Jan.

Gadwall: max 26 OnonL 19 Dec.

Am. Wigeon: max 20 TRWMA 5 Dec; 20 WPd 11 Dec; last 10 WPd 20 Dec.

Am. Black Duck: max 150 WPd 20 Dec.

Mallard: max 500 WPd 20 Dec.

N. Shoveler: max 28 OnonL 19 Dec, unprecedented winter numbers.

N. Pintail: max 14 UM 10 Dec; 2 FH 23 Jan thru.

Green-winged Teal: max 16 OnonL 19 Dec; 4 Meadowbrook Syr thru Feb.

Canvasback: max 150 FH 30 Jan.

Redhead: max 400 LOL 30 Jan.

Ring-necked Duck: max 134 Skaneateles L 16 Jan.

Greater Scaup: max 473 Skaneateles L 16 Jan.

Lesser Scaup: max 275 FH 30 Jan, more than usual.

Harlequin Duck: max 5 Lakeview Road L Ontario 22-24 Jan (DN, mob), inland record high; first 2 different L Ontario sites 17 Jan (MAK).

Surf Scoter: 3 LOL 5 Jan thru.

White-winged Scoter: max 7 LOL 24 Feb.

Black Scoter: 1 ad Nine Mile Point 17 Jan; 2 imm Oswego 7 Feb.

Oldsquaw: max 550 LOL 17 Jan.

Bufflehead: max 75 Oswego 10 Jan.

Com. Goldeneye: max 770 FH 30 Jan.

Barrow's Goldeneye: 1 Brewerton 3 Jan thru (CS).

Hooded Merganser: max 22 WPd 11 Dec; wintered Oswego R.

Com. Merganser: max 1340 OnonL 19 Dec, lower than most years.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 167 Oswego 20 Dec.

Ruddy Duck: max 59 Minoa 19 Dec, higher winter counts only in 1980 and 1983; 1 Oswego 20 Jan thru.

HAWKS-ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: about 4-6 wintering OnonL, Oswego R and LOL; 1 ad UM 30 Jan; 1 ad DL Feb 17; pair Big Moose after 15 Jan; pair Taylor Pd Herk 25 Feb.

N. Harrier: max 3 Sangerfield 29 Dec; singles not uncommon to 15 Jan; 1 West Winfield 14 Feb, only report after.

N. Goshawk: singles Parish 2 Jan and Boylston 21 Jan.

Rough-legged Hawk: scattered singles Dec-Jan; max 10 Fairfield 25 Feb; 7 Schroepfel 14 Feb.

Am. Kestrel: reports of 17 birds; persistent at OSWE locations despite deep snow.

Merlin: 2 Onondaga Pk Syr, where they have wintered since 1991; 1 imm New Hartford 7 Feb; 1 ad male New Hartford 27 Feb; 1 Utica 5 Jan.

Peregrine Falcon: 1 Derby Hill 25 Feb, only verified report.

Ring-necked Pheasant: scattered reports involving 8-10 inds.

Am. Coot: max 140 WPd 11 Dec; last 50 WPd 31 Dec; up to 40 LOL and Oswego R Jan-Feb, many more than most years.

Killdeer: last 2 Syr and 1 Oriskany 19 Dec; arr Sandy Pond 23 Feb.

Purple Sandpiper: last FH 13 Dec.

Com. Snipe: 1 Harbor Brook Syr thru.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 25 SB 15 Dec; 2 OnonL 17 Jan, late.

Thayer's Gull: 1 Phoenix 3 Feb, 1st winter (MR, NYSARC).

Iceland Gull: max 10 Oswego 24 Feb.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: 1 second winter Phoenix 30 Jan, only report.

Glaucous Gull: max 5 Oswego 22 Feb.

Black-legged Kittiwake: 1 imm Oswego 13 Dec (BH).

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS

Mourning Dove: at feeders Eagle Bay and Old Forge all winter; max 140 West Winfield 29 Dec.

E. Screech-Owl: 8 birds reported.

Great Horned Owl: on nest Cicero 19 Feb and DL 27 Feb.

Snowy Owl: 1 imm Fairfield 8 Jan, only report.

Barred Owl: singles at Beaver L, Whiskey Hollow, and Old Forge.

Long-eared Owl: singles Paris 11-17 Jan and Kirkland 21 Jan.

Short-eared Owl: 1 Liverpool 12 Jan, only report.

N. Saw-whet Owl: 1 Old Forge 7 Dec, only report.

Belted Kingfisher: many Dec reports; scarce Jan; increase in numbers during mild Feb.

Red-headed Woodpecker: single imms Rome 26 Dec and T Van Buren 30 Jan thru.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: 1 east of Boonville 31 Jan, beyond accepted range.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: 1 Syr 19 Dec, only report.

Black-backed Woodpecker: 1 Windfall Pd 21 Feb, only report.

N. Flicker: only 5 reports after Dec.

FLYCATCHERS-WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: max 2 Fairfield 25 Feb; 1 TRGMA Jan-Feb, only persistent bird; about 5 other reports.

Fish Crow: 2 Shop City Plaza area of Syr all season; 2 Liverpool late Feb.

Com. Raven: max 3 Windfall Pd 21 Feb.

Horned Lark: max 121 Skaneateles 2 Jan.

Black-capped Chickadee: 55 along 2.5

miles of Adk trail 21 Feb, indicates little movement.

Boreal Chickadee: singles Limekiln Swamp 30 Dec and Windfall Pd 21 Feb.

Tufted Titmouse: 3-5 per day many locations, increasing.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: scarce away from breeding areas; sporadic at feeders Jan-Feb.

Brown Creeper: max 3 per day.

Carolina Wren: about 6-8 reported from Syr area; 1 Brewerton to early January, flew into garage and got caught in a mouse trap.

Winter Wren: singles New Hartford thru 27 Dec and UM thru 24 Dec.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 7 Kirkland 4 Dec; common many locations.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: 1 UM thru 16 Dec; 1 Pompey feeder after 7 Jan, missed most winters.

E. Bluebird: max 9 T Van Buren 7 Feb; numerous reports especially LOL, Oswego R, and Van Buren.

Am. Robin: flocks of 50+ LOL Jan despite deep snow; 80-130 ONEI in Feb.

Gray Catbird: 1 UM 16-24 Dec, only report.

N. Mockingbird: max 4 Syr Fairgrounds 19 Dec; 7 at 5 other sites.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 1 Oswego 20 Dec; max 2 Kirkland 19 Dec; 2 Howland Island WMA 1 Jan; individuals seen Kirkland thru.

Com. Yellowthroat: 1 Dewitt 6 Dec (SB, BG).

TANAGERS-WEAVERS

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 78 Rome 26 Dec; many observers thought this to be an above average year.

Song Sparrow: max 4 Pumpkin Hollow 16 Jan; uncommon even in Dec.

Swamp Sparrow: 2 CM 2 Dec; 1 UM to 24 Dec.

White-throated Sparrow: max 20 at

Pompey feeder all season; 1 Big Moose 11 Jan, rare winter in Adks.

White-crowned Sparrow: singles Dewitt 6 Dec and Skaneateles 2 Jan.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 70 Pompey 1 Jan; subspecies oreganus: 1 Utica 19 Dec; mearnsi: 1 Parsh after 1 Jan (MS!).

Lapland Longspur: max 8 Cato 10 Feb, present for 2 weeks (GP); 1 Sangerfield 16 Feb.

Snow Bunting: coming to many OSWE feeders 7-21 Jan during heavy snows; also at a Big Moose feeder 11 Jan; max 800 Cato 2 Feb.

N. Cardinal: 2 pairs wintered Old Forge.

Red-winged Blackbird: scattered reports of 1-3 with last Bville 9 Jan; arr 2 CM 16 Feb with many reports after 25 Feb.

E. Meadowlark: 1 Utica 19 Dec, only report.

Rusty Blackbird: 1 Oriskany 21 Dec; 3 Skaneateles 2 Jan.

Com. Grackle: last Dewitt 13 Dec; arr 3 West Winfield 14 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: unusually high winter numbers, maxima include 60 Schroepel 17 Jan; 30 Pompey 26 Dec to 12 Jan; 33 NH 13 Jan; 10 Van Buren 1 Feb; arr 50 Van Buren 28 Feb.

Purple Finch: 1 T Western early Dec; max 6 Forestport 29 Jan, otherwise few reports - low numbers.

House Finch: numbers relatively low; max 45 Dewitt 25 Dec.

Red Crossbill: small numbers Adks.

White-winged Crossbill: small numbers Adks.

Pine Siskin: not in Adks until mid-Feb; max 20 Windfall Pd 20 Feb.

Am. Goldfinch: low numbers, max 20 UM 10 Dec; also 20 NH 12 Dec

Evening Grosbeak: max 15 Eagle Bay after 7 Jan; 2 Utica 19 Dec; 1 Boylston 21 Jan, only reports away from Adks.

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NO REGION 6 REPORT WAS RECEIVED FOR THIS SEASON