

GULLS ON THE NIAGARA FRONTIER: AN UPDATE

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INTRODUCTION

Twenty-three years ago, Robert F. Andrle's paper, *Gull's on the Niagara Frontier* appeared in *The Kingbird* (Andrle 1977a). The Niagara Frontier is synonymous with Kingbird Region One (Fig. 1). This excellent piece summarized the status of gull species known to have occurred. In addition, Andrle discussed reasons why the Niagara Frontier is so attractive to gulls, fluctuations in numbers and factors influencing them, movements within and through the Region, concentration areas and places to observe gulls. Much has changed since his paper. New species of gulls have been added, some populations have increased, while others have declined. Environmental changes, both natural and man-made, have affected the populations of gulls and where they concentrate. This paper addresses some of the changes that have taken place during the more than two decades since Andrle's publication.

Central to any work on gulls on the Niagara Frontier is the role of the Niagara River (Fig. 2), one of the premier sites in North America, if not the world, for these birds. The Niagara R. was recently proclaimed an Important Bird Area (IBA), in part because of the significant numbers of Bonaparte's and Herring gulls that occur. All nineteen species of gulls that have been recorded in the Region have also been found on the Niagara R.

Fourteen species in one day, the new standard for the river, was reached on 25 Nov 1995. The "blizzard" of gulls spectacle that Andrle mentioned still occurs. While estimating and especially counting gulls on the river remains difficult, some strides have been made in that regard. For example, Gordon Bellerby of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, has made several dozen careful counts of Bonaparte's Gulls at the mouth of the river.

SPECIES LIST

There has been a total of 19 species of gulls identified. Each has been seen on the Niagara R. at least once. The status of the four most common species has not changed since 1977. They are Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*), Ring-billed Gull (*L. delawarensis*), Herring Gull (*L. argentatus*) and Great Black-backed Gull (*L. marinus*). The other species recorded are Laughing Gull (*L. atricilla*),

Franklin's Gull (*L. pipixcan*), Little Gull (*L. minutus*), Black-headed Gull (*L. ridibundus*), Mew Gull (*L. canus*), California Gull (*L. californicus*), Thayer's Gull (*L. thayeri*), Iceland Gull (*L. glaucoides*), Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*), Slaty-backed Gull (*L. schistisagus*), Glaucous Gull (*L. hyperboreus*), Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*), Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*) and Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*). Mew, California, Slaty-backed and Ross's gulls are new additions since 1977, and remarkably, these three species were discovered by gull enthusiasts from Michigan, Rod and Marlene Planck, in a period of less than one week in 1992!

Andrle and others (e.g. Bull 1974 and Beardslee and Mitchell 1965) considered that two subspecies of Iceland Gull had occurred, both the nominate *glaucoides*, and the form *kumlieni*. However, Brinkley (1998) claimed that there was no hard evidence, such as a specimen, to support the occurrence of *glaucoides*. D'Anna (1997) mentioned a specimen at the Buffalo Museum of Science that showed characteristics more typical of the nominate. Further examination and measurements of the specimen are necessary, which still may not prove conclusive given that data on the bare parts are missing and that there is extensive overlap of the two forms.

POPULATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

It is difficult to know if annual populations of the four most common species of gulls in the Niagara Frontier have changed much in recent years. From year to year, however, undoubtedly the number and distribution of gulls varies considerably, due to the same factors elucidated by Andrle such as "fish abundance and distribution, weather conditions, water levels, icing of water bodies, and human-induced changes involving breeding sites, power generating stations, refuse disposal and ice boom." However, hard data on these fluctuations are difficult to obtain, mostly for the reason that gulls move about constantly on the Niagara R. as well as fly back and forth to the two power reservoirs adjacent to the river and Lakes Erie and Ontario. They do this not only from day to day but at times from hour to hour. The Niagara R.'s status as an IBA may provide impetus to develop the methods and recruit the volunteers needed to properly census the gulls. In 1998 and 1999, after the IBA designation, D. V. Chip Weseloh of the Canadian Wildlife Service conducted such a census of Bonaparte's Gulls on the river with the aid of many volunteers.

Though peak numbers visible from shore on the Great Lakes are much lower than on the Niagara R., the gulls are somewhat more easily counted there. The Hamlin Beach Lake Watch, 25 miles west of Rochester on Lake Ontario in the Genesee Region, conducts daily waterbird counts in the fall, including Bonaparte's Gulls. These gulls are almost invariably flying toward the Niagara

R., 60 miles to the west. Although many are believed to turn into the river, this has not been proven. Still, the counts at Hamlin Beach are probably at least indicative of the numbers found along Lake Ontario in the Niagara Frontier Region.

There have been some major environmental changes since Andrie. For one, the Niagara R. and the Great Lakes are much less toxic, due in large part to anti-pollution agreements between Canada and the United States. Knapton and Weseloh (1999) summarized trends in PCBs found in Herring Gull eggs, showing a dramatic drop during the last two decades. In addition they compared the level of PCBs in the eggs of Herring Gulls breeding on the Niagara R. with that of Herring Gulls breeding on each of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence R. in 1998. Birds on the Niagara showed the lowest level of PCBs.

A major recent impact on the ecology of the region has been the accidental introduction of an alien species, the Zebra Mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*). More recently another alien mussel, the Quagga (*Dreissena bugensis*) has also been accidentally introduced. The Zebra mussel has spread throughout the Great Lakes ecosystem and has caused problems for business and utility owners because of its habit of attaching to pipe inlets in dense clusters. These organisms filter particulates from the water, clarifying Regional waters to a degree that has never been seen before in modern times. The mussels may compete for food with forage fish, thus reducing their numbers and in turn, reducing the amount of prey available to gulls. In addition they may also be competing with the caddisflies (family Hydropsychidae) on the Niagara R. Local residents believe that these insects occur in greatly reduced numbers than formerly. Possibly as a result, the late summer and early fall concentrations of Bonaparte's Gulls on the Niagara R. seem to be much reduced in recent years.

A potential environmental change involves the power plant in Dunkirk. Warm water discharged from the plant keeps Dunkirk Harbor open through the winter, serving to attract large numbers of gulls and waterfowl. The new owners of the plant have discussed discontinuing this practice, which would effectively eliminate the site for gulls when Lake Erie ices over, as it does most winters.

There have been few changes in the manner, extent and locations of ice formation. Dunkirk Harbor, Lake Ontario and much of the Niagara R. normally remain ice-free all winter. The numbers of gulls found during a typical winter at these locations is highly variable from year to year. Whereas garbage dumps have attracted large numbers of gulls including several rare species, the viability of those sites is limited. As Andrie pointed out, landfills are fewer than in the past and more controlled, reducing food availability to gulls. In addition access for

birders to landfill sites is usually not permitted. Still, sizeable concentrations do occur at times and one recent addition to the list, the Slaty-backed Gull, was first found at the landfill in Niagara Falls, Ontario.

An abundance of gulls has been a feature of the Niagara R. throughout its recorded history. There have been many man-made changes but if anything these have served to increase the number of gulls here. Were the power plants and the ice boom to be removed, numbers would be reduced but it seems certain that, barring an environmental disaster, gulls will remain a permanent feature of the Niagara R. landscape.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*). This species is very rare though it has been recorded in almost every month of the year. Most records are from the Lake Erie shoreline. However, it has also been seen on the Niagara R., Lake Ontario and inland in Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties. On only two occasions were more than two birds observed. On 10-15 Oct 1977 up to six were at Dunkirk Harbor (Andrle 1977b) and following the passage of the remains of Hurricane Fran in Sep 1996, five were found at the south end of the Niagara R. (D'Anna 1996).

Franklin's Gull (*Larus pipixcan*). At the time of Andrle's paper in 1977, this gull was considered to be increasing. However, since then it has become rare again with only one or two sightings in some years. The great majority of sightings are from the Niagara R. with a few from Lake Erie and only one or two from Lake Ontario. Most records are between mid August and late November. The maximum is still 11 on the Niagara R. 1 Nov 1967, as cited by Andrle. After the passage of the Veteran's Day storm of 1998, Franklin's Gulls were blown into several midwestern and eastern states. A half-dozen or so of these birds were found, most on the Niagara R., and some were in the rarely observed adult plumage. The one day maximum for this event was only three (D'Anna 1998a, Morgante 1998) but this is the second highest count in the nineties with the maximum of four occurring in Nov 1990 (Planck 1990).

Little Gull (*Larus minutus*). The Little Gull has an interesting history in the Niagara Frontier. It was increasing in 1977 and is still doing so if maximum counts are an indication. Whereas the highest counts formerly occurred in late summer and fall, far greater numbers now are found in late winter and early spring. The maximum recorded in one day was 85 on 19 Mar 1999 (Bellerby 1999). These birds were counted at the mouth of the Niagara R. as they flew to their evening roost on Lake Ontario. Little Gulls have been found every month

of the year except June. Adults greatly outnumber immatures though a few of the latter are found most years. This species is almost always with Bonaparte's Gulls and most sightings are on the river with the Lewiston-Queenston area a favored site. However, sightings from Lakes Erie and Ontario are recorded annually.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*). There are slightly fewer sightings of this species than in the seventies and eighties. It is rare but found most years on the Niagara R. from late fall through spring, occurring with Bonaparte's Gulls. Nearly all sightings involve adults. The 1971 record of two birds at Dunkirk Harbor, mentioned by Andrle, remains the only sighting away from the Niagara R. On only one other occasion were two birds observed. These were at the mouth of the river on 20 Apr 1994 (Bellerby 1994).

Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*). At times in the fall and spring this species is the most abundant gull on the Niagara R. Less often it is the most numerous gull on Lakes Erie and Ontario, this occurring on days when they are migrating. The maximum one-day count at Hamlin Beach on Lake Ontario was 5750 on 2 Dec 1997 and the maximum seasonal count (Sep through Dec) was 32,081 in 1997 (Braddock Bay Raptor Research, unpublished data). Bonaparte's Gulls are uncommon to rare migrants on other area water bodies, with few counts over 100 (BOS Database). The highest estimates of 100,000 and 75,000 on the Niagara R. mentioned by Andrle have not been reported since. However, Gordon Bellerby of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario has conducted several dozen counts from 1986 to the present. These counts are done at the mouth of the Niagara R. at dusk as the gulls fly to their nighttime roost on Lake Ontario. Bellerby's highest fall or winter count was 40,000 on 8 Dec 1990 and again on the same date in 1991. The highest spring count was 50,000 on 21 Apr 1997 (Bellerby, unpublished data). Bellerby's highest counts may suggest that this species is just as common in spring as in fall, unlike what had been previously supposed. The great majority of Bonaparte's Gulls occurring on the Niagara R. are adults and it is assumed that many of the same individuals migrate through in fall and spring.

Weseloh conducted a census of Bonaparte's Gulls on the Niagara R. in 1998. Many observers, each covering a short stretch of the river at the same time, counted all individuals at 9:00 a.m. and 12 noon on four dates in late Nov and mid Dec. The maximum count for each day was compared to the sum of the "fly-by" counts conducted at dusk on the same dates at the source and the mouth of the river. The agreement between the daytime and dusk counts was very good, suggesting that most of the Bonaparte's Gulls using the river were tallied during the daytime survey. Although the maximum daytime count was only 6858 on 12 Dec (Weseloh, unpublished data), the species was considerably less numerous in 1998 than during an average year and its numbers peaked after the census.

Beardslee (1944) described the dichotomous fall migration of this species with large influxes into the Niagara R. and eastern Lake Erie in August and September, a decrease in Oct, and another large influx in Nov and Dec. This two part migration was an obvious feature until the 1990s, when a marked decrease in the late summer movement was noted (personal observation). Generally, at least a few of this species overwinter on the Niagara R. or at Dunkirk Harbor. During mild winters they may stay in the low thousands. Several other species of gulls are searched for within flocks of Bonaparte's, including Franklin's, Little, Black-headed, Sabine's, Black-legged, Kittiwake, and Ross's.

Mew Gull (*Larus canus*). Andrle listed this gull since it had been found just a few miles west in Ontario and considered it a likely addition. The actual initial record involved an adult found by Rod Planck 25 Nov 1992 on the Queenston, Ontario Reservoir and subsequently observed at the power plants on the Niagara R. 4 Dec (Bain 1993). On 3 Dec of the same year another adult was found at Dunkirk Harbor (Sundell 1993). Both individuals were identified as the North American race, *L. c. brachyrhynchus*. An immature of this form was discovered below Niagara Falls 10 Nov 1996 (NYSARC 1999). One week later an immature was at the power plants on the Niagara R. (NYSARC 1999) and another immature was found in Jamestown 21 Dec 1997 (Sundell, pers. comm.). The Mew Gull should be looked for among Ring-billed Gulls although at least one of the birds at the power plants on the river was among a large group of predominantly Herring Gulls.

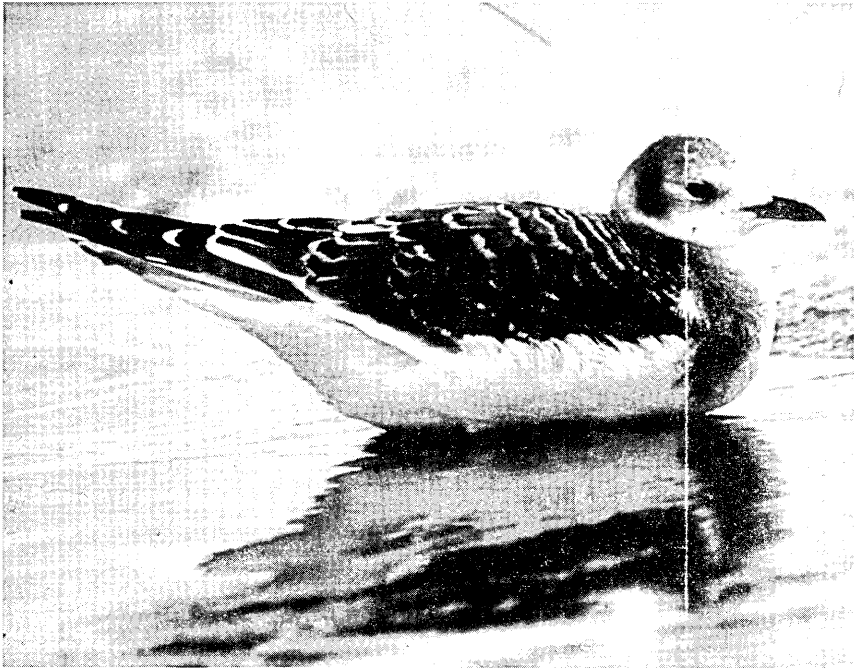
Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*). This gull was increasing in 1977. It ranges widely inland where it is locally common and occurs abundantly on the Great Lakes and Niagara R. It is the most common gull during the summer as well as much of the spring and fall. Less abundant than the Herring Gull in winter, it is still numerous then. It breeds along the Niagara R., perhaps in greater numbers than formerly. Nesting colonies may be monitored more closely now which could account for an apparent increase. In 1997, 5024 nesting pairs were found on the Niagara R. and Buffalo Harbor (DEC 1997). This census did not even include the largest colony which in previous years held over 3000 pairs.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*). The first record of this species, an adult, was discovered by Marlene and Rod Planck at the power plants on the Niagara R. on 29 Nov 1992 (Planck 1992). Incredibly, since that time it has been found in the same locality every year, as well as upriver above Niagara Falls. In 1996 two individuals were in view at the power plants at the same time (D'Anna *et al* 1996) and again in 1999, two were found practically together just upriver (D'Anna, Klick 2000). All sightings on the Niagara R. except two have been of

adults. There is one September record, an adult found with many Ring-billed Gulls and a few Herring Gulls (D'Anna, Potter 1997), but all other sightings have been between early Nov and late Jan. There is one sighting away from the Niagara R., a second-winter bird found 22 Dec 1998 by Robert Sundell in Jamestown (pers.comm.). This species should be looked for with Herring Gull flocks though the Sep sighting suggests that it may occasionally join Ring-billed Gulls, especially earlier in the fall when Herring Gulls are not yet very common. Since this species is very difficult to pick out among the abundant Herring Gulls, its recent change in status may be due in part to increased birder awareness and better identification skills. Jehl (1987) proposed that there are two subspecies of California Gull. Most birds recorded on the Niagara R. appear to be the larger and paler northern race, *L. c. albertaensis*.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*). This abundant species has not changed appreciably during the period. The highest estimate of 50,000 at Niagara Falls was made on 3 Dec 1979 (Schaffner, Clark 1980). The highest regional Christmas Bird Count total was 32,000 at Buffalo in 1965 (Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Bird Source on the Internet). The North American race, *smithsonianus*, is the only subspecies positively identified in the region. The Herring Gull breeds on the Niagara R. In 1997, the DEC counted 115 nests in Buffalo Harbor (DEC 1997), more than the total at all sites mentioned by Andrle. In addition this gull still nests on the cliff and talus slope of Goat Island, adjacent to the falls on the Niagara R. (personal observation), as well as on small islands above the Canadian Falls (Knapton and Weseloh 1999). The favored feeding sites for the Herring Gull are on the river at the power plants and around Niagara Falls. Large numbers also occasionally occur on Lakes Erie and Ontario, especially when they are migrating.

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*). Andrle (1969) established the presence of this species. Improved identification skills and greater awareness account for much of its apparent increase. It is an uncommon visitor on the Niagara R. in the late fall and early winter, usually becoming rare later in the winter into early spring. Formerly considered a subspecies of the Herring Gull, this taxonomically controversial gull now is thought by some to be a subspecies of the Iceland Gull. Individual gulls have been observed that indicate there is no clean break in morphological and plumage characters between a typical Thayer's Gull and a nominate race Iceland Gull. The Niagara R. is a great place to observe the full range of variation within this complex, from the darkest Thayer's to the palest Iceland. Identifying a bird as a typical Thayer's Gull, that is at the dark extreme of the continuum of variation, requires careful observation as well as great caution and patience. This makes it very difficult to determine a maximum number at any one time on the Niagara R. where the gulls are often not close enough to discern the



Sabine's Gull, juvenile - Niagara River - November 1988

Brian & Eileen Keelan

necessary details. Thayer's usually associates with Herring Gulls. There are a few reports of this species within the Region on Lakes Erie and Ontario .

Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides*). This species has increased and is now much more frequently observed than the Glaucous Gull. The maximum number recorded is 20 at the power plants on the Niagara R. on 18 Jan 1998 (D'Anna 1998b). Most reports are from the Niagara R. but it occurs regularly on the Great Lakes. Inland reports are very rare with one record from Chautauqua Lake 25 & 28 Feb 1993 (Sundell 1993) and one from the Allegheny Reservoir 24 Mar 1996 (Schweigert et al 1996). Andrle noted that most Iceland Gulls sighted were in first-winter plumage and that second-winter birds were rather rare. Today many adults as well as all ages are regularly observed. Although individuals showing the characters of the nominate subspecies are occasionally reported, as yet there are no accepted records other than *kumlieni*.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*). In 1977 this species was not yet known as a regularly occurring visitor . In fact the records mentioned by Andrle during the winter of 1976-77 were the first . since the initial discovery in 1949. However, the species has been recorded every year since. During the nineties it

has increased even more rapidly with several counts of ten or more on the Niagara R. Although the great majority of reports are from the river, it is probably now regular on Lakes Erie and Ontario and has occurred inland on Chautauqua Lake and at Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge. There are records from every month except Jul though it is most numerous from early Nov through early Jan. A few remain through the winter. Recent reports, such as three on 23 May 1999 (D'Anna 1999) and six on 29 Sep 1998 (D'Anna 1998c) indicate that the species may be lengthening its stay within the Region.

Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*). On 24 Nov 1992 Rod Planck found an adult of this Asian species at the Niagara Falls, Ontario landfill. On 28 Nov he rediscovered the bird above the falls on the Niagara R. where it was seen sporadically until 29 Dec (Planck 1992, Brock 1998). This remarkable sighting represents only the third in eastern North America.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*). The closing of landfills may have had the most noticeable effect upon this species. Increasing slowly until it reached maxima during the 1970s, it is now reverting to its former uncommon status. There has been one significant count since 1977 when 28 were seen at the outlet of Lake Erie on 17 Feb 1985 (W&M Barber 1985). During the nineties, there were no counts greater than five (BOS Database). The Niagara R. remains the best



Sabine's Gull, juvenile- Niagara Falls - November 1998
Dominic Sherony

place to see this gull but it is regular on Lakes Erie and Ontario and there are a few reports from Chautauqua Lake.

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*). This gull, the largest in the world, has seemingly been unaffected by the closing of landfills. It has continued to increase in the Northeast and in the Region with a daily maximum of 950 established on the Niagara R. 14 Dec 1997 (Bellerby 1998). Small numbers breed on the Great Lakes but it has not increased as a breeder as expected. The first and only breeding record occurred on the Niagara R. in 1994 when a nest with three eggs was located (Leuchner and Roblee 1996). It is now a year round resident on the river and the Great Lakes with small numbers, most immatures, being found throughout the summer.

Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*). Although not quite annual, this species has increased slightly since 1977. The great majority of records involve juveniles seen in the fall with dates ranging from 8 Sep (D'Anna 1996) following the passage of the remains of Hurricane Fran, to 17 Dec (Andrle 1996). The only spring record is from Mar 1901 (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965). There are only three

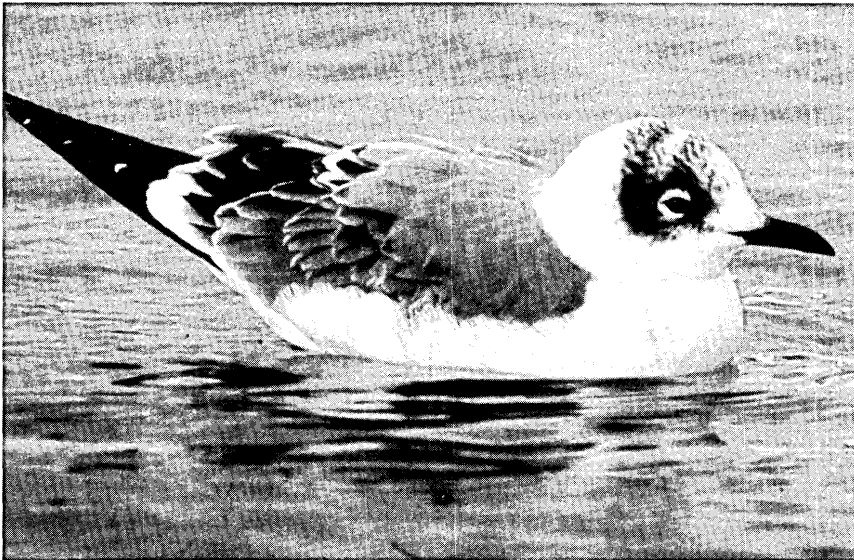


Little Gull, Adult Winter - Lake Ontario - August 1997
Dominic Sherony

Nov 1995 (Mosher, Rew 1995), another reported there on the Chautauqua County Hotline in 1999 and our only inland record, an adult in Dayton, Cattaraugus County 8 Sep 1996 (Schweigert 1998). The latter record is incorrectly given in the reference as 8 Sep 1997 (Schweigert, pers. comm.). The maximum in one day is four at the south end of the river in Oct 1988 (D'Anna 1988, Yoerg 1988).

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Larus tridactyla*). Sightings from the Niagara R. account for the majority of records of this species although it may be just as frequent on Lakes Erie and Ontario. Its status has changed little since 1977. Increased sightings on the Great Lakes are probably due to greater observer awareness. Sightings of one or two birds are the norm with the maximum of six occurring at Athol Springs on Lake Erie 25 Nov 1990 (Andrle 1990). This species is usually found with Bonaparte's Gulls with the vast majority of records involving immatures.

Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*). This high arctic gull is one of the birder's most desired species. The Niagara R. hosted an adult in the fall and early winter of 1995, first discovered by Toronto birder Glenn Coady at Fort Erie on 12 Nov. This very mobile bird was subsequently seen along the Niagara R., includ



Franklin's Gull, first-winter - Niagara River - November 1988
Brian & Eileen Keelan

ing the river mouth, as well as ten miles west of the river in Port Weller, Ontario on Lake Ontario, only to last appear back in Fort Erie on 1 Jan 1996 (Dobos 1997). It was seen on the New York side of the international boundary line on several occasions.

Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*). This species holds the present distinction of being the gull with the longest absence from the region. The last record and the only one since 1977 was an immature at Niagara Falls on 1 Jan 1981 (Andrle, Axtell et al 1981). This represents the fourth record for the Region, all at Niagara Falls .

HYBRIDS, SUBSPECIES AND OTHER FORMS

Gulls, especially the larger ones, are extremely variable. With the great numbers that occur on the Niagara R., a variety of unusual individuals has been observed. These include leucistic and melanistic individuals as well as probable hybrids and birds that have not been positively identified as belonging to any known form. Two probable hybrids occur nearly annually on the Niagara R.(personal observation). They are Great Black-backed x Herring Gull and Glaucous x Herring Gull, the latter often referred to as "Nelson's"Gull . Andrle documented the occurrence of both of these forms in the Region (Andrle 1972, 1973 and 1980).

In recent years there has been an increase in sightings of odd Herring Gull-type birds on the Niagara R.. These birds are usually just slightly darker than a *smithsonianus* Herring Gull though there is variation in the tone of dark. While the legs are usually pink, on at least three occasions yellow-legged individuals have been observed. The total characters of each of these birds do not add up to any known species of North American gull. It is suspected that some of these birds are hybrids or backcrosses of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls or Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Some individuals have shown characters that appear to fit one or the other of the Herring Gull subspecies of Europe and Asia. For some of these subspecies, little has been published about identification. On one occasion, the author observed a bird at the power plants on the river that showed the characters of the nominate form of Herring Gull from Scandinavia, which has been documented in Newfoundland (Mactavish 1995). However, as with many unusual gulls on the Niagara R.the great distance made obtaining adequate documentation too difficult.

SUMMARY

Due principally to the great numbers of gulls including rare species attracted to the Niagara R. these birds have generated much interest and study here since the late 1940s (Andrle 1977a). Interest in this fascinating group of birds is increasing, not only regionally but also across the continent, in Europe, Hong Kong, and many other places. Armed with better identification information and the knowledge of patterns of occurrence throughout North America, birders are looking hard in anticipation of the next new species of gull on the Niagara. Some possibilities include Black-tailed Gull (*L. crassirostris*), Yellow-legged Gull (*L. cachinnans*), Glaucous-winged Gull (*L. glaucescens*) and Heermann's Gull (*L. heermanni*), one of the latter being recently discovered in Toronto, Ontario, just across Lake Ontario from the mouth of the river. Even without the lure of adding a new species to the Regional list, birders will still make the pilgrimage in order to study species that are rare in most other locations of the east, as well as to see the great gull spectacle unique to Niagara Frontier Region.

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migration with numerous sightings of multiple individuals. A group of neck banded individuals from the Canadian introduction project spent a few days feeding along the lakeshore, preceded by sightings near Montezuma NWR in March and near Iroquois NWR later in April. Shorebirds were very low, with an interesting Whimbrel flight and our third spring record of Hudsonian Godwit the only surprises. It was a generally poor spring for gulls, with few large concentrations and few lingering white-winged gulls. Lesser Black-backed Gull continued to be reported regularly. We can now expect this species at almost any time during the year. Terns arrived fairly early, but numbers were low.

Cuckoos arrived early this spring and were found in good numbers. The owl migration was okay. Long-eared Owl numbers were up this spring. N. Saw-whets were about average, with a juvenile found dead at Hogan Point in May near where birds were heard calling beginning in mid-February. Common Nighthawk continued its downward trend, but Whip-poor-will reports seemed slightly up. Amazing numbers of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were reported at the banding stations.

The passerine migration experienced highs and lows as usual. Overall it was a moderate migration. While some species came early, the numbers continued to be less than spectacular. Flycatchers were low, with only a single report of Olive-sided Flycatcher. Acadian continued to be found at the traditional sites. A Loggerhead Shrike in Wayne County may prove to be interesting for the breeding season. White-eyed Vireos continued to be reported from the banding stations, as has been the case in recent years. Other vireos were down. There was only a single report of Common Raven this spring. Sedge Wren was unreported. Kinglet numbers were okay but not great. Thrushes seemed particularly low this spring.

Warbler numbers were moderate, with no reports of Prothonotary or Connecticut. All of the usual sparrows were reported, but there were no reports of large numbers of White-throated and White-crowned sparrows. Some observers reported excellent numbers of Fox Sparrows. An American Tree Sparrow in May was late. Clay-colored Sparrow has returned Mendon Ponds Park for the third year in the last five. Orchard Oriole was again in residence in Geneseo, and Baltimore Oriole was well-reported. Accompanying good numbers of Common Redpoll, it was one of the best seasons on record for Hoary. Pine Siskins lingered on through the season and were widely reported.

The season ended up with a total of 250 species. Rarities for the season included Eared Grebe, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Wigeon, Harlequin Duck, Hudsonian Godwit, and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

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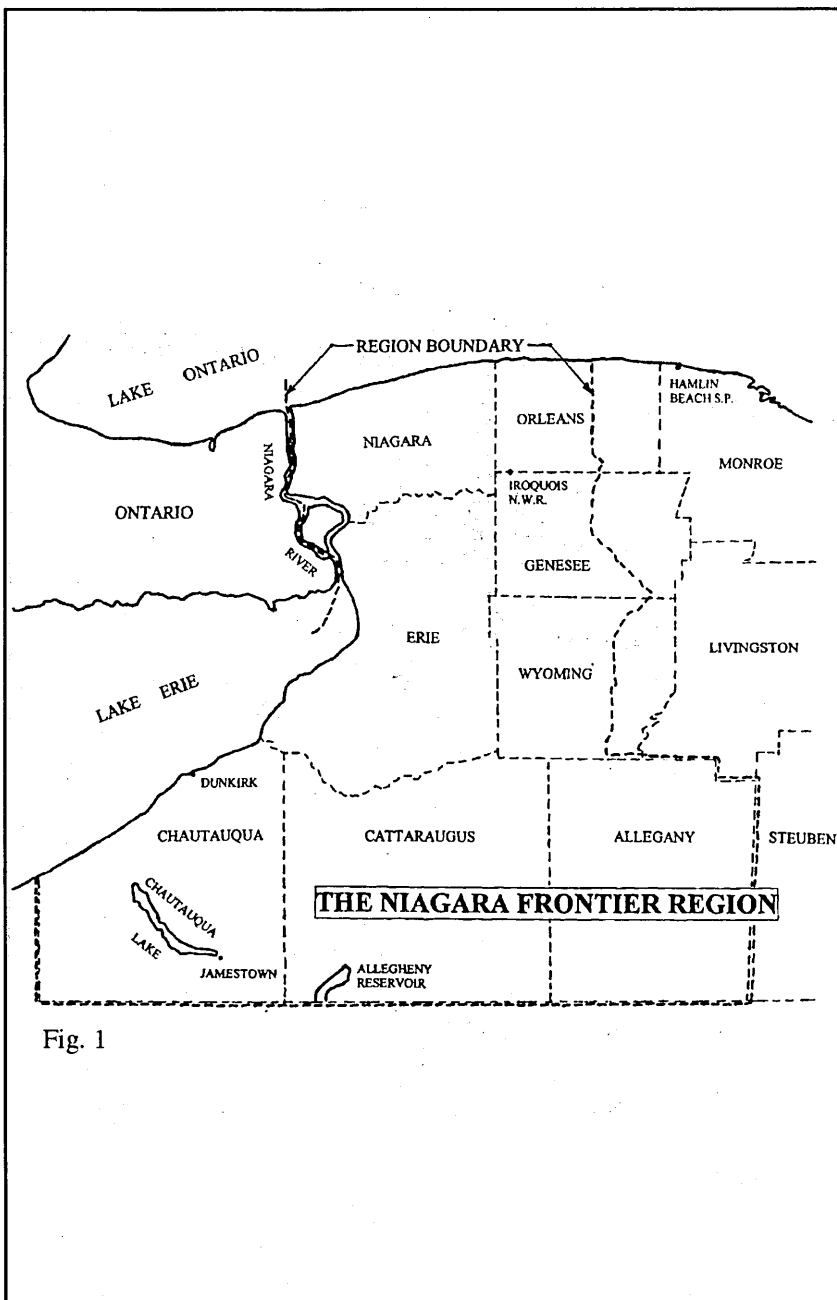


Fig. 1

