

REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

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The first three weeks of December 2001 were unseasonably mild and a continuation of the mild, snow-free November. However, on the 24th, much colder temperatures arrived with record setting snowfall. The average temperature for the month was 35.9° F, which was 6.8° above normal. Local residents will likely never forget the "lake effect" snow onslaught from 24–28 December in which 81.5" of snow fell and virtually shut down the areas most heavily hit. Monthly precipitation at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport was 6.48", 2.81" more than usual, and it was the highest snow total for any month in history, with 82.7", 58.4" more than normal. Very strong winds out of the southwest occurred on the 1st and 20th, bringing windblown jaegers and gulls to the eastern end of Lake Erie.

January was very mild as the average temperature was 31.6°, 7.1° above normal. The monthly precipitation was 3.54", 0.38" above normal, with 13.7" of snow, 12.6" less than normal. The majority of this fell in the last two days. The second warmest January in 50 years allowed the December snows to melt completely by the 27th without any flooding. A major ice storm hit the suburbs north of Buffalo on the 29th and 30th, toppling numerous trees and power lines. Lake Erie remained open throughout the month.

The mild trend continued in February except for a severe windstorm to start the month, with gusts above 60 mph that, coupled with an ice storm, left many homes without power. The average temperature was 31.2°, 5.3° above normal, and the monthly precipitation was near normal at 3.15", 0.73" above normal. Snowfall totaled 17.2", 1.2" below normal, with much of it coming from a late season lake-effect snow on the 27th. Lake Erie remained open throughout the winter for only the fifth time in the last 75 years.

The winter was the mildest in 70 years and only two other winters were warmer. Waterfowl counts were higher than usual as most ponds were ice-free until late December. A very high count of Hooded Mergansers was tallied on the Jamestown CBC and notable counts of Northern Shoveler, Ruddy Duck and American Coot were made. A downside of prolonged fall weather was evidenced by a Pied-billed Grebe found dead after all open water froze at Sinking Ponds Nature Sanctuary in early January.

The mild weather was also likely responsible for numerous species lingering in the Region much longer than usual. Unusually late reports were made this winter for American Bittern, Forster's Tern, Eastern Phoebe, Northern Rough-winged Swallow and Common Yellowthroat. Turkey Vultures are very rarely reported in mid-winter, but there were multiple reports of birds likely wintering and also of early migrants.

Lake Erie did not freeze, thus the buildup of waterfowl at the mouth of the Niagara River was not significant. However, a pair of **Harlequin Ducks**, including

an adult male, was found at this location in late January to the delight of many birders. An immature male **King Eider**, infrequently reported in the Region, was found on Lake Ontario. The group of Tundra Swans wintering along the Niagara grew to 228, the highest recorded number in winter from this location. A somewhat early **Greater White-fronted Goose** was found at Iroquois NWR in February and several flocks of migrant Snow Geese were also notable at the end of February.

Bald Eagles and Merlins maintained their recent increase in wintering records. Five Merlins wintered at the SUNY Buffalo campus, a traditional roosting location. Rough-legged Hawk reports were fewer than recent years and no Northern Goshawk reports were received.

Gulls lingered on the Niagara River later than usual this winter. High numbers were reported throughout January, including a rough estimate by Willie D'Anna of 50,000 Bonaparte's Gulls on the 13th. Gordon Bellerby remarked that this was an atypical winter for Bonaparte's on the river as his fly-past counts of this species are usually very low in late January but he had his winter maximum of 13,300 on 25 January, indicating they stayed a few weeks longer than usual. Perhaps there is a relationship with Lake Erie not freezing. There were several **Black-headed Gull** reports, but possibly involving one individual. Multiple sightings of **Sabine's Gulls** and Black-legged Kittiwakes occurred. **California Gull** lingered through the winter, with the last report on 18 February marking the latest winter date for the Region. A **Laughing Gull** was found at Dunkirk Harbor in early January.

While scanning some fields in Pomfret during the Dunkirk-Fredonia CBC on 1 January, Joanne Goetz was amazed to find 12 **Sandhill Cranes**. They remained in the area until 21 January, allowing many birders to see them. This was the first January report for the Region and also the highest count. While this was very unexpected, perhaps we should not be so surprised as this species breeds and some winter at Long Point, Ontario, "just across" Lake Erie from Dunkirk.

The bird of the season was a **Townsend's Solitaire** that wintered at Bond Lake Park in Lewiston. David Mueller found the bird on 5 December and made the identification after reviewing field guides at home. Willie D'Anna confirmed the sighting on the 23rd and numerous birders went out to try to see it. The bird remained through February but was not always easy to find. It fed on wild grapes and highbush cranberry and was occasionally heard singing softly. The solitaire was the first for the Region.

Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins were present in moderate numbers. Some Pine Grosbeaks remained after the large migration noted in November, while White-winged Crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks were only found in a few places. Purple Finch numbers were low.

Other rarities not previously mentioned included Northern Gannet, Bohemian Waxwing, Fox Sparrow and "Oregon" Junco.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AlSP – Allegany SP, CATT; BeSP – Beaver I SP, ERIE; BuSP – Buckhorn I SP, ERIE; BWWTP – Batavia Waste Water Treatment Plant, GENE; DH – Dunkirk Harbor, CHAU; FMCSP – Four Mile Creek SP, NIAG; FNSP – Fort Niagara SP, NIAG; GHSP – Golden Hill SP, NIAG; INWR – Iroquois NWR, GENE/ORLE; NF – Niagara Falls, NIAG; NPP – Niagara Power Project on Niagara R, Lewiston, NIAG; NR – Niagara R; OOWMA – Oak Orchard WMA, GENE; SPNS – Sinking Ponds Nature Sanctuary, East Aurora, ERIE; Tift NP – Tift Nature Preserve, Buffalo, ERIE; TWMA – Tonawanda WMA, GENE/NIAG.

LOONS – DUCKS

Red-throated Loon: Buffalo NR 1 Dec (MMo!), uncommon away from L Ontario; max 125 Somerset NIAG 9 Dec (KF); 5 Jan reports (max 8) from L Ontario, likely wintering birds.
Com. Loon: 20 Wilson NIAG 1 Jan (BK), high count for date; 3 other Jan reports.
Pied-billed Grebe: SPNS 22 Dec thru 10 Jan (LH), found dead in road after pond froze; max 8 DH 12 Jan; 2 other Jan reports; Belmont ALLE 16-27 Feb.
Horned Grebe: max 73 Yates ORLE 24 Feb (BK), good winter count.
Red-necked Grebe: NF 14 & 16 Jan (WD, BK); only report.
N. GANNET: Olcott NIAG 3 Dec (BK!); GHSP 27 Jan (RR); 5th and 6th reports on L Ontario.
Double-crested Cormorant: 2 INWR 22 Dec, late for inland; max 189 Dunkirk CBC 1 Jan; 8 NF 15 Jan; Wilson NIAG 5 Jan, 27 Jan, 17 Feb, unusual in winter on

L Ontario.

Am. Bittern: Westfield CHAU 3-4 Dec (BS, JG), very late.

Great Blue Heron: max 51 Motor I NR 15 Feb (WW).

Great Egret: INWR 2, 15 & 27 Dec (WW!, LH, PH); first Dec records for Reg.

Black-crowned Night Heron: TWMA 27 Dec (MJW), unexpected winter location; DH 6 Jan (PY); 3 Buffalo ERIE 15 Jan (WD); nearly annual in winter in Buffalo.

Turkey Vulture: Elm Valley ALLE 12 Jan (JH!), likely wintering; Dunkirk CHAU 16 Jan (SC); Lancaster ERIE 26 Jan (BRBA); Lewiston NIAG 27 Jan (MMo!), likely early migrants; Fredonia CHAU 2 Feb (JG); 3 Bond L P NIAG 16 Feb (CC); Lockport NIAG 17 Feb (MG); reports of multiples last week in Feb; high number of mid-winter reports.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE: INWR 24 Feb (DH! BK!), earlier than most reports.

Snow Goose: 16 INWR 2 Dec; 5 other Dec reports, more than usual; 50 Pomfret CHAU 17 Feb (TM); 60 S Wales ERIE (TF) 25 Feb; good numbers.

Brant: FNSP 1 Jan (KL! JW! et al); rare in winter.

Mute Swan: 3 Wilson NIAG 14 Dec; max 6 Dunkirk CBC 1 Jan; INWR 2 Jan; Carlton ORLE 4 Jan; 3 Olcott NIAG 19-20 Jan; Barcelona Harbor CHAU 21-27 Jan; 3 Grand I NR 18 Feb; more winter reports than usual.

Trumpeter Swan: 2 Randolph CATT 10 & 17 Feb (MD, TL); 4 BuSP 15 Feb (JS!); all were collared birds from migration project at OOWMA.

Tundra Swan: 245 Dunkirk CBC 1 Jan; 228 Upper NR 17 Jan (BB), record high for winter on NR; arr 5 GHSP 16 Feb; 20 INWR 24 Feb.

Wood Duck: 5 SPNS 5 Jan (LH), good winter count; Silver Creek ERIE 12 Jan (FR); WTSP 27 Jan (MMo).

N. Shoveler: 262, 177 BWWTP 2, 22 Dec (WW, BK!), good counts for Dec; 36 Jamestown CBC 16 Dec; DH 8 Jan (TM!), late.

N. Pintail: 39 BWWTP 18 Dec; SPNS 1 Jan; arr 31 INWR 24 Feb.

Green-winged Teal: 4 BWWTP 22 Dec (BK); 2 Dunkirk CBC 1 Jan; 2 NF 20 Jan (WD); only reports beyond Dec.

Ring-necked Duck: 518, 52 BWWTP 2, 22 Dec; max 550 Attica Res WYOM 8 Dec (KF); 40 Buffalo NR 14 Feb (RA); arr INWR 24 Feb.

Greater Scaup: 10,000 Hamburg ERIE 13 Jan (BRBA); L Erie typically frozen at this location by mid-Jan.

Lesser Scaup: max 386 BeSP 26 Jan (BK); high winter count, but consistent with recent years.

KING EIDER: imm m FMCS 27 Jan (MMo); rarely reported in winter.

HARLEQUIN DUCK: Wilson NIAG 5 Dec (BE); ad m Buffalo NR 19-27 Jan (MMo, mob).

Surf Scoter: 1, 2 Wilson NIAG 1, 27 Jan;

DH 15 Jan; max 3 FMCS 27 Jan; only reports.

Black Scoter: 2 Somerset NIAG 9 Dec (KF); Buffalo NR 19 Jan (MMo!); only reports.

Hooded Merganser: 125 Attica Res WYOM 8 Dec (KF); max 1105 Jamestown CBC 16 Dec, very high count; 22 DH 12 Jan (FR); 32 Tonawanda NR 20 Jan (RA, JT); good counts for winter.

Ruddy Duck: max 865 BWWTP 2 Dec; 354 BWWTP 22 Dec; 2 Buffalo Harbor ERIE 1 Jan; 4 DH 21 Jan.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 2 Attica Res WYOM 8 Dec (KF); FMCS 9 Dec; Bond L P NIAG 24 Dec; 2 Olean CATT 13 Jan (TL); 2 Salamanca CATT 13 Jan (TL); 3 Allegheny Res CATT 27 Jan (TL); Sheridan CHAU 19 Jan; 2 at nest INWR 19 Jan (S&TO); 2 Strawberry I ERIE 12 Feb; 6 seen from Grand I NR 23 Feb (BB).

N. Goshawk: no reports.

Red-shouldered Hawk: Celeron CHAU 27 Jan (BK, DH), traditional winter location.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 3 Randolph CATT 3 Feb (TL); reported from 7 locations; fewer reports than usual.

Merlin: max 5 SUNY Buffalo campus ERIE thru (PY!), new maximum count at this traditional winter roost; Porter NIAG 9 Dec (PY!); E Aurora ERIE 4 Jan (RR).

Peregrine Falcon: sev Jan & Feb sightings of Buffalo pair near nesting area.

Am. Coot: 1918 Jamestown CBC 16 Dec, very high count; 112 DH 7 Jan.

SANDHILL CRANE: 12 Pomfret CHAU 1-21 Jan (JG, mob); 1st winter record and new max.

Killdeer: 2 Attica Res WYOM 8 Dec (KF); 2 Jamestown CBC 16 Dec; Amherst ERIE 9 Jan (BK); arr Eden ERIE 9 Feb (DH).

Greater Yellowlegs: Dayton CATT 2 Dec (MD), injured.

Com. Snipe: Gerry CHAU 19 Jan (BK!), at historical wintering location.

POMARINE JAEGER: Athol Springs ERIE 1 Dec (MT), during strong winds.

Parasitic Jaeger: 3 Athol Springs ERIE 1 Dec (MT), during strong winds.

jaeger sp.: 3 Athol Springs ERIE 1 Dec (MT); 8 Athol Springs ERIE 20 Dec (BRBA); during strong winds.

LAUGHING GULL: ad DH 3 & 6 Jan (WD! BK! mob); rare in any season.

Little Gull: Somerset NIAG 9 Dec (KF); max 4 NR 5 Feb (GB); scattered reports thru NR; DH 7 Feb (DH).

BLACK-HEADED GULL: Devils Hole SP NR 1 & 8 Dec (WD!); NF 7 & 13 Jan (BE, BK!); Buffalo NR 20 Jan (KF); conceivably same bird.

Bonaparte's Gull: 8330 NR 24 Dec (GB); est 50,000 NR 13 Jan (WD); 13,300 NR 25 Jan (GB), remarkable since sp usually in very low numbers by mid Jan; down to 3830 NR 5 Feb (GB).

CALIFORNIA GULL: 2 ad NPP 2 Dec (WD!); single NPP or vicinity until 18 Feb, latest winter date.

Iceland Gull: max 8 NPP 6 Jan.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: max 9 NF & NPP 2 Dec (WD); Buffalo NR 28 Jan.

Glaucous Gull: max 4 NPP 1 Jan (GR); DH 7 Jan; Buffalo ERIE 12 Feb; Wilson NIAG 16 Feb.

SABINE'S GULL: juv DH 1 Dec (JG, DM); juv Buffalo NR 3 Dec (PY), on the late side.

Black-legged Kittiwake: juv Buffalo NR 1 Dec (MMo); juv Buffalo ERIE 2 Jan (WD).

Forster's Tern: Buffalo ERIE 1-2 Jan (GR! MG! BK!), very late but not unprecedented.

DOVES – WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: 2 DH 11-18 Dec; INWR 12 Dec; NF Airport NIAG 29 Dec-26 Jan; max 4 Buffalo ERIE 23 Dec (WD, BP); Porter NIAG 30 Jan.

Long-eared Owl: max 8 Porter NIAG 29

Dec; Somerset NIAG 13 Jan (STO); 4 GHSP 17 Feb (STO).

Short-eared Owl: TWMA 27 Dec; max 5 Porter NIAG 23 Feb (STO).

N. Saw-whet Owl: Amherst ERIE Jan (BRBA), seen taking a mouse; W Almond ALLE 20 Jan (BK, DH).

Red-headed Woodpecker: 3 FNPS 1 Jan (GR); 2 Porter NIAG 11 Feb (MG); only reports.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Colden ERIE 29 Dec (JW), unusual in winter.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

E. PHOEBE: FMCS 29 Dec (WD!), extremely rare in winter.

N. Shrike: max 3 Olcott NIAG to Kuckville ORLE 12 Jan (BE); 9 other reports plus 9 on CBCs, fewer than recent winters.

Com. Raven: 2 Attica Res WYOM 8 Dec (KF!); max 6 Alfred ALLE 15 Dec (EB); 3 Wethersfield WYOM 26 Dec (DJ); 2 Arkwright ERIE (BK!); 6 other reports from CATT.

N. Rough-winged Swallow: NF 8 Dec (WD!), very late.

Carolina Wren: reported from 12 locations plus 20 on CBCs; good number of reports.

Winter Wren: Bond L NIAG 23 Dec; Porter NIAG 12 Jan, last reports.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Bond L NIAG 2 Dec (PY); Beaver Meadow CBC 15 Dec; Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; Porter NIAG 29 Dec (DH), last report.

E. Bluebird: max 52 Hamburg CBC 5 Jan (GR); reported from 10 other locations, plus strong CBC showing.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE: Bond L P NIAG 5 Dec thru (DM, WD! NYSARC. mob), first for Region.

Hermit Thrush: FMCS 1 & 28 Jan; L Erie SP 3 Jan; only reports.

Gray Catbird: Tift NP 13 Dec (BRBA); Porter NIAG 1 Jan (WD); unusual in winter.

Am. Pipit: Elba ORLE 4 Jan (BK!),

unusually late, first Jan record.

BOHEMIAN WAXWING: FNSP 1 Jan (WD! BK!); 5 Olcott 7 Jan (BE).

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 3 BuSP 2 Dec; 6 INWR 18 Dec; 5 L Erie SP 3 Jan; only reports.

Com. Yellowthroat: BuSP 2 & 16 Dec (PY), different birds; INWR 22 Dec (BK!); very rarely reported in winter.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

Chipping Sparrow: BuSP 2 Dec (PY); Chautauqua CHAU 5 Jan (TM); unusual in winter.

Fox Sparrow: Ashville CHAU 23 Feb (MMi!), early.

Swamp Sparrow: 12 INWR 22 Dec (BK), good count for winter; 2 SPNS 5 Jan; 2 FMCSP 13 Jan; Almond ALLE 21 Jan; Randolph 17 Feb.

White-crowned Sparrow: 5 Wilson CBC 29 Dec; Lewiston NIAG 1 Jan; max 8 Pomfret CHAU 3 Jan; Hamburg CB^c 5 Jan.

Dark-eyed "Oregon" Junco (*J. h. oreganus*): Eden ERIE thru (RA!); same feeder location as last year.

Lapland Longspur: max 26 Porter NIAG 29 Dec (MMo); 2 Cambria NIAG 29 Dec; Yates ORLE 4 Jan; Somerset NIAG 19 Jan.

Snow Bunting: max 500 Alabama GENE 15 Feb (AK), good count.

Red-winged Blackbird: 8 Dec & Jan reports; arr Eden ERIE 14 Feb.

E. Meadowlark: 2 Villanova CHAU 16 Jan (RB), unusual in winter.

Rusty Blackbird: SPNS 28 Jan (BRBA); 2 Grand I ERIE 1 Feb (BB), at feeder.

Com. Grackle: 3 Jan reports; arr Lancaster ERIE 22 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 39 Tonawanda ERIE 2 Feb.

Pine Grosbeak: 8 FMCSP 9 & 21 Dec (PY, STO); Beaver Meadow CBC 15 Dec; 16 Bond L P NIAG 27 Dec-23 Feb (MMo, mob); 8 Somerset NIAG 4 Jan (BK); absent most winters.

Purple Finch: only 5 reports, very low numbers.

Red Crossbill: Jamestown CHAU 7 Jan (BS); 8 Phillips Cr SF ALLE 20 Jan (BK); only reports.

White-winged Crossbill: Franklinville CATT 15 Dec (BK); Elma ERIE 6 Jan (DC); 2 FMCSP 27 Jan (MMo); Almond ALLE 29-31 Jan (SP); few reports after good fall migration.

Com. Redpoll: max 128 Beaver Meadow CBC 15 Dec; 75 Fredonia CHAU 25 Dec; 55 Pomfret CHAU 10 Jan; 40 Bond L NIAG 18 Jan; 90 Newfane NIAG 17 Feb; smaller numbers from 12 other locations.

Pine Siskin: max 71 Colden ERIE Dec. Jan (JW); 35 Darien GENE Dec (TH); smaller numbers from 15 other locations.

Evening Grosbeak: 12 Amity L ALLE 1-24 Dec (VP); 23 Scio CBC 15 Dec; 4 Beaver Meadow CBC 15 Dec; 3 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; 5 Hamburg CBC 5 Jan; 23 AISP 24 Feb (PY); 7 Franklinville CATT 1 Feb; only reports.

