

REGION 3 – FINGER LAKES

Bill Ostrander

80 Westmont Avenue, Elmira NY 14905

Winter 2001-2002 was relatively warm and dry. Average temperatures in Ithaca were 35.4°F in December, 31.0° in January and 31.4° in February. Those temperatures made December the second warmest on record, January the seventh warmest and February the second warmest. The coldest temperature of the entire season was 8° on 1 January. Total precipitation for the season was about 80% of normal in Ithaca, but was less than 50% normal in Elmira. Snow was scarce. December had only three days with one-inch accumulations on the ground. The biggest snowstorm of the season came on 7 January when 4" fell. Another 2" fell on 8 January, which brought the snow depth to 5". The snow depth was reduced to trace amounts by 11 January. February had two 2" snowfalls and only one other with as much as 1" of accumulation.

The warm, relatively snowless winter, following on the heels of a likewise warm fall, allowed several species to linger that would not normally be found in the Region after the first of December. This factor, combined with a decent winter finch invasion and a couple of very lost pelagics made the winter very exciting indeed for the Region's birders.

Most of the Common Loons that were lingering late, probably on Lake Ontario, took advantage of the passing cold front on 7 December to pass southward over the Taughannock Falls State Park Loon Watch. A December record high of 553 was recorded there that day. The Eared Grebe returned to Aurora Bay for the third year in a row and fourth time in five years.

Any heron, other than Great Blue, is a winter rarity in the Region. Birders found individuals of two species this winter. An American Bittern was recorded on the Montezuma CBC. John and Delores Ennis spotted a Great Egret flying low, but southward, over the Mill Street Pond area in Horseheads. Joan Ostrander saw perhaps the same bird flying over the Susquehanna River in Tioga County (Region 4) the following day. In spite of the warmer weather, Great Blue Herons did not seem to linger in any greater numbers than usual.

Geese and swans were all recorded in high numbers for the season, though different species peaked at different times of the winter. A relatively large number of Snow Geese were still present at Montezuma NWR in early December. Among them, several observers found four Greater White-fronted Geese. The Eaton Bird Club noted 400 Brant on its Christmas Bird Count, 19 December. The New York State Waterfowl Count found the high number for Canada Geese in the Cayuga Lake Basin on 19 January. In Elmira, Christmas Bird counters noted many Canada Geese migrating high overhead on 1 January. That was the third consecutive day to experience single-digit overnight temperatures and the resulting freezing must have been sufficient to push many geese southward. The overall number of Canada

Geese reported in the Region increased for the third consecutive winter. The warm February brought back the high number of 1200 Tundra Swans to Montezuma NWR on 25 February.

Most duck species were recorded in lower numbers this winter, especially diving ducks. There were, however, several sightings of all three scoter species, even though winter sightings of Surf and Black are normally rare in the Region. It is possible that the warm winter allowed more ducks to remain at more northern latitudes. Mallard and Lesser Scaup numbers decreased for the second year in a row.

The high counts of Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk and Rough-legged Hawk on the Ithaca CBC, as well as for many other species, can probably be attributed to the 21% increase in party-hours by the count's participants. In spite of these high counts, numbers for Red-tail and Rough-leg were actually down overall in the Region. This is also true for many other species for which single site or CBC highs were recorded. Steve and Susan Fast made the unusual observation of seeing 15 Northern Harriers coming off a communal roost in Ledyard at dawn.

Pete Hosner and Matt Williams discovered a late Common Moorhen on 16 December at Montezuma NWR. Observations of **Sandhill Cranes** have been increasing steadily over the last decade. Winter observations, however, are rare, and John Van Neil's sighting of 18 flying over his property on 15 December is exceptional.

The Greater Yellowlegs at Montezuma NWR on 2 December was unusual, but the **Lesser Yellowlegs** discovered on the Montezuma CBC on New Year's Day was astounding. Three Killdeer and a Dunlin were present at Myers Point for much of January and were joined for a couple of weeks by an American Pipit. Perhaps the same Dunlin appeared at Stewart Park on 7 February.

Former Regional Editor, Steve Kelling, found the two most exciting birds of the season. On 17 December, he discovered a tiny alcid in the middle of Cayuga Lake, near the south end. He was sure that it was a murrelet, and thought that it was probably a **Long-billed Murrelet**. Jay and Kevin McGowan missed finding the bird on their first attempt, but returned later in the day to discover it in the middle of the lake. Much to their surprise, the bird slowly swam toward where they were standing and finally was swimming just a few feet offshore, where it posed for some fine digiscoped photos, which will certainly confirm the bird as New York State's second record of this species. The bird lingered on the lake for three days for observation by mobs of birders. This led to yet another exciting find. An immature **Northern Gannet** winged its way past the murrelet watchers on each of the last two days of the murrelet's presence. Unfortunately, neither bird made a showing for the numerous weekend birders.

The Kellings, Jeff Wells and the McGowans traveled in vain to Sullivan County in Region 9 in hopes of finding the **Slaty-backed Gull** reported there. They speculated that the bird might show up in the large gull concentration at the Seneca Meadows Landfill. This speculation proved to be correct. Steve located the bird, or perhaps another individual, the following day at the landfill.

Bird Club, Karen Edelstein, Steve Eicker, Jesse Ellis, Delores & John Ennis, Bill Evans, Jennifer Fais, Steve & Susan Fast, Annette Finney, Bob Fogg, Kurt Fox, Tom Fredericks, Tim Gallagher, Gracie & Gwyneth & Jeff & Whitney Gerbracht, Aaron Greene, John Greenly, John & Sue Gregoire, Bob Guthrie, Jane Hahn, the Halls, Meena Haribal, Wes Hochachka, Asher & Jane Hockett, Anna & Austin & Jeff Holbrook, George & Jo Houghton, Pete Hosner, Bill Howard, Larry Hymes, Tony Ingraham, Ithaca College Ornithology Class, Carolyn Jacobs, Anne Marie & Tim Johnson, Sam & Steve & Taylor Kelling, Graham Kerslick, Elizabeth King, Geo Kloppel, Jon & Rachel Kloppel, Ely & Julie & Kaila Koski, Paul Larrabee, Leona Lauster, Dan Lebbin, Tim Lenz, Jeff Lewis, Irby Lovette, Ellen Luce, Bob Maguire, Bill & Shirley McAneny, Jay & Kevin & Perry McGowan, Bob McGuire, Marie McRae, Bob Meade, Matt Medler, Teresa Melvin, Melissa Moore, Dave Neveu, Dave Nutter Family, Jim Ochterski, David Olmstead, Bill & Joan Ostrander, Mary Passage, Gerard Phillips, Mike Powers, Bard Prentiss, Bill Purcell, Laurie Ray, Marilyn Ray, Marie Read, Mark Reaves, Michelle Reidy, Ken Rosenberg, Dave Russell, Matt Sarver, Marty Schlabach, the Schmidts, Mickey Scilingo, Tim Setter, Sandy Sharp, Anne Marie Sheridan, Dominic Sherony, Linda Silber, Julie Siler, Carol & Joe Slattery, Ken Smith, Laura Stenzler, Tim Stetter, Matt Stillerman, Dave Streater, Carl & Kathy Strickland, Sarah Striffler, SUNY ESF, Scott Sutcliffe, James Taylor, Steve Taylor, Regi Teasley, Chris & Diane Tessaglia-Hymes, Julian & Mary Jane Thomas, Robin Tuttle, John Van Niel, Matt Victoria, Betty Walker, Dave Warner, Dan Watkins, Gil Weakland, Watt Webb, Allison & Jeff Wells, Matt Williams, Caissa Willmer, Sandy Wold, Colleen Wolpert, Carl & June Wood, Jill & Richard Wood, Matt Young.

ABBREVIATIONS

Caro – Caroline; CCBC – Corning CBC 15 Dec; CLB – Cayuga Lake Basin; CLSP – Cayuga L SP; ECBC – Elmira CBC 1 Jan; ESSC – East Shore Sailing Club TOMP; GCBC – Geneva CBC 5 Jan; ICBC – Ithaca CBC 1 Jan; KH – Kestrel Haven Avian Migration Observatory; MCBC – Montezuma CBC 1 Jan; MNWR – Montezuma NWR; MyPt – Myers Pt CAYU; SaMu – Savannah Mucklands SENE; SML – Seneca Meadows Landfill SENE; StP – Stewart P TOMP; TFSP – Taughannock Falls SP; WCBC – Watkins Glen CBC 29 Dec.

LOONS – DUCKS

Red-throated Loon: max 2 TFSP 2 Dec; last StP 19 Dec.

Com. Loon: max 553 TFSP 8 Dec (CaBC,BMe), high; +.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 16 WCBC (JBr, JGrg), high; 12 CLB 19 Jan.

Red-necked Grebe: MyPt 23 Feb (CaBC,MH); only report.

EARED GREBE: Aurora Bay CAYU 22

Dec (J&KMc) thru.

N. GANNET: ESSC 19-20 Dec (GD,PH,DL,MME,CT).

AM. BITTERN: MCBC (EBC); only report.

GREAT EGRET: last Horseheads 5 Dec (D&JEn), late; only report.

Turkey Vulture: max 8 Cascadilla Gorge TOMP 25 Feb (SB), high; +.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED

There were a few short population trends, or perhaps trends in birder reporting, to be noted. Regionwide, the number of Ring-billed Gulls was up for the second consecutive year. Both Rock and Mourning doves were down for the second straight year, as were Lapland Longspurs and Brown-headed Cowbirds. European Starlings were up for the third year in a row.

The warm winter produced several lingering passerines. The Ithaca CBC turned up a Hermit Thrush and a Gray Catbird. Another Hermit Thrush was in Caroline 9 January. Dave Russell thought that he had found an Orange-crowned Warbler at Park Station, always an exciting find in Chemung County. When he obtained a better look at the bird, it turned out to be a Tennessee Warbler, not so exciting, but extraordinary on the late date of 2 December. Half a dozen Yellow-rumped Warblers overwintered in Ledyard. The Montezuma CBC turned up an Eastern Towhee. John and Sue Gregoire had a Chipping Sparrow through early December. The Ithaca CBC had a high count of 12 Swamp Sparrows and the Geneva CBC had a high count of 10 Field Sparrows. White-crowned Sparrows were present at a few feeders across the Region.

Blackbirds returned quite early. Though not the first migrants reported, the huge flock of Red-winged Blackbirds flying through Hornellsville on 19 February was unusual for such an early date.

The appearance of Pine Grosbeaks in the Region was the highlight of a decent winter finch invasion. White-winged Crossbills were much more evident than Red Crossbills. Common Redpolls were present in sizable flocks at several locations. Steve Kelling recorded and photographed the season's only **Hoary Redpoll**. Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks also visited many feeders.

The following species listing includes comparisons of observed bird populations in the region between winter 2001-2002 and winter 2000-2001. A "+" at the end of the species account indicates an increase; a "-" indicates a decrease. Accounts with neither symbol indicate that the species did not demonstrate a significant change in reported numbers. Unless otherwise noted, the cited comparisons showed statistically significant changes ($X^2 > 3.84$; $P = 0.05$). A discussion of my methodology and its limitations can be found in the Region 3 report that appeared in the December 1999 issue of *The Kingbird*.

CONTRIBUTORS

Judy Abrams, Marion Adams, Dorothy Ainsworth, Karen Alaben-Confer, Michael Andersen, Deirdre Anderson, Sylvia Anglin, Mary Ascenzi, Jai Balakrishnan, Eric Banford, Maureen Barger, Susan Barnett, BasinBirds Online Database, Fred Bertram, Ivy Bigelow, Gladys Birdsall, Dianne Black, Jack Brubaker, Greg Budney, Norene Buehner, Chris & Kristie Butler, Adam Byrne, Cayuga Bird Club, Gary Chapin, Lois Chaplin, Chemung Valley Audubon Society, Danielle Cholewiak, John Churchill, Dick & Joan Clements, Ben Clock, John Confer, Cornell Bird Club, Nancy Cusumano, Willie D'Anna, Susan Danskin, Donna Jean Darling, Greg Delisle, Nancy Dickinson, Rachel Dickinson, Mike Duffy, Eaton

GOOSE: MNWR 2 Dec (BG,JHa,CJ,LL); SaMu 15-16 Dec (BH); max 4 Montezuma Wetlands Complex SENE 23-24 Feb (mob), high; MNWR 25 Feb (JE,DL).
Snow Goose: max 4725 MNWR 2 Dec (BG,JHa,CJ,LL), high; +.
Canada Goose: max 52,341 CLB 19 Jan (BBOD), high; +.
BRANT: ESSC 19-25 Dec (AB,PH, mob); ICBC (CaBC); max & last 400 GCBC (EBC), high & late; +.
Mute Swan: max 2 Clute Memorial P SCHU 12 Jan; -.
Tundra Swan: max 1200 MNWR 25 Feb (PH), high; +.
Wood Duck: max 12 MCBC (EBC), high; 2 Big Flats Bird Sanctuary CHEM 1 Dec.
Gadwall: max 150 CLB 19 Jan (CaBC), high; -.
Am. Wigeon: max 44 CLB 19 Jan; -.
Am. Black Duck: 2052 CLB 19 Jan; -.
Mallard: max 5087 CLB 19 Jan; -.
N. Shoveler: max & last 51 MNWR 22 Dec; +.
N. Pintail: max 23 SaMu 2 Dec; -.
Canvasback: max 1242 CLB 19 Jan; -.
Redhead: max 5574 CLB 19 Jan; -.
Ring-necked Duck: max 181 CLB 19 Jan (CaBC), high; -.
Greater Scaup: max 100 Springport 14 Jan; -.
Lesser Scaup: max 150 Hog Hole TOMP 12 Jan; -.
SURF SCOTER: max 4 StP 3 Dec (StK), high; ESSC 16 Dec-19 Jan (JBa); +.
White-winged Scoter: max 7 TFSP 2 Dec (JE), high; +.
BLACK SCOTER: ESSC 16 Dec (JBa); max 2 ESSC 18 Dec (Kfo,JeH,MV), high; StP 24 Dec (BBOD).
Long-tailed Duck: max 20 ESSC 18 Dec (PH), high; +.
Bufflehead: max 101 CLB 19 Jan; -.
Com. Goldeneye: max 665 CLB 19 Jan; -.
Hooded Merganser: max 13 StP 8 Dec; -.
Com. Merganser: max 227 MCBC; 22 West Elmira Riverine Forest CHEM 26 Jan; -.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 7 MNWR 2 Dec; max 10 MCBC (EBC), high.
N. Harrier: max 33 ICBC (CaBC), high; 15 Ledyard 21 Jan; +.
Red-tailed Hawk: max 124 ICBC (CaBC), high; 22 Ithaca Game Farm TOMP 26 Dec; -.
Rough-legged Hawk: max 17 ICBC; 5 Caro 17 Feb; -.
Peregrine Falcon: max 2 SaMu 2 Dec (BG,JHa,CJ,LL), high.
Wild Turkey: max 214 ICBC (CaBC), high; 80 Caro 1 Jan; -.
COM. MOORHEN: MNWR 16 Dec (PH,MW); only report.
Am. Coot: max 509 CLB 19 Jan; -.
SANDHILL CRANE: 18 Seneca Falls 15 Dec (JVN);, only report; +.
Killdeer: max 3 MyPt 11 Jan-5 Feb; arr Cornell U TOMP 26 Feb.
GREATER YELLOWLEGS: last MNWR 2 Dec (BG,JHa,CJ,LL), late; only report.
LESSER YELLOWLEGS: last MCBC 1 Jan (EBC,BPu!), late; only report.
DUNLIN: MyPt 5-28 Jan (St&TK,TL,J&KMc); StP 7 Feb (JBa).
Com. Snipe: Dryden 6 Feb (BPr); only report.
Am. Woodcock: Hector 26 Feb (ND); only report.
Bonaparte's Gull: max 19 StP 28 Dec (BBOD), high; +.
Ring-billed Gull: max 5000 CLSP 30 Dec (BBOD), high; +.
Herring Gull: max 3500 CLSP 30 Dec (BBOD), high; +.
Iceland Gull: max 6 SML 23 Feb; +.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: max 4 SML 25 Feb.
SLATY-BACKED GULL: SML 23 Feb (StK! J&KMc, ph, mob), 1st Reg report.
Glaucous Gull: max 2 Seneca Landfill ONTA 19 Jan.
Great Black-backed Gull: max 137 MCBC (EBC), high; 85 Seneca Landfill ONTA 19 Jan; +.

LONG-BILLED MURRELET: StP 17-20 Dec (St&TK!J&KMc, ph, mob), Reg 1st.

DOVES – WOODPECKERS

Rock Dove: max 1916 ICBC (CaBC), high; 570 Dryden 5 Jan; -.

Mourning Dove: max 625 ICBC; 90 Dryden 20 Jan; -.

Great Horned Owl: max 11 ICBC; 4 17 Jan; -.

Snowy Owl: max 2 SaMu 2 Dec.

Long-eared Owl: Danby 16 Jan (BBOD); only report.

Red-headed Woodpecker: Ithaca 12 Jan (BBOD); only report.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: max 110 ICBC (CaBC), high; 11 Caro 1 Jan.

Downy Woodpecker: max 315 ICBC; 19 Caro 1 Jan; -.

Hairy Woodpecker: max 109 ICBC (CaBC), high; 5 Sapsucker Woods TOMP 14 Feb.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: max 3 ICBC; Veteran 2 Jan; -.

Blue Jay: max 538 ICBC; 24 Newfield 19 Feb; -.

Am. Crow: max 30,000 5 Jan; +.

Com. Raven: max 15 CCBC (CV,AS), high; 5 Dryden 26 Jan.

Horned Lark: max 400 Genoa 6 Jan; -.

Black-capped Chickadee: max 2490 ICBC (CaBC), high; 93 Caro 1 Jan; -.

Tufted Titmouse: 20 Newtown Battlefield Reservation CHEM 8 Dec; max 367 ICBC (CaBC), high.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: max 94 ICBC (CaBC), high; 8 Dryden 24 Jan.

Carolina Wren: max 20 ICBC (CaBC), high; 6 Caro 1 Jan.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: 14 Spencer Crest Nature Center STEU 8 Dec; max 93 ICBC (CaBC), high; -.

E. Bluebird: max 98 ICBC; 15 Ithaca 12 Jan; -.

Hermit Thrush: ICBC; Caro 9 Jan.

Am. Robin: max 698 ICBC; Springport 27 Jan; -.

GRAY CATBIRD: ICBC (CaBC).

N. Mockingbird: max 16 ECBC; 3

Ledyard 16 Dec; -.

European Starling: 3000 KH 1 Dec; max 15,863 ICBC (CaBC), high; +.

AM. PIPIT: MyPt 20 Jan-5 Feb (JGrn,A&TJ); Veteran 23 Jan (AG); Veteran 16 Feb (B&JO).

BOHEMIAN WAXWING: Dryden 21-24 Jan (mob, ph).

Cedar Waxwing: max 788 ICBC (CaBC), high; 500 Ithaca 22 Feb; +.

WARBLERS

TENNESSEE WARBLER: last Park Station CHEM 2 Dec (DR), very late.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: max 6 Ledyard 22 Jan; -.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

E. TOWHEE: MCBC (EBC); only report; -.

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 456 ICBC; 53 Caro 1 Jan; -.

CHIPPING SPARROW: last KH 5-7 Dec (J&SGrg), late.

Field Sparrow: 10 GCBC (EBC), high; only report.

Fox Sparrow: arr Caro 23 Feb (StK).

Song Sparrow: 2 MNWR 2 Dec; max 35 ICBC; -.

Swamp Sparrow: max 12 ICBC (CaBC), high; Hog Hole TOMP 12 Jan.

White-throated Sparrow: max 77 ICBC; 14 West Elmira Riverine Forest CHEM 19 Feb; -.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 587 ICBC; 45 Caro 1 Jan; -.

Lapland Longspur: max 5 MCBC; 2 Dryden 22 Dec; -.

Snow Bunting: max 300 Dryden 20 Jan; -

N. Cardinal: max 430 ICBC; 25 Caro 1 Jan; -.

Red-winged Blackbird: arr 3 Romulus 11 Feb (J&MT); max 1200 Hornellsville 19 Feb (TM), high; +.

Com. Grackle: arr 30 Westside Ave Elmira 13 Feb (BO), early; max 200

Romulus 26 Feb; +.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 62 ICBC;
arr 25 Newtown Creek CHEM 24 Feb; -.

PINE GROSBEAK: 2 Summerhill State
Forest CAYU 1 Dec

(MSa,MY,SUNYESF); max 41 ICBC
(CaBC), high; 4 Dryden 20 Jan-26 Feb
(BBOD,KR); +.

Purple Finch: max 10 Dryden 24 Jan; -.

House Finch: 56 Caro 4 Dec; max 620
ICBC; +.

Red Crossbill: Ithaca 1 Dec.

White-winged Crossbill: max 35 Dryden
15 Feb (BBOD), high; +.

Com. Redpoll: max 300 CCBC (CVAS),
high; 300 KH 17 Feb; +.

HOARY REDPOLL: Caro 8 Feb (StK,
ph); only report.

Pine Siskin: max 33 Caro 1 Feb (BBOD),
high; +.

Am. Goldfinch: max 490 ICBC (CaBC),
high; 56 17 Jan; -.

Evening Grosbeak: max 118 ICBC; 101
Summerhill State Forest CAYU 14 Feb; +.

House Sparrow: max 2442 CCBC, high;
200 Canandaigua 15 Jan; +.

brown_creeper@sg23.com