

REGION 5 – ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

Bill Purcell

281 Baum Road, Hastings NY 13076

The winter of 2001-2002 was the warmest on record at Syracuse, with an average temperature of 34°F, 0.7° above the previous high. At higher elevations there was snow cover through most of the season but at lower elevations there was often less than 6" on the ground, with frequent bare areas. At Syracuse the snowfall total was a scant 41" for the season and there was rarely more than an inch or two on the ground. Adirondack lakes were open until late December. Oneida Lake didn't freeze until the last few days of January and part of it reopened by the end of the season. Otisco Lake never froze completely and Delta Lake froze on 1 January.

December's average temperature was 36.8°, 8.5° above normal and the warmest ever. There was 2.19" of precipitation for the month, 1.01" below normal. The average January temperature was 10.2° above normal at 32.9° and the season continued dry with 2.13" of precipitation, 0.47" below normal. February had an average temperature of 32.3°, 7.8° above normal, and 1.44" of precipitation, which was 0.68" below normal.

A Region 5 birder expects to see Great Blue Heron in the winter, but this season there was a record late **Cattle Egret**, seen by many, and a New Year's Day American Bittern. Waterfowl were later than usual in leaving the Region. The Syracuse CBC on 15 December had 29 Common Loons on Onondaga Lake and the following day the Oswego-Fulton CBC had record numbers of Ring-necked Ducks and Hooded Mergansers, more typical of early November than the middle of December. Snow Geese were seen in large numbers to the end of December and Tundra Swans may have wintered. A handful of American Wigeon did spend the winter and a Blue-winged Teal was found. Waterfowl lingered in southern Madison County into early January due to the late freeze-up. There were large numbers of White-winged Scoters and Long-tailed Ducks through the season in the relatively shallow waters of Lake Ontario's Mexico Bay; they were thought to be feeding on zebra mussels. Uncommon waterfowl included Greater White-fronted Goose, Brant, Trumpeter Swan, Harlequin Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye.

Two Osprey at the mouth of the Salmon River in late December were a first winter record. Bald Eagle was frequently seen along the major rivers and open lakes and a Golden Eagle was attracted to a deer carcass in Muller Hill State Forest, along with a record count of 18 Common Ravens. Northern Harriers were abundant – 27 on the Oneida CBC alone – and were present through the season. There were many reports of the three accipiters, including two at once when a Northern Goshawk caught and plucked an unwary Sharp-shinned Hawk in New Haven. One Red-shouldered Hawk was reported. Rough-legged Hawks seemed to be concentrated in southern Herkimer County. Hawks were moving past Derby Hill by 22 February.

Three winter shorebird species were more than in most years. Only one Killdeer

was reported in December, but they were flying past Derby Hill by 22 February. A Dunlin in early January was the second report for that month and an American Woodcock on 1 December was the second for that month. While visiting from New Jersey, Richard Crossley found a Black-headed Gull in Oswego Harbor. The species is much less common on eastern Lake Ontario than to the west. Bonaparte's Gulls were present through the season; the last February report was in 1958. In what appears to be a regular pattern, Herring and other large gulls peaked along the Oswego River in late January and most departed by 10 February. The gull mix seemed to be constantly changing as shown by three adult Iceland Gulls with different wing patterns seen at Phoenix on separate days over a five-day span. Other unusual reports were of two Pomarine Jaegers in January with the passage of a strong cold front, two Lesser Black-backed Gulls on the Oswego River and a Black-legged Kittiwake in December.

There were the usual reports of Eastern Screech-Owls and Great Horned Owls, especially on CBCs, but the fall Snowy Owl invasion was over quickly as only two birds were seen early in the season. The Short-eared Owl roost in Verona grew to 14. There was a single Long-eared Owl and two Northern Saw-whets as well. Northern Shrike was not an easy bird to find, with few reports of individuals persisting at one location.

The summer drought of 2001 reduced available food so that many song birds did leave the Region regardless of the mild weather. Both Gary Lee and Tom Salo said that few birds remained in northern Herkimer County. Matt Perry walked into the woods on the Clinton CBC expecting to find half-hardies everywhere but found none. An area full of crabapples in New Hartford did attract a large concentration American Robins, Cedar and Bohemian waxwings and Pine Grosbeaks in February. Bohemian Waxwings were otherwise present but on the move.

Matt Young tirelessly covered areas of southern Madison and Onondaga counties, finding up to 100 Pine Grosbeaks and 250 Evening Grosbeaks per day in December. The Pine Grosbeaks were most numerous in Tioughnioga WMA in southern Madison County where they took advantage of abundant crabapple and larch. White-winged Crossbills were present through the season, mostly as small flocks searching for food after the poor cone crop in 2001. There was no evidence of any breeding activity. There were only a few Red Crossbills reported, while Pine Siskins moved out in early December, with only a handful seen at feeders afterwards. Common Redpolls staged a large invasion and, as is usually the case, a few Hoary Redpolls were reported as well.

There was a good variety of half-hardy species including: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, Gray Catbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Towhee and Rusty Blackbird, but they were few in number. Chipping and Field sparrows also put in brief appearances at feeders in the DeRuyter area. The warm weather encouraged the first few American Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles to push into the southern edge of the Region in mid-February.

The season's total was 139 species, possibly the highest winter total ever for the

Region. Highlights included American Bittern, Cattle Egret, Harlequin Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Osprey, Golden Eagle, Dunlin, American Woodcock, Pomarine Jaeger, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake and the legion of half-hardies.

CONTRIBUTORS

Ginny Alfano, Brenda Best, Sue Boettger, Joseph Brin, Bernie Carr, Dorothy Crumb, Natalia Garcia, Bill Gruenbaum, Steve Hall, Barbara Herrgesell, Jody Hildreth, Gene Huggins, Mary Alice Koeneke, Gary Lee, David Nash, Kevin McGann, Matt Perry, Gerard Phillips, Bill Purcell, Marge Rusk, Tom Salo, Mickey Scilingo, Gerald Smith, Sheila Smith, Maureen Staloff, Matt Young.

ABBREVIATIONS

Adks – Adirondacks; Bvllc – Baldwinsville; CM – Clay Marsh; DH – Derby Hill; FH – Fair Haven, Little Sodus Bay and vicinity; GSC – Great Swamp Conservancy, n. MADI; HIWMA – Howland I WMA; LOL – L Ontario Littoral; OneiL – Oneida L; OnonL – Onondaga L; SFWS – Spring Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, Kirkland; SSSP – Selkirk Shores SP; SVB – Sylvan and Verona Beach; Syr – Syracuse; TRWMA – Three Rivers WMA.

LOONS – DUCKS

Red-throated Loon: DH 1 Dec; 2 OnonL 19 Dec; Skaneateles 5-30 Jan; last Oswego 5 Feb.

Com. Loon: 12 Labrador Pd 12 Dec, unusual; max 29 OnonL 15 Dec; last Old Forge 27 Dec, very late.

Pied-billed Grebe: up to 4 per day Oswego Ri/OnonL thru.

Horned Grebe: max 44 LOL 27 Jan, high for late Jan.

Red-necked Grebe: FH 13 Jan; only report.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 50 Oswego 22 Dec and up to 40 per day there thru.

Am. Bittern: HIWMA 1 Jan (SB! BG!), 4th winter record.

Great Blue Heron: 1-2 per day where found; scarce for an open winter.

CATTLE EGRET: Skaneateles to 19 Dec.

Turkey Vulture: max 6 Dewitt 6 Dec, with reports thru; arr DH 26 Feb.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED

GOOSE: Cazenovia L 2 Jan (KM, MY); FH 4 Jan (KM, BP).

Snow Goose: 1500 over Old Forge 15 Dec; max 2000 Canastota 19 Dec; 1200 Sauquoit 28 Dec; 3 Munnsville 16 Jan; arr Port Byron 16 Feb; first flock Tully 21 Feb.

Snow Goose, blue phase: 5 DeRuyter 7 Dec; Sherrill 19 Jan; Manlius 20 Jan.

Canada Goose: to 5000 per day FH thru; 10,000 OneiL 27 Jan; 2000 Old Forge 15 Dec, late for numbers in Adks.

Brant: Fulton to 22 Dec; SVB to 27 Dec.

Mute Swan: SVB 29 Dec; 2 Woodman Pd thru; max 7 FH 18 Feb.

TRUMPETER SWAN: 5 FH 18 Feb (BP, NYSARC).

Tundra Swan: imm Hookway Tract Syr 8 Dec, unusual site; max 15 OneiL 13 Jan; 13 LOL 6 Feb.

Wood Duck: max 4 Fulton 16 Dec; scattered Jan singles.

Gadwall: max 41 OnonL 12 Jan.

Am. Wigeon: max 22 LOL 13 Jan; 5-6 FH thru; wintering birds unusual.
Am. Black Duck: max 102 OneIL 13 Jan.
Mallard: max 1374 Oswego Ri 16 Feb.
Blue-winged Teal: Oswego 16 Jan (GP!), 9th winter record.
N. Pintail: FH 27 Jan.
Green-winged Teal: max 9 GSC 11 Dec; 4 Hookway Tract Syr thru.
Canvasback: max 9 FH 19 Feb.
Redhead: max 90 LOL 13 Jan; 50 per day OneIL to 20 Jan.
Ring-necked Duck: max 150 Fulton 16 Dec; 33 Fulton 27 Feb, early migrants.
Greater Scaup: max 300 LOL 20 Jan; low numbers.
Lesser Scaup: max 30 FH 22 Dec.
Harlequin Duck: LOL 3 Feb (GS).
Surf Scoter: 2 LOL 20 Jan.
White-winged Scoter: max 300 LOL in Mexico Bay 13 Jan; 150+ there thru.
Black Scoter: 9 DH 1 Dec; imm OnonL 15 Dec; male OnonL 12-20 Jan; 3 LOL 13 Jan.
Long-tailed Duck: 800-1000 per day LOL Jan-Feb, mostly Mexico Bay.
Bufflehead: max 70 Oswego 22 Dec.
Com. Goldeneye: max 1100 LOL 18 Feb.
Barrow's Goldeneye: LOL 5 Feb (KM); FH 18 Feb thru (BP).
Hooded Merganser: max 118 Fulton 16 Dec; 37 Old Forge 15 Dec, late in Adks.
Com. Merganser: 34 Old Forge 15 Dec, late in Adks; max 1800 OneIL 29 Dec; 1720 Oswego Ri 15 Feb.
Red-breasted Merganser: max 140 Oswego 22 Dec.
Ruddy Duck: max 20 Minoa 15 Dec; last OneIL 14 Jan.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

OSPREY: 2 SSSP 28-29 Dec (Don Coogan, NYSARC), 1st winter record.
Bald Eagle: 2 per day OneIL until late Jan freeze-up; present OnonL, Oswego Ri, Mohawk Ri, LOL thru; 2 ad & 2 juv Big Moose L 28 Dec; pair in courtship Salmon Ri 5 Feb.

N. Harrier: max 27 Oneida CBC 29 Dec; 30+ reports thru; 4 DH 25 Feb, first migrants.
Sharp-shinned Hawk: about 25 reports.
Cooper's Hawk: about 28 reports; 4 migrants DH 25 Feb.
N. Goshawk: Muller Hill SF thru; Clinton 15 Dec; TRWMA 23 Dec; 2 Tioughnioga WMA 5 Jan; West Monroe 27 Jan; Georgetown 29 Dec; New Haven 9 Feb, plucking a Sharp-shinned Hawk; DH 25 Feb.
Red-shouldered Hawk: Verona 7 Feb; only report.
Red-tailed Hawk: max 29 CM 15 Dec; albino Elbridge 5 Jan, present since 1996.
Rough-legged Hawk: max 7 Fairfield 23 Dec, only area with large concentration; 4 SVB 29 Dec; 3 DeRuyter 20 Feb; 13 DH 25 Feb; 8 DH 26 Feb, migrants.
Golden Eagle: Muller Hill SF 15 Feb (MY).
Am. Kestrel: max 4 Sterling 22 Dec; widespread wintering.
Merlin: reports indicate only a single bird roosting Onondaga P Syr thru; Oneida 3 Jan.
Wild Turkey: 75 Ira 13 Dec; max 200 DeRuyter 30 Dec; 100 Fabius 26 Jan.
Am. Coot: max 3 DeRuyter 7 Dec; 2 FH 4 Jan; scarce.
Killdeer: Pompey 24 Dec; arr DH 22 Feb.
Dunlin: Lewis Pt OneIL 2 Jan (BB!), 2nd Jan record.
Am. Woodcock: Hamilton 1 Dec (Brian White), 2nd Dec record.
Pomarine Jaeger: 2 DH 13 Jan (KM), 2nd Jan record.
BLACK-HEADED GULL: Oswego 17 Dec (Richard Crossley!), 9th record.
Bonaparte's Gull: max 72 OneIL 30 Dec; 5 DH 13 Jan; 2-4 LOL thru Feb, very unusual.
Ring-billed Gull: max 6000 SVB 30 Dec.
Herring Gull: max 4200 Oswego Ri 2 Feb.
Iceland Gull: SVB 23 Dec; 3 ad Oswego Ri 15-25 Jan, unusual; 1-2 per day

Oswego Ri Jan-Feb.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL: 2
Phoenix 6 Feb (GP).

Glaucous Gull: arr Oswego, DH 2 Dec;
SVB 29 Dec; mostly 1 per day Oswego Ri
thru.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 400 SVB
30 Dec.

Black-legged Kittiwake: imm DH 1 Dec.

DOVES – WOODPECKERS

E. Screech-Owl: Fulton 16 Dec; SVB 29
Dec; 6 Skaneateles 5 Jan; 2 Camillus 5
Jan; Whiskey Hollow 13 Jan.

Great Horned Owl: 2 DeRuyter 6 Dec; 7
Old Forge 15 Dec; CM 1 Jan; 2 Camillus
5 Jan; 5 Skaneateles 5 Jan.

Snowy Owl: Oswego 3 Dec; Bvile 9 Dec;
only reports.

Barred Owl: Oneida 15 Dec; Clinton 15
Dec; HIWMA 19 Jan; SVB 28 Jan. **Long-
eared Owl:** Liverpool 8 Jan; only report

Short-eared Owl: max 14 SVB 1 Jan;
Fairfield 23 Dec, only other location.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Highland Forest 13
Dec; T Onondaga 21 Feb.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Boonville 2
Dec, last reported there in 1999, at edge of
range.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: DeRuyter to 7
Dec; HIWMA 19 Jan.

Black-backed Woodpecker: 2 Old Forge
27 Jan (BC, KM).

N. Flicker: max 11 HIWMA 19 Jan; 3
Sterling 18 Feb.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: singles DeRuyter, Georgetown.
2 Mexico regular thru; only 4 others
reported including 1 Camillus in same
place 3 winters running.

Am. Crow: 12,993 Syracuse CBC;
10,249 Clinton CBC; urban roosts
continue to increase.

Fish Crow: 2-3 OnonL, 2 Shop City Syr;
Syr U area thru.

Com. Raven: max 18 Muller Hill SF 15
Feb, at deer carcass; numerous reports

from Adks; courtship noted Georgetown
23 Jan; 2 SVB 29 Dec and 1 East Syr 24
Feb, at unusual sites.

Horned Lark: max 300 Marcellus 6 Jan;
scarce in Feb with little snow cover;
singing several locations late Feb.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: scarce early but
showed up at feeders in Jan.

Carolina Wren: Syr thru; Oneida 9 Jan.

Winter Wren: Syr 15 Dec; SFWS 4 Feb.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: 3-4 per day
many areas on CBCs.

E. Bluebird: max 11 TRWMA 28 Jan;
singing Tully 9 Feb.

Hermit Thrush: 2 Oswego 16 Dec; CM
13 Feb.

Am. Robin: 100 SFWS thru; 60 Sterling
18 Feb; 200 New Hartford 25 Feb, likely
return migrants.

Gray Catbird: Oneida 29 Dec (BB).

N. Mockingbird: singles most sites; 3-4
NYS Fairgrounds thru.

European Starling: 900 Albion 9 Dec,
reflects lack of snow southern Tug Hill.

Bohemian Waxwing: 12 Tioughnioga
WMA 29-30 Dec; 10 Clinton 10 Feb; 28
Pulaski 15 Feb; 100 SFWS 18, 26 Feb;
max 160 New Hartford 26 Feb.

Cedar Waxwing: max 200 New Hartford
26 Feb.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: East Syr 22
Dec; only report, surprising for a mild
winter.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

E. Towhee: Oriskany 15 Dec (C.
Sassman, fide MP).

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 44 Camillus 5
Jan.

Chipping Sparrow: New Woodstock 30
Dec (MY).

FIELD SPARROW: DeRuyter 21 Jan
(MY).

Swamp Sparrow: singles Syr and Clinton
CBCs 15 Dec; SFWS 14 Dec, 19 Jan.

White-throated Sparrow: max 14 Dewitt

6 Jan.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 24 Camillus 5 Jan.

Lapland Longspur: Fabius 23 Dec; max 3 Skaneateles 5 Jan; New Woodstock 20 Jan.

Snow Bunting: max 300 Marcellus 6 Jan; last 100+ count Tully 26 Jan.

Red-winged Blackbird: winter max 75 Fabius 24 Dec; 21 Port Byron 10 Feb; 8 DeRuyter 10 Feb; early migrants with larger flocks by 21 Feb.

Rusty Blackbird: SFWS 5 Feb; Victory 23 Feb.

Com. Grackle: North Syr 1 Jan; arr 2 DeRuyter 10 Feb; max 74 North Syr 26 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 150 Fabius 23 Dec; 15 DeRuyter to 15 Jan; 42 Brookfield 21 Feb.

Pine Grosbeak: max 70 Tioughnioga WMA 5 Jan; small numbers Adks; 60 New Hartford 15 Feb, where many lingered thru.

Purple Finch: max 4 Tioughnioga WMA 5 Jan; only a few other reports of 1-2 per

sighting.

House Finch: up to 15 per day Muller Hill SF, unusual at 1800'.

Red Crossbill: 5 Clinton 15 Dec; 4 Parish 22 Dec; 2 Rome 30 Dec; only reports.

White-winged Crossbill: max 26 Mexico 10 Feb; to 16 per day DH feeders 18 Feb thru; 1-5 per day S MADI & ONON thru; pair Bville after 20 Jan, unlikely location.

Com. Redpoll: max 500 Highland Forest 5 Jan; 300 Verona 10 Jan; flocks of 50-120 common many locations.

Hoary Redpoll: Oriskany 15 Dec (fide MP); DeRuyter 18 Jan (MY!); Muller Hill SF 15 Feb (MY!).

Pine Siskin: max 25 Highland Forest 22 Dec, 25 Feb; 15 DeRuyter 1 Dec, with 2 per day thru; small numbers Adks departed early Dec.

Evening Grosbeak: 150-200 DeRuyter thru; 12 Boonville 2 Dec; 31 Brookfield 29 Dec; at feeders Adks, Tug Hill.

wpurcell@twcny.rr.com
315-668-2871