

REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

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December started off very cold but turned milder over the last two weeks. The average temperature for the month was 28.4° F, which was 1.4° below normal. Monthly precipitation at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport was 4.36", 0.56" more than usual, with 35.8" of snow, 10.3" more than usual. Half of the snow total fell over the first three days. January was very cold as the average temperature was 19.0°, 5.5° below normal. There was a stretch of 21 days when the temperature did not exceed the freezing mark. The monthly precipitation was 2.30", 0.86" below normal, with 37.4" of snow, 11.3" more than normal. Lake Erie began to ice over at mid-month and was mostly covered by 20 January. The chill continued in February with an average temperature of 20.8°, 5.1° below normal. The monthly precipitation was 2.69", 0.27" above normal. Snowfall totaled 19.5", 1.7" above normal.

The winter was the coldest in 24 years. Birder activity seemed lighter than usual after the CBC season, quite possibly due to the cold winter. Those who ventured out kept good tabs on the waterfowl in Dunkirk Harbor and along the Niagara River, where concentrations increase when Lake Erie freezes.

The Tundra Swan numbers on the Niagara River reached another winter high. The swans are most often viewed in the vicinity of Strawberry Island. An adult male **Harlequin Duck** was the highlight from the mouth of the Niagara River. Many birders observed this handsome duck in the same area as last winter's "Harley," leaving some to wonder if it was a return visit. Two **Eared Grebes** and a "**Richardson's**" **Canada Goose** were the highlights from Dunkirk Harbor. A neck-collared Trumpeter Swan was also observed from that location.

Bald Eagles were well reported again this winter. Sightings were widespread, with the highest counts along the Niagara River near Grand Island. Tom LeBlanc reported that a **Golden Eagle** wintered in Allegany State Park again; there was also a report of this species from the Town of Amity in Allegany County. A mind-boggling **nine Merlins** wintered at the SUNY Buffalo campus. This is an increase over the previous maximum of five that was recorded last winter. Wintering Red-shouldered Hawks were reported in higher numbers than usual. They are more expected in the Southern Tier, so a report from along Lake Ontario was a surprise.

As usual in December, gulls on the Niagara River drew a lot of attention. Black-legged Kittiwake, **California Gull** and Black-headed Gull were all observed on multiple days and by several observers. These birds were likely the same as those seen in November. Gordon Bellerby reported that Bonaparte's Gulls departed the Niagara River in mid-January, which he has found is typical for the past 20 years. His winter maximum was 6220, which is lower than usual. A **Laughing Gull** was found at Dunkirk Harbor in January.

By far the biggest highlight of the gull season was an adult **Ross's Gull**. Ron Scovell and the South Peel (Ontario) Naturalists found the bird in the mist below Niagara Falls on 1 December. Several other fortunate birders on the river that Sunday afternoon were able to see this prized rarity. However, despite much searching in the following week the bird was never found again and fell into the "one-day wonder" category. This was the second Ross's Gull for the Region, with the first observed along the Niagara River in November 1995.

Despite the cold weather there were some interesting reports of species that do not traditionally winter in the Region. **Virginia Rails** were reported from two locations in January. Winter reports of this species are very rare. For the second year in a row, an **Eastern Phoebe** was found on a CBC. This year's bird, in Allegany, was at the "relatively early" winter date of 14 December. Pine Warblers, while still very rare, have been observed with increased regularity in recent winters. Two were seen this winter, including one in Middleport that was a regular at a feeder. There were more reports of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and Eastern Towhees than in a typical winter.

Similar to the fall season, finches were scarce. Only a few Pine Siskins were reported plus a single observation of **Pine Grosbeak**. There were no crossbill, redpoll or Evening Grosbeak reports. Purple Finches seemed fewer than usual, other than in Allegany County.

By mid-to-late February there are typically the first signs of the coming spring in the form of returning geese, swans and blackbirds. However, these early spring arrivals were very scarce or absent this February.

Other rarities not previously mentioned included King Eider and Barrow's Goldeneye.

CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Andrie, Paul Baglia, Tim Baird, Gordon Bellerby, Allen Benton, Jim Berry, Buffalo Rare Bird Alert (BRBA), Bill Burch, Willie D'Anna, Brett Ewald, Kurt Fox, Joanne Goetz, Carol Harding, Don Harris, Linda Holmes, Bill & Julie Horne, Dave Junkin, Brendan Klick, Jim Landau (CBCs), Tom LeBlanc, Garner Light, Steve McLaughlin (weather), Dick Miga, Miley Miller (MMi); Mike Morgante (MMo), Terry Mosher, Susan & Tom O'Donnell, Jim Pawlicki, Betsy Potter, Fran Rew, Don Roberson, Richard Rosche, Ron Scovell, David Suggs, Bob Sundell, Michael Turisk, William Watson, Peter Yoerg.

ABBREVIATIONS

AISP – Allegany SP CATT; BeSP – Beaver I SP ERIE; BuSP – Buckhorn I SP ERIE; DH – Dunkirk Harbor CHAU; FMCSP – Four Mile Creek SP NIAG; FNSP – Fort Niagara SP NIAG; INWR – Iroquois NWR GENE/ORLE; JDSP – Joseph Davis SP NIAG; L Erie SP – L Erie SP CHAU; MI – Motor I NR ERIE; NF – Niagara Falls NIAG; NPP – Niagara Power Project on Niagara R, Lewiston

NIAG; NR – Niagara R; OOWMA – Oak Orchard WMA GENE; RTPI – Roger Tory Peterson Institute, Jamestown CHAU; SPNS – Sinking Ponds Nature Sanctuary, E Aurora ERIE; Tift NP – Tift Nature Preserve, Buffalo ERIE; TWMA – Tonawanda WMA GENE/NIAG; WoBSP – Woodlawn Beach SP ERIE; WTSP – Wilson-Tuscarora SP NIAG

LOONS – DUCKS

Red-throated Loon: max 72 Wilson NIAG 6 Dec (BK); last 3 Porter & Wilson NIAG 28 Dec.

Com. Loon: last Porter NIAG 28 Dec; no Jan reports.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 13 DH 5 Jan, good winter count, only Jan & Feb reports from DH.

Horned Grebe: max 22 DH 26 Dec; Olcott 2 Jan; 7 wintered DH.

Red-necked Grebe: Lewiston Res NIAG 9 Jan; max 26 DH 14 Feb (TM, JG).

EARED GREBE: 2 DH 26 Dec (BK!), one lingered thru 8 Feb.

Double-crested Cormorant: 6 NF 15 Dec; max 225 DH 21 Feb (DM).

Black-crowned Night-Heron: 3 Buffalo ERIE 13 Dec (PY); WoBSP 5 Jan (BK), non-traditional wintering location; DH 29 Jan (JG, DM).

Turkey Vulture: arr Ellicottville CATT 24 Feb.

Snow Goose: max 6 Scio CATT 14 Dec; 2 DH 1 Jan; DH 7 Feb; only reports.

Canada Goose (*B. c. hutchinsii*): DH 26 Dec (BK! NYSARC), rare winter report.

Mute Swan: max 8 Wilson NIAG 28 Dec.

Trumpeter Swan: 2 DH 26 Dec (BK, DM), one, neck-collared, lingered thru 27 Jan.

Tundra Swan: 231 Jamestown CBC 15 Dec; max 287 BeSP 17 Dec (TB, BB); 8 DH 2 Feb; arr 25 Eggertsville ERIE 21 Feb.

Wood Duck: Wilson NIAG 5 Dec (BE); max 9 Jamestown CBC 15 Dec; only reports.

N. Shoveler: SPNS 4 Dec (LH), only report.

N. Pintail: SPNS thru (LH); 3 DH 8 Feb, only reports.

Green-winged Teal: SPNS thru (LH), only report.

Canvasback: max 10,350 Grand I NR 15 Jan (BB); 100 DH 22 Feb.

Redhead: SPNS 17-19 Jan; Williamsville ERIE 8 Feb; inland winter reports unusual.

Ring-necked Duck: max 80 NR 15 Dec; 24 Lewiston Res NIAG 9 Jan; 2 BeSP 16 Jan; 5 MI 19 Feb.

Greater Scaup: max 8000 Buffalo ERIE 2 Feb.

Lesser Scaup: max 457 NR 15 Dec; 14 Porter & Wilson NIAG 28 Dec; 14 BeSP 16 Jan; 32 DH 2 Feb; 100 Buffalo NR 2 Feb.

KING EIDER: Wilson NIAG 6 Dec (BK); FMCSP 19 Jan (BRBA); rare.

HARLEQUIN DUCK: ad m Buffalo NR 21 Dec-15 Feb (PY, mob); same location as last winter.

Surf Scoter: NR 15 Dec; Porter NIAG 28 Dec; 2 DH 1 Jan-21 Feb; only reports.

Black Scoter: NR 15 Dec; 3 Porter NIAG 28 Dec (BK); 1-2 DH 25 Jan-14 Feb (DM, BK!, mob); Buffalo NR 2 Feb (MMo); annual but uncommon in winter.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE: f Porter NIAG 28 Dec (BK!), observed in flight only.

Hooded Merganser: max 39 NR 15 Dec; 36 DH 14 Jan.

Com. Merganser: 1035 DH 26 Dec (BK), good count for location.

Red-breasted Merganser: 830 DH 26 Dec; max 3000+ Buffalo NR 2 Feb.

Ruddy Duck: 2 DH 3 Jan; DH 19 Jan (TM); only reports.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: Wellsville ALLE 15 Dec; Angelica ALLE 22 Dec; 3 BeSP 22 Dec; Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; max 6,7 Grand I ERIE 13-15 Jan, 20 Feb (BB); imm Allegheny Res CATT 2 Feb; 3 Buffalo NR 2 Feb; imm Olcott NIAG 19 Feb; DH 16, 27 Feb; 2 Lewiston NIAG 17 Feb; FNSP 17 Feb; very good showing.

N. Goshawk: ad Wethersfield WYOM 25 Dec (DJ), only report.

Red-shouldered Hawk: Wilson NIAG 28 Dec, unusual winter location; 2 Jamestown CHAU 10 Feb (JB); Ripley CHAU 19 Feb; Hartland NIAG 22 Feb; Falconer CHAU 28 Feb; increased number of winter reports.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 12 Jamestown CBC 15 Dec; 5 Gerry CHAU 31 Jan; 4 Ellington CHAU 31 Jan; 3 Randolph CATT 12 Jan; 4 Ripley & Westfield CHAU 19 Feb; 5 S. Dayton CATT 20 Feb; singles from 7 other locations.

GOLDEN EAGLE: imm AISP 6 Dec (TL), wintered here in recent years; Amity ALLE 26 Dec (Burton, Maynard), unverified.

Merlin: max 9 SUNY Buffalo campus ERIE thru (PY!), new max at this traditional winter roost; NR 15 Dec; Olcott NIAG 17 Dec (BE); Tift NP 1 Jan (RA!); Buffalo ERIE 31 Jan (BK!); DH 13 Feb (DM).

Peregrine Falcon: NF 2 Dec (MT!); 1-2 Buffalo ERIE thru (BB! WD! PY), near nesting area.

Virginia Rail: TWMA 4 Jan (BK!); SPNS 12 Jan (LH); very rarely reported in winter.

Am. Coot: max 140 DH 14 Jan.

Killdeer: NF 8 Dec; Grand I ERIE 15 Dec; unusual in winter.

Purple Sandpiper: 3 NF 8, 22 Dec (WD), traditional location.

LAUGHING GULL: DH 27 Jan (TM); unusual in any season.

Little Gull: 4 Buffalo NR 21 Dec; 4 FNSP 22 Dec; 1-2 DH 25 Jan-16 Feb; 3 Lewiston NR 23 Feb; absent from NR mid-Jan to mid-Feb.

BLACK-HEADED GULL: Lewiston NR 22 Dec-19 Jan (WD! PY BK!); annual in recent winters.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 6220 NR 10 Dec (GB); 3600 NR 24 Dec (GB); 1355 NR 14 Jan (GB); last NR mid-Jan, Bellerby reports this as normal departure over last 20 years; returned to NR in mid-Feb.

CALIFORNIA GULL: 2 ad NPP 23 Dec (WD! NYSARC); single NPP 1-30 Dec.

Thayer's Gull: several undocumented reports along NR and L Ontario, as usual.

Iceland Gull: max 9 NPP 9 Jan (BRBA); typical number of reports along NR; DH 13-20 Feb.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Porter NIAG 28 Dec, only report away from NR.

Glaucous Gull: Porter NIAG 28 Dec; max 4 NF 1 Jan; 2 DH Jan; Buffalo NR 2 Feb; 2 FMCSF 24 Feb.

Black-legged Kittiwake: juv NF 1-6 Dec (mob), carryover from Nov.

ROSS'S GULL: ad NF 1 Dec (RS, WD! NYSARC), first since 1995.

DOVES – WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: NF Airport NIAG 14-21 Dec (WD); Buffalo NR 21 Dec (PY); Niagara 17 Jan (SO); Wales ERIE 22 Jan (*fide* RR); Carlton ORLE 22 Jan (BRBA).

Long-eared Owl: 4 Porter NIAG 28 Dec; 2 WTSP 21 Feb (STO).

Short-eared Owl: 3 Carlton ORLE 2 Dec; 7 Porter NIAG 10 Dec, max 15 Porter 19 Jan (STO, PY); 2 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 22 Dec, 1 there 30 Jan; Shelby ORLE 27 Dec; 3 Wheatfield NIAG 15 Feb, 4 there 23 Feb; 3-5 Royalton NIAG 28 Jan - 21 Feb (GL).

N. Saw-whet Owl: Grand I ERIE 15 Dec (BK, DH); Porter NIAG 28 Dec; Jamestown CHAU 1 Jan (PB); Mt Pleasant SF CHAU 2 Feb (BK, DH), responding to tape; WTSP 9 Feb (BP, WD).

Red-headed Woodpecker: FNSP 28

Dec, 9 Jan; WTSP 28 Dec (BE);
Sturgeon Pt ERIE 5, 30 Jan (FR);
Fredonia CHAU 27 Feb (AB); only
reports.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: 2 St.
Bonaventure CBC 14 Dec; 2 Shelby
ORLE 27 Dec; 2 NIAG 28 Dec; AISP
29 Dec (TB); L Erie SP 29 Dec (JG);
Boston ERIE 5 Jan (STO); high
number of reports, unusual in winter.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

E. PHOEBE: Allegany CATT 14 Dec
(TB!), very rare in winter.

N. Shrike: lower numbers than typical
for CBCs; >15 other reports.

Com. Raven: 2 Attica Res WYOM 1
Dec (KF), only report outside of CATT
or ALLE.

Horned Lark: max 461 Oak Orchard
CBC 27 Dec; 150 Somerset NIAG 22
Feb.

Carolina Wren: well reported again
this winter.

Winter Wren: 6 NIAG 28 Dec; last
NF 21 Jan.

E. Bluebird: max 67 Hamburg CBC 5
Jan; continued increase in reports and
numbers.

Hermit Thrush: 3 Grand I ERIE 15
Dec; FMCSF 28 Dec-17 Feb; Bond L
P NIAG 18 Jan (JP); RTPI 10 Feb;
only reports.

Am. Robin: 2397 INWR 12 Jan (BK,
DH), flying north to unknown roost
location.

Gray Catbird: BeSP 7, 15 Dec (STO);
Beaver Meadow CBC 21 Dec; Shelby
ORLE 28 Dec (KF); unusual in winter.

N. Mockingbird: E. Aurora ERIE 5
Jan, unusual location.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 22 BuSP 18
Dec (BK); 17 NIAG 28 Dec; Shelby
ORLE 27 Dec; 10 Dunkirk CBC 1 Jan;
Lewiston NIAG 27 Jan (B&JH); 2 L
Erie SP 2 Feb; 2 JDSP 15 Feb; more
locations than usual in winter.

Pine Warbler: FNPS 28 Dec (BRBA);
Middleport ORLE 2 Feb (WD! BP),
coming to feeder; very rare in winter.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

E. Towhee: E. Aurora ERIE 12 Dec
(BRBA); Dunkirk CBC 1 Jan; Panama
CHAU 10 Feb (MMi); Colden ERIE
12 Feb (BRBA); Bond L P NIAG 27
Feb (DR); more reports than usual.

Chipping Sparrow: Carlton ORLE 4
Dec (BE); Shelby ORLE 27 Dec (KF);
unusual in winter.

Field Sparrow: 8 Scio CATT CBC 14
Dec; Orchard P ERIE 5 Jan; Portland
CHAU 1-15 Feb (CH); unusual in
winter.

Fox Sparrow: RTPI 5 Dec (MMi); JAS
6 Dec (BS); Grand I ERIE 15 Dec
(BK); rare in winter.

Swamp Sparrow: 12 Scio CBC 14
Dec; 12 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; 3
FMCSF 5 Jan; BeSP 16 Jan; Eden
ERIE 1-28 Feb; good showing on
CBCs.

White-crowned Sparrow: Belmont
ALLE 2 Dec; Eden ERIE 4 Dec;
Jamestown CBC 15 Dec; 2 Oak
Orchard CBC 27 Dec; max 18 NIAG
28 Dec; Tift NP 16 Jan.

Lapland Longspur: Oak Orchard
CBC 27 Dec; Porter NIAG 28 Dec;
Yates ORLE 2 Feb; max 10 Somerset
NIAG 22 Feb.

Snow Bunting: 50 FNPS 5 Dec; 158
Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; 35 DH 5
Jan; 45 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 31 Jan;
max 350 Oakfield GENE 2 Feb (STO);
250 Yates ORLE 22 Feb.

Red-winged Blackbird: fewer than
usual winter reports; arr Lancaster
ERIE 23 Feb (BRBA).

E. Meadowlark: Yates ORLE 8 Dec
(BK, DH), only report.

Rusty Blackbird: Hamburg CBC 5
Jan; Porter NIAG 9 Feb (WD, BP), at
feeder.

Com. Grackle: 15 Buffalo CBC 15
Dec; last 8 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 111
Buffalo CBC 15 Dec; 20 Tonawanda
ERIE 7 Feb; arr 20 Pomfret CHAU 22
Feb.

Pine Grosbeak: 3 Lewiston NIAG 27
Dec (DS), only report.
Purple Finch: max 21 Hamburg CBC
5 Jan; sparsely reported outside of
ALLE.

Pine Siskin: 2 Tifft NP 13 Dec (RA);
Beaver Meadow CBC 21 Dec; 10
Hamburg CBC 5 Jan; only reports.