

REGION 3 – FINGER LAKES

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It was a truly wintry winter by everyone's standard. Already in December, my neighbor and I, as we held our seemingly daily meeting to clear snow from the sidewalks, were wondering if the winter would ever end. Every month of the season was colder and snowier than normal. December was 2.2°F colder than normal, and the 27.4" of snowfall was 13.4" above normal. January was 5.6° colder than normal, and the 30" of snowfall was 12.1" above normal. February was 10.9° colder than normal, and the 17" of snow was 2.9" above normal. In Ithaca, at least trace amounts of snow fell on 48 days. The colder than normal temperatures allowed snow cover to persist. Snow that fell Christmas Day was the beginning of a stretch of continuous snow cover that lasted through the end of the season.

In spite of the cold and snow, a number of hardy individuals of various species lingered into and through the season. A small group of loons spent most of the season on Cayuga Lake off East Shore Park. The group included a couple Common Loons, a Red-throated Loon and one mystery loon that was identified as a possible Pacific Loon. Unfortunately, the group stayed just a little too far out for even the toters of the best scopes to commit to that identification with certainty. There was little December movement of Common Loons over the Cayuga Lake Loon Watch to make up for the dismal November migration.

The prolonged cold of this winter led to a rare ornithological event. Lakes Erie, Huron and Superior froze entirely and Lakes Michigan and Ontario were half frozen by the end of February when birders began to notice numbers of Red-necked Grebes showing up on smaller bodies of water throughout the Region and as far away as West Virginia. The phenomenon was consistent with the theory that large numbers of the species normally spend the winter somewhere on the Great Lakes.

As could be expected with the persistent snow cover, goose numbers were generally down. Large numbers of Canada Geese vacated the Region on 29 December. Catherine Sandell found a Greater White-fronted Goose on Cayuga Lake and Charlie Rouse found two immatures of that species on Seneca Lake. The Montezuma CBC recorded very large numbers of American Black Ducks and Mallards. Several species of diving ducks were up from last year, White-winged Scoter increasing for the second consecutive year. They were probably taking advantage of the Zebra Mussel food supply in Cayuga Lake. American Wigeon declined for the second straight year and Lesser Scaup declined for the third straight year. A Barrow's Goldeneye appeared at various points between Union Springs and Aurora Bay on Cayuga Lake between 12 January and 2 February.

Northern Harriers were sparsely distributed. Perhaps the snow cover pushed them farther south. A Red-shouldered Hawk was seen several times perched near Route 13 in Dryden and once at Sapsucker Woods, just down the road. Mike Powers also found one at Spencer Crest Nature Center in Corning. The Peregrine

Falcon that appeared in Elmira in November made just one appearance in December. Joan Scrocarelli found it feasting on a Rock Dove on 1 December. Charlie Rouse found one at Seneca Lake State Park in mid-January, and Ryan Bakelaar may have been disappointed to find one where others had had sightings of Gyrfalcons.

The first of several Gyrfalcon reports came on 11 January. Wes Hochahcka, Steve Kelling and Ann Redelfs saw an immature gray phase bird flying along Cayuga Lake's east shore at Farley's Point. Jay and Kevin McGowan photographed a Gyrfalcon as it flew over them in the Town of Ledyard on 12 January. A group of observers spotted one at Farley's Point on 16 January. Ken Rosenberg had a brief look at one north of Levanna, which lies between Farley's Point and the McGowans' location. Matt Victoria saw the Gyrfalcon fly by his place of employment in Aurora, which is between Levanna and the McGowans' location, on 24 January. Jeff Holbrook drove up from Corning on 25 January and had a wonderful view of an adult bird soaring over the same field where the McGowans had photographed a Gyrfalcon. The same day at the same location, Mike Andersen, Jesse Ellis, Pete Hosner and Matt Medler saw a falcon catch a duck and subsequently lose it into the waters of Cayuga Lake. Having seen that the bird had gray upperparts, and knowing that the previous Gyrfalcon reports had been of an immature, they were thinking that it was a Peregrine Falcon. Jeff and Whitney Gerbracht then arrived and Jeff spotted the falcon perched in a tree, where all were able to get a good look at it: an adult, gray phase Gyrfalcon. At virtually the same location, Matt Victoria photographed an immature, gray phase Gyrfalcon feeding on a duck while perched on a telephone pole on 28 January. All those who had seen the adult three days earlier verified that the bird in Matt's photographs was definitely not the same bird that they had identified as an adult. Fred Bertram provided the last sighting of a dark Gyrfalcon in Aurora on 14 February.

While driving past snow-covered fields on icy roads, Fred Bertram was surprised to find a Purple Sandpiper in a ditch in Scipio. He surmised that it had been downed in this inappropriate habitat by the previous night's whiteout. Pete Hosner had the only other sandpiper report, a Dunlin. Killdeer wisely retreated from the Region; there was not a single report of one this season. Tim Lenz had the best gull of the season, a Little Gull at Stewart Park on 16 January. Herring and Great Black-backed gulls were both present in higher numbers for the second consecutive year.

Both Snowy and Short-eared owls were scarce this winter. All of the Snowy reports came from the Savannah Mucklands in Seneca County, but even there the species was not reliably found.

The Ithaca CBC turned up Regional nine-year highs for four species of woodpeckers. Hopefully, this only means that the count had even better than usual coverage of its woodlands and/or suet feeders and not that the woodlands were richer in insect-infested trees.

In spite of the harsh winter, Carolina Wrens and Northern Mockingbirds were both reported in higher numbers than last year. It will be interesting to see how the

spring numbers compare. The CBCs turned up some interesting passerines. The Montezuma count located two Marsh Wrens and a Common Yellowthroat. The Geneva count listed two Ruby-crowned Kinglets. The Watkins Glen count found an American Pipit. The Ithaca count had three Hermit Thrushes.

Other passerines of note were Chemung County's second record of Bohemian Waxwing in Ann and Dan Kenlon's yard in West Elmira, Eastern Towhee at Marg and Bill Comstock's feeders in the Town of Jerusalem, Chipping Sparrows in Dick Clements' yard in Pine City and in David Bonter's yard in Cayuga Heights. Out in the field, Bob Guthrie found three Savannah Sparrows in Torrey and Jay and Kevin McGowan photographed their first winter encounter with one in Ledyard. It was this bird that enabled them to have their camera ready when the Gyrfalcon flew over. Chris Tessaglia-Hymes found an Eastern Phoebe at Sapsucker Woods in December, and more amazing, Bob Guthrie and Leona Lauster found one in Varick in February.

Winter finches were totally absent, with none of any species reported anywhere in the Region. It was a long hard winter, but a very interesting one for birders.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AuB – Aurora Bay CAYU; CayL – Cayuga L; CLB – Cayuga L Basin; ESP – East Shore P TOMP; GCBC – Geneva CBC; HH – Hog Hole TOMP; ICBC – Ithaca CBC; IGF – Ithaca Game Farm TOMP; MCBC – Montezuma CBC; MyPt – Myers Point TOMP; SaMu – Savannah Mucklands SENE; SaWo – Sapsucker Woods TOMP; StP – Stewart P TOMP; TMSP – Treman Marina SP; UMPd – Union Springs Mill Pond CAYU; WCBC – Watkins Glen CBC.

LOONS – DUCKS

Red-throated Loon: ESP 20 Dec-28 Feb.

Com. Loon: max 10 Taughannock Falls SP 7 Dec; MyPt 28 Feb, -.

Red-necked Grebe: TMSP 6 Dec; max 35 ESP 28 Feb (S&SF), high, +.

EARED GREBE: CayL 12 Dec (StF!); AuB 1 Jan (KF)-3 Feb (StF).

Double-crested Cormorant: TMSP 6 Dec; max 4 StP 22 Dec), high; 2 HH 25 Jan.

Turkey Vulture: GCBC 15 Dec; max 2 GCBC 15 Dec; Ithaca 27 Feb.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED

GOOSE: CayL 7 Dec (CSa); max 2 Seneca L SP 19 Jan (CR).

Snow Goose: max 6000 Owasco L 1 Dec (FB), high; CayL 8 Feb, -.

Canada Goose: max 34,199 GCBC 15 Dec, -.

Tundra Swan: 2 Airport Gravel Pit 1 Dec; max 560 MCBC 1 Jan; 5 MyPt 28 Feb, -.

Am. Wigeon: TMSP 6 Dec; max 11 CLB 11 Jan; UMPd 11 Feb, -.

Am. Black Duck: max 7732 MCBC 1 Jan, high, +.

Mallard: max 18,052 MCBC 1 Jan, +.

Green-winged Teal: max 6 UMPd 29 Dec; 2 UMPd 16 Feb, -.

Canvasback: TMSP 6 Dec; max 2000 Farley's Pt CAYU 8 Feb; 5 MyPt 28 Feb.

Redhead: TMSP 6 Dec; max 10,001 AuB 3 Feb; MyPt 28 Feb, +.

Greater Scaup: TMSP 6 Dec; max 271 MCBC 1 Jan; 3 MyPt 28 Feb, +.

Lesser Scaup: TMSP 6 Dec; max 51 AuB 3 Feb; 5 MyPt 28 Feb, -.

Surf Scoter: 2 MyPt 8 Dec; max 2 MyPt 8 Dec; Keuka L 18 Jan.

White-winged Scoter: 2 AuB 12 Dec; max 7 StP 5 Jan; MyPt 28 Feb, +.

Bufflehead: 20 CayL 1 Dec; max 101 CLB 11 Jan; MyPt 28 Feb, +.

Com. Goldeneye: 13 StP 5 Dec; max 508 CLB 11 Jan; MyPt 28 Feb, +.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE: Union Springs Marina CAYU 12 Jan (J&KM); AuB 2 Feb (BT).

Com. Merganser: 13 StP 5 Dec; max 225 StP 8 Feb; MyPt 28 Feb, +.

Red-breasted Merganser: StP 7 Dec; max 22 MCBC 1 Jan; 3 CayL 20 Feb, +.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

N. Harrier: 2 Ulysses 1 Dec; max 4 MCBC 1 Jan, low; 2 CLB 15 Feb, -.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK:

ICBC 1 Jan (CaBC); Dryden 10 Feb (A&JW); SaWo 20 Feb (TL).

PEREGRINE FALCON: Elmira 1 Dec (JSc); Seneca L SP 19 Jan (CR); Ledyard 30 Jan (RB).

GYRFALCON: imm Farley's Pt CAYU 11 Jan (WWho, SK, AR!); ad Ledyard 25 Jan (JH); MacKenzie-Childs Pottery CAYU 14 Feb (FB); *intro.*

Wild Turkey: max 315 ICBC 1 Jan, high.

Am. Coot: max 501 MyPt 5 Jan, -.

PURPLE SANDPIPER: Scipio 9 Dec (FB).

DUNLIN: StP 7 Dec (PH).

LITTLE GULL: StP 16 Jan (TL).

Bonaparte's Gull: max 14 StP 1 Dec (GP, CT), only report.

Ring-billed Gull: max 1618 WCB C 28 Dec, -.

Herring Gull: max 6000 CayL 7 Dec (KF), high, +.

Iceland Gull: CayL 7 Dec; max 4 CayL 12 Jan; IGF 25 Feb.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: CayL 7 Dec; max 3 CayL 8 Dec; StP 9 Feb.

Glaucous Gull: StP 12 Dec; max 2 Rt 414 Seneca Falls 11 Jan; ESP 25 Feb.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 600 CayL 7 Dec (KF), high, +.

DOVES – WOODPECKERS

Rock Dove: max 1361 ICBC 1 Jan, high.

Mourning Dove: max 957 GCBC 15 Dec.

Great Horned Owl: max 24 ICBC 1 Jan, high.

Snowy Owl: SaMu 18 Dec; SaMu 29 Dec; SaMu 5 Jan.

Barred Owl: max 2 ICBC 1 Jan, only report.

Long-eared Owl: Ledyard 6 Dec (FB), only report.

Short-eared Owl: GCBC 15 Dec; max 7 Montezuma NWR 5 Jan; 2 Hopewell 10 Feb.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Corning CBC 14 Dec; Romulus 21 Dec; Red Jacket Yacht Club SENE 1 Jan.

Belted Kingfisher: HH 13 Dec; max 9 ICBC 1 Jan, high; 2 MyPt 1 Feb.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: max 129 ICBC 1 Jan, high, +.

Downy Woodpecker: max 384 ICBC 1 Jan, high, +.

Hairy Woodpecker: max 126 ICBC 1 Jan, high.

Pileated Woodpecker: max 36 ICBC 1 Jan, high.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

E. PHOEBE: SaWo 2 Dec (CT); Varick 9-11 Feb (BG, LL).

N. Shrike: SaWo 6 Dec; max 2 ICBC 1 Jan; SaWo 27 Feb.

Blue Jay: max 904 ICBC 1 Jan, high, +.

Am. Crow: max 15,000 Auburn.

Fish Crow: 6 IGF TOMP 13 Dec; max 12 ICBC 1 Jan, high; IGF 13 Feb.

Horned Lark: 101 Dryden 1 Dec; max 599 GCBC 15 Dec, +.

Black-capped Chickadee: max 2333 ICBC 1 Jan, +.

Tufted Titmouse: max 355 ICBC 1 Jan.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: max 59 ICBC 1 Jan, -.

Brown Creeper: max 38 ICBC 1 Jan, high.

Carolina Wren: max 43 ICBC 1 Jan, high, +.

Winter Wren: StP 4 Dec; max 3 ICBC 1 Jan, high; StP 4 Feb.

MARSH WREN: max 2 MCBC 1 Jan.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 79 ICBC 1 Jan, +.

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET: max 2 GCBC 15 Dec (EBS); Seneca Falls 24 Feb (CSa).

E. Bluebird: max 136 ICBC 1 Jan, +.

Hermit Thrush: Fayette 1 Jan; max 3 ICBC 1 Jan; Ledyard 18 Jan.

N. Mockingbird: max 27 ICBC 1 Jan, high, +.

European Starling: max 11,991 GCBC 15 Dec, -.

AMERICAN PIPIT: WCBC 28 Dec, StP 5 Jan.

BOHEMIAN WAXWING: Elmira 15 Feb (A&DK), only report.

Cedar Waxwing: max 834 ICBC 1 Jan, high, -.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: max 3 MCBC 1 Jan; 2 Ledyard 27 Feb.

COM. YELLOWTHROAT: MCBC 1 Jan.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

E. TOWHEE: Jerusalem 9 Dec (B&MC), only report.

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 1302 ICBC 1 Jan, +.

CHIPPING SPARROW: Pine City 1 Dec (DCI); Cayuga Heights 1 Jan thru (DB).

Field Sparrow: WCBC 28 Dec, only report.

SAVANNAH SPARROW: max 3 Torrey 12 Jan (BG); Ledyard 12 Jan (J&KM).

Song Sparrow: max 44 ICBC 1 Jan, +.

Swamp Sparrow: HH 8 Dec; max 15 ICBC 1 Jan, high; SaWo 13 Feb.

White-throated Sparrow: max 134 ICBC 1 Jan, +.

White-crowned Sparrow: GCBC 15 Dec; Ledyard 12 Jan.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 969 ICBC 1 Jan, high, +.

Lapland Longspur: max 25 Torrey 18 Jan (LD, BG), high, +.

Snow Bunting: max 1000 Torrey 25 Jan. -

N. Cardinal: max 495 ICBC 1 Jan, high.

Red-winged Blackbird: KH 1 Dec; max 34 GCBC 15 Dec; KH 4 Jan, -.

E. Meadowlark: TMSP 2 Dec; max 4 Moravia 7 Dec; HH 13 Dec.

Com. Grackle: 2 Ulysses 1 Dec (MH), only report, -.

Brown-Headed Cowbird: 20 Ulysses 1 Dec; max 70 GCBC 15 Dec; 3 KH 9 Feb.

House Finch: max 377 ICBC 1 Jan, -.

Am. Goldfinch: max 588 ICBC 1 Jan, high, +.

House Sparrow: max 594 ICBC 1 Jan, low, -.