

REGION 6 – ST. LAWRENCE

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It was a real winter for the first time in the new century. Cold and snow began in late October, intensified in mid November, and remained with us through the period. At my base in Barnes Corners on Tug Hill, snowfall exceeded 350", with higher amounts in interior sections. Even the snow-limited banana belt of northwestern Jefferson County experienced significant snowfall this winter. As I write this report in early April, my front lawn remains snow covered and early migrants are stressed to find sustenance. December continued the fall cold trend, with average temperatures 1-2°F below normal and widespread frequent lake effect snows. A cold front on 9-10 December dropped temperatures well below zero and produced more than two feet of snow in the Central Tug Hill. Highmarket officially recorded 54" of snow for the month, but this Lewis County resident thinks that number is low. Needless to say, with such weather most half-hardies were already scarce by Christmas count time. The only truly moderate period of the winter occurred in the first week of January when temperatures reached the low thirties and reports surfaced of human residents of Tug Hill being seen in shorts. Soon after, a major cold wave established over eastern North America and persisted mostly unbroken through late February. The intense cold froze all waters in the Region except for the current-maintained open water pools of the St. Lawrence River. Frequent heavy snows buried most areas to a depth of several feet. Remaining ground-feeding half-hardies vanished, and even hardy winter raptors seemed pressed. This weather also notably reduced birder activity. In February, another arctic blast occurred in mid month. Overall January/February temperatures were 7-10° below average and, as the upper Great Lakes became ice covered, flow ice on Lake Ontario extended at least 15-20 miles out from our shores.

Positives for the season included: (1) a good variety of waterfowl and waterbirds, although in low numbers; (2) good numbers of Tundra Swans in the northwest until their rapid exit in mid January; (3) widespread occurrence of Bald Eagles in fair numbers; (4) widespread Common Ravens; (5) large numbers of overwintering Eastern Bluebirds and American Robins due to an immense wild fruit crop; (6) fair numbers of open country passerines in northwestern Jefferson County.

Negatives included: (1) no evidence of the Red-necked Grebe invasion observed elsewhere, due to limited open water; (2) low numbers of most waterfowl; (3) few half-hardies; (4) poor to fair numbers of most mouse-eating hawks; (5) virtual absence of any northern owls, including the lowest Snowy Owl numbers in recent memory; (6) virtual absence of Gray Partridge in northwestern Jefferson County despite ideal conditions for concentrating them; (7) ridiculously low numbers of American Tree Sparrows; (8) no winter finches.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

CV – T Cape Vincent JEFF; FL – Fishers Landing, T Orleans JEFF; MCBC – Massena CBC; NBCBC – New Boston CBC; PilPt – Pillar Pt, T Brownville JEFF; PtPen – Pt Peninsula, T Lyme JEFF; RMPD – Robert Moses Power Dam; SLR – St. Lawrence R.; WCBC – Watertown CBC; WFC – Federation Waterfowl Count.

LOONS – DUCKS

Red-throated Loon: 2 WFC (NL).

Com. Loon: RMPD to 24 Feb, only report.

Horned Grebe: 2 PilPt 13 Dec; 2 WFC.

Red-necked Grebe: none despite large late winter invasion elsewhere.

Great Blue Heron: very scarce; none on CBCs for first time in years; 1 imm T Worth JEFF 13 Dec, at small freezing pond, probably expired soon after.

Canada Goose: max 5812 MCBC, high, but numbers diminished rapidly; only 463 WFC; 10-70 in scattered small flocks mid-Jan thru.

Mute Swan: 4 WCBC; 2 WFC.

Tundra Swan: max 42 WCBC; 36 PtPen 19 Dec; last 26 Stony Pt heading south in heavy snow squalls 14 Jan (GS).

Gadwall: max 25 MCBC; 10 WCBC; 14 WFC.

Am. Black Duck: 10-25/day thru where open water existed; 282 WFC.

Mallard: 2394 WFC; 1283 MCBC; 16 NBCBC; most 30-100/day Dec, fewer after; 602 SLR 5 Jan, high for location.

N. Pintail: 2 WCBC; WFC; none thereafter.

Green-winged Teal: f FL 23 Dec, late.

Redhead: 2 Pt Vivian SLR 5 Jan, only report.

Ring-necked Duck: 335 WCBC, record high; 5 FL thru 25 Jan, rare mid-winter.

Greater Scaup: max 380 WCBC; 241 WFC; continues a great decline in our area.

Lesser Scaup: 6 WCBC.

COMMON EIDER: f Pt Vivian SLR 5 Jan (NL, NYSARC), extremely rare.

Long-tailed Duck: 146 WFC; otherwise quite scarce.

Bufflehead: 408 WFC; 15-35/day to mid-Jan; scarce after.

Com. Goldeneye: 2617 WFC; most 150-300/day to mid-Jan; thereafter only in SLR pools.

Barrow's Goldeneye: f FL 5-8 Jan; 2 WFC.

Com. Goldeneye x Barrow's Goldeneye hybrid: FL 23 Dec (NL).

Com. Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser hybrid: FL 5 Jan (NL).

Hooded Merganser: max 29 WFC, good count; thru 25 Jan.

Com. Merganser: 520 PtPen 19 Dec; 1261 MCBC; 681 WFC.

Red-breasted Merganser: 3 MCBC; 152 WFC, high.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: widespread at 1-4/day thru near any open water; occasionally elsewhere.

N. Harrier: three singles thru 19 Dec; absent thereafter until return of migrants in Mar.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: total 12 mostly in Dec/Jan.

Cooper's Hawk: total 10 mostly Dec.

N. Goshawk: total 9 (6 ad, 3 imm), more than usual.

Red-tailed Hawk: mostly less than 10/day in prime habitat NW JEFF; max 18 PtPen 11 Feb.

Rough-legged Hawk: most counts 8-12/day in prime NW JEFF habitat; max 20+ NW JEFF, low; high percentage (35-50%) dark morphs this year interesting.

Merlin: imm f Gosier Rd CV Nov thru, wintered successfully at a large dairy farm.

Am. Kestrel: 1-4/day Dec; very scarce thereafter, only 3 scattered singles.

Gray Partridge: virtually none seen despite ideal conditions to concentrate them, suggests reduced populations; T Massena STLA 1 Dec, unusual.

Ring-necked Pheasant: 1-2/day scattered.

Ruffed Grouse: max 9 MCBC; 5 NBCBC; scarce.

Wild Turkey: max 239 NBCBC; widely distributed at 20-60/day.

Killdeer: T Massena STLA 1 Dec.

Ring-billed Gull: max 24 MCBC; gone after late Dec.

Herring Gull: max 804 MCBC; scarce after mid-Jan.

Iceland Gull: 3 MCBC.

Glaucous Gull: 2 MCBC.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 676 MCBC; only regular gull after mid-Jan at 5-15/day.

DOVES – WOODPECKERS

Rock Dove: 222-365 on all CBCs.

Mourning Dove: max 206 MCBC; 5-25/day, reduced after mid-Jan; feeder/farm dependent.

E. Screech-Owl: 3-4/day Louisville-Massena STLA (MB); not reported elsewhere.

Great Horned Owl: 1-5/day all areas.

Snowy Owl: 1-2/day Philadelphia area JEFF Jan, only reports.

Barred Owl: 5 reports of singles.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: 3 singles JEFF.

Downy Woodpecker: max 33 MCBC.

Hairy Woodpecker: max 28 MCBC.

N. Flicker: 1-3/day scattered areas; successful wintering PtPen.

Pileated Woodpecker: 1-3/day all areas; max 6 T Louisville-Massena STLA 24 Feb, high.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 8 total, a very poor year.

GRAY JAY: at feeder T Louisville STLA 12 Jan (MB), convincing description, very rare away from Adirondack haunts.

Blue Jay: 516 NBCBC; truly the only common bird on Tug Hill this winter.

Am. Crow: max 1957 MCBC.

Com. Raven: 1-2/day many areas including lowland sites along L Ontario and SLR; increasing; max 7 NBCBC.

Horned Lark: max 434 CV 13 Dec; 200-300/day CV thru Jan; 150 MCBC; good.

Tree Swallow: 6 CV 3 Dec (GS, T.Carrolan), insane, highly fluffed individuals in 6°F temperatures were probably sorted out of the gene pool that evening.

Black-capped Chickadee: max 460 MCBC; 380 NBCBC.

Tufted Titmouse: now regular along L Ontario shore JEFF; 1-3/day Louisville STLA thru.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: 1-4/day at scattered locations; scarce.

White-breasted Nuthatch: max 75 MCBC.

Brown Creeper: 10 MCBC, high count; a few scattered singles elsewhere to early Jan.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: 27 MCBC, very high count; scattered 1-4/day elsewhere.

E. Bluebird: many reports of 3-6/day lowland areas to early Feb, reflect super-abundant wild fruit crop.

Am. Robin: 100-300/day wintered in the alvar areas of NW JEFF dining on super-abundant fruit crops; 10-50/day many other areas N STLA; extraordinary numbers for such a severe winter.

Brown Thrasher: at feeder Black River JEFF thru at least 9 Feb.

European Starling: max 2137
WCBC.

Cedar Waxwing: scattered flocks of
15-60/day.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 1 MCBC.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 85 MCBC;
40 PtPen 11 Feb; 5-10/day average;
incredibly scarce.

Song Sparrow: MCBC, only report.

White-throated Sparrow: 8-10/day at
scattered feeders; virtually none afield.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 46 MCBC;
very few after early Jan.

Lapland Longspur: 5-15/day NW
JEFF.

Snow Bunting: 10-100/day
widespread; max 300 CV 25 Jan.

N. Cardinal: max 55 MCBC,
indicative of how well established
along SLR.

Com. Grackle: 1 WCBC.

Brown-headed Cowbird: f PtPen 11
Feb, extraordinary.