

REGION 1—NIAGARA FRONTIER

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December was mostly mild except for one extremely cold arctic air-mass on the 19th and 20th and lake-effect snow events on the 12th-15th and 24th. The average temperature was 29.7° F, 0.1° F below normal. Monthly precipitation at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport was 4.99", 1.19" more than usual, along with 22.8" of snow, 2.7" less than usual. Considerably more snow fell in the Southern Tier counties. The first half of January was extremely mild with some record highs, while the second half of the month was bitter cold and snowy with some record lows. The range in extreme temperatures was unprecedented for January. The average temperature was 23.8° F, 0.7° F below normal, although the first half average was 36.1° F and the second half average was a mere 11.9° F. The monthly precipitation was 3.57", 0.41" above normal, with 37.0" of snow, 10.9" more than normal. Lake Erie reached 32° F° on the 22nd, about a week later than normal. February was uneventful, with an average temperature of 25.3°F, 0.6° F below normal. The monthly precipitation was 2.42", normal, with only 22.3" of snowfall, 1.6" above normal. A colder than usual second half of the month slowed the return of blackbirds and waterfowl.

Despite the general lack of returning waterfowl in late February this year, wintering waterfowl still provided several highlights for the season. The number of ducks on the Niagara River typically increases dramatically after Lake Erie freezes, often including tens of thousands of ducks near the Peace Bridge. Notwithstanding this regular occurrence, an estimate of nearly 70,000 ducks, mostly Greater Scaup and Canvasbacks, in one very large raft on the Niagara River near the north end of Grand Island in early February was staggering.

A **Ross's Goose** turned up in February at Dunkirk Harbor, marking the second Regional winter report, with the first occurring just last winter. Many birders were able to see this bird, and several excellent digi-scoped photos clearly show the bill field marks to eliminate the identification concern of a Ross's x Snow Goose hybrid. **King Eider** sightings were more numerous than in any recent winter. There were several sightings on Lake Ontario at Fort Niagara State Park, possibly involving more than one individual; repeated sightings of a female near Strawberry Island later in the season; and two females that were consistently found with Mallards in Fort Erie, Ontario that were not observed to cross mid-river into New York waters. The only report of **Harlequin Duck** was a female seen for several days above Niagara Falls. Surf and Black scoters are rare beyond early January. This winter there were a few more reports than usual including a Regional record winter maximum of six Black Scoters.

Black-crowned Night-Herons were again found roosting through the winter in Buffalo and an immature was also frequently spotted at Dunkirk Harbor. As many as 29 Great Blue Herons were observed near the Motor Island nesting colony.

Two Bald Eagle pairs were observed nest building on the Niagara River in February. By the end of the month, the pair constructing on Navy Island (Ontario, Canada) appeared more likely to nest than the pair moving sticks around at Strawberry Island (New York). Bald Eagles have not been known to nest on the Niagara River in more than 50 years, yet another sign of the dramatically increased occurrence of this species in the Region.

The peak overall numbers of gulls on the Niagara River was likely during the second week of December. The large gull species were still numerous through mid-January, while the Bonaparte's Gulls departed after early January. Winter season highlights include the continued presence of **California Gull** from November and good counts of Iceland Gulls, with up to 25 observed at the Niagara Power Project in mid-January. Two **Sabine's Gulls** observed near Dunkirk Harbor in late December and early January was a remarkable find, not only because of the late date, but one of the birds was an adult, which is an age very rarely sighted in the Region.

Snowy Owls were reported at four locations this winter, including one that lingered at a field in Yates and a long-staying bird at the Dunkirk Airport in Pomfret. Short-eared Owl reports were up slightly. A count of 26 in Porter at a field where this species is found nearly every winter was the highest Regional count in more than 30 years. Long-eared Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl reports were typical and from regular locations. Two **Boreal Owls** was easily the owl highlight of the winter. Brett Ewald found the first roosting in the open at Wilson-Tuscarora SP on 18 December during a CBC. Many birders were able to see the bird that day, but it could not be relocated the next day. The second bird was discovered by Marg Partridge on some remote private property in the Town of Wilson on 23 January. The bird was found repeatedly until nearly mid-March. These sightings mark the third and fourth records for the Region.

Brown Thrasher is rarely found in winter, making the one in Allegany SP on 27 February a good find. **American Pipits** are rare past mid-November and have only been reported past December several times before. Therefore, two separate sightings in early January were remarkable. Three Chipping Sparrows that spent the winter at a feeder in Wilson represent a record winter count. Perhaps the mild start to the winter season may have coaxed some of these birds to linger.

Pine Siskin was the most widespread of the 'winter finches' this year, although it was hardly a banner year for numbers or distribution. Purple Finches were noted mostly in the southern portion of the Region, as usual. There were only isolated reports of Common Redpolls, but some lingered at feeders in Niagara County. Only one Evening Grosbeak was reported, and there were no reports of either crossbill species or Pine Grosbeak.

Besides the two Boreal Owls, there were two other major rarities found in the winter season. Vicki Rothman discovered a **Lark Sparrow** visiting her feeding station in the Town of Porter on 15 December. The bird lingered throughout the season, and numerous birders were able to enjoy seeing this bird thanks to the gracious hospitality by the Rothmans. This was the first winter record for the Region and the fifth overall.

While practicing nature photography on Black-capped Chickadees in her Niagara Falls backyard, Joan Hilts noticed a bird with them that she thought was

another chickadee. After finding the bird in her camera, she realized that it was different so she snapped a few photos. After downloading her photos onto the computer, she realized she didn't know what kind of bird it was. Along with her husband, David, they looked through bird guides and decided on **Black-throated Gray Warbler**. Because they are not birders, it is fortunate that they knew a birder, Jerry Farrell, and they told Jerry what Joan had photographed. Upon seeing the photographs, Jerry was convinced they had the proper identification. Several fortunate birders were able to find this bird among the thick spruce trees during the next two days, 18-19 December. This was the third Regional record for this species. The text on the Black-throated Gray Warbler discovery and identification was derived from an account prepared by Willie D'Anna.

Contributors

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Abbreviations

AISP – Allegany SP, CATT; AmSP – Amherst SP, ERIE; BeSP – Beaver I SP, ERIE; BuSP – Buckhorn I SP, ERIE; BWWTP – Batavia Wastewater Treatment Plant, GENE; DH – Dunkirk Harbor, CHAU; FMCSP – Four Mile Creek SP, NIAG; FNSP – Fort Niagara SP, NIAG; GHSP – Golden Hill SP, NIAG; INWR – Iroquois NWR, GENE/ORLE; MI – Motor I, NR, ERIE; NF – Niagara Falls, NIAG; NPP – Niagara Power Project on NR, Lewiston, NIAG; NR – Niagara R; PG – Point Gratiot – CHAU; SPNS – Sinking Ponds Nature Sanctuary, E Aurora, ERIE; Tift NP – Tift Nature Preserve, Buffalo, ERIE; WTSP – Wilson-Tuscarora SP, NIAG.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: arr DH 18-27 Feb (TM), only report.

ROSS S GOOSE: DH 19 Feb thru (DN, MZ!), second winter record.

Brant: Buffalo NR 12 Dec (PY!), late.

Mute Swan: 3 WTSP 18 Dec; 2 Jamestown CBC 19 Dec; DH 25 Jan; GHSP 5 Feb; 3 BeSP 8 Feb; only reports.

Tundra Swan: max 135 BeSP 7 Feb, traditional wintering area on NR.

Wood Duck: Tift NP 11 Dec; max 5

Amherst ERIE 26 Dec (JP); Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; 2 DH 21 Jan.

Am. Black Duck: 18 BWWTP 21 Dec; max 175 NF CBC 27 Dec.

N. Shoveler: 12 Jamestown CBC 19 Dec; 2 BWWTP 21 Dec (WW!); 2 DH 1 Jan - 13 Feb (WW!), rare in winter.

N. Pintail: max 5 DH 13 Feb.

Green-winged Teal: SPNS 4.6 Dec (LH); 9 Buffalo CBC 19 Dec; 2 NF 30 Jan (WW, JP); only reports.

Canvasback: very large numbers near BuSP 6 Feb, *intro*.

Redhead: max 200 Grand I NR 29 Jan.

Ring-necked Duck: Bennington WYOM 8 Dec; max 22 NF 19 Dec (DR); 13 Lewiston Res NIAG 8 Jan.

Greater Scaup: very large numbers near BuSP 6 Feb, *intro*.

Lesser Scaup: 5 Grand I NR 7 Jan; max 20 N Tonawanda NR 24 Feb (WW, JP).

King Eider: FNSP 27 Dec, 16 Jan, 27 Feb (JP, PY, WD); Strawberry I NR 21, 24 Feb (WW, JP); 2 also frequently seen on NR in Fort Erie, Ontario 12 Dec thru; good showing.

Harlequin Duck: NF 4-5 Dec (WD), only report.

Surf Scoter: Porter NIAG 27 Dec; GHSP 5 Feb; max 3, 4 FNSP 5, 13 Feb; DH 24, 27 Feb.

Black Scoter: 3 Wilson NIAG 18 Dec; FNSP 27 Dec (JP, BK); 1-3 DH 30 Jan — 20 Feb (TM); max 6 FNSP 11 Feb (S&TO), record count for winter.

Hooded Merganser: max 22 Buffalo Harbor ERIE 11 Dec.

Com. Merganser: 82 Bennington WYOM 1-18 Dec (GS), good inland count.

Ruddy Duck: NF CBC 27 Dec; BuSP 9 Jan; 1-2 DH 15 Jan — 20 Feb; only reports.

Red-throated Loon: 45 Wilson CBC 18 Dec; 4 NF CBC; only reports.

Com. Loon: GHSP 5 Feb, only report past Dec.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 8 DH Jan-Feb; N Tonawanda NIAG 31 Jan, 24 Feb (WW).

Horned Grebe: 3 Wilson NIAG 9 Jan; 13 GHSP 5 Feb; max 27 Shadigee ORLE 5 Feb.

Red-necked Grebe: 2 Porter NIAG 27 Dec; DH 12 Feb; only reports.

Double-crested Cormorant: 67 Buffalo Harbor ERIE 8 Jan; max 107 DH 20 Feb.

Great Blue Heron: 9 DH 30 Dec; max 29 MI 5 Feb.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: DH 30 Dec — 24 Feb, 5 Buffalo ERIE 4 Jan, roosting.

Turkey Vulture: Cambria NIAG 27 Dec (MM!), rare in mid-winter.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: max 15 imm + 11 ad AISP and Allegheny Res CATT 5 Dec (TB, MD, TL), regional high count; 3 Buffalo ERIE 28 Jan (JL), along waterfront ice; 2 ad Strawberry I NR 5-27 Feb (WW, mob), possible nesting activity at new site; Machias CATT 19 Feb; well reported from other traditional wintering and breeding areas.

N. Goshawk: Beaver Meadow CBC 18 Dec; Bethany GENE 3 Feb; only reports.

Red-shouldered Hawk: 3 Beaver Meadow CBC 18 Dec; Wilson CBC 18 Dec; Jamestown CBC 19 Dec; Royalton NIAG 26 Dec (S&TO), uncommon in winter.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 8 Yates ORLE 3 Jan; well reported near L Ontario throughout season.

Merlin: max 6 SUNY Buffalo campus ERIE thru (PY!), traditional winter roost; NF CBC 27 Dec.

Peregrine Falcon: Athol Springs ERIE 1 Dec (MT!); 2 NF 7 Dec; Buffalo ERIE 23 Jan; DH 19 Feb; only reports.

Am. Coot: 11 BuSP 9 Jan; 46 DH 25 Jan, max beyond Dec.

Killdeer: Wilson NIAG 5 Feb (JP, WW), rare in winter.

Purple Sandpiper: NF 4 Dec (WW, WD), only report.

Little Gull: max 2 NR Dec, fewer reports than usual.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 7,000 NR 1 Dec (GB).

CALIFORNIA GULL: 1-2 ad NPP 4 - 27 Dec (WD! WW!), continued from fall.

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

Iceland Gull: 13 Porter NIAG 27 Dec (WD, AG), good count for location;

Wilson NIAG 15 Jan; max 25 NPP 16 Jan (WD), impressive showing.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: max 11 NF & NPP 5 Dec (WD); BeSP 12 Jan, only report away from NF and NPP.

Glaucous Gull: Wilson NIAG 12 Dec; 2 Porter NIAG 27 Dec; WTSP 16 Jan; DH 20 Feb; only reports away from lower NR.

Nelson's Gull: NPP 12 Dec, scattered reports of this Glaucous x Herring hybrid thru Dec.

Great Black-backed Gull: 222 DH 25 Jan (WW), counts rarely made for this common species.

SABINE'S GULL: 2 (ad, juv) DH 28 Dec - 1 Jan (DM, PY, BC), very rare in winter, adults also very rare.

Black-legged Kittiwake: last 2 FNSP 5 Dec (PY).

PIGEONS — WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: Cheektowaga ERIE 20 Dec; Yates ORLE 27 Dec — 15 Jan; Buffalo Waterfront ERIE 10, 16 Jan (TC); Pomfret CHAU 6-27 Feb (TM, mob); modest showing.

Long-eared Owl: WTSP 18, 21 Dec; GHSP 3 Feb; only reports.

Short-eared Owl: 3, 6 Yates ORLE 5 Dec, 5 Jan; 3 Shelby ORLE 11 Dec; 4 Royalton NIAG 2 Jan; max 26 Porter NIAG 17 Jan, 4 — 13 reported thru season at this location; 2 Pomfret CHAU 15 Jan; Wheatfield NIAG 31 Jan; 2 Cambria NIAG 5 Feb; 3 Lockport NIAG 5 Feb.
BOREAL OWL: WTSP 18 Dec (BE, WW!); Wilson NIAG 23 Jan thru (MP, WD!); very rare, only the 3rd and 4th sightings in Region.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Wilson CBC 18 Dec; INWR 1 Jan (CR); 2, 1 WTSP 15, 28 Feb (BP).

Red-headed Woodpecker: Hamburg ERIE 2 Jan; PG 6 Feb; only reports.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: well reported thru.

Com. Raven: 2 Attica WYOM 4 Jan (RK), only report outside of CATT or ALLE.

Horned Lark: max 300 Oakfield GENE 27 Dec.

Carolina Wren: moderate number of reports.

Winter Wren: SPNS 9 Dec, 1 Jan; max 6 NF CBC 27 Dec; Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; Carrollton CATT 1, 23 Jan; Tift NP 29 Jan; BeSP 29 Jan; AmSP 4 Feb; good showing.

E. Bluebird: max 8 SPNS 9 Jan; typical number of reports.

Hermit Thrush: Buffalo CBC 19 Dec; Porter NIAG 27 Dec, 16 Jan; only reports.

Gray Catbird: Porter NIAG 27 Dec, 16 Jan; NF 30 Jan; unusual in winter.

N. Mockingbird: S Buffalo ERIE 2 Dec thru Jan; PG 27 Feb; only reports away from NIAG.

Brown Thrasher: AISP 27 Feb (TB), rare in winter.

Am. Pipit: 2 Eden ERIE 2 Jan (RR); 3 BWWTP 5 Jan (WW!); rare in mid winter.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: max 8 Buffalo CBC 19 Dec; 6 Porter NIAG 27 Jan; INWR 27 Jan; Orchard Park ERIE 5 Jan thru (MZ); Wilson NIAG 2 Feb.

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER: NF 17-19 Dec (JH, WD! NYSARC), third Regional record.

TANAGERS — WEAVERS

Chipping Sparrow: 3 Wilson NIAG 10 Dec thru (BP, WD), record count for winter; Portland CHAU 9 Jan.

Field Sparrow: Pomfret CHAU 9 Jan (TM); unusual in winter.

LARK SPARROW: Porter NIAG 15 Dec thru (VR, WD! NYSARC), first winter record, fifth overall for Region.

Savannah Sparrow: Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec, only report.

Swamp Sparrow: SPNS thru; max 17 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; Tifft NP 29 Jan.

White-crowned Sparrow: 7 Porter NIAG 16 Dec; 2 Wilson NIAG 18-30 Dec thru; max 29 NF CBC 27 Dec; Bethany GENE 8 Feb.

Dark-eyed Junco (*J. h. oregonus*): Wilson NIAG 22 Jan (WD, DD), rare but near annual in recent winters.

Lapland Longspur: 8 Oakfield GENE 27 Dec; max 20 Wilson NIAG 12 Feb (BB).

Snow Bunting: 900 Oakfield GENE 27 Dec (BK, JP); 250 Yates ORLE 30 Dec (MT); max 1200 Yates ORLE 5 Feb (WW, WD); 400 Carlton ORLE 27 Feb (MZ, DH).

Red-winged Blackbird: max 9, 19 Tonawanda ERIE 19 Dec, 26 Jan; 12 S Buffalo ERIE 23 Jan; arr Lancaster ERIE 18 Feb.

Com. Grackle: 4 NF CBC 27 Dec; 2 Yates ORLE 5 Jan (MT); arr Grand I ERIE 15 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: 85 Alden ERIE 24 Dec (G&MC), good count for date; arr 3 Lancaster ERIE 18 Feb.

Purple Finch: low numbers on CBCs and elsewhere; max 12 Farmersville CATT 2-28 Jan.

Com. Redpoll: Wilson NIAG 11 Dec; Buffalo ERIE 13 Dec; 6 Porter NIAG 29 Jan; max 10 Wilson NIAG 31 Jan; isolated reports.

Pine Siskin: max 94 Wilson NIAG 11 Dec (WD, BP), up to 20 at feeder thru; moderate number of reports throughout Region and season.

Evening Grosbeak: Scio CBC 18 Dec, only report.