

REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

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December was the first month since May that wasn't warmer than average. The average temperature was 27.1° F, 2.1° F below normal. Monthly precipitation at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport was 2.36", 1.44" less than usual. There was 20.3" of snow, 5.2" less than usual with no large snow events. A strong Pacific flow resulted in extremely mild weather for January. The average temperature was 34.9° F, an amazing 10.4° F above normal and the fourth warmest on record. The monthly precipitation was 3.67", 0.51" above normal, with only 7.1" of snow, 19.0" below normal. February brought a return to more expected winter conditions, with an average temperature of 27.8°F, 1.9° F above normal. The monthly precipitation was 2.45", 0.03" above normal, with 26.3" of snowfall, 8.5" above normal.

With the unusual warmth in January, Lake Erie did not freeze over this winter, and there were fewer waterfowl than usual on the Niagara River and at Dunkirk Harbor. Waterfowl highlights included a lingering **Harlequin Duck** at both locations, plus a **Cackling Goose** and two wing-tagged **Trumpeter Swans** on the upper Niagara.

The prolonged mild weather and plentiful open water resulted in some extremely early waterfowl movement in early February. Several American Wigeons, Northern Pintails, and Hooded Mergansers observed at Oak Orchard WMA on February 2-4 were very likely returning migrants. Gadwalls and Ring-necked Ducks at Lake Flavia in Dayton on 17 February are also best categorized as very early migrants. It is unclear whether these facultative migrants remained through February or retreated to more hospitable areas when the weather turned colder.

The unseasonable mild weather also prompted an earlier movement of gulls. Willie D'Anna reported several large flocks of gulls, mostly Ring-billed, along the Lake Ontario plain on 5 February, about a month earlier than usual. In the ensuing weeks, several observers commented that large gulls, especially adult Ring-billed, were much more numerous along Lake Ontario and near the Niagara River mouth than expected for the date.

There were some other unusual patterns for gulls on the Niagara River this winter. As continued from November, there were more Bonaparte's Gulls and large gulls in the Buffalo-Fort Erie area than usual. After early January, there were very low numbers of gulls observed at the Niagara Power Project. Bonaparte's Gulls were absent for only a brief period in January. With the exception of the latter, these patterns were probably more attributed to prey availability than the weather. Notable gull sightings included two reports of **Black-headed Gull** and the **California Gull** was found only once after November.

Bald Eagles continue to increase in winter, with maximum counts this year of 12 at Allegheny Reservoir and nine at Strawberry Island on the Niagara

River. Rough-legged Hawk numbers were lower than usual, while winter Red-shouldered Hawk reports were up slightly. A maximum of seven **Merlins** was observed roosting at the SUNY-Buffalo Main Street campus this winter.

There were four reports of **Snowy Owls**, while Long-eared, Short-eared, and Northern Saw-whet owls were reported from two locations each. The season will be long remembered for a long-staying **Northern Hawk Owl** in the town of Yates, Orleans County. It was the Region's first documented sighting since 1963 and fourth ever. The bird was found on 7 January by Paul Schnell, Anne Terninko, and Mike Crane, who were out banding raptors. They banded the bird and then notified birders. Local homeowners indicated the owl was present at least two weeks before its discovery by birders. The bird was extremely cooperative as it stayed near a roadside location through 9 March allowing numerous birders and non-birders to observe it. Photos revealed the bird to be in its first year, but even despite being banded, the bird could not be reliably sexed due to overlap in measurements between the sexes. The photogenic owl gained considerable media attention, and a debate ensued after a few individuals fed mice to it even though the bird was catching numerous wild mice on its own.

The mild weather undoubtedly helped the persistence of numerous half hardies this winter. There was an unprecedented number of winter sightings for the following species: Turkey Vulture, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, **Eastern Phoebe**, Fox Sparrow, and Gray Catbird. Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, and Field Sparrow also had good showings for winter.

Finch numbers were low again. There were scattered reports of Pine Siskins, only two reports of Evening Grosbeak, and single reports of Common Redpoll and **Pine Grosbeak**. Purple Finch was scarce.

While participating in the Hamburg-East Aurora CBC on 1 January Mike Zebehazi spotted a **Varied Thrush** in the town of Hamburg. It was the 11th sighting for the Region, all of which have occurred since 1970. The bird could not be relocated.

The female **Rufous or Allen's Hummingbird**, as reported in the fall season, continued to visit a feeder in Glenwood until 9 December. The bird likely perished following the arrival of a cold spell that night.

With nearly annual reports at the Batavia Wastewater Treatment Plant for the past ten years, an **Eared Grebe** is no longer considered unusual there. However, a report from January at that location was unprecedented. It was identified on 31 January by Elaine Dart and Doug Beattie.

It is with sadness that we report that Gordon Bellerby passed away at his home in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario on 16 January. A long-time fixture of the Niagara River birding scene, Gordon collected valuable data by conducting counts of Bonaparte's Gulls as they departed the Niagara River at dusk en route to Lake Ontario.

CONTRIBUTORS

Tim Baird (TBa), Doug Beattie, Paul Benham, Bill Broderick, Tom Burke (TBu), Bruce Chilton, Mike Crane, Willie D'Anna, Elaine Dart, Brett Ewald, Mike & Sylvia Galas, Andrew Guthrie, Rich Guthrie, Doug Happ, Linda Holmes, M.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AlSP – Allegany SP, CATT; AmSP – Amherst SP, ERIE; BeSP – Beaver I SP, ERIE; BuSP – Buckhorn I SP, ERIE; BWWTP – Batavia Wastewater Treatment Plant, GENE; ChauL – Chautauqua Lake, CHAU; DH – Dunkirk Harbor, CHAU; FMCSP – Four Mile Creek SP, NIAG; FNSP – Fort Niagara SP, NIAG; GHSP – Golden Hill SP, NIAG; LBSP – Lakeside Beach SP, ORLE; NF – Niagara Falls, NIAG; NPP – Niagara Power Project on NR, Lewiston, NIAG; NR – Niagara R; OOWMA – Oak Orchard WMA; GENE/ORLE; PG – Point Gratiot – CHAU; SPNS – Sinking Ponds Nature Sanctuary, E Aurora, ERIE; TBNP – Times Beach Nature Preserve, Buffalo, ERIE; Tiftt NP – Tiftt Nature Preserve, Buffalo, ERIE; WTSP – Wilson-Tuscarora SP, NIAG.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: SPNS 5 Dec; Dayton CATT 11 Dec; last 6 Yates ORLE 28 Dec (PY).

CACKLING GOOSE: Buffalo NR ERIE 15 Jan (JL! LL!), only second Jan record.

Mute Swan: 4 LBSP 28 Dec; 2 Wilson 1-4 Feb; max 6 Olcott NIAG 4 Feb.

Trumpeter Swan: Jamestown CBC 18 Dec; 2 Buffalo-NF NR 1 Jan – 22 Jan (FR! WD! mob), wing-tagged, photo.

Tundra Swan: 6 BWWTP 4 Dec; max 175 BeSP 17 Dec, traditional wintering area on NR; 5 Salamanca CATT 6 Jan (TBa).

Wood Duck: no Jan reports; arr 3 OOWMA 20 Feb (S&TO), early.

Gadwall: arr 2 Dayton CATT 17 Feb, early.

Am. Wigeon: 3 OOWMA 4 Feb (PY), likely early migrants.

Am. Black Duck: max 122 BWWTP 4 Dec; 76 DH 22 Dec.

Mallard: max 900 BWWTP 4 Dec.

N. Shoveler: 310 BWWTP 4 Dec (WW); SPNS 1 Jan (LH); only reports.

N. Pintail: 2 BWWTP 4 Dec; 2 Salamanca CATT 20 Jan; arr 6 OOWMA 4 Feb (PY), early.

Green-winged Teal: 8 BWWTP 4 Dec; 4 NF 6 Jan (DS); only reports.

Ring-necked Duck: 3 BeSP 17 Dec; 6 BuSP 22 Jan; max 8 Buffalo NR 2 Feb; arr 4 Dayton CATT 17 Feb; 6 DH 22 Feb.

Lesser Scaup: 3 BWWTP 4 Dec; 3 BuSP 22 Jan; max 6 DH 22 Feb.

Harlequin Duck: DH 3 Dec – 22 Feb (DN, mob); m NF 1 Dec.

Surf Scoter: Buffalo NR 24 Dec, only report.

Black Scoter: DH 1-22 Dec; Buffalo NR 2 Feb (PY!), only reports.

Com. Goldeneye: max 1050 NF 12 Jan (WW).

Hooded Merganser: max 600 ChauL 1 Dec (DN); 100 DH 15 Dec (DN); 3, 6 OOWMA 2-3 Feb, unusual location for date, early migrants?

Com. Merganser: max 1000 DH 10 Dec.

Ruddy Duck: 19 ChauL 1 Dec; max 135 BWWTP 4 Dec; BeSP 10, 16 Dec; 4 Buffalo NR 24 Dec; 4 DH 22-23 Feb (WW!, MG!).

Red-throated Loon: max 76 Wilson CBC NIAG 17 Dec; 63 FMCSP 27 Dec (WD); Somerset NIAG 7 Jan (J&KL, FR); Shadigee ORLE 4 Feb (WD).

Com. Loon: Olcott NIAG 4 Feb, only report past Dec.

Pied-billed Grebe: BuSP 11 Jan; max 8 DH 22 Feb (WW).

Horned Grebe: max 68 DH 7-31 Dec; 15 Yates ORLE 8 Jan; BWWTP 31 Jan (ED, DB).
Red-necked Grebe: BuSP 3 Dec (S&TO); 6 Wilson CBC 17 Dec; GHSP 4 Feb (PY); only reports.
EARED GREBE: BWWTP 31 Jan (ED! DB), first Jan record from this location.
Double-crested Cormorant: NF 28 Jan; max 83 DH 22 Feb.
Great Blue Heron: max 40 Strawberry I NR 13 Feb (M&SG).
Turkey Vulture: Dunkirk CHAU 28 Dec (DN); Yates ORLE 19 Jan (FR!); Amherst ERIE 20 Jan (GR!); Porter NIAG 22 Jan (DS!); rare but increasing in mid-winter; arr Aurora ERIE 22 Feb.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: max 12 Allegheny Res CATT 29 Jan (TBa); 9 Strawberry I NR 20 Feb (M&SG); well reported from other traditional wintering and breeding areas.
N. Goshawk: Beaver Meadow CBC 17 Dec, only report.
Red-shouldered Hawk: Beaver Meadow CBC 17 Dec; St. Bonaventure CBC 17 Dec; 2 Jamestown CBC 18 Dec; Porter NIAG 27 Dec (BB); Ashford CATT 29 Jan (JR); uncommon in winter.
Rough-legged Hawk: max 6 Dayton 22 Jan (DN); fewer reports than most winters.
Merlin: max 7 SUNY Buffalo campus ERIE thru (PY!), traditional winter roost; NF 3 Dec; Beaver Meadow CBC 17 Dec; Jamestown CBC 18 Dec; SPNS 10 Jan (LH); Jamestown CHAU 12 Feb; Kenmore ERIE 12 Feb (JL!).
Peregrine Falcon: 1-2 Buffalo ERIE thru, only reports.
Am. Coot: 1000 ChauL 1 Dec (DN); 5 BuSP 11 Jan; Olcott NIAG 19 Feb; 46 DH 22 Feb, max beyond Dec.
Killdeer: last Jamestown CBC 18 Dec.
Purple Sandpiper: 2 NF 3 Dec (PY), only report.
Dunlin: Buffalo NR 18 Dec (JL, BC), rare in winter.
Wilson's Snipe: 3 Jamestown CBC 18 Dec, rare in winter.

Little Gull: max 3 Lewiston NR 29 Jan, 4 Feb.
BLACK-HEADED GULL: Buffalo NR 4 Dec (WD); Lewiston NIAG 27 Dec; only reports.
Bonaparte's Gull: 17 ChauL 1 Dec; max 6,000 upper NR 22 Jan (WD).
CALIFORNIA GULL: ad NPP 28 Dec (RG, AG), only report since Nov.
Herring Gull: max 15,000 NF 18 Dec (WD).
Thayer's Gull: 2 NPP, 1 NF 3 Dec (WD); all sightings considered "probable" due to identification difficulties.
Iceland Gull: max 6 NPP 3 Dec; FMCSF 24, 27 Dec; 3 NF 1 Jan, fewer on NR than usual beyond Dec; 2 Wilson NIAG 5 Feb; DH 23 Feb.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: BeSP 24, 28 Dec; max 8 NF 1 Jan (WD); Buffalo NR 2 Feb.
Glaucous Gull: FMCSF 24, 27 Dec; max 4 NF 1 Jan; 1-2 DH 11 Jan -19 Feb; Wilson NIAG 5 Feb.
"Nelson's" Gull: ad NF 3 Dec (WD), Glaucous x Herring hybrid.

PIGEONS – WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: 2 Lewiston Reservoir NIAG 7 Dec (PB); Olcott NIAG 24 Dec (BE); Yates ORLE 28 Dec – 15 Jan; DH 15 Jan (DN); Wilson NIAG 4 Feb; only reports.
N. HAWK OWL: Yates ORLE 7 Jan thru (PS, AT, MC, mob, NYSARC); 4th Regional record, first since 1963, *intro*.
Long-eared Owl: AmSP 6 Jan (RS); GHSP 4, 18 Feb, only reports.
Short-eared Owl: Jamestown CBC 18 Dec; 3-8 Porter NIAG 24 Dec thru; not reported from any other locations.
N. Saw-whet Owl: Jamestown CBC 18 Dec; AmSP 30 Dec, 2-20 Jan (RS); only reports.
RUFIOUS or ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRD: female Glenwood ERIE thru 9 Dec (B&LS), continued from fall.
Red-headed Woodpecker: PG 22 Feb; 2 Dunkirk CHAU 23 Feb, only reports.
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Lewiston NIAG 18 Dec (PY); 2 FMCSF 18 Dec

(PY); Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; FNSP 1 Feb (MG, GR); NF 19 Feb (S&TO); 2 Dunkirk CHAU 23 Feb (M&SG); unprecedented winter showing.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

E. Phoebe: Brant ERIE 4 Dec thru 8 Jan (DN); AmSP 24 Dec, 2 Jan (RS!); very rare in winter.

N. Shrike: below average reports.

Com. Raven: 2 Arkwright CHAU 25 Feb, only report outside of CATT or ALLE.

Horned Lark: max 200 Wilson NIAG 7 Jan.

Carolina Wren: moderate number of reports.

Winter Wren: 2 Wilson NIAG 16 Dec; max 3 FMCSP 27 Dec (WD, BP); BeSP 11 Feb.

E. Bluebird: max 11 E. Aurora ERIE 1 Jan; typical number of reports.

Hermit Thrush: Wilson NIAG 4-17 Dec; 2,1 FMCSP 27 Dec, 11 Feb; Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; LBSP 28 Dec; Tift NP 4 Jan; AmSP 6 Jan; Porter NIAG 15 Jan; TBNP 12 Feb; good showing.

Am. Robin: max 500 WTSP 31 Dec.

VARIED THRUSH: Hamburg ERIE 1 Jan (MZ! NYSARC), very rare; 11th Regional sighting; could not be relocated.

Gray Catbird: FMCSP 11 Dec; Wilson CBC 17 Dec; Jamestown CBC 18 Dec; 1-2 SPNS 23 Dec – 10 Jan; Hanover CHAU 24 Dec; TBNP 1 Jan; 2 BuSP 11 Jan; GHSP 10 Feb; Bethany GENE 12 Feb; unprecedented winter showing.

N. Mockingbird: 4 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; BuSP 22 Jan; only reports away from NIAG.

Brown Thrasher: Belmont ALLE 18, 19 Feb (MJ), unusual in winter.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: BuSP 3 Dec; Buffalo ERIE 18 Dec; 2 LESP 8 Jan, only reports.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

E. Towhee: Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec (KF); Dunkirk CBC 1 Jan, only reports.

Chipping Sparrow: Bethany GENE 8 Dec thru (DB); Sheridan CHAU 17 Dec, only reports.

Field Sparrow: 3 Wilson NIAG 11 Dec; N. Tonawanda NIAG 13 Dec; Sheridan CHAU 17 Dec; 4 Jamestown CBC 18 Dec; Wilson NIAG 2,3 Jan; Bethany GENE 16,26 Jan; Pomfret CHAU 5 Feb (TM); good showing.

Fox Sparrow: Franklinville CATT 6-11 Dec (MD!); 2 Grand I ERIE 10 Dec (TBu); Orchard Park ERIE 17 Dec – 1 Jan (MZ! NV!); Jamestown CBC 18 Dec; Buffalo ERIE 11,12 Jan (PY!); Williamsville ERIE 18-25 Jan (AK); unprecedented winter showing.

Swamp Sparrow: max 6 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec.

White-crowned Sparrow: Lancaster ERIE 7 Dec; Eden ERIE 7 Dec; max 4 Porter NIAG 27 Dec; Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; Bethany GENE 28 Dec; 3 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 7 Jan; Somerset NIAG 10 Feb.

Lapland Longspur: 2 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 28 Dec; 3 Bliss WYOM 8 Jan; 3 Porter NIAG 14 Jan; max 23 Yates 15 Jan (WD).

Snow Bunting: max 1000 Yate ORLE 24, 28 Dec (S&TO, PY); 700 Wilson NIAG 8 Jan; 100 Bethany GENE 16 Jan.

Red-winged Blackbird: SPNS 1 Jan; 16 S. Buffalo ERIE 1-30 Jan; 14 Tonawanda ERIE 13 Feb; arr 21 Alabama GENE 20 Feb.

E. Meadowlark: 2 Youngstown NIAG 8 Feb (BB), rare in winter.

Com. Grackle: Shelby ORLE 15 Jan; arr SPNS 27 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 39 Porter NIAG 1 Feb.

Pine Grosbeak: 3 Bond L Park NIAG 27 Dec (MZ, DH), only report.

Purple Finch: 2 Porter NIAG 11 Dec; 3 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; Williamsville ERIE 22 Jan; 2 OOWMA 20 Feb; 2 Arkwright CHAU 20 Feb; only reports; low numbers on CBCs.

Com. Redpoll: 12 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec (DB), only report.

Pine Siskin: max 55 Wilson NIAG 1-31
Dec; six other reports in low numbers.

Evening Grosbeak: 28 Scio CBC 17
Dec; 3 AISP 3 Feb (TL), only reports.