

REGION 5 - ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

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The first three weeks of December were very cold, but then temperatures moderated to bring the warmest January on record at Syracuse. That pattern held into early February. The December average temperature was 26.2°F, 2.4° below normal, with 2.56 inches of precipitation, 0.56 inches below normal, and 53 inches of snow. In January the temperature averaged 33.4°, 10.7° above normal, and there was 2.96" of precipitation, 0.36" above the average. There was only 12.1" of snow for the month. The February average temperature of 27.2° was 2.7° warmer than normal, and there was 1.66" of precipitation, 0.46 inches below normal, with 34.8" of snow.

Large areas of ice developed on Oneida Lake by mid December, but significant open water remained through January, and the lake did not freeze solidly until the last week of February. Oswego Harbor and the Lake Ontario shore line were open much of the winter. Almost no birds returned to the area during the record January warmth, but by the end of the month wetlands and ponds were beginning to open and the local Canada Geese were establishing territory, if only temporarily. The last three days of February were the coldest of that month refreezing most open water and creating a large ice shelf along Lake Ontario. There was very little snow on the ground for most of the period, and even in northern Herkimer County Gary Lee recorded a maximum depth of only 14 inches. Sustained winds of 40-50 MPH on February 17 damaged many unoccupied Great Blue Heron and Red-tail Hawk nests, but no one reported that Great Horned Owls on nests had been disturbed.

Observers reported that food stocks over most of the Region were in very low supply. Brenda Best said, "Locally here, food is located sporadically. Some conifers have cones, but most don't. Same with catkins on birches. Berries and fruit are almost nonexistent (no waxwings, few starlings except at the landfill...) , even Tree Sparrows and Juncos seem hard to find." Gary Lee said, "Very little winter food, berries practically nonexistent, poor cone crop."

Snow Goose and Tundra Swan returned in February although some of them had wintered close by. There were several Brant reports in December. Trumpeter Swans spent time at their usual location in Fair Haven, and one wing-tagged Trumpeter wintered in Oswego County. There was more open water than usual during the mild January, and waterfowl took advantage of that in different ways. Canada Geese moved into wetlands that are usually locked up, and Common Mergansers that winter on Onondaga Lake stayed on Oneida Lake for a long time. Waterfowl concentrations rarely developed on Lake Ontario, and counts for most species were low. Three Northern Shovelers in January were the most unusual sighting among the waterfowl.

Red-throated and Common Loons departed in January. Great Blue Herons were found around Onondaga Lake through the season, but they were uncommon elsewhere. There were two Turkey Vulture reports from the southwestern part

of the Region, some distance from the eastern Syracuse suburbs where they are expected. Bald Eagle was common along the open waterways, Northern Harrier was scarce after the snowy December, and accipiters were seen in good numbers. We had two Red-shouldered Hawks this winter. Rough-legged Hawks were scattered, with the only concentration in Verona. Merlin reports were up, and Peregrine Falcons stayed in Utica and Syracuse.

Ring-necked Pheasant numbers were up, but they are still considered to be put-and-take. Killdeer, Dunlin, and Purple Sandpiper all lingered into December. Iceland and Glaucous Gulls were both common for much of the season and especially so in February. Lesser Black-backed Gull is still uncommon in the Region, so two in December and up to three in February may be a sign of increasing numbers. There was only a single Bonaparte's Gull seen after December. Still a common winter bird, Great Black-backed Gull numbers seemed to be low. Snowy Owls were numerous, with reports from traditional areas such as Fairfield, Oswego Harbor, and the Syracuse airport. There were also four in Stockbridge, one hilltop east of the Fenner site where they have been found in some recent years. Most Short-eared Owls left during the snowy December. There was one report of N. Saw-whet Owl and none for Long-eared Owl.

Northern Shrike was somewhat common in December, but it was much harder to find after the onset of warm weather in January. Two flocks of Fish Crows in Syracuse may have been the same birds, but their numbers are expanding. Half-hardy species included Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Winter Wren, Gray Catbird, Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, and Eastern Meadowlark. Several Winter Wrens and a Gray Catbird were still present at the end of February. There was also a late American Pipit, a species generally not accorded half-hardy status here.

Reports of Carolina Wren and Northern Mockingbird came from established areas, where the population seems to be at least stable if not on the rise. Tufted Titmice wintered in Old Forge, a good year to try, and they continue to push their limits in the Region. American Robins usually winter in the southern parts of the region where snowfall is less, but a late January flock in Morgan Hill State Forest at 1540 feet was well above where they are normally found. There were no warblers for the season. Sparrow numbers were generally low, as they were able to roam far and wide due to the lack of snow. We had no Rusty Blackbirds and just two Common Grackles.

Finches were mixed. There were no Red Crossbills, only one Pine Grosbeak, and just a few Purple Finches over the winter. Evening Grosbeak numbers were higher than in most recent years although nothing reminiscent of 1980's numbers. Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins persisted at some feeders but were sporadic at most. Both species were only infrequently found away from feeders. The White-winged Crossbills that found their way to the Region used what was available, and there were two examples of birds away from the typical forests: a pair of crossbills at Sylvan Beach were utilizing a few spruces laden with cones in an otherwise deciduous woods and scrubland area and a flock in Herkimer that spent a few days in a cone-laden spruce grove on a college

campus with only a mature climax woodland nearby.

There was a total of 124 species seen for the season. Less common species included: Northern Shoveler, Red-shouldered Hawk, Purple Sandpiper, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Fish Crow, Gray Catbird, American Pipit, Bohemian Waxwing, Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, and White-winged Crossbill.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

Bvllc – Baldwinsville; CM – Clay Marsh; DeR – DeRuyter; FH – Fair Haven, Little Sodus Bay, and vicinity; Geo – Georgetown; HIWMA – Howland Island WMA; LOL – Lake Ontario Littoral; MCL – Madison County Landfill, T Lincoln; OneiL – Oneida Lake; OnonL – Onondaga Lake; SCH – T Schroepfel; SFNS – Spring Farm Nature Sanctuary, Kirkland; Skan – Skaneateles; SSSP – Selkirk Shores State Park; SVB – Syvan & Verona Beaches; Syr – Syracuse; TRWMA – Three Rivers WMA.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: max 300 Bridgewater 3 Dec; 70 SFNS 4 Feb, early return; 200 Van Buren 22 Feb; 250 Skan 23 Feb; 100 SSSP 27 Feb.
Brant: 40 Third L 3 Dec, unusual location; last Oswego 15 Dec.
Canada Goose: last large-scale migration 9 Dec.
Mute Swan: max 7 FH to 13 Jan.
Trumpeter Swan: max 3 FH 7-15 Jan; wing tag 807 wintered LOL.
Tundra Swan: max 32 FH 5 Dec; 25 Bridgeport 26 Dec; 4 OnonL 19 Feb, arr or had they even left?
Wood Duck: last Fulton 15 Dec; arr Fulton Feb 24.
Gadwall: max 9 FH 7 Jan.
Am. Wigeon: arr 4 FH 11 Feb.
Am. Black Duck: max 55 Oneida 15 Jan.
N. Shoveler: 3 Brewerton 9 Jan.

N. Pintail: m Seneca R after 11 Dec.
Green-winged Teal: 2 Syr to 30 Jan; 2 W Eaton 16 Jan.
Canvasback: 1 OnonL after 12 Jan; max 3 OnonL 11 Feb.
Redhead: max 10 DeR 10 Dec; 6 Otisco L 2 Jan.
Ring-necked Duck: max 50 DeR 10 Dec; 15 Otisco L 2 Jan.
Greater Scaup: max 250 Oswego 6 Feb.
Lesser Scaup: 8 FH 20 Feb.
White-winged Scoter: max 26 Mexico 8 Jan.
Black Scoter: 1 Oswego to 24 Dec.
Long-tailed Duck: max 170 LOL 8 Jan.
Bufflehead: max 28 FH 7 Jan.
Com. Goldeneye: max 700 FH 19 Feb.
Hooded Merganser: max 60 OneiL 6 Dec; 45 Otisco L 2 Jan; 14 FH 20 Feb.
Com. Merganser: max 2400 OneiL 9 Jan.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 190

Oswego 24 Dec.

Ring-necked Pheasant: max 10 SVB
1 Jan.

Wild Turkey: max 177 DeR 3 Jan.

Red-throated Loon: OnonL 10 Dec; last
Oswego 10 Jan.

Com. Loon: max 6 Oswego 24 Jan; last
Oswego 22 Jan.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 6 OnonL 17
Dec; 1 Fulton thru.

Horned Grebe: max 23 Mexico 8 Jan.

Red-necked Grebe: OnonL 28 Dec;
Oswego 21 Feb.

Double-crested Cormorant: 35 Oswego
Harbor end of season.

Great Blue Heron: max 11 OnonL
17 Dec.

Turkey Vulture: Fulton 12 Jan; Camillus
2 Feb; Fayetteville 23 Feb.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 2-3 OnonL thru;
6 Redfield 23 Feb; to 5 per day
LOL.

N. Harrier: 3 Jan-Feb reports.

N. Goshawk: 5 reports.

Red-shouldered Hawk: Utica 17 Dec
(VB); Hannibal 18 Dec (JB).

Rough-legged Hawk: max 9 Verona
1 Jan.

Am. Kestrel: max 8 Oneida CBC 1 Jan.

Merlin: reports from 7 locations.

Peregrine Falcon: FH 5 Dec; Syr &
Utica thru.

Am. Coot: max 6 FH 13 Dec.

Purple Sandpiper: FH 5 Dec.

Dunlin: FH 5 Dec.

Bonaparte's Gull: last FH 21 Jan.

Ring-billed Gull: max 4200 Oswego
19 Feb.

Herring Gull: max 900 Oswego R 24
Dec.

Iceland Gull: 2-3 per day Oswego R
after 17 Dec; 3 MCL 2 Feb.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: 2 Oswego R
15-24 Dec; 1 Bvll after 21 Feb.

Glaucous Gull: 1-2 per day Oswego R
& MCL.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 220
Oswego R 18 Dec.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Great Horned Owl: 16 Oneida-
Durhamville 1 Jan, very high number.

Snowy Owl: max 4 Syr airport 10 Dec &
Stockbridge 2 Jan; reports of 7 others at
5 locations.

Barred Owl: 1 Skan after 2 Jan, unusual
site.

Short-eared Owl: Phoenix 19 Dec; last
Skan 2 Jan.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Skan after 23 Feb.

Belted Kingfisher: OnonL thru.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: 6 Fulton 18
Dec, increase in that area.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: last Pratt's
Falls 3 Jan.

Black-backed Woodpecker: Old Forge
3 Jan.

N. Flicker: low-average CBC numbers.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 18+ individuals for season,
only 5 after 8 Jan.

Blue Jay: max 232 Skan CBC 2 Jan.

Am. Crow: max 5218 Syr 17 Dec.

Fish Crow: 9 Onondaga Park Syr 17
Dec;
max 13 OnonL 4 Feb.

Com. Raven: max 16 Big Moose 15
Feb; reports from MCL, Oswego and
TRWMA.

Horned Lark: max 100 Bridgewater 6
Jan.

Tufted Titmouse: 3 Old Forge thru,
unexpected; 18 Rome CBC 17 Dec, new
high.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: max 11 Utica
South Woods 17 Dec.

Carolina Wren: persists at established
sites.

Winter Wren: max 3 CM 18 Dec; CM 2
Jan; Fulton 10 Jan; 2 Skan thru.

E. Bluebird: max 20 Green L SP 3 Jan.

Hermit Thrush: SFNS 1 Dec; Utica 2
Dec, only reports.

Am. Robin: 55 Fabius 29 Jan, where
unusual; 200 SFNS 21 Feb, local origin;
40 Oneida 26 Feb, possible migrants.

Gray Catbird: 2 Fayetteville 17 Dec;
Utica Marsh thru.

N. Mockingbird: Stockbridge 7 Jan.
Am. Pipit: Elbridge 16 Dec (MV), late.
Bohemian Waxwing: 2 Old Forge
28 Dec (GL).
Cedar Waxwing: max 150 SFNS 16 Feb;
50 Fayetteville 22 Feb.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

E. Towhee: SCH 22 Feb.
Am. Tree Sparrow: one flock of 78 Skan
2 Jan, high; mostly less than 10 per day
and scarce at feeders.
Field Sparrow: Bvllc 24 Dec; Oneida 1
Jan.
Fox Sparrow: New Woodstock CBC 18
Dec; Pulaski 29 Dec - 8 Jan.
Song Sparrow: max 4 Sterling 10 Dec.
Swamp Sparrow: 2 Van Buren 6 Dec; 2
Syr CBC 17 Dec; last HIWMA 7 Jan.
White-throated Sparrow: max 5-10 per
day, generally scarce.
White-crowned Sparrow: imm T
Onondaga 2 Jan.
Dark-eyed Junco: max 30 Waterville 19
Dec.

Lapland Longspur: max 3 Bridgewater
1-4 Feb; 7-8 other individuals.
Snow Bunting: many lingered well into
Jan; max 1250 Stockbridge 6 Jan.
N. Cardinal: 2 Old Forge to 21 Dec.
Red-winged Blackbird: 15 Skan 4 Dec;
2 W Winfield 2 Feb; arr 30 Green L SP
26 Feb.
E. Meadowlark: W Winfield 10 Jan.
Com. Grackle: Rome 17 Dec; Fabius 19
Feb, early migrant?
Brown-headed Cowbird: max 200 Skan
4 Dec.
Pine Grosbeak: Geo 22 Jan, only report.
Purple Finch: 2 Fulton 8 Dec.
House Finch: max 100 Hannibal 26 Dec.
White-winged Crossbill: 2 SVB 1 Jan;
30 Herkimer 21-22 Jan; 30 SSSP after
28 Jan.
Com. Redpoll: to 40/day mostly N of
Oneil after 1 Jan.
Pine Siskin: max 35 Hastings 24 Jan.
Evening Grosbeak: max 75 Boylston 12
Jan; small flocks Tug Hill and southern
highlands.