

REGION 6 - ST. LAWRENCE

Jeffrey S. Bolsinger

98 State Street, Canton NY 13617

jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

Weather data for Watertown indicate a winter that was 3.3° F warmer than average, with 1 inch of precipitation more than is the norm. But these statistics don't tell the whole story. The season began during a cold snap that ended two days before Christmas. As a result, December was 2.1° colder than normal, and by Christmas a deep snow pack covered much of the Region, especially near Lake Ontario. This cold stretch was followed by five weeks of remarkably mild weather, with temperatures rising as high as 57° during mid-January. The mean temperature in Watertown for January was 11.1° warmer than average, and by the end of the month most of the Region, including parts of the reliably snowy Tug Hill, had no snow cover remaining. February alternated between very cold and relatively mild. The coldest night of the season, -25° in Watertown, was February 27, but mean temperatures for the month were within half a degree of normal.

Waterfowl departed the interior portions of Region 6 during the cold snap that coincided with the beginning of the reporting season. As a result, few ducks and geese were reported away from Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. A Cackling Goose at Upper and Lower Lakes WMA in early December was presumably one of two birds first reported in November. Other waterfowl highlights included a raft of 600 Redhead on the St. Lawrence River found on the DEC waterfowl count and 5000 Long-tailed Ducks on Lake Ontario in mid-February. Nick Leone noted that this was the first winter in years he was unable to find a Barrow's Goldeneye. Other waterbirds and waders of note included a single Red-necked Grebe on the St. Lawrence River in January and several Great Blue Herons observed as late as mid-January.

The heavy snow and cold temperatures during the first half of December appeared to push out many raptors, especially in Lewis and western Jefferson Counties where the heaviest lake effect snow fell. Raptors were reported in good numbers at the beginning of December, but many had left the area by the middle of the month and were reported in lower than normal numbers through the middle of January. Northern Harrier and American Kestrel were virtually absent from Jefferson County during this period, although small numbers of kestrels wintered in northern St. Lawrence County where snowfall was somewhat lower. As the snow pack disappeared in January, Northern Harriers and Red-tailed and Rough-legged hawks filtered back into the Region, suggesting that they had not moved very far in response to the snow.

Only two Snowy Owls were reported in Jefferson County before mid-January, but a late winter invasion occurred in the traditional raptor wintering areas in the northern part of the county. Snowy Owl numbers peaked during the last two weeks of February, when at least 9 owls were present in Lyme and Cape Vincent. Other notable owl reports included a **Northern Hawk-Owl** found in the Adirondacks by Peter O'Shea, but which could not be relocated, and Short-eared Owls in Cape Vincent, Potsdam, and Waddington.

Participants on the Massena-Cornwall Christmas Bird Count found a good assortment of gulls, including 3 Iceland Gulls, 7 Glaucous Gulls, and 1 **Black-legged Kittiwake**. The kittiwake was the fourth record for this Christmas Bird Count. Single Iceland and Glaucous gulls were reported from below the Moses-Saunders Dam through mid-February, but gull numbers generally declined as the season progressed.

The picture was mixed with respect to half-hardies. Several reporters felt that half-hardies were present in unusually low numbers, especially in western Jefferson and Lewis counties, where the heaviest snow fell. In St. Lawrence County, Gray Catbirds were found in Massena and Potsdam, Eastern Bluebirds in Canton, and American Robins in several locations along the St. Lawrence River. Northern Flickers were reported in higher than usual numbers throughout the Region. One observer noted that this was the first winter in many years that he found no Song or White-throated sparrows.

Bohemian Waxwings and several species of northern finches put on a good show this winter. Several flocks of Bohemian Waxwings were reported from the Canton and Potsdam area, where sightings became increasingly frequent as the season progressed. Joan Collins found evidence that Red Crossbills were

nesting in a red pine stand in the northern Adirondacks. Common Redpolls were widespread in generally modest numbers, although Joan Collins had large flocks at her feeders, which also hosted **Hoary Redpolls** twice. I received no other reports of Hoary Redpolls this winter. Pine Grosbeaks were observed on the Massena-Cornwall Christmas Bird Count and in Canton during mid-January but otherwise were not reported. Evening Grosbeaks were widespread and, at least on the Tug Hill, more numerous than in recent years.

The ongoing increases in the populations of Bald Eagle and Common Raven were noted by many observers this winter. Daily totals of 5-10 Bald Eagles have become expected along the St. Lawrence River, and this species can now be found virtually anywhere in the Region during winter. The spread of ravens into the Lake Ontario plains and St. Lawrence Valley continues as well, as evidenced by the count record 4 ravens on the Watertown Christmas Bird Count and a group of 12 along the St. Lawrence River. Not many years ago any ravens at these locations would have been considered extremely unusual.

I received reports of 93 species for the winter period. Highlights included the late season Snowy Owl incursion, the Northern Hawk-Owl, Black-legged Kittiwake, Bohemian Waxwings, and good finch numbers. Disappointments included generally poor waterfowl numbers, with some exceptions; low numbers of raptors for much of the winter; and the absence of many half-hardies from much of the Region.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jeff Bolsinger, Dick & Marion Brouse, Carol Cady, Joan Collins, Bruce DiLabio, Harold Ellingsen, Jr., Lee Harper, Bob & Ellie Long, Peter O'Shea, Chris Reidy, Gerry Smith, Eve Sweatman, Bob & June Walker, MaryBeth Warburton, Tom & Eileen Wheeler, Matt Young.

ABBREVIATIONS

CV – Cape Vincent, JEFF; FD - Fort Drum Military Reservation; KC – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown, JEFF; MCCBC – Massena-Cornwall Christmas Bird Count; PilPt - Pillar Pt, T Brownville, JEFF; RMSP - Robert Moses State Park, T Massena, STLA; SLR - Saint Lawrence River; ULLWMA—Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton, STLA; WCBC - Watertown Christmas Bird Count.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

CAKCLING GOOSE: 1 ULLWMA

3 Dec, where 2 found in Nov (JB).

Tundra Swan: max 156 Sacketts Harbor
15 Jan.

Am. Black Duck: 194 PilPt 2 Dec;
90 RMSP 1 Jan.

Mallard: max 900 RMSP 1 Jan.

N. Pintail: max 5 SLR Massena 11 Feb.

Redhead: max 600 SLR CV 15 Jan.

Greater Scaup: 1500 PilPt 13 Jan.

Long-tailed Duck: max 5000 Stony
Point mid-Feb.

Bufflehead: 68 PilPt 2 Dec.

Com. Goldeneye: max 1300
SLR between Cape Vincent and
Alexandria Bay 27 Jan.

Com. Merganser: max 1000 RMSP 7 Jan.

Red-necked Grebe: Cedar Pt. SP 27 Jan (JB), only report.

Double-crested Cormorant: 2-5 per day SLR Massena thru.

Great Blue Heron: 6 reports late Dec and Jan; last ULLWMA 16 Jan.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 3-5+ per day SLR; lower numbers reported throughout Region.

N. Harrier: absent from most of Region Dec and early Jan; scattered singles late Jan; 2-4 per day late Feb.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: ave numbers.

Cooper's Hawk: ave numbers.

N. Goshawk: 2 reports Tug Hill.

Red-tailed Hawk: 10-12 per day N Jeff Dec, declining to 6 per day Jan and Feb; 3-6 per day rest of Region thru; max 33 WCBC, unusually high compared with rest of Region.

Rough-legged Hawk: 2-5 per day St. Lawrence Valley; 10-20 per day N Jeff thru mid-Jan, increased Feb.

Am. Kestrel: only 2 reports STLA; none Jeff after late Dec.

E. Screech Owl: 1 dead on road Barnes Corners Dec.

Snowy Owl: 2 rep N JEFF Dec and Jan; 4 arr N JEFF 9-11 Feb; up to 9 by late Feb.

N. HAWK OWL: Piercefield 14 Feb (PO), could not be relocated.

Short-eared Owl: 1-3 per day CV Jeff thru; Potsdam 10 Jan; 2 Waddington early Jan.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Colton 4 Feb.

Herring Gull: max 2056 MCCBC.

Iceland Gull: max 3 MCCBC 27 Dec; ad SLR Massena 15 Dec.

Glaucous Gull: max 7 MCCBC 27 Dec; at least 1 Moses-Saunders Dam thru early Feb.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 489 MCCBC.

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE: 1 MCCBC 27 Dec (BD).

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Mourning Dove: max 638 WCBC, high.

Belted Kingfisher: KC 14-18 Jan.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: widespread reports from E JEFF.

N. Flicker: 10+ reports; max 4 WCBC.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 1-4 per day in open areas throughout Region; declined JEFF but not STLA after Dec.

Gray Jay: 2 near Sevey's Corners 28 Jan.

Com. Raven: 4 WCBC, high; 12 Blind Bay SLR mid-winter.

Horned Lark: widespread reports of 5-50 from open country throughout Region thru.

E. Bluebird: max 4 MCCBC 27 Dec; Potsdam 21 Dec; 2 ULLWMA 8 Jan.

Am. Robin: mid-winter max 12 RMSP 14 Jan.

GRAY CATBIRD: MCCBC 27 Dec (BD); Potsdam 2-4 Jan.

Bohemian Waxwing: numerous reports of 30-100+ STLA 16 Dec thru.

Cedar Waxwing: max 20 RMPD 14 Jan.

WARBLERS

No reports.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

Savannah Sparrow: PiPen 11 Feb.

Dark-eyed Junco: 10-15 KC thru.

Snow Bunting: max 500 FD 10 Jan.

Red-winged Blackbird: arr ULLWMA 25 Feb.

Pine Grosbeak: 16 MCCBC; 5 Canton 16 Jan; 1 Canton 22 Jan; only reports.

RED CROSSBILL: 12-15 Colton 11 Feb thru, nesting suspected (JC); 4 Barnes Corners early Feb (GS).

Com. Redpoll: numerous reports; max 350 at Potsdam feeder 23 Jan (JC).

HOARY REDPOLL: 2 each at Potsdam feeder on 26 Dec, 18 Jan (JC), only reports.

Pine Siskin: KC 13, 20 Dec.

Evening Grosbeak: scattered reports of 5-12 per day Tug Hill; max 75 Barnes Corners Jan and Feb.