

REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

Mike Morgante

59 Briar Hill Road, Orchard Park, NY 14127

morgm@adelphia.net

The very mild weather from November continued into December, and it was the second warmest November-December period on record. The average temperature was 37.2° F, 7.4° F above normal. Monthly precipitation at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport was 3.16", 0.64" less than usual, along with only 7.5" of snow, 18" less than usual. Very strong winds on the 1st resulted in a major seiche on Lake Erie and the highest water levels since 1985. The extremely mild weather continued for the first two weeks of January, but then very wintry conditions finally arrived and lingered. The average temperature was 28.9° F, 4.4° F above normal. The monthly precipitation was 4.77", 1.61" above normal, with only 15.5" of snow, 10.6" below normal. The long run of warm winter weather resulted in some bizarre sights and sounds for January including sprouting crocuses and daffodils and calling spring peepers! The arctic chill lasted through February, and it was the coldest February in nearly 30 years and snowiest in 12 years. The average temperature was 18.6° F, 7.3° F below normal. There was a 22-day stretch where the temperature was below freezing, the longest such stretch since 1985. The monthly precipitation was 1.71", 0.71" below normal, with 33.5" of snowfall, 15.7" above normal. Snow fell on 26 of the 28 days.

The mild weather in the first half of the season allowed waterfowl to linger later than usual and in places where open water is normally frozen by New Year's Day, e.g. Iroquois NWR and Lake Flavia in Dayton. There were unusually large numbers of geese at Iroquois NWR and vicinity in early January, including a group of 400 Snow Geese that far surpassed the previous regional winter maximum of 60. A **Greater White-fronted Goose** and several **Cackling Geese** were also seen in January. There are only two previous January records for both species. At the onset of snowy weather on 20 January, Jeff Reed observed several skeins of Canada Geese flying south in Olean. Lake Erie did not freeze over until mid-February, and there were fewer waterfowl than usual on the Niagara River and at Dunkirk Harbor until that time. Canvasbacks were in lower numbers on the Niagara River than usual until the cold weather of mid-January set in, at which time Bill Burch and Jerry Lazarczyk counted 12,500 off Beaver Island State Park. There were several reports of diving ducks and grebes being rescued from roadsides in mid-February. Other waterfowl highlights included a lingering **Harlequin Duck** at Dunkirk Harbor, an **Eared Grebe** at Dunkirk Harbor in early December, and a **Barrow's Goldeneye** on Lake Ontario at Point Breeze. The goldeneye was most frequently seen off the east pier and, therefore, considered by many birders to be in Region 2, however;

it kindled a mild debate about the regional boundaries because Route 98 does not reach Point Breeze as indicated in the boundary definitions in *The Kingbird*.

Other than lingering waterfowl, the unseasonably mild weather did not result in increased numbers of “half-hardies” like the very mild weather in the previous winter. Despite warmer weather through the CBC season and into mid-January, there were no Gray Catbirds or Eastern Phoebe and only a few Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Hermit Thrushes, Winter Wrens, Fox Sparrows, and Field Sparrows like an “average” winter. Looking back, the unprecedented number of these species seen last winter may have had more to do with abnormal weather systems, e.g., Jet Stream irregularities and hurricane effects in autumn 2005, than just mild winter weather, as speculated by Edward Brinkley in “The Changing Seasons: Winter that Wasn’t,” *North American Birds*, Vol. 60, No. 2, 2006. Some interesting out-of-season birds did occur this winter. An **American Woodcock** heard by Terry Mosher on the morning of New Year’s Day resulted in only the second January record for that species. A **Virginia Rail** was found by Linda Holmes at Sinking Ponds Nature Sanctuary, a location where the species has wintered irregularly before. Blackbirds, in several flocks of unprecedented numbers for January, were observed prior to the onset of freezing weather and seemed more like arrivals than departures. As Brinkley pointed out in the aforementioned article, it is getting tougher to determine how to use terms like half-hardy, lingerer, reverse migrant, and facultative migrant in these warm and unusual winters.

Both large and small gulls were found in good numbers on the Niagara River in December and through most of January. An estimated count of 15,000 Bonaparte’s Gulls on the Niagara River in Buffalo on 14 January was impressive for the date. The best gull find was the Niagara River’s second **Slaty-backed Gull**. The bird was found by the Cayuga Bird Club and seen by many above Niagara Falls on 2 December. The bird, considered to be in third-winter plumage, was reported several times over the next two weeks but eluded birders on most days in that span. The gull was always observed from the Canadian side of the river and was seen to approach or possibly cross into New York on 3 December. The record is included here because it is difficult to discern in the field where the international boundary lies above Niagara Falls, and it is a safe assumption that most of the gulls seen on the Niagara River are present on both sides at some time. Other notable gull sightings included one **Black-headed Gull** and the continued presence of the **California Gull** from the fall season. Jaegers are rarely seen in winter, so a **Pomarine Jaeger** in early December and two unidentified jaegers in early January observed near the source of the Niagara River were especially notable.

Short-eared Owls were reported from more locations than usual this winter. While this species is known to be declining, it is also likely overlooked in winter because little effort is made to search for them outside of traditional locations. Several of the birds at the Royalton location were fitted with transmitters as part of a NYSDEC tracking program. There have been fewer

reports of Snowy Owls in recent years, but it was still unusual to have no reports this year.

Finch numbers were very low, as was expected after a fall season with few sightings and reports of bountiful cone crops to the north in Ontario. There were only single reports of one Pine Siskin and one Evening Grosbeak and just a few scattered reports of Purple Finches.

Besides the Slaty-backed Gull, the biggest rarities included Razorbill and Varied Thrush. The **Razorbill** continued at the mouth of the Niagara River off Fort Niagara State Park from late November until last seen on 7 January. Many birders were able to see this very rare inland alcid although it remained elusive during most of its stay. A **Varied Thrush** visited the home of Bob and Joan Barry in Cambria during the period 1-15 February. It represented the 12th sighting for the Region and second consecutive winter for this species.

CONTRIBUTORS

Tim Baird, Doug Beattie, Bill Broderick (BBr), Bill Burch (BBu), Gary Chapin, Willie D'Anna, Elaine Dart, Michael DeSha, Brett Ewald, Kurt Fox, Mike & Sylvia Galas, Joanne Goetz, Linda Holmes, Marcie Jacklin, Dave Junkin, Brendan Klick (BKl), Bruce Kramer (BKr), Jerry Lazarczyk, Tom LeBlanc, Garner Light, Kevin McGowan, Terry Mosher, Dave Neveu, Susan & Tom O'Donnell, Karl Overman, Jim Pawlicki, Betsy Potter, Gerry Rising, Don Roberson, Vicki Rothman, Richard Salembier, Debbie Sharon, David & Debbie Suggs, William Watson, L. Wilson, Al Wormington, Peter Yoerg.

ABBREVIATIONS

AlSP – Allegany SP, CATT; BeSP – Beaver I SP, ERIE; BuSP – Buckhorn I SP, ERIE; BWWT – 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; INWR – Iroquois NWR, GENE/ORLE; 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; SPNS – Sinking Ponds Nature Sanctuary, E Aurora, ERIE; TBNP – Times Beach Nature Preserve, Buffalo, ERIE; Tift NP – Tift Nature Preserve, Buffalo, ERIE; TWMA – Tonawanda WMA, GENE/NIAG; WTSP – Wilson-Tuscarora State Park, NIAG.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES
GREATER WHITE-FRONTED
GOOSE: 4 Olcott NIAG 24 Dec (JP);
TWMA 7 Jan (PY), very rare in winter.

Snow Goose: Orchard Park ERIE 30 Dec;
1, 2 Dayton CATT 31 Dec, 7 Jan; Porter
NIAG 6 Jan; max 400 INWR 7 Jan (PY),
record winter count.

CAKCLING GOOSE: Carlton ORLE 10 Dec (GC); INWR 27 Dec (JP); 4 INWR, 1 TWMA 7 Jan (PY!); INWR 18 Jan (WW!), only two previous Jan records.

Mute Swan: Beaver Meadow CBC 16 Dec, unusual location; 20 Pt Breeze ORLE 7 Jan (S&TO), record regional count; 4 WTSP 7 Jan.

Trumpeter Swan: Allegheny Res CATT 28 Jan (TB!), tagged.

Tundra Swan: 20 Dayton CATT 6 Dec; 180 BeSP 14, 21 Dec (DS), traditional wintering area on NR; 17 Celeron ChauL 14 Dec; 59 N Harmony CHAU 14 Dec; max 500 Beaver Meadow CBC 16 Dec; 9 INWR 27 Dec; 31 INWR 8 Jan; 47 Buffalo NR 11 Jan; 2 Findley L CHAU 14 Jan; 15 Pomfret CHAU 5 Feb.

Wood Duck: 2 Jamestown CBC 17 Dec; 2 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; 2 SPNS 30 Dec; no reports beyond Dec.

Gadwall: 12 Celeron ChauL 14 Dec; 2 Tift NP 28 Dec; 10 INWR 7 Jan; max 28 NF 11 Jan; 6 Tonawanda NR ERIE 24 Feb.

Am. Black Duck: max 48 Dayton CATT 31 Dec.

N. Shoveler: max 150 BWWT 3 Dec; 40 Jamestown CBC 17 Dec; BWWT 18 Jan (WW); 4 Wilson NIAG 19 Jan (BE), only reports beyond Dec.

N. Pintail: 7 OOWMA 16 Dec; 2 Tift NP 16 Dec; 15 INWR 27 Dec; Orchard Park ERIE 30 Dec; max 20 Dayton CATT 31 Dec.

Green-winged Teal: 9 Bethany GENE 8 Dec (DB); 2 INWR 27 Dec (JP); DH 17 Jan (TM); only reports.

Redhead: max 458 Jamestown CBC 17 Dec; 265 Tonawanda NR 21 Feb.

Canvasback: 6 BWWT 3 Dec; max 12500 BeSP 21 Jan (JL, BBu).

Ring-necked Duck: 50 BuSP 19 Dec, good count for date; 11 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec, good count for location and date; Tift NP 5 Jan; Tonawanda NR ERIE 10 Feb.

G. Scaup: leucistic f BuSP 10 Feb (JL, WW).

Lesser Scaup: 2 BWWT 24 Dec; 2 DH 9 Jan – 18 Feb; 20 BeSP 2 Feb; max 130 Tonawanda NR ERIE 8 Feb (JP); 100 Tonawanda NR ERIE 21 Feb (JP).

Harlequin Duck: ad m DH thru 23 Dec (DN, mob), continued from fall.

Surf Scoter: Barcelona CHAU 14 Dec; Tonawanda NR ERIE 8-21 Feb; max 13 DH

23 Feb (DN), good count for location and date.

Black Scoter: Barcelona CHAU 14 Dec; DH 18, 23 Feb; only reports.

Long-tailed Duck: Conewango CATT 14 Jan (TB), unusual location.

Com. Goldeneye: 350 & 700 Celeron ChauL 14 & 21 Dec (DN), good inland counts.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE: m Point Breeze ORLE 29 Dec (BK!), less than annual, same bird found by Fox on 9 Dec on “Reg 2 side” and seen thru.

Hooded Merganser: max 512 Celeron ChauL 14 Dec (DN); 34 Tonawanda NR 3-24 Feb.

Com. Merganser: 150 BWWT 3 Dec (KF), good count for location; 87 Dayton CATT 6 Dec; 1500 Celeron ChauL 14 Dec (DN); max 6000 DH 27 Jan (DN).

Red-breasted Merganser: grounded Darien GENE 16 Feb (KF), rescued and released.

Ruddy Duck: max 50 & 35 BWWT 3 & 24 Dec; 15 Dayton CATT 15 Dec; 2 DH 11 Dec – 20 Jan; 5 Buffalo NR 5 Jan; 5 BWWT 18 Jan (WW); BuSP 9 Feb; Tonawanda NR 10 Feb.

Ring-necked Pheasant: max 22 Porter NIAG 20 Feb (VR), good count for one group.

Red-throated Loon: 2 Somerset NIAG 3 Jan; 10 & 2 GHSP 4 & 7 Jan; Yates ORLE 20 Feb (JP); only reports beyond Dec.

Com. Loon: Grand I NR 6 Jan; DH 27 Jan – 18 Feb; only reports past Dec.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 14 DH 27 Jan (DN); 2 BuSP 14 Jan (DS).

Horned Grebe: max 17 Somerset NIAG 3 Jan; 12 max DH 11-23 Feb.

Red-necked Grebe: 1-2 DH 18-27 Feb; grounded AISP 24 Feb (TL), rescued and released.

EARED GREBE: DH 9, 10 Dec (DN, JG), increased reports in recent winters.

Double-crested Cormorant: Strawberry I NR 1 Jan; Tift NP 5 Jan; 15 Tonawanda NR 11 Feb; max 86 DH 18 Feb.

Great Blue Heron: 16 DH 11 Dec; max 61 Motor I NR 21 Feb (WW).

Black-crowned Night-Heron: 24 Buffalo NR 1 Jan (D&DS), along Black Rock Canal, excellent winter count; 1, 2 Tonawanda NR 8, 10 Feb; only report.

Turkey Vulture: Scio CBC 16 Dec; Jamestown CBC 17 Dec; Hamburg CBC 30

Dec; Batavia GENE 10 Feb (KF), only reports.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: max 13 Allegheny Res CATT 28 Dec (TB); well reported from other traditional wintering and breeding areas.

N. Goshawk: Beaver Meadow CBC 17 Dec; FNSP 29 Dec; only reports.

Red-shouldered Hawk: St. Bonaventure CBC 16 Dec, only report.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 10 Dayton CATT 20 Jan (DN).

Merlin: max 4 SUNY Buffalo campus ERIE thru (PY!), traditional winter roost; Cheektowaga ERIE 7 Dec; Leon CATT 10 Dec (MD, TB); Jamestown CBC 17 Dec.

Peregrine Falcon: DH 9, 17 Jan; 2-3 Buffalo NR 27 Jan (WD); 2 BuSP 1 Feb; Dayton CATT 3 Feb (DN).

VIRGINIA RAIL: SPNS 31 Jan (LH), has wintered at this location before.

Am. Coot: max 482 Jamestown CBC 17 Dec; 9 BuSP 2 Jan; Allegany CATT 14 Jan, unusual location for date; 4 Tonawanda NR ERIE 8 Feb; 26 DH 18 Feb, max beyond Dec.

Killdeer: DH 7 Dec; 3 Jamestown CBC 17 Dec; arr Rushford ALLE 28 Feb (LW).

Purple Sandpiper: 2, 3, 2 NF 3, 17 Dec, 28 Jan (PY), only reports.

Am. Woodcock: Pomfret CHAU 1 Jan (TM!), second regional Jan record.

POMARINE JAEGER: Buffalo NR 3 Dec (AW, KO), viewed from Canadian side to cross river, winter reports very rare.

jaeger species: 2 Buffalo NR 6 Jan (MJ), Jan reports rare.

Little Gull: max 5 Lewiston NR 21 Jan (GC).

BLACK-HEADED GULL: ad FNSP 3 Dec (BBr), only report.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 15,000 Buffalo NR 14 Jan (D&DS).

CALIFORNIA GULL: ad NPP 30, 31 Dec, 6, 14 Jan (WD, WW), assumed same bird from fall.

Thayer's Gull: a few reports NPP, NF; all sightings considered "probable" due to identification difficulties.

Iceland Gull: max 6, 6 NF 31 Dec, 21 Jan; 2 Wilson NIAG 28 Jan; Point Breeze ORLE 3 Feb; Tonawanda NR ERIE 8 Feb; only reports away from NR.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: max 8 NF 31 Dec (WD); BeSP 19 Jan.

SLATY-BACKED GULL: NF 2, 3 Dec (KM, WD!), several unconfirmed reports through 13 Dec, was seen on Canadian side but likely crossed into NY, second record for NR.

Glaucous Gull: FMCSF 14 Jan; max 5 NF 21 Jan; DH 18, 23 Feb.

Great Black-backed Gull: 4 BWWTP 24 Dec (KF), good inland count.

Black-legged Kittiwake: juv NPP 30, 31 Dec (JP, RS, BP), only reports.

RAZORBILL: FNSP thru 7 Jan (WD, mob), continued from late Nov.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: no reports.

Long-eared Owl: 5, 5, 2 GHSP 3, 11, 25 Feb (WD); only reports.

Short-eared Owl: max 10, 6 Porter NIAG 5 Dec, 20 Jan (DS; BBr); 4 Royalton NIAG 15 Dec (GL); 4 Shelby ORLE 14 Jan (PY); Grand I ERIE 20 Jan (D&DS); 4 Yates ORLE 21 Jan (DS); Carlton ORLE 19 Feb (S&TO); 2 Wheatfield NIAG 27 Feb (DR); more locations than recent winters but still mostly in traditional wintering area.

N. Saw-whet Owl: banded Wethersfield WYOM 16 Dec (DJ); Jamestown CBC 17 Dec; Ellery CHAU 18 Dec (JL).

Red-headed Woodpecker: LBSP 10 Dec, 6 Jan, 20 Feb (GC, JP); Beaver Meadow CBC 17 Dec; only reports.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: NF 6 Jan (S&TO); Bethany GENE 26 Jan - 18 Feb (DB); only reports.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: well reported in Dec and Jan.

Com. Raven: 3 Ellery CHAU 7 Dec; 2 Java WYOM 31 Dec; only reports outside of CATT or ALLE.

Horned Lark: max 240 Wilson NIAG 11 Feb; 153 Bethany GENE 15 Feb (DB).

Carolina Wren: moderate number of reports.

Winter Wren: Hanover CHAU 16 Dec; Newfane NIAG 23 Dec; Porter NIAG 29 Dec; no reports beyond Dec.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: TBNP 28 Dec (RS), only report.

E. Bluebird: max 10 Allegany CATT 16 Dec.

Hermit Thrush: FMCSF 29 Dec; GHSP 4 Jan; only reports.

Am. Robin: arr Brant ERIE 17 Feb.

VARIED THRUSH: Cambria NIAG 1-15 Feb (B&JB; GR, JL, mob), 12th regional sighting.

N. Mockingbird: Tift NP 16,28 Dec; Tonawanda ERIE 17 Dec, 23 Jan; Bethany GENE 30 Dec, 13 Jan; only reports away from NIAG.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 2 INWR 27 Dec; 3 Porter NIAG 29 Dec; only reports.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

E. Towhee: Grand Island ERIE 3 Feb (BKr), only report.

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 410 Wilson NIAG 15 Feb, large flock.

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

Savannah Sparrow: Newfane NIAG 13 Jan (WD), rare in winter.

Fox Sparrow: Wilson NIAG 4-7 Dec (BP, WD); Jamestown CBC 17 Dec; only reports.

Swamp Sparrow: max 6 TWMA 7 Jan.

White-crowned Sparrow: 3 max Wilson NIAG 1 Dec thru 31 Jan; 8 Porter NIAG 29 Dec; 3 max Houghton ALLE 21 Jan thru;

35 Bethany GENE 20 Feb (ED), good winter count.

Lapland Longspur: 50 Wilson 14 Jan (WD, BP); max 58 Somerset NIAG 11 Feb (WD).

Snow Bunting: 146 BWWT 16 Dec (WW); 160 Bethany GENE 15 Feb (DB); 120 Wilson NIAG 11 Feb; 70 Farmersville CATT 25 Feb; max 200 Somerset NIAG 25 Feb (PY).

Red-winged Blackbird: 9 Porter NIAG 29 Dec; 13 Jan (WD); max 150 Hartland NIAG 13 Jan (WD); 115 Newfane NIAG 13 Jan (WD), very high numbers for Jan; arr 23 FMCSF 18 Feb.

E. Meadowlark: FNSP 18 Jan (DS), rare in winter.

Com. Grackle: Tonawanda ERIE 21 Dec; arr Tonawanda ERIE 28 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: 2 Bethany GENE 28 Dec; max 158 Wilson NIAG 2 Jan (MG), good count for Jan; 150 Hartland NIAG 13 Jan (WD); 3 Grand I ERIE 25 Jan; Silver Creek CHAU 29 Jan; Colden ERIE 10 Feb; arr 25 Houghton ALLE 14 Feb.

Purple Finch: 19 Pomfret CHAU 5-8 Feb (TM); few reports; low numbers on CBCs.

Pine Siskin: Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec, only report.

Evening Grosbeak: Beaver Meadow CBC 16 Dec, only report.