

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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Winter was divided into two periods of nearly equal duration: very mild weather that lasted until mid-January gave way to harsh winter conditions that remained through the end of February. Watertown's mean temperature for December of 35.4° F was 10.1° above normal, and similar balmy conditions persisted until 16 January, the date of the season's first sub-zero night. Despite colder weather late in the month, January's mean temperature of 22.9° was still 4.3° above normal. February was cold, with a mean temperature of 14.0° that was 6.4° below normal. Precipitation was above normal in December, when virtually all of Watertown's 5.4", 1.7" above normal, fell as rain; precipitation for the rest of the season was within one inch of normal. Watertown received just 13.2" of snow in January, but 74.5" in February. The Tug Hill received even heavier snowfall, especially during an intense period of lake effect snow between 5 and 10 February.

Open water that persisted through mid-January allowed many species of waterfowl and waterbirds to remain in northern New York longer than is typical. Perhaps the biggest surprise was a flock of approximately 20,000 Snow Geese a DEC officer directed Dave Prosser and Steve Guy to on the day of the statewide waterfowl count. This species is rarely encountered in Region 6 after early December, and such a large flock in January is unprecedented. Tundra Swans were also unusually common through late January, and the four Wood Ducks reports were more than in most years. Once again Nick Leone found the rarest ducks of the season, one Harlequin Duck and two Barrow's Goldeneye. Other waterbirds rarely reported in winter included a high count of 10 Common Loons on the St. Lawrence River in January, a Red-necked Grebe at Stony Point, and an American Coot at Pt. Peninsula.

In response to the potential for large-scale energy development in Cape Vincent, Gerry Smith conducted extensive raptor surveys there and on Pt. Peninsula throughout the winter. It turned out to be an exceptional winter for raptors in northern Jefferson County. Northern Harriers were present in Cape Vincent in high numbers during the mild portion of the winter, but moved out, at least some apparently to Pt. Peninsula, when the cold and snow settled in during late January. At about the same time large numbers of Rough-legged Hawks flooded into the Region, with daily counts reaching 80+ each in Cape Vincent and Pt. Peninsula. Most impressively, at least 100 Short-eared Owls wintered in these two towns. All of these species were found in much lower numbers elsewhere in Region 6, indicating the importance of northern Jefferson County for wintering raptors.

The winter's list of half-hardies was relatively long, but many of these species were represented by just one or two sightings, and most observers felt that fewer half-hardies were present than would be expected given the mild December. Surprisingly, a Marsh Wren that I pushed up on the Watertown Christmas Bird Count appears to be a first winter record for Region 6. Swamp Sparrow and Rusty Blackbird were also new species for that count. Other rare half-hardies included a Brown Thrasher that came to a Potsdam feeder for several weeks and a Fox Sparrow in Canton. Mid-winter reports of Wilson's Snipe and Belted Kingfisher in the northern Adirondacks, where typically the ground is covered by deep snow and open water is exceedingly scarce, are indicative of the unusual winter.

Finches were among the season's highlights, but were generally limited to the Adirondacks. Most finch reports for Region 6 came from the town of Colton (Boreal habitat is easier to access there than elsewhere in the Region.), where Joan Collins and others found Red Crossbills, Pine Siskins, and Purple Finches in good numbers. White-winged Crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks were reported sporadically and in smaller numbers. Flyover crossbills of both species on Fort Drum and two pairs of Evening Grosbeaks on the Tug Hill represented the only reports of these finch species outside Adirondack Park.

I received reports of 104 species for the winter. Among the negatives not previously mentioned were very low numbers of gulls, including no reports of white-winged gulls, even from the usually reliable Moses-Saunders Dam area. It was also a poor year for Snowy Owls, although a banded owl Tom MacDonald had observed through the summer and fall of 2006 was relocated in the same area during January. Only three other Snowy Owls were reported, and none stuck around for any length of time. Aside from northern Jefferson County and the Adirondacks, birding in the Region was generally slow, or "spectacularly poor" as Nobi Ackerman described it on the day of the Massena-Cornwall Christmas Bird Count. The highlights of the season were the large numbers of hawks and especially Short-eared Owls in Cape Vincent and Pt. Peninsula, crossbills and other finches in the northern Adirondacks, and a few unusual half-hardies, particularly Marsh Wren and Brown Thrasher.

CONTRIBUTORS

Nobi & Joanne Ackermann, Dick & Marion Brouse, Gordon Batson, Jeff Bolsinger, Carol Cady, Joan Collins, Steve Guy, Monica LeClerc, Nick Leone, Tom MacDonald, Chris Reidy, Gerry Smith, Eve Sweatman, Bob and June Walker, Mary Beth Warburton, Tom & Eileen Wheeler.

ABBREVIATIONS

BRB - Black River Bay; CV – Cape Vincent JEFF; FD - Fort Drum Military Reservation; FL - Fisher's Landing T Orleans JEFF; KC – Kelsey Creek T Watertown JEFF; LPd - Leonard Pond trail T Colton STLA; PiPt - Pillar Pt T Brownville JEFF; PtPen - Pt Peninsula T Lyme; RMSP - Robert Moses State Park T Massena STLA; SLR - St. Lawrence River; ULLWMA - Upper and Lower Lakes WMA T Canton STLA; WCBC - Watertown Christmas Bird Count.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: max 20,000 Ellisburg WFC 13 Jan (DP, SG), rare in Jan.
Tundra Swan: max 176 PtPen 9 Dec, departed late Jan.
Wood Duck: Lyme 10 Dec (NL); Three Mile Bay 9 Dec (DB); Henderson 13 Jan (SG, DP); Watertown 31 Jan (NL), more than usual.
Gadwall: max 200 CV 2 Feb.
Am. Wigeon: 5 Pt. Salubrius 3 Dec; 2 CV 2 Feb.
Am. Black Duck: max 320 L Ontario shoreline JEFF 2 Feb.
N. Pintail: CV 21 Jan.
Canvasback: max 100 CV 8 Dec.
Redhead: max 1000-1500 CV 8 Dec.
Ring-necked Duck: max 200 CV 8 Dec.
Greater Scaup: max 4000 CV 8 Dec.
Lesser Scaup: 6 CV 2 Feb, only report.
Harlequin Duck: f BRB 5 Dec (NL); ad m CV 8 Dec (NL).
Long-tailed Duck: max 76 L Ontario shoreline JEFF WFC.
Bufflehead: 55 CV 10 Dec, good count; max 301 WFC 13 Jan.
Com. Goldeneye: max 2435 WFC 13 Jan; 1500-2000 FL 28 Jan, good count.
Barrow's Goldeneye: f FL 28 Jan (NL).
Hooded Merganser: max 39 RMSP 3 Dec.
Com. Merganser: max 672 SLR WFC 13 Jan.
Red-breasted Merganser: max 76 WFC 13 Jan.
Com. Loon: max 13 WFC, high.
Pied-billed Grebe: 3 Dec reports; last SLR JEFF 14 Jan.
Horned Grebe: max 3 PiPt 20 Dec and L Ontario shoreline WFC 13 Jan, scarce.

Red-necked Grebe: Stony Pt. 12 Dec, only report (DP).

Double-crested Cormorant: max 6 SLR Massena WFC.

Great Blue Heron: 8 reports Dec; Hounsfield 7 Jan; FD 23 Jan.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

N. Harrier: 15 per day CV early Dec increased to 25-35 per day mid Jan, then declined to 2-5 per day by late Jan; 10-20 per day PtPen late Jan thru.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: max 2 Rutland 13 Feb, scarce.

Cooper's Hawk: 10 reports.

N. Goshawk: Colton 14 Dec, only report.

Red-tailed Hawk: 9-15 per day CV.

Rough-legged Hawk: 15-25 per day each CV and PtPen Dec increased to 35-85 per day late Jan thru (GS); similar pattern of occurrence elsewhere in smaller numbers.

Golden Eagle: 2 ULLWMA 2 Dec (JB).

Am. Kestrel: 2-5 per day CV thru; scarce elsewhere after mid-Jan.

Merlin: CV several dates Jan; Watertown 2 Feb.

Am. Coot: PtPen 11 Dec (NL), rare in winter.

Wilson's Snipe: LPd 7 Jan (JC, EW, TW), rare in winter.

Snowy Owl: Hammond bird that was present Feb thru Nov 2006 relocated in same location early Jan (TM); CV 27 Dec to 18 Jan; two others CV one day each.

Long-eared Owl: PtPen 24 Feb.

Short-eared Owl: 73 in 5 roosts CV thru; 28 PtPen thru; scattered individuals elsewhere JEFF, very high.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Canton 2 Feb.

Bonaparte's Gull: 22 PtPen 3 Dec; 20 CV 10 Dec.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Belted Kingfisher: LPd 3 Feb (JC), rare in Adirondacks in winter.

N. Flicker: 7 reports, scarce.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 1-3 per day throughout Region.

Com. Raven: 2 CV 24 Jan; 6 PtPen 13 Feb; adult in nest Barnhart Is. 23 Feb; now widespread throughout lowlands.

Horned Lark: 100-200 per day CV thru.

MARSH WREN: WCBC 16 Dec (JB, CC, CR), first winter record Region 6.

E. Bluebird: Alexandria Bay 15 Dec.

Am. Robin: scarce Dec and Jan; 10-25 per day by mid Feb.

Brown Thrasher: Potsdam feeder mid-Jan to 19 Feb (GB *fide* NA, ph!), fifth winter record.

Am. Pipit: CV 16 Jan, only report

Cedar Waxwing: scarce.

WARBLERS

No reports.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 155 Canton 24 Jan.

Fox Sparrow: ULLWMA 24 Jan (JB), very rare in winter.

Song Sparrow: 2 WCBC; KC 3 Dec thru, only reports.

Swamp Sparrow: WCBC 16 Dec (GS), rare in winter.

White-throated Sparrow: FD 21 Dec, only report.

Lapland Longspur: 20-80 per day CV thru.

Snow Bunting: max 2000-2500 CV several dates Dec and Jan.

Red-winged Blackbird: PiPt 3 Dec.

Rusty Blackbird: WCBC 16 Dec, rare in winter.

Com. Grackle: arr Watertown 21 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 210 WCBC 16 Dec, high.

Purple Finch: abundant in Adirondacks, virtually absent elsewhere.

Red Crossbill: up to 60 per day Colton thru; FD 4 Jan, only report outside Adirondacks.

White-winged Crossbill: 5 FD 4 Jan only report outside Adirondacks; 2-6 per day Colton Feb.

Pine Siskin: common Adirondacks, few elsewhere.

Evening Grosbeak: 4 Tug Hill, only report outside Adirondacks.