

REGION 1—NIAGARA FRONTIER

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The first half of December was snowy and consistently colder than average, but then it got milder toward the end of the month for CBC season. The average temperature was 29.3° F, 0.5° F below normal. Monthly precipitation at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport was 4.28", 0.48" more than usual, with 31.3" of snow, 5.8" more than usual.

January was mild and with little snow. The average temperature was 29.7° F, 5.2° above normal. It was the third consecutive mild January. The monthly precipitation was 2.33", 0.83" below normal, with only 17.5" of snow, 8.6" below normal. Severe wind storms occurred on the 9th and 30th, both with wind speeds topping 65 miles per hour. The event on the 30th featured a near record surge on Lake Erie and a breach of the ice boom that filled the Niagara River with ice.

It was the ninth wettest February on record. The average temperature was 25.1°F, 0.8° below normal. The monthly precipitation was 4.83", 2.41" above normal, with 22.5" of snowfall, 4.7" above normal.

It was a mostly typical season for waterfowl. There were few lingering birds early in the season and only a few spring arrivals in late February. Numbers on the Niagara River increased as Lake Erie became more ice covered in January. The ice floes that entered the river following the breach of the ice boom affected the distribution of available foraging areas for at least several days. Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup continue to occur in greater numbers in the winter season. **King Eiders** are nearly annual. However, a female shot by a hunter off Fort Niagara in early January was likely a very rare take during the winter waterfowl hunting season. Other highlights among waterfowl sightings include an **Eared Grebe** in late December at Dunkirk Harbor, a **Cackling Goose** there in early January, and a record monthly count of eight for **Red-throated Loons**

in February. The loons were found on Lake Ontario off Golden Hill State Park, and it is uncertain if they were truly wintering birds and/or early migrants.

It is not unusual for one or a few Black-crowned Night Herons to winter on or near the Niagara River and occasionally at Dunkirk Harbor. David Gordon found 30 at Tonawanda Island in the Niagara River on 13 January, which constitutes a record winter count.

Rough-legged Hawk sightings represented an average winter. Bald Eagle, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon continue to be found with increased regularity. Red-shouldered Hawks wintered at several southern tier locations. Jeff Reed identified a **Golden Eagle** at Allegany State Park in late December, a location where they have occasionally wintered.

There were some excellent gull sightings this winter. The best find was clearly an adult **Ross's Gull** that allowed many birders to catch a glimpse of this ultra-rarity. On 27 January, Willie D'Anna spotted the bird standing on ice off of Niagara Falls State Park near Goat Island while he was scoping from the Control Gates above Niagara Falls on the Ontario side of the Niagara River, an amazing feat considering this small gull was approximately a half mile away. A quick trip across the border afforded D'Anna and Betsy Potter very close views and excellent photographs. The bird remained in the area for several days but was not usually easy to find. On several occasions the bird was found standing in the parking lot, allowing exceptionally close views to those lucky birders present. The last sighting was on 1 February to the dismay of the many birders who arrived from near and far to search for the bird on the weekend of 2-3 February. This represents the third record for Region 1.

An adult **Sabine's Gull** and juvenile **Franklin's Gull** were excellent finds on 23 December at Dunkirk Harbor by David Wheeler. Both birds were re-found on several days, with the last sighting for both on 2 January. The date range of the sightings is late for both species; it is the first documented January record for Sabine's Gull and the second documented January record for Franklin's Gull. Adult Sabine's are also especially rare, as there had only been three to four previous sightings. Other notable gulls included several sightings of **Black-headed Gull**, probably the same bird, and an adult **Black-legged Kittiwake** at Niagara Falls. Adult kittiwake sightings have increased slightly in recent years, but they are still much rarer than immatures. Notable in its absence during the fall and winter seasons was California Gull after 15 consecutive years of occurrence on the Niagara River. Hopefully a new streak will start in the fall!

Three **Snowy Owls** were reported, with one in each month. None of them appeared to stay beyond a day or two. Short-eared Owls were reported from several regular locations. There were two Northern Saw-whet Owl reports and only one Long-eared Owl found. The most unusual owl sighting this winter was a Barred Owl in a yard along Lake Ontario in Wilson. Barred Owls are rarely observed along the Lake Ontario plain in Region 1, and this bird may have been a part of a slight push south by more northerly birds, which is a periodic occurrence based on reduced prey availability. There was anecdotal evidence

this winter of similar unusual occurrences of Barred Owls along the lake plain in Region 2 and Toronto.

It was a good year for **Bohemian Waxwing** sightings, with more than usual numbers along the Lake Ontario plain and a few sightings south of the lake plain, where very rare. Several birders commented on the marked increase of American Robin flocks in early February after few had been seen earlier in the winter, touching off an internet thread as to where the birds were coming from and going to. There is no easy categorization to this pattern, but it could be that robin flocks wander more widely in search of ample food supplies than we suspect. This is one of those questions that increased reporting to eBird from across the country might be able to help address.

Other than a few waterfowl species, the early spring migrants did not arrive in late February this year. There were no blackbirds, Killdeer, or Turkey Vultures in February that clearly demonstrated migratory behavior.

Following the excellent fall season, it was no surprise that many northern finches occurred in the winter season. Common Redpolls were common and widespread with the best numbers this decade. There were two **Hoary Redpoll** reports with acceptable documentation submitted, one at a feeder in Wilson and the other in a large group of Common Redpolls in Colden. Pine Siskins were well reported in December, but there were fewer after that. Pine Grosbeaks were reported from four locations. There were two reports of **Red Crossbill** and an apparent wintering pair of **White-winged Crossbills** in Clarence. After the number of reports in the fall season, it was surprising to have only one report of Evening Grosbeaks, a total of 30 from the Scio CBC. There were very few Purple Finches around this winter.

Besides the Ross's Gull and other rarities already mentioned, the greatest rarities included **Yellow-throated Warbler** and **Yellow-headed Blackbird**. The warbler was found by Vicki Rothman and Bill Broderick at Four Mile Creek State Park on 2 December. It is the second winter record for the Region. The Yellow-headed Blackbird was identified by Nancy and Mahlon Miller among some Red-winged Blackbirds at Tonawanda WMA on the Oak Orchard CBC on 27 December. It is the first winter record for the Region.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AISP – Allegany SP, CATT; AmSP – Amherst SP, ERIE; BeSP – Beaver I SP, ERIE; BuSP – Buckhorn I SP, ERIE; BWWTP – Batavia Wastewater Treatment Plant, GENE; 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; LESP – Lake Erie SP, CHAU; NF – Niagara Falls, NIAG; NFSP – Niagara Falls SP, NIAG; NPP – Niagara Power Project on NR, Lewiston, NIAG; NR – Niagara R; OOWMA – Oak Orchard WMA; GENE/ORLE; PB – Point Breeze, ORLE; PG – Point Gratiot, CHAU; SPNS – Sinking Ponds Nature Sanctuary, E Aurora, ERIE; Tiftt NP – Tiftt Nature Preserve, Buffalo, ERIE; TWMA – Tonawanda WMA, GENE/NIAG; WoBSP – Woodlawn Beach SP, ERIE; WTSP – Wilson-Tuscarora SP, NIAG.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: arr 2 DH 22 Feb (JSm); Grand I NR 25 Feb; no wintering birds reported.

CACKLING GOOSE: DH 4 Jan (JSk), only report.

Mute Swan: max 17 Carlton ORLE 8 Dec (KF); 3 NF CBC 27 Dec; 8 WTSP 10 Jan; Olcott NIAG 27 Jan, 16 Feb; only reports.

Tundra Swan: 3 OOWMA 1 Dec, only report away from NR; max 325 BeSP 24 Dec (DSH).

Wood Duck: SPNS thru 9 Dec; Jamestown CBC 16 Dec; arr Amherst ERIE 27 Feb; only reports.

Gadwall: 13 Tiftt NP 10 Jan; max 19 NFSP 2 Feb; 2 Tonawanda NR ERIE 6 Feb.

Am. Black Duck: max 60 BWWTP 1 Dec.

N. Shoveler: last 71, 12 BWWTP 1, 9 Dec.

N. Pintail: reported from 7 locations in winter; arr 2 AmSP 17 Feb (RS), unusual location.

Green-winged Teal: Buffalo ERIE 1 Jan (PY); DH 2 Jan (DB, ED); only reports.

Canvasback: max 8000 BeSP 21 Jan (WW, JP).

Redhead: max 128 Tonawanda NR 21 Feb.

Ring-necked Duck: max 119 BuSP 23 Dec (WW), good count for date; 45 Buffalo NR 12 Jan.

Lesser Scaup: Buffalo NR 12 Jan; 3 BeSP 21 Jan; NF 2 Feb; max 5 Tonawanda NR 21 Feb.

KING EIDER: fem Wilson NIAG 22 Dec (BE, WD); fem FNSP 6 Jan (JB), shot by hunter; only reports.

Surf Scoter: 2 Buffalo NR 10 Dec; FNSP 6 Jan; DH 17 Feb; only reports.

Black Scoter: max 5 Buffalo NR 1 Dec (MiM); 2 FMCSP 28 Dec; Sheridan CHAU 5 Jan (JSm); DH 17, 28 Feb; only reports.

Long-tailed Duck: max 2171 FNSP 16 Feb.

Com. Goldeneye: AmSP 2 Feb, unusual location.

Hooded Merganser: max 52 DH 26 Dec.

Ruddy Duck: max 4 BWWTP 9 Dec; St. Bonaventure CBC 15 Dec; Jamestown CBC 16 Dec; 2 Buffalo NR 19 Dec; 3 Wilson NIAG 22 Dec; 2 DH 25 Dec - 4 Jan; only reports.

Red-throated Loon: 4, 1 FNSP 6, 21 Jan; 8 GHSP 23 Feb (WD), record maximum for Feb; only reports beyond Dec.

Com. Loon: Carlton, Yates ORLE 6 Jan; Olcott NIAG 17 Jan; only reports past Dec.

Horned Grebe: 50 LESP 29 Dec; max 68 Yates & Carlton ORLE 6 Jan.

Red-necked Grebe: FNSP 6 Jan (JB), only report.

EARED GREBE: DH 29, 30 Dec (DW, WW! JP! BK!), increased reports in recent winters.

N. GANNET: FNSP, FMCSP 2 Dec (JP, WD), same bird observed as it flew east.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 185 DH 26 Dec; Porter NIAG 28 Dec; NF 2 Feb; 6 Tonawanda NR 22 Feb.

Great Blue Heron: 14 Strawberry I NR 26 Dec; 14 DH Feb; max 23 Tonawanda ERIE 22 Feb.

Black-crowned Night Heron: 30 Tonawanda I NR 13 Jan (DG), record winter count; only report.

Turkey Vulture: 8 Lewiston NIAG 2 Dec; Carlton ORLE 13 Jan (TL, KF); Zoar Valley ERIE 24 Feb (DW); only reports.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: max 5 Allegheny Res CATT 7 Jan (TB, SE); well reported from other traditional wintering and breeding areas.

N. Goshawk: imm Porter NIAG 28 Dec (JP! EL!); imm TWMA 30 Dec, 16 Feb; only reports.

Red-shouldered Hawk: AISP 9 Dec; 5 on 4 CBCs Dec; Ashford CATT 7, 26 Jan; Orchard Park ERIE 17,23 Feb; Zoar Valley ERIE 24 Feb.

Rough-legged Hawk: average number of reports.

GOLDEN EAGLE: AISP 28 Dec (JR!), has wintered at this location on several occasions.

Merlin: Yates ORLE 8 Dec (KF); Williamsville ERIE 20 Dec, 21 Feb (RS); Alexander GENE 21 Dec (KF); Elma ERIE 26 Dec (CR); max 3 SUNY Buffalo campus ERIE thru season (PY), traditional winter roost; Leon CATT 15 Jan (TB, MD).

Peregrine Falcon: 2 Buffalo NR 11 Dec, 24 Feb; 2 BuSP 22 Dec; DH 24 Dec – 1 Jan; NFSP 28 Jan-2 Feb; all near nesting areas.

Am. Coot: max 91 DH 26 Jan; 15 BuSP 6 Jan; 8 Buffalo NR 12 Jan; 2 NFSP 2 Feb; Olcott NIAG 16 Feb.

Purple Sandpiper: 2, 1 NF 8,15 Dec; only reports.

Wilson's Snipe: 2 Charlotte CHAU 19 Feb (JeL, WW), rare in winter.

FRANKLIN'S GULL: juv DH 23 Dec-2 Jan (DW, mob), only 2nd Jan record.

Little Gull: DH 25 Dec, 11 Jan; max 4 Lewiston NR 29 Dec, 3 Feb.

BLACK-HEADED GULL: ad Buffalo NR 11-12 Dec, 15-16 Jan (JP); Lewiston NR 2 Feb (Jay Keller), possibly same bird.

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

Iceland Gull: 10 FMCSF 28 Dec (WD); 15 NPP 5 Jan (WD); DH 21, 29 Jan; max 18

Porter NIAG 14 Feb (JP), high count for away from NR.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Buffalo NR 21 Dec; FMCSF 28 Dec; max 6 NF 6 Feb; DH 21 Jan.

Glaucous Gull: WoBSP 4 Dec; 3 Porter NIAG 28 Dec; DH 11,20 Jan; max 5 Porter NIAG 14 Feb; Somerset NIAG 16 Feb; only reports away from NR.

G. Black-backed Gull: max 250 DH 2 Feb.

G. Black-backed x Herring Gull: DH 25 Dec (WD, DD), photo, occasionally reported but rarely documented.

SABINE'S GULL: ad DH 23 Dec - 2 Jan (DW, mob), first Jan record, only 4th record of adult in Reg.

Black-legged Kittiwake: ad+juv NF 22 Dec (DD, JoL), ads rare; juv NPP 5 Jan (BP); Lewiston NR 17 Feb (PY), likely same bird that wintered, 5th Feb record.

ROSS'S GULL: ad NFSP 27 Jan - 1 Feb (WD!, mob), third record for Region, *see intro*.

FORSTER'S TERN: DH 5, 7 Jan (DW, JSm), very rare in Jan, only third Jan report.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: Buffalo ERIE 9, 10 Dec (JT); WoBSP 10 Jan (TS); PB 13 Jan (S&TO, PY); Porter NIAG 3 Feb (WD, BP).

Barred Owl: Wilson NIAG 16 Feb (BP, WD), rarely found along L Ontario Plain.

Long-eared Owl: Porter NIAG 28 Dec, 1 Jan; only reports.

Short-eared Owl: 3 Yates ORLE 2 Dec (D&DS); Dunkirk Airport CHAU 26-29 Dec (JSm); 3 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; max 8 Hartland NIAG 24 Feb (JP).

N. Saw-whet Owl: AmSP 1 Jan (RS); arr Getzville ERIE 29 Feb (EW).

Red-headed Woodpecker: Clarence ERIE 16 Jan (DL), only report.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Porter NIAG 2 Dec; AmSP 22,28 Dec, 2 Feb; LESP 29 Dec; 6 Hamburg CBC 29 Dec; Alexander GENE 4 Jan; Orchard Park ERIE 5 Jan; Bethany GENE 16 Feb; good showing.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: max 3 INWR 27 Dec; well reported throughout Reg.

Com. Raven: Bethany GENE 9 Dec thru; 5 Beaver Meadow CBC 22 Dec; Bennington WYOM 22 Dec; only reports outside of CATT or ALLE.

Horned Lark: max 112 Somerset NIAG 16 Feb.

Carolina Wren: lower than average number of reports.

Winter Wren: 2 AmSP 22 Dec, 7 Jan; FMCSPP 28 Dec; Tift NP 9 Feb; only reports.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: PG 25 Dec (BH), only report.

E. Bluebird: max 25 Fredonia CHAU 1 Jan.

Hermit Thrush: Williamsville ERIE 6, 22 Dec; Yates ORLE 8 Dec; FMCSPP 28 Dec; only reports.

Am. Robin: max 535 Porter NIAG 10 Feb; numbers increased noticeably in early Feb.

Gray Catbird: Yates ORLE 8 Dec (KF), only report.

N. Mockingbird: Buffalo ERIE 2 Dec; Tift NP 11 Dec, 8 Jan, 9 Feb; Clarence ERIE 16 Jan; Alexander GENE 27 Jan; Newstead ERIE 16 Feb; Pomfret CHAU 23 Feb; only reports away from NIAG.

Am. Pipit: Wilson NIAG 22 Dec; Porter NIAG 28 Dec (JP!, EL), late.

Bohemian Waxwing: 2 FNSP 1 Dec (JP, RS, JW); max 34 Yates ORLE 5 Dec (DT); Grand I ERIE 7 Dec (JeL); 3 Porter NIAG 9 Dec (PY); 2 TWMA 5 Jan (RS); 6, 5 Newfane NIAG 12, 21 Jan (WD, BP; JP, RS).

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: Wilson CBC 22 Dec; 7 INWR 27 Dec; 2 NF CBC; 2 BuSP 17 Feb; only reports.

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER: FMCSPP 2 Dec (VR!, BB, JP! WD!), 2nd winter record.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

E. Towhee: Hamburg ERIE 29 Dec; Eden ERIE 20-25 Jan, only reports.

Chipping Sparrow: Wilson CBC 22 Dec; 2 Dunkirk CBC 1 Jan; only reports.

Savannah Sparrow: Wilson NIAG 4-6 Dec (WD), late; Wilson CBC 22 Dec.

Fox Sparrow: Amherst ERIE 10-11 Feb (DM), only report.

Swamp Sparrow: 1, 2 TWMA 6 Jan, 16 Feb; only reports beyond Dec.

White-crowned Sparrow: Wilson NIAG 3 Dec thru; 30 on 7 CBCs Dec-Jan; 4 Porter NIAG 21 Jan; Lancaster ERIE 11 Feb; max 5 Yates ORLE 16 Feb; Newfane NIAG 16 Feb.

Dark-eyed "Oregon" Junco (*J.h. oreganus*): Williamsville ERIE 15, 16 Dec (RS), rare.

Lapland Longspur: Eden ERIE 20 Dec; 5 Beaver Meadow CBC 22 Dec; Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; 2 Bethany GENE 24 Jan; max 52 Wilson NIAG 10 Feb (WD); 11, 20 Somerset NIAG 16, 29 Feb; 12 Porter NIAG 16 Feb.

Snow Bunting: 350 Newfane NIAG 3 Dec; 250 max Bethany GENE 9-22 Dec; 48 Eden ERIE 15 Dec; 53 INWR 27 Dec; 150 Porter NIAG 16 Feb; 70 Persia CATT 23 Feb; max 450 Wilson NIAG 28 Feb.

Red-winged Blackbird: 21 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; 10 Tift NP 9 Feb; eight other reports.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD: TWMA 27 Dec (M&NM!), first Reg winter record.

Rusty Blackbird: Porter NIAG 9 Dec; Alexander GENE 22 Dec; max 15 Newstead ERIE 6 Jan (PY), good winter count; AISP 7 Jan (TB, SE, JR); only reports.

Com. Grackle: no reports beyond CBCs.

Brown-headed Cowbird: arr 2 Wilson NIAG 26 Feb; only four other reports.

Pine Grosbeak: 6, 10 FNSP 1, 8 Dec (RS); 5 Beaver Meadow CBC 22 Dec; max 11 INWR 27 Dec (WW, JP); Porter NIAG 1 Jan (RS).

Purple Finch: very few reports; low numbers on CBCs.

Red Crossbill: Orchard Park ERIE 23-27 Dec (MZ); FMCSPP 28 Dec (BP); only reports.

White-winged Crossbill: 2 Clarence ERIE 29 Dec (AS); Clarence ERIE 15 Feb (MaM); only reports.

Com. Redpoll: 100 Porter NIAG 1 Dec; max 150 Yates ORLE 5 Dec; 80 Colden ERIE 28 Dec; 70 Charlotte CHAU 30 Dec; 100 Varysburg WYOM 2 Jan; 130 Boston ERIE 12 Jan; 75 Yates ORLE 16 Feb; 120 Newfane NIAG 17 Feb; well reported throughout.

HOARY REDPOLL: Wilson NIAG 9 Dec (WD!); Colden ERIE 29 Dec (BK!); only documented reports received.

Pine Siskin: 40 Colden ERIE 29 Dec; 30 max Orchard Park ERIE 10 Jan; well reported in Dec, but fewer reports after that.

Evening Grosbeak: 30 Scio CBC 15 Dec, only report.