

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

Jeffrey S. Bolsinger

98 State Street, Canton NY 13617

jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

The winter of 2007-08 was characterized by temperatures that fluctuated frequently between seasonally cold temperatures and relatively mild conditions, with the result that overall temperatures averaged above normal. The average December temperature in Watertown of 33.6° F was just 0.4° above normal, but January was actually warmer, with a mean temperature of 35.3°, which is 8.4° above normal. February had a more seasonal mean of 31.3° that was still 1.6° above normal. Monthly precipitation totals for December (4.3") and January (2.8") were each within an inch of normal, and the two-month combined total was less than 0.25" below normal. The February total of 5.1" Watertown received was 2.6" above normal, so that the season as a whole had above-average precipitation, most of which fell as snow. Watertown received 88.5" of snow and, unusually, parts of St. Lawrence County received more, with totals of 100" or more in many locations.

Waterfowl numbers and diversity were high until many Lake Ontario bays and much of the St. Lawrence River froze over in late January. One highlight of the season was a total of five King Eider reported from two locations. King Eider is rarely observed in Region 6, and the four that Chris Reidy and I found at Montario Pt. on 7 December appears to be a Regional high count. These eiders were in an impressive raft of diving ducks that included 500 Long-tailed Duck, all three scoters, and several other species, with an adult female Barrow's Goldeneye nearby. As he so often does, Nick Leone found another Barrow's Goldeneye at Fisher's Landing in January, where he also observed an apparent **Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser** hybrid. Nick also found a raft of 8500 Redhead on the St. Lawrence River for the mid-winter waterfowl count, which was the most notable concentration of waterfowl found all winter. Also notable were 1500 Snow Geese observed on the day of the waterfowl count, making two consecutive years with sizable mid-winter flocks.

Raptors were much less numerous than during the winter of 2006-07. Small numbers of Northern Harriers were observed on Pt. Peninsula through mid-January but were absent from the rest of the Region entirely. They left Pt. Peninsula by the end of January. Small concentrations of Red-tailed and Rough-legged hawks were noted in Cape Vincent and Pt. Peninsula, with both species widely scattered throughout the remaining lowland areas. Strangely, Wolfe Island, Ontario, directly across the river from Cape Vincent, hosted substantially larger numbers of Rough-legged Hawks than did anyplace in Region 6. Raptor highlights included a subadult Golden Eagle in Cape Vincent, three Merlin reports, and a Peregrine Falcon that wintered in Ogdensburg.

Bill Stahl spent much of early December kayaking the St. Lawrence River in the vicinity of Coles Creek State Park, where twice he saw a Purple Sandpiper on Murphy Island. Surely this species occurs in the Region more often than reports indicate, with the relative inaccessibility of extensive rocky shore habitat at least partly explaining the paucity of reports. I suspect if birders spent more time on the water Purple Sandpiper and other shorebird species would be better documented. The only white-winged gull reports were from the St. Lawrence River between Ogdensburg and Massena, with two single Iceland Gulls and a maximum of three Glaucous Gulls at Ogdensburg.

The only Snowy Owl report was of a single bird Gerry Smith found in Rodman on 6 January; unfortunately the owl did not stay for others to see it. Short-eared Owls were present in northern Jefferson County in much lower numbers than last winter, with a maximum count of six birds in Cape Vincent. I received reports from five people totaling at least 11 cases of Barred Owls hunting during broad daylight, often in areas not typically associated with this species, such as at feeders or in agricultural fields. Apparently there was a significant movement of Barred Owls into the Region from the north, with resident owls likely preventing the new arrivals from occupying high quality habitat and forcing them to expend more time and energy in locating food.

Several species of irruptive winter birds made good showings this winter. It was the best year for Pine Grosbeaks since the winter of 2001-02, with reports of numerous flocks of 5-25 from all parts of the Region, and occasional reports of flocks of up to 63 individuals. Bohemian Waxwings were present in large numbers in St. Lawrence County, but were generally scarce in the rest of the Region. As has been the case in other recent years, the largest flocks—up to 700 individuals—were reported from Potsdam, with flocks of up to 350 reported from several other towns in the county. I saw several small flocks, 15-40 birds, of Bohemian Waxwings, usually mixed with Cedar Waxwings, on Fort Drum, but otherwise received only one report from Jefferson County. As expected, it was a redpoll year, with widespread reports of mostly small flocks coming to feeders. Flocks of up to 150 were easy to find in natural stands of birch during much of December, but as the winter wore on these larger flocks disappeared and redpolls became difficult to locate away from feeders. I received good descriptions and/or photos of at least four **Hoary Redpolls** from three locations,

with several more reports of probable Hoary Redpolls that didn't allow the observer a good enough view to confirm the ID. Evening Grosbeaks were ubiquitous through much of the fall, but began declining in numbers as the winter season began; small flocks were observed at feeders throughout the Region all winter, with the largest numbers occurring in the Adirondacks.

Several species were notable by their absence or presence in lower than usual numbers. Blue Jays were scarcer than usual, and several people working Christmas Bird Counts commented on their difficulty finding this species. Purple Finches were virtually absent all season, and Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches were present in many locations during early December but largely left the Region by the end of the year. Poor mast and cone crops likely explain these absences.

Half-hardies found in relatively good numbers include Song and White-throated sparrows, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, and Brown-headed Cowbird. The most unusual report was of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker that successfully over-wintered, thanks in large part to Dick Brouse's feeders. I don't know if it officially counts as a half-hardy, but the Great Blue Heron I saw at Upper and Lower Lakes WMA on 27 January constitutes the latest date for this species in Region 6 that I can find any records for. It isn't clear whether a Belted Kingfisher that Tom and Eileen Wheeler found in this same location on 24 February was an over-wintering bird or an early spring migrant. Other half-hardies reported primarily during the first half of the season included good numbers of Eastern Bluebirds, at least five Northern Flickers, and one Northern Mockingbird.

For the season I received reports of 103 species, which is one fewer than last winter's total. Several observers noted that other than the abundance of Pine Grosbeaks, Bohemian Waxwings, and Common Redpolls, there generally seemed to be relatively few birds around this winter, and the abundance of these irruptives was the highlight of the season.

CONTRIBUTORS

Joanne & Nobi Ackerman, John Barthelme, Jeff Bolsinger, Dick & Marion Brouse, Carol Cady, Tom Carrolan, Sheila Cerwonka, Joan Collins, Steve Guy, Lee Harper, Mike Jeziorski, Steve Kelling, Nick Leone, Bob & Ellie Long, Kevin McGann, David Prosser, Chris Reidy, Mike Sheard, Gerry Smith, Bill Stahl, Eve Sweatman, Bob & June Walker, Mary Beth Warburton, Tom & Eileen Wheeler, Matt Young.

ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart Island, Massena; BRB – Black River Bay; CPSP – Cedar Point SP; CV – Cape Vincent JEFF; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; FL – Fisher's Landing JEFF; HH – Henderson Harbor JEFF; HP – Hawkin's Pt. Robert Moses SP, Massena; ICNC – Indian Creek Nature Center Canton STLA; KSP – Keewaydin SP; KC – Kelsey Creek Watertown JEFF; MP – Montario Pt. Ellisburg; PtPen – Pt Peninsula Lyme; SH – Sackett's Harbor, JEFF; SLR – St. Lawrence River; TP – Tibbet's Pt, Cape Vincent; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, Canton STLA; WBSP – Westcott's Beach SP, Ellisburg.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: several reports 150-300 JEFF and STLA 2-5 Dec; max 1500 BRB 13 Jan.

Tundra Swan: max 100 HH 7 Jan.

Gadwall: max 10 HP 13 Jan.

Am. Wigeon: 2 Ogdensburg 18 Feb.

Am. Black Duck: max 159 CV 16 Jan.

N. Pintail: max 11 CV 16 Jan.

Canvasback: CV 16 Jan.

Redhead: max 8500 CV 10 Jan, high.

Ring-necked Duck: BI 14 Dec; 2 SH 8 Jan; CV 16 Jan.

Greater Scaup: 2000 BRB 5 Dec; max 3500 CV 10 Jan; 1000 PtPen 16 Jan.

Lesser Scaup: 3 CV 16 Jan.

King Eider: 3 f, 1 first-year male MP 7 Dec (JB, CR); first-year m TP CV 2-4 Feb (NL, SK).

Surf Scoter: 5 MP 7 Dec.

White-winged Scoter: 13 CV 10 Jan; Southwick Beach SP 15 Jan; Ogdensburg SLR 18 Feb thru.

Black Scoter: MP 7 Dec.

Long-tailed Duck: 500 MP 7 Dec; 116 CV 10 Jan; 213 MP 15 Jan; 380 TP 2 Feb.

Bufflehead: 2 SLR Ogdensburg 18 Feb.

Com. Goldeneye: max 1500 FL 5 Jan.

Barrow's Goldeneye: ad f MP 7 Dec (CR, JB); f FL 4-10 Jan (NL).

COM. GOLDENEYE X HOODED

MERGANSER: ad m matched published descriptions of this hybrid pairing CV 10 Jan (NL).

Hooded Merganser: 17 FL 5 Jan.

Com. Merganser: 200-700 per day SLR thru late Jan; up to 200 per day Feb.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 51 CV 10 Jan.

Com. Loon: last BI SLR 13 Jan.

Pied-billed Grebe: HH 11 Dec.

Horned Grebe: MP 8 Dec, only report.

Double-crested Cormorant: 1-2 per day SLR Massena thru 13 Jan.

Great Blue Heron: 5 reports; last ULLWMA 27 Jan, late.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 1-7 per day L Ontario and SLR.

N. Harrier: 2-5 per day PtPen thru 14 Jan.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 11 reports.

Cooper's Hawk: 27 reports.

N. Goshawk: ad FD 17 Jan; imm ICNC 3 Feb.

Red-tailed Hawk: 10 per day CV thru, low.

Rough-legged Hawk: 15-18 per day CV thru, numbers much lower than previous winter.

Golden Eagle: subad CV 22 Feb (GS).

Am. Kestrel: 1-3 per day near L Ontario and SLR; scarce elsewhere.

Merlin: Watertown 20 Dec; CV early Jan; PtPen thru.

Peregrine Falcon: Ogdensburg thru (MW).

Am. Coot: HH 11 Dec.

Purple Sandpiper: Murphy Is. SLR 6 & 11 Dec (BS).

Bonaparte's Gull: 2 MP 7 Dec, only report.

Iceland Gull: first cycle Ogdensburg 26 Jan; ad Ogdensburg 24 Feb.

Glaucous Gull: HP 27 Dec; BI SLR 13 Jan; max 3 Ogdensburg 27 Jan.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

E. Screech-Owl: Canton 21 Feb, only report.

Snowy Owl: Rodman 6-7 Jan (GS), only report.

Barred Owl: 11 reports of mid-day activity, including 2 hunting feeders and 1 foraging in a cornfield.

Short-eared Owl: 6 CV thru; PtPen thru; numbers much lower than previous winter.

Belted Kingfisher: ULLWMA 24 Feb.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: m at KC feeder
15 Dec thru (DB).

N. Flicker: WBSP 7 Dec; Potsdam 11 Dec;
ULLWMA 20 Dec; FD 8 Jan; 2 PtPen 16
Feb.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 1-4 per day thru.

Horned Lark: max 85 Ellisburg 8 Dec; 80
CV 8 Feb.

E. Bluebird: max 12-15 Canton 23 Dec; 8
other reports to 29 Jan.

Am. Robin: max 100 KC 17 Feb; fairly
common W and N JEFF, scarce elsewhere.

N. Mockingbird: Canton 5 Dec.

Bohemian Waxwing: max 700+ Potsdam
27 Feb, where several flocks present thru;
flocks 5-325 reported elsewhere STLA thru;
scarce JEFF where max 40 FD 18 Dec;
CPSP Feb only other JEFF location.

Cedar Waxwing: max 100 CPSP 5 Dec.

WARBLERS

No reports.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

E. Towhee: at CV feeder thru.

Song Sparrow: KC 14 Dec thru; max 4
PtPen 16 Feb.

White-throated Sparrow: Potsdam 3 Dec;
2 KC 14 Dec thru; CV 4 Jan.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 33 ULLWMA 21
Jan; widespread at feeders.

Lapland Longspur: max 7 PtPen 8 Dec;
most other reports of 1-3 with Horned Lark
or Snow Bunting flocks.

Snow Bunting: max 1500 CV 3 Jan.

Red-winged Blackbird: 3 reports; last
Clayton 9 Jan.

Com. Grackle: 5 reports; last Clayton 22
Jan.

Brown-headed Cowbird: 5 reports; last
Henderson 23 Jan.

Pine Grosbeak: max 62 ULLWMA 11
Dec; 38 Potsdam 3 Jan; 53 Canton 2 Feb; 27
CPSP 8 Feb; many reports 5-25 thru.

Purple Finch: virtually absent entire period.

Red Crossbill: Ellisburg 8 Dec (KM); up to
6 Barnes Corners thru Dec (GS).

Com. Redpoll: up to 350 per day at
Potsdam feeder thru; 150 ULLWMA 25
Dec; many reports 5-40 at feeders
throughout Reg; increasingly scarce away
from feeders after Dec.

HOARY REDPOLL (R6): Watertown
CBC (SG!); 1-2 Potsdam several dates 22
Dec thru (JC photos); ULLWMA 25 Dec
(JB!).

Pine Siskin: 7 CV 5 Dec; 5 Potsdam 5 Dec;
2 Canton 15 Dec; 6 KSP 29 Feb; generally
scarce, especially after Dec.

Am. Goldfinch: max 85 Lefargeville 3 Feb;
1-3 more typical numbers after Dec.

Evening Grosbeak: max 100 Clifton;
scattered reports 5-10 at feeders throughout.