

REGION 1—NIAGARA FRONTIER

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December 2008 was a wild ride for weather with two major rain events, three record snowfalls, record warmth, major flooding, and a major windstorm. The average temperature was 29.4° F, 0.4° F below normal. Monthly precipitation at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport was 6.79", 2.99" more than usual, with 49.2" of snow, 23.7" more than usual. It ended up the fifth wettest and ninth snowiest December on record. Several CBCs were affected by very poor weather, especially the Hamburg-East Aurora count on the 28th with intense winds up to 75 mph throughout the day. January brought prolonged cold and near daily minor snowfalls. The average temperature was 18.5° F, 6.0° F below normal. The monthly precipitation was 2.27", 0.89" below normal, with 30.6" of snow, 4.5" more than normal. Temperatures dropped to the lowest in five years at -3° F on the 21st, which coincided with dramatic increases of several waterfowl species on the heated waters of Dunkirk Harbor. Lake Erie reached 32° F on the 10th, about four days early, and ice increased soon thereafter. It was an uneventful February. The average temperature was 27.2° F, 1.3° F above normal. The monthly precipitation was 2.65", 0.23" above normal, with 11.6" of snowfall, 6.2" below normal.

Similar to last winter, it was a fairly typical season for waterfowl. The harsh December did not keep many lingering birds around, and there were only a few spring arrivals in late February. The bitter cold weather on 21 January brought an impressive winter total of 137 Horned Grebes and increases in several duck species at Dunkirk Harbor. Dave Neveu found far fewer grebes in the days before and after the 21st during his frequent checks of Dunkirk Harbor. There were four December reports of **Cackling Geese** and two reports in late February of returning birds; few have been documented in winter beyond December in the Region. A dead **Trumpeter Swan** was found by Pat Morton in Conewango. He brought the carcass to Jim Berry at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute where the yellow wing tags and leg band were recovered and reported back to the Wye Marsh Ontario introduction program. At least two other trumpeters were off Grand Island on the Niagara River in January. A **King Eider** was identified on Lake Ontario at Shadigee for the only winter report. The **Barrow's Goldeneye** that has been a regular in Region 2 at Point Breeze for the past few winters wandered into Region 1 at least once. **Red-throated Loon** sightings continue to increase on Lake Ontario beyond December with a max count of 12 in mid January.

It was seemingly an average or slightly below average winter for Rough-legged Hawk sightings. Bald Eagle sightings continue to be on the rise in the winter, with a maximum of 12 at Dunkirk Harbor in early February. Once again, Jeff Reed found a **Golden Eagle** at Wolf Run in Allegany State Park in late

December and early January, a location where they have occasionally wintered. A juvenile Golden Eagle in Perrysburg in late February was more likely an early migrant.

Four shorebird species were more than usual for a winter season. The highlight of the bunch was the Region's first **American Avocet** in winter. Debbie Sharon found the bird along the Niagara River at Beaver Island S.P. on 7 December and it remained through 16 December. Based on a review of photographs, it was likely the same bird seen near Toronto, Ontario from 16 November through 5 December and then again remarkably in Erie, Pennsylvania on 20 December.

Three **Mew Gulls** were the most remarkable sightings of the winter gull season. The first was observed on the Niagara River from the Niagara Power Project on 6 December and considered to be either the North American form (*L. c. brachyrhynchus*) or possibly the Asian form (*L. c. kamchatsensis*). The second bird was found by Jim Pawlicki roosting among Ring-billed Gulls at Olcott on Lake Ontario on the afternoon of 15 February. Pawlicki noticed a darker mantled bird and patiently waited for the snoozing gull to awaken. He confirmed identity as the North American form (*L. c. brachyrhynchus*) and many local birders were able to see the bird. The bird was not relocated; however, while birding the same location a week later on 22 February Pawlicki and Dave Wheeler found a different Mew Gull that was most likely of the European form (*L. c. canus*). These sightings represent the 6th, 7th, and 8th Regional records.

Other notable gulls from the winter season on the Niagara River included a **California Gull** that continued from late November, a **Franklin's Gull** on 21 December, and an adult **Slaty-backed Gull** in definitive basic plumage roosting on the rapids above Niagara Falls on 13 December. The Slaty-backed Gull was never seen on the New York side of the river or verified beyond the initial sighting; however, I included mention here because it is probable that at some point the gull crossed over into New York airspace. It was the same situation as the last occurrence of Slaty-backed Gull on the Niagara River in November 2006, when New York was denied a confirmed record.

Snowy Owls continued their decent showing from the fall, with sightings from seven locations. **Short-eared Owls** were reported in low numbers from mostly traditional wintering locations. There was only one report each for Long-eared Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl.

The record late **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** in an Orchard Park backyard described in the fall season report continued until 5 December, representing a first Regional winter season record for this species. Red-headed Woodpeckers are getting harder to find in all seasons, including the winter. Meanwhile, winter season sightings of Yellow-bellied Sapsucker have increased this decade. Both species were reported from three locations this winter. It seemed to be an average or slightly below average winter for Northern Shrike sightings. A very rare in winter **Marsh Wren** was found at Tonawanda WMA in early January. An American Pipit photographed at Dunkirk Harbor by David Wheeler on 18 January represents the latest ever in winter for the Region. In late January, Deb

Abgott was very surprised to find a **Dickcissel** frequenting her Clarence Center backyard feeder with numerous House Sparrows and American Tree Sparrows. The bird remained throughout the winter season. It was the first documented Dickcissel in winter in the Region since 1990.

Only a few waterfowl and low numbers of blackbirds arrived in February this year.

Many **White-winged Crossbills** remained throughout the Region from the unprecedented numbers that moved through in late November. Pine Siskins were also widespread. **Common Redpolls** started to appear in late December but were not widespread. One Hoary Redpoll was documented. Only one **Pine Grosbeak** was reported, and there were no reports of Red Crossbill or Evening Grosbeak. There were relatively few Purple Finches around this winter.

CONTRIBUTORS

Deb Abgott, Tim Baird, Jim & Liz Barry (J&LB), H.M. Bateman, Doug Beattie, Ann Beebe, Jim Berry, Bruce Chilton, Ken Cohen, Lewis Crowell, Willie D'Anna, Kurt Fox, Ron Hausauer, Jim Horn, Jean Iron, Brendan Klick, Kathy Krolbart, Lynne Landon, Jerry Lazarczyk (JeL), Helen Link, Joe Mitchell, Mike Morgante, Celeste Morien, Andy Morrison, Pat Morton, Terry Mosher, Dave Neveu, Jim Pawlicki, Betsy Potter, Jeff Reed, Gerry Rising, Richard Rosche, Richard Salembier, Debbie Sharon (DSH), David Suggs (DSu), Tom Sommerville, John Thill, William Watson, John Welte, David Wheeler, Scott Whittle, Ginnie Yerkovich, Peter Yoerg, Terry Yonker, Mike & Wendy Zebehazy.

ABBREVIATIONS

AlSP – Allegany SP, CATT; AmSP – Amherst SP, ERIE; BeSP – Beaver I SP, ERIE; BuSP – Buckhorn I SP, ERIE; BWWT – Batavia Wastewater Treatment Plant, GENE; ChauL – Chautauqua L, CHAU; DH – Dunkirk Harbor, CHAU; FMCS – Four Mile Creek SP, NIAG; FNSP – Fort Niagara SP, NIAG; GHSP – Golden Hill SP, NIAG; INWR – Iroquois NWR, GENE/ORLE; NF – Niagara Falls, NIAG; NPP – Niagara Power Project on NR, Lewiston, NIAG; NR – Niagara R; OOWMA – Oak Orchard WMA, GENE/ORLE; PB – Point Breeze, ORLE; Tift NP – Tift Nature Preserve, Buffalo, ERIE; TWMA – Tonawanda WMA, GENE/NIAG; WTSP – Wilson-Tuscarora SP, NIAG.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: max 19 Darien GENE 10 Dec (M&WZ); last Bethany GENE 22 Dec; only reports.

Cackling Goose: Buffalo Harbor ERIE 8 Dec; 3 BWWT 16 Dec; 3 WTSP 20 Dec; OOWMA 27 Dec; arr DH 24 Feb (DN); 4 Porter NIAG 28 Feb (JP).

Mute Swan: 3 FNSP 3 Jan; 2 Wilson NIAG 3 Jan; 4 DH 20 Jan - 7 Feb; 6 WTSP 16 Feb; 6 BeSP 17 Feb; max 13 Wilson & Olcott NIAG 18 Feb; 2 ChauL 28 Feb.

Trumpeter Swan: 2 BeSP 12 Dec (DS), one with wing-tag; 2 Grand I ERIE 20 Dec (DS); Conewango CATT 10 Feb (PM, JB, NYSARC), found dead, specimen preserved at RTPI.

Tundra Swan: 76 OOWMA 5 Dec (WW); 16 Tift NP 6 Dec; 3 AlSP 26 Dec (TB); max 280 BeSP 20 Jan (DS); 3 DH 21 Jan, 9 Feb (DN); arr 6 Celeron ChauL 23 Feb (DN).

Wood Duck: BWWT 5 Dec; Jamestown CBC CHAU 14 Dec; Orchard Park ERIE 28 Dec; W Seneca ERIE 1 Jan thru (GY); 2 Amherst ERIE 2, 3 Feb; only reports.

Gadwall: max 26 Buffalo NR 2 Dec; 5 BeSP 10 Feb; Tonawanda ERIE 14 Feb.

Am. Wigeon: arr 2 Wilson Harbor NIAG 28 Feb.

Am. Black Duck: max 130 OOWMA 16 Dec; 111 DH 29 Dec; 54 Allegheny R CATT 18 Jan.

N. Pintail: max 65 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec (JP), good winter count for recent years; 15 Wilson NIAG 6 Jan (DS); arr 6 BeSP, 6 Wilson Harbor NIAG 28 Feb.

Green-winged Teal: reported from 5 locations; arr DH 26 Feb (DN).

Canvasback: max 10,000 Grand I NR 23 Jan (JL); 454 DH 5 Feb; 448 Celeron ChauL 12 Feb.

Redhead: max 770 DH 25 Jan (DN), good count for location, significant increase from previous days likely attributed to recent freezing of L Erie; 294 Celeron ChauL 12 Feb.

Ring-necked Duck: max 126 NF 4 Dec; 15 Buffalo Harbor ERIE 3 Jan; 4 Celeron ChauL 12 Feb; PB 17 Feb; 2 BeSP 28 Feb.

Gr. Scaup: max 10,000 Buffalo NR 11 Jan (DSu); 1728 DH 26 Feb.

Lesser Scaup: 7, 3 DH 26 Dec, 10 Feb; max 24 Tonawanda NR 14 Feb.

KING EIDER: Shadigee ORLE 3 Jan (JP, BK), only report.

Surf Scoter: Sheridan CHAU 28 Dec; PB 8-24 Feb; FNSP 15 Feb; 2 Buffalo NR 17 Feb; only reports.

Black Scoter: 2 DH 15 Feb; max 6 PB 16 Feb; FNSP 15 Feb; Wilson NIAG 16 Feb; only reports.

Long-tailed Duck: Celeron ChauL 16, 23 Feb (DN), returning migrant?; 85 Buffalo NR 26 Feb (WW), good count for location and date.

Bufflehead: 1050 Buffalo NR 2 Dec; max 1187 DH 21 Jan.

Com. Goldeneye: max 1765 DH 27 Jan.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE: PB 8 Feb (RS), same individual as last few winters in Reg 2.

Hooded Merganser: max 93 DH 6 Dec.

Com. Merganser: max 6218 DH 27 Jan (DN).

Red-breasted Merganser: 2 Salamanca CATT 22 Feb; max 3000 Buffalo NR 26 Feb.

Ruddy Duck: 2, 1 Buffalo NR 2 Dec, 30 Dec; 4 BWWTP 6 Dec; max 5 Jamestown CBC CHAU 14 Dec; 3 DH 20 Dec, 1-2 thru 14 Feb; 2 Grand I NR 12, 18 Dec; 3 ChauL 28 Feb; only reports.

Red-throated Loon: 1, 3 Shadigee ORLE 3 Jan, 6 Feb; max 12 Wilson NIAG 19 Jan (WD), good count for date; FMCSF 8 Feb; FNSP 8 Feb; DH 14-21 Feb; 5 GHSP 21 Feb (DW); winter reports beyond Dec are increasing.

Com. Loon: 15 FNSP 10 Jan (J&LB), only report past Dec.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 11 DH 1 Dec, at least 3 thru 7 Feb; Tonawanda NR 2 Feb; ChauL 21 Feb; only reports.

Horned Grebe: max 137 DH 21 Jan, excellent count for location and date, significant increase from previous days likely attributed to extreme cold and freezing of L Erie; FMCSF 8 Feb.

Red-necked Grebe: FNSP 4 Jan; Olcott NIAG 19 Jan; 1-3 DH 21 Jan – 24 Feb; 2 Wilson Harbor NIAG 16 Feb; GHSP 21 Feb; only reports.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 164 DH 29 Dec; 6 Tonawanda NR 18 Jan.

Great Blue Heron: 15, 13 DH 30 Dec, 13 Feb; 16 BeSP 11 Feb; max 59 Motor I NR 17 Feb.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: 4, 1, 1 DH 4 Jan, 26 Jan, 7 Feb; 2, 1 Tonawanda NR 15 Jan, 16 Feb; only reports.

Turkey Vulture: Scio CBC ALLE 20 Dec; Buffalo ERIE 20 Jan (KC); Rushford ALLE 1 Feb (DW); only reports.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 6 Buffalo ERIE 1 Feb (WD); max 12 DH 6 Feb (TM); well reported from other traditional wintering and breeding areas.

N. Goshawk: Wellsville ALLE 26 Feb (HMB, JH), only report.

Red-shouldered Hawk: 2 Jamestown CHAU 6 Dec, 21 Jan; 3 Jamestown CBC CHAU 14 Dec; 2 Darien GENE 15 Jan, 5 Feb; Wellsville ALLE 5 Feb; Harmony CHAU 8 Feb; Keaney Swamp WMA ALLE 15 Feb; only reports.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 6 S. Dayton CATT 22 Feb; average number of reports.

GOLDEN EAGLE: AISP 29 Dec, 1 Jan, 4 Jan (JR!), has wintered at this location on several occasions; juv Perrysburg CATT 22 Feb (DN!, AM).

Merlin: max 2-3 SUNY Buffalo campus ERIE thru (PY), traditional winter roost; Williamsville ERIE 22 Dec; NF CBC NIAG 27 Dec.

Peregrine Falcon: well reported near nesting areas and elsewhere.

Am. Coot: max 148 DH 27 Dec; BuSP 18 Jan; 3 ChauL 28 Feb.

Killdeer: last BeSP 8 Dec.

AM. AVOCET: BeSP 7-16 Dec (DS, mob), 1st Regional winter report; see *intro*.

Purple Sandpiper: 2 NF 13 Dec; DH 28 Dec – 7 Jan (JP, DN, mob); only reports.

Dunlin: 1, 1 BeSP 7, 26 Dec (DS); only reports.

FRANKLIN'S GULL: Buffalo CBC 21 Dec (LL, TY), only report.

Little Gull: 3 DH 28 Dec, 21 Jan; 9-12 Buffalo NR 28 Dec (PY); Silver Creek CHAU 28 Dec; max 14 Lewiston NR 28 Feb (JP).

MEW GULL: NPP 6 Dec (WD! JI! NYSARC), either North American form (*L. c. brachyrhynchus*) or Asian form (*L. c. kamchetsensus*); Olcott NIAG 15 Feb (JP! mob NYSARC), North American form (*L. c. brachyrhynchus*); Olcott NIAG 22 Feb (JP! WD, DW, NYSARC), probable European form (*L. c. canus*); 6th, 7th, and 8th regional records. **CALIFORNIA GULL:** 2nd-winter NF 6, 7 Dec (WD, JI, JP, NYSARC), continued from fall. **Thayer's Gull:** a few reports NPP, NF, Olcott NIAG; all sightings considered "probable" due to identification difficulties.

Iceland Gull: max 10 NPP 7 Dec; 6 Porter NIAG 27 Dec; 2 Sheridan CHAU 28 Dec; Silver Creek CHAU 2, 12, Jan; DH 9, 11 Jan; DH 9 Jan, 13 Feb; 5 Wilson NIAG 21 Feb; 4 FNSP 22 Feb.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: 2 DH 29 Dec; max 6 NF 2, 5 Jan; Buffalo ERIE 24 Jan.

SLATY-BACKED GULL: NF 13 Dec (JI, WD, SW, mob) – **was never sighted on U.S. side of NR.**

Glaucous Gull: max 8 NF 4 Jan; 4 NPP 11 Feb.

PIGEONS – WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: Porter NIAG 2 Dec; Medina ORLE 15 Dec (CM); Beaver Meadow CBC WYOM 20 Dec; Wilson NIAG 21 Dec; Concord ERIE 23-23 Dec; Buffalo Airport ERIE 27-29 Dec; Sardinia ERIE 21 Feb; decent showing continued from fall.

Long-eared Owl: East Aurora ERIE 28 Dec (LC), only report.

Short-eared Owl: 3, 5 NF Airport NIAG 5, 8 Dec (JP, WW, RS); Lockport NIAG 16 Dec (RS); 3 Shelby ORLE 16 Dec (JP, WW); 2 Royalton NIAG 5 Jan (RS); Yates ORLE 10 Jan (WD); Dunkirk Airport CHAU 22 Jan (DN); only reports.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Jamestown CBC CHAU 14 Dec, only report.

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD: Orchard Park ERIE thru 5 Dec (KK), continued from fall season; latest ever for Region.

Red-headed Woodpecker: Wilson CBC NIAG 21 Dec; Newfane NIAG 3, 17 Jan (JP); 2 Burt NIAG 18 Feb; only reports.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Allegany CATT 14 Dec; Silver Creek CHAU 20 Dec thru (DN); Perrysburg CATT 31 Dec; only reports.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: seemed to be an average or slightly below average season; reported throughout Reg.

Com. Raven: Darien GENE 6 Dec (KF); Sherman CHAU 1 Jan (AB); Silver Creek CHAU 12 Jan (DN); Alden ERIE 26 Dec (JM); Arkwright CHAU 1 Jan (DN); only reports outside of CATT or ALLE.

Horned Lark: max 75 Bethany GENE 25 Jan.

Carolina Wren: lower than average number of reports.

Winter Wren: FMCSP 27 Dec; DH 4 Jan; AmSP 9 Jan; only reports.

MARSH WREN: TWMA 3 Jan (BK!, JP!), very rare in winter.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: NF CBC NIAG 27 Dec; Hamburg-E Aurora CBC 28 Dec; Kenmore ERIE late Dec – 13 Jan, at suet feeder (JT), only reports.

E. Bluebird: max 15 INWR & TWMA 23 Jan (DSu), 15 Sheridan CHAU 1 Feb (DN).

Hermit Thrush: FMCSP 27 Dec; FNSP 6 Jan; only reports.

Am. Robin: max 100 GHSP 17 Jan.

Gray Catbird: 2 INWR 27 Dec (JP); OOWMA 27 Dec (KF); Williamsville ERIE 17 Feb (RS), only reports.

N. Mockingbird: Lackawanna ERIE 1 Jan; AmSP 9, 12 Jan, 25 Feb; only reports away from NIAG.

Am. Pipit: DH 18 Jan (DW), latest ever for Region.

Bohemian Waxwing: GHSP 17 Jan (RS); Porter NIAG 19 Jan (WD, BP), only reports including fall.

Cedar Waxwing: max 80 Fredonia CHAU 4 Feb.

WARBLERS

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 6 INWR 27 Dec; 2 OOWMA 3 Jan; INWR 23 Jan; only reports.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

E. Towhee: Jamestown CBC CHAU 14 Dec; Clarence ERIE 22 Jan, 2 Holland ERIE 2 Feb (RH); GHSP 21 Feb; only reports.

Field Sparrow: Scio CBC ALLE 20 Dec; Buffalo CBC 21 Dec; AmSP 9 Jan (RS), only reports.

Fox Sparrow: Orchard Park ERIE 28 Dec (JP), only report.

Swamp Sparrow: 4 TWMA 3 Jan; only report beyond Dec.

White-crowned Sparrow: 5 Pomfret CHAU 20 Dec; 6 Fredonia CBC 20 Dec; max 13 Wilson CBC NIAG 20 Dec; 4 Buffalo CBC 20 Dec; 8 Bethany GENE 24 Dec (DB); Oak

Orchard CBC 27 Dec; 6, 1 Porter NIAG 3, 17 Jan; Grand I ERIE 14 Jan; Newfane NIAG 17 Jan; Rushford ALLE 17 Jan; only reports.

Lapland Longspur: 6 Alexander GENE 2 Dec; 11, 15 Bethany GENE 24 Dec, 25 Jan (DB); max 50 Somerset NIAG 3 Jan (JP, BK); 6 Wilson NIAG 10 Jan; 5 Newfane NIAG 10 Jan; 27 Yates ORLE 11 Jan (WD); 5 Carlton ORLE 31 Jan.

Snow Bunting: 150 BWWT 6 Dec; 275 Rushford ALLE 18 Dec (JL, RR); 150, 175 Bethany GENE 24 Dec, 5 Feb; 150 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 24 Dec; 160 Alexander GENE 4 Jan; max 800 Yates ORLE 18 Jan; 155 Wilson NIAG 19 Jan; 500 Carlton ORLE 31 Jan.

DICKCISSEL: Clarence Center ERIE 27 Jan thru (DA!), at feeder with House Sparrows and other sparrows, first Regional winter report since 1990.

Red-winged Blackbird: 6-10 Alma ALLE 13-31 Jan (HL); four other January reports; arr 2 Williamsville ERIE 20 Feb.

E. Meadowlark: Tillman WMA ERIE 9 Jan (BC), only report.

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD: Lewiston NIAG 20 Dec (Buffalo RBA), at feeder one day only.

Rusty Blackbird: 3, 3 BuSP 11, 30 Dec; Jamestown CBC 14 Dec; ALSP 26 Dec (TB); Alexander GENE 26 Dec; 2 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; 3 TWMA 19 Jan (DSu); more reports than most winter seasons.

Com. Grackle: 57 Oak Orchard CBC 27 Dec; four January reports; arr Alden ERIE 19 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 70 Wilson NIAG 10 Jan; 16 Houghton ALLE 31 Jan.

Oriole species: Orchard Park ERIE 3 Dec (DW), likely Baltimore.

Pine Grosbeak: GHSP 17 Jan (RS), only report.

Purple Finch: few reports; low numbers on CBCs; max 24 Scio CBC 20 Dec.

Red Crossbill: no reports.

White-winged Crossbill: 50 Panama CHAU 1 Dec (AB); 35 Amherst ERIE 5 Dec; 24 OOWMA 16 Dec; 20 Lancaster ERIE 30 Dec thru; 50, 40 Porter NIAG 4, 19 Jan; max 100 Wilson NIAG 4 Jan (JW); 40 GHSP 18 Jan; widespread throughout Region.

Com. Redpoll: 38 St. Bonaventure CBC, 1 Jamestown CBC 14 Dec; OOWMA 27 Dec (GR); 1-4 Wilson NIAG 3-31 Jan; 30 WTSP 4 Jan (JW); 3 Youngstown NIAG 31 Jan; 50 PB 15 Feb (PY); max 275 Carlton ORLE 21 Feb (WD); mostly in small numbers.

HOARY REDPOLL: Wilson NIAG 16 Feb (WD! BP); only documented report received.

Pine Siskin: 88 Allegany CATT 14 Dec (TB); 50 max Wilson NIAG 1 Jan thru; max 150 Varysburg WYOM 27 Jan (TS); 70 Youngstown NIAG 8 Feb; 83 Silver Creek CHAU 11 Feb; 75 E Aurora ERIE 11 Feb (LC); widespread.

Evening Grosbeak: no reports.