

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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Most North Country residents that I talked to thought that the winter of 2008-09 was particularly cold and unpleasant, and the Watertown weather data at least partially supports that claim. December wasn't particularly cold, as the mean temperature of 26.2° F was actually 0.9° above normal, but the January mean of 12.6° was 6.0° below normal. Temperatures moderated somewhat in February, with a mean of 22.6°, which is 2.2° above normal. February was also relatively snow free, as only 12.5" fell in Watertown, providing something of a respite from December's 52.5" and January's 87" of snow. The season as a whole therefore ended up being somewhat colder and snowier than average.

Waterfowl were abundant during December and early January, but most open water froze over a few days before the 18 January statewide waterfowl count, and many ducks moved out into Lake Ontario or out of the Region entirely during the week leading up to the count. Early season waterfowl highlights included the year's final large movement of Snow Geese on 10-11 December, continuing the recent trend toward later and larger December passage; two untagged adult Trumpeter Swans at Jacques Cartier State Park in December; an apparent hybrid Common x Barrow's Goldeneye Nick Leone

found at Point Peninsula; and up to 4000 Redhead, 1200 Long-tailed Ducks, and 80 Red-breasted Mergansers on the St. Lawrence River in Cape Vincent in late December and early January. These latter numbers dropped precipitously between 10 and 16 January as the St. Lawrence River and near shore Lake Ontario iced over, and fewer than 20 individuals of each species were tallied on the waterfowl count. Waterfowl numbers and diversity were low for the remainder of the winter, but the scarcity of open water made it relatively easy to find Barrow's Goldeneye, with a total of four individuals reported between 23 January and the end of February.

Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks were present in moderately low numbers for the second consecutive year, and raptors generally were reported in modest numbers. Northern Harriers were particularly scarce, and several observers noted that they saw none after early December. Accipiters also seemed scarcer than usual, although they were reported in typical proportions: Cooper's Hawks were not quite twice as common as Sharp-shinned Hawks, and only one Northern Goshawk was reported. Among the exceptions to the general trend were continuing good numbers of wintering Bald Eagles along the St. Lawrence River, including a concentration of 11 feeding at deer remains in Alexandria accompanied by an astonishing 37 Common Ravens. Other highlights included individual Golden Eagles in Alexandria in January and Canton in February, and at least nine Merlins, the latter representing a continuation of the trend for increasing numbers during all seasons.

It was a fairly good winter for owls, especially Snowy Owls, which made their best showing in the Region since 2001. The highlight of the winter was a **Northern Hawk Owl** that MaryBeth Warburton spotted along the side of Rt. 11 in Potsdam as she drove home from her Christmas break. The Hawk Owl remained on a territory in an unlikely location near a Wal-Mart for about a month, allowing numerous observers great looks. On 21 January Mark Manske captured and banded the Hawk Owl, which he identified as a first winter female and reported to be in good condition. Short-eared Owls were present in moderate numbers in Cape Vincent early in the season, but most individuals dispersed by mid-winter and few could be found after late January. As a final note on owls, I received a very belated report of a **Boreal Owl** from March of 2008 that included excellent photographs, and a second-hand report from somebody who saw photographs of a Northern Hawk Owl from the same period in 2008, although I never received documentation for the latter. Assuming that this report is valid, Great Gray, Northern Hawk, and Boreal owls were all present in St. Lawrence County at the same time in 2008, but few people heard about any of them.

Many of the usual half-hardies were present in typical or higher than average numbers. For instance, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, and Song and White-throated Sparrows were well reported during at least the first half of the winter period. In contrast, Northern Flicker, often among the most reliable of half-hardies, was virtually absent. Some of the more unusual half-hardies included Winter Wren, Eastern Towhee, and White-crowned Sparrow. Most half-hardy

reports came from December and early January, and most species were largely absent in February.

It was another good winter for irruptive waxwings and finches. Bohemian Waxwings were scarce early, with just a couple of December reports, but invaded St. Lawrence County in large numbers during February. Pine Grosbeaks were also present in St. Lawrence County in good numbers, and, as with Bohemian Waxwings, were barely reported in Jefferson and Lewis Counties. White-winged Crossbills were everywhere, with reports in the hundreds from the Adirondacks and Tug Hill and even a few large tallies from the lowlands. More typical were reports of individuals flying overhead from virtually every portion of the Region. Redpolls were generally scarce in December and early January, with just a few scattered small flocks, but a substantial wave moved into the Region during the middle half of January, with a maximum count of 440 on Fort Drum 12 January. At least two **Hoary Redpolls** were observed each on Fort Drum and in Canton during late January and early February. Redpoll numbers gradually diminished during the last 4-5 weeks of the reporting period.

I received reports of an even 100 species for the winter, a total that is slightly lower than for the preceding two years but roughly average overall. The highlight was certainly the Northern Hawk Owl, runners up being relatively good numbers of Snowy Owls and large numbers of Bohemian Waxwings and irruptive finches. The biggest disappointment was the poor showing by many diurnal raptors.

CONTRIBUTORS

Nobi & Joanne Ackerman, Jeff Bolsinger, Dick & Marion Brouse, Carol Cady, Joan Collins, Richard Crossley, Mary Curtis, Doug Gochfield, Mike Jeziorski, Anne Johnson, Steve Kelling, Monica LeClerc, Nick Leone, Mark Manske, David Prosser, Gerry Smith, Bill Stahl, MaryBeth Warburton, Tom & Eileen Wheeler.

ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart Island, Massena, STLA; CCSP – Coles Creek SP, STLA; CPSP – Cedar Point SP, JEFF; CV – Cape Vincent, JEFF; FL – Fisher's Landing, JEFF; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation, JEFF & LEWI; HP – Hawkin's Pt., Massena, STLA; LB – Lisbon Beach, STLA; KC – Kelsey Creek, Watertown, JEFF; PRWMA – Perch River WMA, JEFF; PtPen – Pt Peninsula, Lyme, JEFF; SLR – St. Lawrence River; TP – Tibbet's Pt., Cape Vincent, JEFF; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, Canton, STLA.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: 1100 FD 11 Dec, last of fall migrants.

Mute Swan: 2 FL thru.

Trumpeter Swan: 2 unmarked adults Jacques Cartier SP 3-4 Dec (GS, JB).

Wood Duck: arr FD 26 Feb.

Gadwall: max 3 LB 1 Feb.

Am. Black Duck: max 140 CPSP 9 Jan.

N. Pintail: Waddington 10 Jan.

Green-winged Teal: CV 12 Dec, only report.

Canvasback: FL 2 Jan, only report.

Redhead: max 4000 CV 30 Dec.

Greater Scaup: max 11 CPSP 9 Jan.

Lesser Scaup: 6 CV 27 Dec; FL 18 Feb.

White-winged Scoter: CCSP 1 Dec; CV 4 & 9 Jan; 17 PtPen 6 Jan.

Long-tailed Duck: max 1200 SLR CV 9 Jan.

Com. Goldeneye: max 834 SLR between TP and Thousand Islands Bridge 18 Jan.

Barrow's Goldeneye: pr ad LB 23 Jan (JB); ad f FL 18 Feb (NL); ad m HP 25 Feb thru (MC, mob).

Com. x Barrow's Goldeneye: ad m PtPen 6 Jan (NL).

Hooded Merganser: max 12 SLR Louisville 14 Dec; scattered reports 1-6 thru.

Com. Merganser: max 500 SLR Hammond 9 Jan.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 81 SLR CV 2 Jan.

Pied-billed Grebe: ULLWMA 5-13 Dec; FL 2 Jan (NL).

Horned Grebe: TP 2 Jan, only report.

Double-crested Cormorant: last SLR Hammond 14 Dec.

Great Blue Heron: last PtPen 5 Jan.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 11 at deer remains Alexandria 30 Dec; 52 counted along SLR by NYSDEC staff during mid-winter flight.

N. Harrier: virtually absent after early Dec.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 7 reports.

Cooper's Hawk: 12 reports.

N. Goshawk: ad FD 20 Jan.

Red-tailed Hawk: 7-15 per day N JEFF; 3-6 per day elsewhere.

Rough-legged Hawk: 7-15 per day N JEFF; 1-4 per day elsewhere; a relatively poor year.

Golden Eagle: Alexandria 9 Jan (JB); ULLWMA 7 Feb (JB).

Am. Kestrel: 1-2 per day N JEFF; scarce elsewhere after Dec.

Merlin: 2 CV thru; CCSP 1 Dec; Brownville 3 December; Gouverneur 5 Dec; Sackett's Harbor 6 Dec; CV 12 Dec; Sackett's Harbor 12 Dec; LB 6 Feb; good showing.

Peregrine Falcon: BI thru (MC).

Ring-billed Gull: arr FD 26 Feb.

Iceland Gull: max 4 HP 2 Jan; CPSP 27 Feb (DG, rarely reported JEFF).

Glaucous Gull: 1-4 per day HP Jan; several dates Ogdensburg.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

E. Screech-Owl: CV 24 Feb.

Snowy Owl: FD thru; Leray 2 Dec thru; 2 Fuller Bay CV early Dec; Morristown 1 Jan; Barnes Corners 11 Jan; Lisbon mid-Jan; Hammond 28 Jan; at least 6 more reports lacked information on location.

N. HAWK OWL: first winter female Potsdam 29 Dec to 2 Feb (MW, banded by MM, mob, photos!, report to NYSARC).

Long-eared Owl: FD 9 Feb.

Short-eared Owl: max 21 CV 9 Dec where numbers declined through season; Ogdensburg airport 13 Dec; Massena 31 Jan; Galop Is SLR 6 Feb.

N. Saw-whet Owl: 2 FD 9 Feb.

Belted Kingfisher: last ULLWMA 11 Jan.

N. Flicker: FD 18 Dec; scarce.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 1-4 per day thru except for S JEFF and LEWI where scarce after mid Jan.

Com. Raven: max 37 at deer remains Alexandria 18 Jan.

Horned Lark: max 102 CV 30 Jan.

Carolina Wren: CV thru; KC 17 Jan thru 23 Feb.

Winter Wren: FD 12 Jan; rare in winter.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 6 TP 19 Feb.

E. Bluebird: 2 FD 18 Dec; 5 ULLWMA 5 Jan; 4 PRWMA 22 Jan; 3 PRWMA 18 Feb.

Am. Robin: max 28 BI 18 Jan; many reports Dec & Jan; scarce Feb.

Bohemian Waxwing: 112 Morristown 3 Dec; 2 HP 10 Dec; 19 FD 30 Jan; many reports 100-300 per day STLA 2 Feb thru.

Cedar Waxwing: scarce until mid Feb; max 40 Canton 22 Feb.

WARBLERS

No reports.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

E. Towhee: Alexandria 7-8 Jan, only report (ML).

Song Sparrow: FD 4 Feb, only report.

White-throated Sparrow: 6 per day KC thru 22 Feb; CV 14 Jan; PtPen 14 Jan.

White-crowned Sparrow: KC 14-26 Jan (DB & MB).

Lapland Longspur: 7-10 per day CV.

Snow Bunting: max 750 CV several dates.

Red-winged Blackbird: Canton feeder 19 Jan; migrants arr Deferiet 28 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: Deferiet 4 Feb.

Pine Grosbeak: max 55 Canton 25 Jan; numerous reports smaller groups STLA thru; few reports JEFF & LEWI.

White-winged Crossbill: lowland max 400 CV 12 Dec; widespread throughout.

Com. Redpoll: max 440 FD 12 Jan.

HOARY REDPOLL (R6): different locations FD 22, 27 Jan (JB); 2 Canton 5-8 Feb (TW, EW, RC, photos!).

Pine Siskin: max 400 per day at Potsdam feeder thru; abundant and widespread throughout.

Evening Grosbeak: scarce outside Adirondacks.

ADDENDUM

BOREAL OWL: roosting in Brasher shed early & mid March 2008 (Karla Young, photos!, report to NYSARC).