

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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The winter was generally mild with relatively little snow. December was about as close to typical as possible, as Watertown's temperature of 25.0° F was 0.3° above normal, and the 3.99" of precipitation that fell was 0.2" below normal. January's weather was less typical, with a mean temperature of 20.5° or 1.9° above normal, and the 1.8" of precipitation was almost exactly half of normal. Temperatures remained relatively mild through February, as that month's mean temperature of 21.2° was 0.8° above average, and the 2.1" of precipitation was 0.4 inches below average.

Some of the heaviest snow of the season fell during the second week of December, which was unfortunate for the large number of Canada and Snow Geese that passed through the Region during the heavy snow squalls. The pattern in recent years for the bulk of the Snow Goose migration to occur in December continued this year, and I received many reports of goose flocks fighting gale force winds and heavy snow as they flew south. A number of these observers noted that geese were flying very low, no doubt because of poor visibility, and it seems likely that mortality was greater than usual given the weather conditions. On 11 December Eugene Nichols saw four Sandhill Cranes migrating over Hounsfield during the awful weather.

As is often the case, waterfowl numbers were highest in December and declined as the St. Lawrence River and near shore Lake Ontario iced over. Among the more unusual ducks reported were at least two King Eiders continuing through mid-December at Montario Point, Barrow's Goldeneye at Fisher's Landing in December and Hawkins Point in January, and a Ruddy Duck in Black River Bay in December. Notable high counts included 78 Tundra Swans at Pt. Peninsula 25 January, a good count for mid-winter, 5000 Redhead at Millen's Bay, and 1900 Long-tailed Ducks at Montario Point.

Raptors were generally present in low numbers, and I received no reports of any large concentrations of Rough-legged or Red-tailed Hawks. Accipiters were scarcely reported, and Merlin numbers dipped after several consecutive years of increases. Bald Eagle was the one exception to the poor raptor season. I received many reports of this once-scarce species from all areas of the Region, including many places far from open water, but the most eye-popping reports were of a record **110** eagles counted by NYSDEC on their annual mid-winter count of the St. Lawrence River, and a gathering of **37** eagles on the ice at Wellesley Island State Park.

White-winged gulls were reported in modestly higher numbers than during the previous few winters, with high counts for both Iceland and Glaucous Gulls coming from the Massena-Cornwall Christmas Bird Count. This area traditionally hosts more white-winged gulls than elsewhere in the Region. Also from the Massena area was a Lesser Black-backed Gull on 20 December. Lesser

The Kingbird 2010 June; 60 (2)

Black-backed Gulls are extremely rarely reported in Region 6 but almost certainly occur with greater frequency than local birders realize, given how often they are documented just across the St. Lawrence River in Ontario.

The season's Snowy Owl tally was just four, and as far as I can tell none stayed around for any length of time. Short-eared Owls were at Cape Vincent in about average numbers early in the season, but I received few reports after December and numbers apparently declined as the season progressed. In fact, I heard of no Short-eared Owls after mid-January.

Half-hardies were generally scarce with a few exceptions. The most notable half-hardy was an injured Brown Thrasher at a feeder in Clayton for six days in early December. Song and White-throated Sparrows, while scarce, were somewhat more common than during most winters, and Northern Flickers were present in modest numbers along the Lake Ontario shoreline. Other half-hardies, such as American Robin and Eastern Bluebird, were reported in lower than average numbers.

Aside from American Goldfinch, finches were basically absent, and I heard of no crossbills, redpolls, or Pine Grosbeaks. Bohemian Waxwing, another winter irruptive, was present, but flocks were so scarce that this species was barely noted, and Cedar Waxwings were not much more common. North Country birders had been treated to an abundance and nice diversity of winter irruptives during the previous several winters, so the almost total lack of these species this winter was a real letdown.

Overall, birding was remarkably slow, and I was therefore not surprised that the season's species tally was just 90, about a dozen shy of the average from recent winters. Throughout the winter I heard various versions of the same question: "Why aren't any birds coming to my feeders?" The overall lack of birds is certainly the main disappointment of the season. The main highlight of the season was the abundance of Bald Eagles, and the early season waterfowl diversity was nice as well.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart Island, Massena STLA; BRB – Black River Bay; CCSP – Coles Creek SP STLA; CV – Cape Vincent JEFF; ED – El Dorado Shores Preserve; FL – Fisher's Landing JEFF; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation JEFF & LEWI; HP – Hawkin's Pt. Massena STLA; KC – Kelsey Creek Watertown JEFF; MB – Millen's Bay, Cape Vincent JEFF; MCCBC – Massena-Cornwall Christmas Bird Count; MP – Montario Pt. Ellisburg JEFF; SLR; PRWMA – Perch River WMA JEFF; PtPen – Pt Peninsula Lyme JEFF; SLR – St. Lawrence River; SnPt – Snowshoe Pt. Henderson JEFF; TP – Tibbet's Pt. Cape Vincent JEFF; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: many reports 100-2000 migrating against strong south wind and snow 8-12 Dec; last Ellisburg 31 Dec.

Mute Swan: last SLR Massena 1 Jan.

Tundra Swan: 48 CV 17 Jan; max 78+ PtPen 25 Jan.

Gadwall: max 16 CV 19 Jan.

Am. Wigeon: 5 WHWMA 6 Dec, only report.

Am. Black Duck: max 100 CV 19 Dec.

N. Pintail: TP 30 Dec.

Redhead: max 5000 MB 27 Dec.

Ring-necked Duck: max 260 PRWMA 4 Dec; last MP 18 Dec.

Greater Scaup: max 1000 MB 27 Dec.

Lesser Scaup: max 40 PRWMA 4 Dec; 11 MB 27 Dec.

King Eider: 2 MP continuing thru 18 Dec.

White-winged Scoter: max 30 MP 18 Dec; 8 PtPen 15 Jan.

Black Scoter: CCSP 6 Dec; 4 MP 18 Dec.

Long-tailed Duck: max 1900 MP 18 Dec.

Bufflehead: max 11 HP 2 Feb.

Com. Goldeneye: 800 FL 24 Dec.

Barrow's Goldeneye: f FL 24 Dec (NL); ad m HP 16 Jan - 14 Feb (JB).

Hooded Merganser: max 80 CCSP 11 Dec; mid-winter max 19 SLR Massena 16 Jan.

Com. Merganser: max 2716 between TP and Thousand Is. Bridge SLR 16 Jan.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 69 between TP and Thousand Is. Bridge SLR 16 Jan.

Ruddy Duck: BRB 14 Dec, rare in winter.

Com. Loon: last 3 SLR Massena 13 Dec.

Double-crested Cormorant: last 2 SLR Massena 27 Dec.

Great Blue Heron: 4 MP 18 Dec; last PRWMA 31 Dec.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 110 mid-winter waterfowl count 14 Jan, record high; 37 Wellesley Is SP 15 Feb; many reports throughout.

N. Harrier: max 5 CV 6 Dec; scarce after mid-Dec.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: scarce.

Cooper's Hawk: few reports.

N. Goshawk: FD 2 Dec.

Red-tailed Hawk: wintered in modest numbers.

Rough-legged Hawk: generally 1-5 per day, numbers lower than most winters.

Am. Kestrel: scarce.

Merlin: several reports CV may be an overwintering individual; virtually unreported elsewhere.

Am. Coot: Sackett's Harbor 20 Dec, rare in winter.

Sandhill Crane: 4 Hounsfield 11 Dec (EN), flying south against 50 mph winds.

Killdeer: last ED 21 Dec, late.

Ring-billed Gull: scarce after mid-Dec.

Iceland Gull: max 11 MCCBC; TP 2-3 Jan; WI 14 Feb; 3 SLR Ogdensburg 5 Feb.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: HP 20 Dec (JB).

Glaucous Gull: max 9 MCCBC.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

E. Screech-Owl: Ellisburg 7 Dec.

Snowy Owl: Harrisburg 16 Jan; Chaumont 17-18 Jan; Ogdensburg airport 10-23 Jan; Adams 14 Feb; scarce.

Short-eared Owl: max 14 CV 22 Dec (GS), where declined through winter; 2 Hammond late Dec.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Canton 31 Dec; hit by car and taken to rehab Potsdam 14 Feb.

Belted Kingfisher: Rutland 2 Jan, only report.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: BI Massena 20 Dec.

N. Flicker: about 15 reports along near L Ontario shoreline; scarce elsewhere.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: max 4 PtPen & CV 10 Jan (GS); generally 0-2 per day, low.

Gray Jay: max 3 Massawepie Lake 8 Dec.

Com. Raven: flock 10 flew past MP 9 Feb heading north.

Carolina Wren: 9 Dec CV thru.

E. Bluebird: 4 SnPt 14 Dec; 4 Ellisburg 21 Jan.

Am. Robin: wintered in very low numbers.

Brown Thrasher: injured bird at Clayton feeder 5-10 Dec (ND).

Bohemian Waxwing: 22 MCCBC; at least 3 in mixed flock 90 waxwings Potsdam 1 Jan; mixed flock 70 including Cedar Waxwing Philadelphia 11 Feb; scarce.

Cedar Waxwing: scarce.

WARBLERS

No reports.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

Am. Tree Sparrow: much more common than previous winter.

Song Sparrow: max 8 KC 15 Feb.

White-throated Sparrow: max 4 KC 15 Feb.

Lapland Longspur: 2-5 per day CV thru; a few scattered reports 1-4 elsewhere.

Snow Bunting: max 500-700 CV 22 Dec.

E. Meadowlark: last Madrid 8 Dec, late.

Com. Grackle: at feeder 18 Jan, only report.

Purple Finch: scarce thru.

Pine Siskin: KC 8 Dec; scarce.