

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—WINTER 2010-11

W. Bradley Carlson

17 Old French Road, Honeoye Falls, NY 14472
BradCarlson1@hotmail.com

THE WEATHER

Record setting cold temperatures and high levels of snow accumulation were a trend this winter throughout most of New York. Hugh McGuinness' report from the Marine Region best described it as "the weather this season was %\$^#! crazy!" "Snowbirds" would boast that it was a perfect year to head to a warmer climate for the winter months, but of course then you would have missed all the good birds observed in New York from December through February.

As of mid-January, Syracuse had received almost double their average snowfall to that date. The New York City Metropolitan area received three large snowstorms in December and January, each one between 16 and 20 inches, resulting in record breaking levels in January. It was also an incredibly cold winter, with a number of low temperature records being shattered in January, when parts of the State were more than 20 degrees below zero.

WATERFOWL AND WATERBIRDS

- On 3 January, Kurt Fox and Dave Tetlow reported a "goose slam" with a single each Brant, Greater White-fronted Goose, Ross's Goose, and Cackling Goose present amongst thousands of Canada Geese and Snow Geese in the Savannah Mucklands.
- Approximately 15 different Greater White-fronted Geese were discovered over four different counties in the Marine Region.
- Snow Geese remained in higher than usual numbers in the Finger Lakes Region through January.
- Nine Ross's Geese were in West Sparta in December. A single Ross's Goose was present in Bridgehampton in February.
- Apparently two Barnacle Geese were present near Belmont Lake State Park in January, as observers noted one with leg bands and one without.
- There were a large number of reports (32) of Cackling Geese in the Genesee Region, with a few other individual reports elsewhere throughout the State.
- Trumpeter Swans were reported in six out of ten Regions in the State, with multiple reports of as many as 20 birds at Point Peninsula and Henderson Harbor. Little to no detail was given on most sightings of this species in the State, with the exception of one very well documented wing-tagged individual at Lake Agawam in Southampton. Extremely interesting is the

fact that this individual bird has a known origin of Ontario, Canada, a region which has officially given Trumpeter Swans full species status since October 2007. You can read more about this bird in the Marine Region write-up. Other than that specific report, the birding community seems to have a somewhat lackadaisical approach towards reporting Trumpeter Swans since there does not appear to be a clear path forward for this species to receive full species status in New York.

- Five separate reports of Eurasian Wigeon came from Long Island in December and January. One Eurasian Wigeon was present at Vischer's Ferry in Saratoga County, as well as another that had lingered from the fall into early December at Rockland Lake in the Hudson-Delaware Region.
- Nearly 200 Gadwalls held on through mid December in Cape Vincent which is 20x higher than normal winter numbers.
- A record early Blue-winged Teal was seen at Fair Haven on 27 February.
- Three reports of "Eurasian" Green-winged Teals (Common Teals) came from Long Island throughout the reporting period.
- Redheads were present in excellent numbers in the Finger Lakes with Cayuga Lake hosting a winter flock of up to 18,000, and the Conesus-Hemlock CBC detecting a record high count of 6,655 birds.
- A Tufted Duck was found by Gary Straus in Cold Spring Harbor on 4 January, and stayed through 7 January.
- Good numbers of King Eiders were seen around the State with a high count of eight off Montauk Point, three on the Buffalo waterfront in January, an immature male at Point Breeze on Lake Ontario in December, and a near adult male at the south end of Cayuga Lake in December. A female and an immature male were also reported after being shot by a hunter legally in Lake Ontario, at the mouth of the Niagara River.
- One of the most impressive waterfowl spectacles of the winter was the size of the sea duck flock, comprised mainly of all three scoter species and Common Eider, at Montauk Point. Observers estimated the total number of sea ducks at forty to sixty thousand individuals, with the maximum numbers occurring in mid-January.
- Good numbers of Harlequin Ducks were reported from upstate—four in Rochester, two in Dunkirk, and two on Onondaga Lake in Syracuse.
- Barrow's Goldeneyes put in an excellent show around the State with a high count of six being reported in the St. Lawrence. Three reports of Barrow's Goldeneyes came from the Hudson-Mohawk Region. Also, individual Barrow's Goldeneyes returned to three previous winter locations on Long Island, while single males returned to Lake Ontario at Point Breeze and Sodus Bay. One was reported in the Adirondack-Chaplain Region, as well as one on the east side of Canandaigua Lake in Vine Valley, Yates County.
- An unusually high count of 875 Common Mergansers were seen on Seneca Lake in mid January.
- A large number of Ruddy Ducks (645) stayed at the Batavia WWTP up until it froze in December.

- In December, single annually returning Eared Grebes were reported at the Batavia WWTP and Cayuga Lake in Aurora. An additional Eared Grebe spent much of the winter in Dunkirk Harbor.
- Three reports of a single American White Pelican came from Long Island between 29 December and 8 January, the latter being of a dead bird. An American White Pelican was also reported flying high over Chelsea in Dutchess County on 5 January.
- An immature Great Cormorant was seen flying into Irondequoit Bay on Lake Ontario. Another that was found in the Adirondack-Champlain Region in November lingered into early December. A pair of Double-crested Cormorants were found on the Binghamton CBC which were locally rare for the winter months.
- In the Oneida Lake Basin, Karl Curtis spotted a record sized flock of 48 Sandhill Cranes flying over Jamesville on 4 December.
- An offshore pelagic southeast of Shinnecock Inlet on 11 December located 35 Atlantic Puffins.
- An inshore pelagic trip from Freeport, Long Island on 23 January found 31 Common Murres, one Thick-billed Murre, and 27 Razorbills. At least 66 additional large alcids were observed on the pelagic (likely murres or Razorbills). Decent numbers of Razorbills were reported throughout the winter from the south shore of Long Island. A dead Thick-billed Murre was also found near Montauk.

VULTURES AND RAPTORS

- Black Vultures continue to move their range northward, and winter records are no exception in reflecting this trend. A modest winter roost of a half dozen Black Vultures has become established east of the city of Hudson. Nine Black Vultures were reported from Manhattan to Montauk during the period. On 19 January, David Nicosia observed a Black Vulture in Johnson City near Binghamton. Four days later on 23 January, Susan Danskin observed possibly the same Black Vulture approximately 30 miles north near Ithaca. This bird was refound in that same area by other birders on subsequent days. In late February a Black Vulture was reported eating a deer carcass in Hilton along Lake Ontario. Also of interest were five Black Vultures reported along the Niagara River just across the New York State border in Queenston, Ontario.
- An unusual mid-winter sighting of Osprey occurred in February in Montgomery County.
- There were very good numbers of both species of eagles reported this winter across the state. Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch ended up breaking their record for Bald Eagles (221). A one day count of 191 Bald Eagles came from a section of the Hudson River, and 102 were counted on a January NYSDEC aerial survey of the St. Lawrence River.

- The Hudson-Delaware Region also turned in at least 10 reports of Golden Eagles; a few of these reports were of multiple birds. There were numerous Golden Eagle reports from the Susquehanna Region, three reports from the St. Lawrence Region, two from Oneida Lake Basin, and single reports near the Helderbergs of Albany County, and north of Aurora Bay on the east side of Cayuga Lake.
- Small numbers of Northern Goshawks were reported across the State, with slightly higher than normal numbers of Cooper's Hawks, Merlins, and Red-shouldered Hawks. Merlins and Cooper's Hawks in particular are trending higher in recent winters.
- An extremely rare winter report of a Broad-winged Hawk came from Tom Sarro at the Mohonk Lake area in the Hudson-Delaware Region on 18 December.
- Rough-legged Hawks were observed in good numbers in much of upstate and northern NY, although this varied in some locations. The Susquehanna Region also reported higher than average numbers.
- Reports of owl species were average at best throughout much of the State, with some species low to non-existent in parts of the State. The exception to this was a good number of Eastern Screech-Owls reports throughout much of the State.
- Snowy Owls were detected in very low numbers in six out of ten Regions (2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10), with typically only one bird briefly present per Region during the period.
- Short-eared Owls were found in small numbers at traditional locations, with a high count of 16 at a roost on Cape Vincent in December.
- Long-eared Owls and Northern Saw-whet Owls were detected primarily in small numbers during a few of the CBCs, with some Regions having no reports at all.

GULLS AND SHOREBIRDS

- All the expected gull species were reported on the Niagara River and along the coast. The Slaty-backed Gull that Jim Pawlicki found in late February, at the Lewiston Power Reservoir in Niagara County, was really the only rarity.
- Upstate Black-legged Kittiwakes are always notable, as were single birds found at Buffalo Harbor, the mouth of the Genesee River in Rochester, and at Derby Hill.
- A Black-headed Gull was present much of December in the Rochester area, and multiple birds were reported from the Marine Region throughout the reporting period.
- One, and possibly two, California Gulls were on the Niagara River in December.

- Good numbers of Iceland Gulls were reported from the Niagara River and the coastal Region.
- Thayer's Gulls were also reported in good numbers from the Niagara River. Rochester reported an above average number (six) of Thayer's Gulls.
- At one point during the reporting period, Willie D'Anna reported exceptional numbers of Glaucous Gulls on the Niagara River. Decent numbers of this species were reported throughout the State.
- The ever-expanding list of hybrid gull combinations cannot be overlooked when summarizing winter gull highlights. In addition to the regularly reported "Nelson's Gulls" (Herring x Glaucous hybrid) from the Niagara River, Jim Pawlicki and Jim Watson photographed a presumed Great Black-backed x Glaucous Gull) at Dunkirk Harbor.
- A few reports of Purple Sandpipers came from upstate (Niagara River, Rochester, Fair Haven, and Onondaga Lake). Of course, if you really want to see this species in New York State, you may want to attend next year's Brooklyn CBC where they reported the maximum count of 199 Purple Sandpipers!
- Wilson's Snipes were reported in five out of ten Regions (1, 3, 5, 8, and 10).
- An offshore pelagic southeast of Shinnecock Inlet on 11 December located eight Red Phalaropes.

PASSERINES AND HALF HARDIES

- An average number of Northern Shrikes were reported throughout the State.
- The large American Crow roost in Rochester continued with over 24,000 birds counted for the second year in a row on the CBC. However, the bigger story was the detection of the first winter record of Fish Crow for the Region amongst the large roost. With additional observation by numerous observers, as many as 23 Fish Crows were detected in early February.
- Common Ravens continued to spread through the Marine Region, and are slowly working their way east on Long Island. Several western Long Island nest sites appeared to be active by the end of the period.
- Very good numbers of Bohemian Waxwings were reported across the Lake Ontario plain, and into northern New York, with some flocks in the Oneida Lake Basin and the Adirondacks numbering almost 300 birds. Two Bohemian Waxwings were reported from DeBruce in northern Sullivan County, and a single report came from Saratoga County.
- Excellent numbers of field birds such as Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, and Horned Larks, were observed upstate. A mixed flock that included over 200 Lapland Longspurs was enjoyed by many birders near Cuylerville. Flocks of 1000 to 2400 Snow Buntings were reported from the western Lake Ontario plain on multiple occasions, as well as one report of 1000 atop Mount Pleasant.

- Rusty Blackbirds were reported from Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 10 including 10 photographed at a feeder in McConnellsville in the Oneida Lake Basin on 19 January.
- In the general category of half hardy species, all the expected species were represented in at least seven Regions in the State, including Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Gray Catbirds, Hermit Thrushes, American Pipits, and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Ruby-crowned Kinglets were recorded in six Regions.
- As expected, the southern Marine Region recorded the most half hardy wood warbler species (nine) over the reporting period (Orange-crowned, Pine, Yellow-rumped, Hermit, Palm, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow-breasted Chat). A Yellow-breasted Chat in a Buffalo yard from mid December through most of January was unprecedented for the Region. An extremely late Yellow Warbler was observed well by Dave Czaplak at Seneca Lake State Park on 4 December.
- The Marine Region also put together an impressive list of no less than fifteen species of sparrows over the reporting period, including American Tree, Chipping, Field, Lark, Savannah, Le Conte's, Saltmarsh, Nelson's, Seaside, Fox, Song, Swamp, White-throated, White-crowned, and Dark-eyed Junco. A Vesper Sparrow reported upstate in the Genesee Region was unexpected.

WINTER FINCHES

- Matt Young, who is looked to by many in the State as a resident finch expert, described the season as a "pretty good finch winter." Of course the numbers of observations varied greatly by specific species.
- There was a conspicuous near-absence of Pine Grosbeaks across the State this winter. Two reports came from the Adirondack-Champlain Region, a third from Canton, and a final one from Saratoga. These reports were primarily of single birds.
- Small flocks of Red Crossbills were reported from Fort Drum in the St. Lawrence Region. Other than that, only single birds were reported from five other Regions (2, 3, 4, 5, and 10), possibly due to the poor cone crop.
- I was really surprised to learn that all Regions except the Finger Lakes reported White-winged Crossbills this winter season. I was under the impression that they also were nearly absent, but apparently small numbers were present across the State, in particular from the Adirondacks and from five counties within the Hudson-Mohawk Region. A couple of sightings came from the Susquehanna and Niagara Frontier Regions.
- Pine Siskins were present in small numbers across the State, however they were in low numbers compared to recent invasion years.
- Evening Grosbeaks made a very good push in December, and as a result, were detected from all Regions except the Marine Region. Good numbers

were reported in the Adirondacks and foothills, Sullivan, Chenango, and Cortland Counties, the Oneida Lake Basin, and the Summerhill area.

- The winter finch story of the season was the very large influx of redpolls across localized portions of upstate and northern New York, and included both subspecies of Common Redpolls and both subspecies of Hoary Redpolls. The redpolls started arriving en masse in late December with flocks of hundreds being reported at feeders and other locations in the field. This was followed by a second large wave of redpolls in mid to late February. This latter push sent many redpolls downstate to Long Island, and some birds were even reported as far south as North Carolina.
- Flocks of one hundred or more Common Redpolls were reported in every Region of the state, with some Regions (Adirondack, St. Lawrence, Finger Lakes, Genesee, and Marine) reporting flocks of approximately three- to four-hundred birds. The Oneida Lake Basin reported widespread flocks of up to 100 per day in January and February. A few of the darker and larger sized “Greater” Redpolls (*rostrata* subspecies from Greenland) were reported as well. Multiple reports of this rare *rostrata* subspecies came from the Susquehanna and Genesee Regions, and one report came from Bill Kruegerin in Cumberland Head in the Adirondack Region.
- Hoary Redpolls were found amongst the Common Redpoll flocks at the seven northern and western Regions in the State. The Genesee Region alone had 37 Hoary Redpolls reported over the period. At some locations, Hoary Redpolls were seen in unusually large numbers, with a high count of 11 reported by Dave Tetlow in a flock of Common Redpolls near Kendall. Up to five Hoary Redpolls were photographed by multiple observers at Beaver Lake Nature Center in Onondaga County. At least four Hoary Redpolls were photographed at Brad Carlson’s feeders south of Rochester. Multiple reports came from the St. Lawrence, Adirondack, Finger Lakes, and Susquehanna Regions, the later documenting some birds with photographs. The Niagara Frontier Region had two reports of Hoary Redpolls including two birds photographed at Willie D’Anna’s feeders. T. Lloyd Williams reported one Hoary Redpoll as far south as the Hudson-Mohawk Region. One, or possible two different, larger, and much rarer Greenland race of “Hornemann’s” Hoary Redpolls (*hornemanni* subspecies) were seen at Brad Carlson’s feeders south of Rochester in January and February.

RARITIES

There was quite a nice list of rarities this winter season, and they were spread across the entire State.

- The number of Eurasian Collared-Doves in the Genesee Region continues to increase with eight being observed perched together in January at a traditional location. Possibly a sign of their continuing range expansion within the State, the Niagara Frontier Region experienced their first ever Eurasian Collared-Dove at a feeder in Lyndonville.

- A Lewis's Woodpecker continued to frequent a private residence in Ontario County through the entire reporting period.
- One December report of a Western Kingbird came from Tottenville in the Marine Region.
- The well-photographed Loggerhead Shrike found at Jones Beach State Park on 30 October continued through 6 December.
- A large movement of Cave Swallows occurred in late November along Lake Ontario, and 16 of the birds lingered at a treatment plant in Greece, NY into early December, where they perished.
- A Townsend's Solitaire found by Mike Stewart on Point Peninsula on 19 December was seen by many birders throughout the rest of the reporting period. A second Townsend's Solitaire was reported from the Orient CBC on 1 January, but could not be relocated.
- An adult male Varied Thrush was photographed at a feeder at a private residence in Wurtsboro, Sullivan County in late December and stayed through the reporting period. A Varied Thrush at Central Park found in November stayed through the entire reporting period, while another at a private residence in East Marion was present in early December.
- The first State record of Hermit Warbler was recorded at Sunken Meadow State Park on 4 December (see p.132 and p.149).
- Vicki Bustamante found an adult male Western Tanager at her feeder on 31 December, which remained until 22 February.
- Tom Burke and Gail Benson found a LeConte's Sparrow on the EPCAL property in Suffolk County on 8 January. This may constitute New York's first winter record for the species. A wintering Lark Sparrow was also at EPCAL for three weeks from mid-December to early January.
- A Harris's Sparrow was present for nearly the entire reporting period by a feeding station along Dryden Lake in the Finger Lakes Region.
- In February, an adult male "Oregon" Junco was photographed by LeAnn Childs at her feeder in Ellery in the Niagara Frontier Region.
- An unusually large mixed flock of icterids were present at Brad Carlson's feeders south of Rochester in December including ~800 cowbirds, numerous Red-winged Blackbirds, grackles, and one adult female Yellow-headed Blackbird that was present for seven days. This is the same location that hosted an immature male Yellow-headed Blackbird last winter.
- A European Goldfinch was discovered at a feeder in Pine Bush, Orange County during the Great Yard Bird Count on 21 February.

BIRD OF THE SEASON

There were quite a few rarities this season, but I felt that only two species warranted consideration as the Bird of the Season for Winter 2010-11. The first accepted New York State record of Hermit Warbler is likely the most obvious contender. However, I also think there are strong merits for the fifth State record

of Lewis's Woodpecker. For the following reasons, I select both of these species as the Bird(s) of the Season for Winter 2010-11.

This season's first fall female Hermit Warbler found at Sunken Meadow State Park by Vinnie Pellegrino on 4 December stayed through 8 December, and was seen by hundreds of birders. This bird was of great interest to many State birders because this same species had previously nearly received full status on the New York State checklist in 2002, but was rejected at that time. The previous well-photographed hatching year male warbler was found at Jones Beach SP, Nassau Co. in November 2002. However, it was not accepted by NYSARC because the possibility of Townsend's x Hermit Warbler hybrid origins could not be ruled out due to some plumage characteristics. For details on this previous bird, you can see NYSARC's conclusions online at: <http://www.nybirds.org/NYSARC/Reports/NYSARC2002.html>.

In the meantime, those of you who were lucky enough to see this winter's Hermit Warbler can breathe comfortably now that this bird has officially been accepted as New York State's first Hermit Warbler (p. 132).

The Lewis's Woodpecker was hosted by Fred and Eleanor Jordon at their private residence in Ontario County. This bird arrived on 30 October, and remained throughout the entire winter season / reporting period. The Jordon's initially requested that the bird not be publicized on the internet, with the understandable concern of being inundated by the birding community. The Jordon's did, however, agree to host small groups of birders at prearranged times and dates. They proceeded to coordinate visits with small groups of birders via word of mouth, through the entire reporting period. Eleanor recently informed me that on 7 May, well after the reporting period ended, the Lewis's Woodpecker loaded up on suet for the last time and headed off, not to be seen again. As of this final date, the Jordon's had hosted 312 birders hoping to see the woodpecker. They wanted me to mention how much they really enjoyed the birding community that visited and shared this wonderful woodpecker with them! Based on the fact that this mega rarity stayed the entire season, and considering the well-coordinated effort between the homeowners and the birding community to respect one another's wishes, the Lewis's Woodpecker also deserves to be recognized as the Bird of the Season.

