

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

Jeffrey S. Bolsinger

98 State Street, Canton NY 13617

jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

It was a real old-fashioned winter, as I heard from several long-time residents of northern New York. All three months were between 3° and 4° F colder than average in Watertown, where the temperature dropped below zero on 14 nights, and the coldest temperature of the season was -30° on 24 January. Precipitation was below normal for the season, although the 3.9" that fell in December was 1.1" above average. January was very dry, as the 1.7" of precipitation that month was about half of normal. More precipitation fell in February, but the 3.6" total was still 1.2" below average. For the season, 115.9" of snow fell on Watertown, which is about a foot more than normal.

Waterfowl were abundant during the early winter, with many species present in far larger numbers than usual for December. Swan numbers were particularly high during the first half of the season, including: Tundra Swans in the low hundreds from several Lake Ontario locations, scattered Trumpeter

Swan sightings that unfortunately lacked details regarding identification or the presence of wing tags, and Mute Swans in several locations. Dabbling duck numbers were very high during early December and in fact much higher than they were previously in the fall, as it seemed that most Gadwall, American Black Ducks, Mallards, and Northern Pintails did not arrive to Region 6 until the first week of December. As one example, the 199 Gadwall observed in Cape Vincent on 16 December was about six times the maximum number observed during the fall season and 20 times that reported most winters. Seasonally unusual species included a Green-winged Teal at Fisher's Landing and three Canvasbacks at Stony Point. Winter ducks put in a good showing, with larger than usual numbers of Bufflehead and six Barrow's Goldeneye, a good total.

Raptor numbers were generally modest, with winter buteos present in low numbers, but Cooper's Hawk and Merlin continuing their increases of recent years. Northern Harrier and American Kestrel were generally scarce during early winter and then absent for the rest of the season. It was the fourth consecutive year with relatively low numbers of wintering Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, and numbers declined further as snow piled up in January and February. Cooper's Hawks outnumbered Sharp-shinned Hawks by about three to one. The Short-eared Owl roosts in Cape Vincent hosted at least 16 birds in December, but this species was scarce later in the winter. There were just two Snowy Owl reports of three individuals observed within two days of each other, suggesting that these owls may have been part of a small movement of owls through or out of the Region.

The rarity highlight of the season was clearly a **Townsend's Solitaire** found by Mike Stewart on Point Peninsula on 19 December and seen by many birders throughout the rest of the winter. The solitaire was frequently observed munching red cedar berries and occasionally singing from the tree tops, seemingly quite content on its winter territory. The solitaire was the only true rarity of the winter other than a few seasonally rare birds, including a Gray Catbird that survived to at least 8 January at Westcott Beach State Park and an Eastern Towhee that showed up at an Adams feeder 12-13 February.

It was a good winter for half-hardies and seemed particularly outstanding when compared with the previous, woeful winter. American Robins were widespread and seen almost daily in the Lake Ontario Plains and St. Lawrence Valley. Northern Flickers and Eastern Bluebirds occurred in the same areas in lower numbers. Sparrows and blackbirds were well represented, especially White-throated Sparrow which was counted in near-record numbers on the Watertown Christmas Bird Count.

Waxwings and finches irrupted in modest numbers, including nearly every species of winter irruptive. Bohemian Waxwings were reported throughout the Region in mostly small flocks but were generally scarce near Lake Ontario, where they were outnumbered by Cedar Waxwings. In most other locations Bohemian Waxwings were clearly the more abundant waxwing. Small to medium-sized flocks of redpolls roamed around the Region throughout the winter, mostly feeding in successional woodlands during December and early January and increasingly relying on feeders from late January on. Hoary

Redpolls were reported in many flocks, and several observers felt that it was an exceptionally good winter for Hoary Redpolls given the relatively modest size of the overall redpoll irruption. Unfortunately, no details were provided for any Hoary Redpoll sighting. Other notable finches included flocks of Red Crossbills at Fort Drum and near Leonard Pond, good numbers of Evening Grosbeaks in the Adirondacks and foothills, and, oddly, Pine Siskins at feeders in Canton and Watertown but strangely unreported elsewhere, and just a single Pine Grosbeak in a Canton tamarack stands that has hosted Regional high counts for this species during two of the last four winters.

Strong southerly winds 17-18 February brought to Philadelphia an exceptionally early Killdeer, beating the previous record early arrival date by nearly a week. Also arriving on this weather system were at least two Great Blue Herons, a species not normally seen in Region 6 until March. The first Red-winged Blackbird believed to be a spring arrival was at a Watertown feeder 23 February.

The 112 species documented during the winter was a major improvement over the previous winter, when just 90 species were reported. This year's winter species tally is the highest in at least six years and among the highest ever for Region 6. The obvious highlight was the Townsend's Solitaire, but the modest waxwing and finch irruption and good numbers of half-hardies were also welcome. Perhaps the biggest disappointment was another relatively poor winter for buteos. But considering how miserable the birding was during the previous winter, birders had little to complain about. On a more personal note, my biggest disappointment was the failure of contributors to provide details on Trumpeter Swans or Hoary Redpolls.

CONTRIBUTORS

Erwin Batalla, Jeff Bolsinger, Dick & Marion Brouse, Carol Cady, Brad Carlson, Bernie Carr, Tom Carrolan, Star Carter, Joan Collins, Mary Curtis, Nan Dixon, Chris Dobony, Kirk Huffstater, Mike Jesiorski, Steve Kelling, Miranda Monica, Daniel Leete, Nick Leone, Eugene Nichols, John Ohst, Fred Ossman, Bill Purcell, Dominic Sherony, Tony Shrimpton, Gerry Smith, Mike Stewart, Todd Vincent, Tom & Eileen Wheeler, Hans van der Zweep.

ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart Island, Massena, STLA; CPSP – Cedar Point State Park; CV – Cape Vincent, JEFF; FL – Fisher's Landing, JEFF; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation, JEFF & LEWI; GPSP – Grass Point SP; HH – Henderson Harbor; HP – Hawkin's Pt., Massena, STLA; KC – Kelsey Creek, Watertown, JEFF; LPd – Leonard Pond trail, Colton, STLA; LPSP – Long Point SP; MCCBC – Massena-Cornwall CBC; MP – Montario Pt, Ellisburg, JEFF; PilPt – Pillar Point; PRWMA – Perch River WMA, JEFF; PtPen – Pt Peninsula, Lyme, JEFF; RMSP – Robert Moses SP, Massena, STLA; RWSP – Robert G. Wehle SP; SLR – St. Lawrence River; SnPt – Snowshoe Pt., Henderson, JEFF; StPt – Stony Point, Henderson, JEFF; WBSP – Westcott Beach SP; WISP – Wellesley Island SP.

WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES

Snow Goose: heaviest migration of fall 4-10 Dec; last 3 MP 11 Dec.

Canada Goose: mid-winter max 1350 PtPen 8 Jan; just a few small flocks Feb.

Mute Swan: 2 HH 11 Dec; 8 WISP 5 Jan; 3 PtPen 8 Jan; 7 FL 28 Jan; 1-3 per day SLR Ogdensburg 5 Feb thru; increasing during winter.

Tundra Swan: max 433 PilPt 4 Dec; many reports 100-250 L Ontario shore JEFF thru Dec; 88 PtPen 14 Jan where remaining open water iced over 15 Jan.

Trumpeter Swan: several reports up to 20 PtPen and HH; few details provided.

Wood Duck: 2 Canton 4 Dec; FD 10 Dec.

Gadwall: max 199 CV 16 Dec, high; mid-winter max 45 PtPen 2 Jan; many reps of up to 10 thru.

Am. Wigeon: max 5 PtPen 20 Dec; last 2 BI 13 Jan.

Am. Black Duck: 130 CV 16 Dec.

Mallard: heavy movement 1-20 Dec; max 450 WISP 5 Jan.

N. Pintail: several reports 1-3 Dec; last HP 9 Jan.

Green-winged Teal: CV 19 Dec; FL 24 Dec - 22 Jan.

Canvasback: 3 StPt 19 Dec, only report.

Redhead: up to 14 per day FL thru; max 16 PtPen 2 Jan.

Ring-necked Duck: mid-winter max 12 FL 28 Jan; last StPt 30 Jan.

Greater Scaup: 60 PtPen 2 Jan; up to 10 per day FL thru.

Lesser Scaup: MP 11 Dec; FL 28 Jan.

White-winged Scoter: 4 MP 11 Dec; 3 CV 16 Dec; GPSP 4 Jan.

Black Scoter: 2 MP 12 Dec; last MP 19 Dec.

Long-tailed Duck: max 900 MP 11 Dec; SLR Lisbon 17 Jan unusual location for mid-winter.

Bufflehead: 75 HH 11 Dec; max 120 PtPen 20 Dec; 48 PtPen 14 Jan, high for mid-winter.

Com. Goldeneye: max in one location 700 FL 28 Jan.

Barrow's Goldeneye: ad f PtPen 20 Dec - 1 Jan (JB, TC); ad m PtPen 26 Dec - 13 Jan (DL); pr CV 4 Jan (EN); ad f SLR Ogdensburg 17 Jan (JB); f FL 15-28 Jan (NL, JB).

Hooded Merganser: max 27 MCCBC 27 Dec.

Com. Merganser: max 2500 Chaumont Bay 13 Dec; 925 SLR Ogdensburg 5 Feb; 660 SLR Oak Pt 21 Feb; additional counts 200+ from GPSP, HP, LPSP, Red Mills, & Wellesley Is.

Red-breasted Merganser: 104 BI 3 Dec, high for this stretch SLR; 120 SnPt 11 Dec; max 200 SLR Clayton 10 Jan.

Red-throated Loon: SH 11 Dec; rare in winter.

174

Com. Loon: max 10 BI 3 Dec; 2 SH 5 Jan; last 2 BI 9 Jan.

Horned Grebe: max 6 StPt 11 Dec & RWSP 18 Dec; last RWSP 9 Jan.

Red-necked Grebe: MP 11 Dec; 3 RWSP 18 Dec; StPt 18 Dec.

Double-crested Cormorant: max & last 3 SLR Massena 27 Dec.

Great Blue Heron: last Canton 1 Jan; arr Rodman 18 Feb, early; FD 23 Feb.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 102 counted on Jan NYSDEC aerial survey SLR, second consecutive year with 100+ on survey; many reports 1-3 from loc far from L Ontario & SLR.

N. Harrier: up to 4 per day PtPen thru early Jan; scarce after 10 Jan.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 9 reports.

Cooper's Hawk: 26 reports of at least 29 individuals.

N. Goshawk: imm PtPen thru; ad Canton 31 Dec; Hounsfield 2 Jan; Chaumont 29 Jan.

Red-tailed Hawk: 6-12 per day CV thru; similar numbers elsewhere.

Rough-legged Hawk: 6-10 per day CV & PtPen thru mid Jan decreasing to 1-4 per day; 1-3 per day most other lowland locations.

Golden Eagle: ad & imm HP 6 Jan (HZ); PtPen 20 Jan (MB); 10 ravens harassing imm Pierrepont 27 Feb (JB, CC).

Am. Kestrel: widely scattered Dec; declined thru Jan; last PRWMA & PtPen 29 Jan.

Merlin: PtPen 20-21 Dec; 2 CV 28 Dec; Ogdensburg 8 Jan; FD 17 Feb; additional reports Hammond & Rodman lacked dates.

Peregrine Falcon: pr BI Bridge Massena thru.

Am. Coot: PilPt 11 Dec; 12 HH 19 Dec; PtPen 23 Dec; unusual in winter.

Sandhill Crane: Hounsfield 19 Dec; second consecutive Dec migrant reported.

Killdeer: arr Philadelphia 17 Feb, 6 days earlier than previous record early date.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 5 GPSP 4 Jan; unusual in winter.

Ring-billed Gull: absent from SLR after 13 Jan until 7 arr BI 28 Feb.

Iceland Gull: 5 reports singles SLR Ogdensburg & Oak Point.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: HP 3 Dec (JB).

Glaucous Gull: 2-3 per day SLR Ogdensburg 17 Jan thru; 2 SLR Oak Pt. 21 Feb.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

E. Screech-Owl: Canton 29 Dec; PtPen 30 Jan.

Snowy Owl: 2 FD 6 Feb could not be relocated (FO); Denmark 8 Feb; only reports.

The Kingbird 2011 June; 61 (2)

Barred Owl: 20+ reports of daytime hunting throughout Region.

Long-eared Owl: Clayton 30 Dec, only report.

Short-eared Owl: Lyme 3 Feb; max 16 CV 9 Dec; Galop Is. 5 Feb.

Belted Kingfisher: last Pt Salubrious 14 Dec.

Black-backed Woodpecker: foraging on red pine LPd 30 Jan.

N. Flicker: max 4 PtPen multiple dates; reports from 22 other locations; high.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 1-2 per day throughout lowland areas.

Com. Raven: max 50+ Canton 4 Dec (JB).

Horned Lark: max 110 Canton 16 Jan; 54 Philadelphia 10 Dec; 52 CV 28 Jan; many reports smaller flocks.

Carolina Wren: 2-3 at Canton feeders thru, increasing.

E. Bluebird: 4 Canton 89 Dec; Hounsfield 11 Dec; 4 Massena 29 Dec; Canton 29 Jan; max 8 PtPen. several dates Jan.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE: PtPen 19 Dec thru (MS, BP, JB, mob, photos, reports to NYSARC), 1st Regional record.

Am. Robin: max 75 PtPen 23 Dec; 30 FD 2 Jan; 51 BI 17 Feb; numerous smaller flocks & singles; more than most winters.

Gray Catbird: WBSP 11 Dec (JSB, MS), still present 8 Jan (MS).

Bohemian Waxwing: 223 Canton 29 Dec; 150 RMSP 13 Feb; many smaller flocks throughout except scarce near L Ontario.

Cedar Waxwing: 150 CPSP 17 Dec; 300 PtPen 23 Dec; 226 Massena 27 Dec; most flocks small.

LONGSPURS -WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: max 14 CV 9 Dec; most reports of 1-3 with Snow Buntings and Horned Larks.

Snow Bunting: max 600 Hammond 11 Feb.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

E. Towhee: coming to Adams feeder 12-13 Feb (TV, photos!).

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 110 Canton 29 Dec.

Savannah Sparrow: last 2 Hounsfield 11 Dec (JB, MS), late.

Song Sparrow: max 3 CV 11 Jan; 8 other reports.

White-throated Sparrow: 20 WCBC, second highest total in count history; many reports.

Red-winged Blackbird: FD 6, 16, & 22 Dec; Massena 5 Feb; arr Watertown 23 Feb.

E. Meadowlark: 2 PtPen 14 Jan (JB, MS).

Com. Grackle: Clayton 10 Dec; Massena 30 Dec; Henderson 9 Feb.

Pine Grosbeak: Canton 1 Jan in tamarack stand where good numbers found in past irruptions (JB), only report.

Purple Finch: absent from most of Region except 5-10 daily at Clayton feeder thru; 5 PtPen 14 Jan.

Red Crossbill: several flocks 4-10 FD 13 Jan thru; 4-14 per day LPd 30 Jan thru.

White-winged Crossbill: Taylor Creek SF Pierrepont 29 Jan; Canton feeder 2 Feb.

Com. Redpoll: widely scattered flocks 30-150 in natural habitat Dec & Jan; increasing numbers at feeders mid Feb thru including max 400 at Evans Mills feeder.

Hoary Redpoll: 2 FD 18 Feb (JB!); PRGC 20 Feb (JB!); Canton several dates late Feb (JB!); at least 11 other reports all lacking details.

Pine Siskin: up to 21 per day at several Canton feeders thru; up to 6 per day KC; 12 Deferiet early Dec.

Evening Grosbeak: max 125 Pierrepont 15 Jan; several reports smaller flocks Adirondacks & foothills and NE STLA.

Am. Goldfinch: up to 20 per day at feeders throughout Region.

