

REGION 3 - FINGER LAKES

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A mere 20 inches of snow fell during the entire reporting period in Ithaca. This total amounted to less than half of the historical average and less than one-third of the total for the equivalent timeframe of 2010-2011. Throughout the period, there was essentially no snow cover except at higher elevations. Temperatures were also unusually mild. Average temperatures in December, January, and February all exceeded historical monthly norms by more than five degrees Fahrenheit. Whether the anomalous weather affected bird movements or increased birder effort or for whatever other reasons, the season was one of the better winters in recent memory for frequency and magnitude of rarity sightings.

At least three individual birds from the genus *Aechmophorus* appeared on Cayuga Lake at three different locations. Chris Wood and Jessie Barry found the first, a **Western Grebe**, at Myers Park in Lansing on 10 January. Tim Lenz found the second at the south end of Cayuga Lake on 31 January. This bird evidently lingered here through the end of the period. Moreover, astonishingly, on 8 February, Tom Johnson and Jay McGowan found two *Aechmophorus*

together on Cayuga Lake near the Twin Oaks Campground just north of Union Springs. These two birds were noted in this area by multiple observers all the way to 11 February. Notably, on 10 February, Marsha and Fred Kardon reported seeing one definite *Aechmophorus* grebe and possibly a second one at the south end of Cayuga Lake, at nearly the same time as Dave Nicosia, Fritzie Blizzard, and Becky Sewell were observing two *Aechmophorus* together in the Twin Oaks area.

All of these observations involved excellent views that yielded clear photos and detailed notes by multiple birders. Still, it remained impossible to state definitively the identities of the Stewart Park bird and one of the two Twin Oaks grebes. At both sites, the grebe in question showed paler flanks, a slightly brighter bill, and more white in the loreal area above the eye than an indisputable Western Grebe. Clark's Grebe could be ruled out because the bill and face in both cases were insufficiently bright, but the possibilities of either a hybrid Western/Clark's Grebe or a pale Western Grebe remain open.

For at least the 13th consecutive winter, an Eared Grebe was regularly seen on Cayuga Lake near Aurora. Suan Yong found the season's most notable duck, a female **King Eider**, at Seneca Lake SP on 2 December.

Turkey Vultures took advantage of the absence of snow, staying in large numbers throughout the winter. Donna Scott saw an impressive single flock of at least 65 Turkey Vultures at an evening roost in Lansing on 10 February. Golden Eagles were observed a remarkable five times during the reporting period, but Red-shouldered Hawks were reported neither to eBird nor to local birding listserves. This absence broke a string of several years in which a Red-shouldered Hawk wintered in Sapsucker Woods. Merlins were observed in downtown Ithaca and Elmira; separately, Peregrine Falcons were seen in these cities and in Corning as well.

The season's indisputable highlight among rare larids was an adult **Black-legged Kittiwake**, found by Jessie Barry, Chris Wood, and Jeff Gerbracht at the south end of Cayuga Lake on 14 January. Chris found a Thayer's Gull at Cornell University's compost facility on 9 December; this bird was found again at the south end of Cayuga Lake by several other birders the next day, and again by Chris in the same area a week later. The usual winter array of other uncommon white-headed winter gulls, including Glaucous, Iceland, and Lesser Black-backed, all appeared in expected numbers at traditional spots, especially Cornell University's compost facility on Stevenson Road in Dryden, as well as Stewart Park in Ithaca.

As in the rest of the northern United States, **Snowy Owls** irrupted in impressive numbers into Region 3. They were seen at no fewer than eight locations by many dozens of delighted birders. Most remarkably, one Snowy Owl was seen from 27 December to 1 January on the parking lot light towers and buildings of Waterloo Premium Outlets, a sprawling shopping mall.

Carol Keeler saw a hummingbird at her feeders in Auburn on 14 December. She was unable to pinpoint this bird's species, and alas, it did not return for a closer look.

The most notable songbird of the winter was an **Orange-crowned Warbler** found by Ken Rosenberg on the Ithaca Christmas Bird Count on 1 January. This was an all-time first for the species for this count. Chris Wood found the season's only Gray Catbird at Monkey Run South in Dryden on 20 January. The next day, he and Jessie Barry found, photographed, and thoroughly described an apparent "Cassiar" Dark-eyed Junco in the same area. Marty Borko and John Palmer recorded a clear observation of a brown-headed chickadee on the Corning Christmas Bird Count on 17 December, but could not confirm other field marks that might clinch an identification of Boreal Chickadee.

It was an unremarkable winter for irruptive songbird species. Carl Steckler found the only Bohemian Waxwing of the season in Summer Hill State Forest on 20 January. Moderate-sized flocks of White-winged Crossbills and Pine Siskins were seen regularly in Summer Hill State Forest, with scattered sightings of these species elsewhere. Common Redpolls were similarly scattered, appearing in modest numbers. No definitive reports of Hoary Redpoll or Red Crossbill were made. The only three sightings of Evening Grosbeak all occurred in January. Terie Rawn found one in Newfield. Chris Wood and Jessie Barry found two together in Hammond Hill State Forest on 15 January, while Jeff Gerbracht found one two weeks later.

CONTRIBUTORS

Janet Akin, Paul Anderson, Bill Baker, Jessie Barry, Hope Batcheller, Kara Beach, Fred & Julie Bertram, Fritzie Blizzard, Marty Borko, Mark Chao, Claire Damaske, Doug Daniels, Susan Danskin, France DeWaghe, Nancy Dickinson, Lynn Donaldson, Bill Evans, Steve and Susan Fast, Annette Finney, John Fitzpatrick, Rhea Garen, Jeff Gerbracht, Lindsay Goodloe, Stephanie Greenwood, John and Sue Gregoire, Melissa Groo, Bob Grosek, Eric Gulson, Scott Haber, Meena Haribal, Kim Hartquist, Wesley Hochachka, Janet Huie, Lyn Jacobs, Andy Johnson, Anne Marie Johnson, Tom Johnson, Fred and Marsha Kardon, Carol Keeler, Steve Kelling, Dave Kennedy, Geo Kloppel, J. Gary Kohlenberg, Stuart Krasnoff, Robbie LaCelle, Leona Lauster, Jerry Lazarczyk, Tim Lenz, Sarah Maclean, David Marsh, Bill McAneny, Elaina McCartney, Tom McDonald, Jay McGowan, Kevin McGowan, Bob McGuire, Matt Medler, Mark Miller, Ann Mitchell, Graham Montgomery, David Nicosia, Dave Nutter, Steffan Ohlstrom, Bill Ostrander, John Palmer, Teresa Pegan, Brian & Dolores Perkins, Sandy Podulka, Jay Powell, Mike Powers, Terie Rawn, Marilyn Ray, Marie Read, Bill Roberts, Ken Rosenberg, Wade & Melissa Rowley, Marty Schlabach, Tom Schulenberg, Donna Scott, Glenn Seeholzer, Nathan Senner, Becky Sewell, Vera Shotwell, Nick Sly, Maria Stager, Laura Stenzler, Dale Stevens, Jae Sullivan, Jim Tarolli, Dave Tetlow, Joann and Mike Tetlow, Cyndy and Richard Tkachuck, Lee Ann van Leer, Brad Walker, Mary Jean Welser, David Wheeler, Mark Witmer, Christopher L. Wood, Matt Young, Suan Yong.

ABBREVIATIONS

ATSMF – Allan Treman State Marine Park, Ithaca; CCBC – Corning Christmas Bird Count; CU – Cornell University; dtCo – downtown Corning; dtElm – downtown Elmira; dtIth – downtown Ithaca; EBSCBC – Eaton Birding Society Christmas Bird Count; ECBC – Elmira Christmas Bird Count; ESP – East Shore Park, Ithaca; GCBC – Geneva Christmas Bird Count; HHSF – Hammond Hill State Forest; ICBC – Ithaca Christmas

Bird Count; KHAMO – Kestrel Haven Avian Migration Observatory, Burdett, SCHU; LPtSP – Long Point State Park; MCBC – Montezuma CBC; MNWR – Montezuma NWR; MRS – Monkey Run Road South (Cornell Plantations), Dryden; Myers – Myers Park, Lansing; SchCBC – Schuyler County CBC; SLSP – Seneca Lake SP; StvR – Stevenson Road, Dryden; SW – Sapsucker Woods; StP – Stewart Park, Ithaca.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Greater White-fronted Goose: 1 Moravia 17 Dec (JB, CLW); 1 Seneca Lake 4 Feb (W&MR).

Ross's Goose: 1 MNWR 12 Dec (JB, CLW); 1 Atwood Road (CAYU) 17 Dec (JB, CLW); 1 SW 3 Jan (JB, CLW); 1 SW 27 Feb (JM, TS).

Brant: 2 SP 1 Dec (TL); these birds remained at the south end of Cayuga Lake until 17 Dec.

Cackling Goose: max 11 SW 27 Feb (JM); 5 StP 1 Jan (KR on Ithaca CBC).

Tundra Swan: max 2200 Cayuga Lake CAYU 28 Jan (AJ, CLW).

Trumpeter Swan: scattered reports from Cayuga Lake and MNWR thru.

Gadwall: max 200 Cayuga Lake CAYU 7 Jan (SK), high for mid-winter.

Eurasian Wigeon: 1 StP 30 Jan (JT, DW, JGK, AM); 1 Cayuga Lake CAYU 4 Feb (DNU); 1 StP 25 Feb (TL).

N. Shoveler: max 100 MNWR 18 Dec (DNU), very high count for early winter.

N. Pintail: max 1500 MNWR 26 Feb (TL, JM, BW, MS).

Green-winged Teal: max 5 MNWR 18 Dec (DNU).

KING EIDER: 1 SLSP 2 Dec (SY), only report.

Canvasback: max 7000 Cayuga Lake 26 Feb (TL, JM, NSe, MS, BW).

Redhead: max 35000 Cayuga Lake 26 Feb (TL, JM, NSe, MS, BW).

Surf Scoter: max 6 Cayuga Lake CAYU 10 Dec (TL, JM, NSI, BW).

Long-tailed Duck: max 5 Seneca Lake 31 Dec (LL).

Hooded Merganser: max 64 StP 18 Dec (KR), very high for early winter.

Com. Merganser: max 670 Cayuga Lake CAYU 11 Feb (TL, JM, BW).

Red-throated Loon: max 2 ESP, StP, and ATSMP several times starting 20 Dec (TL, BW) thru (DNU).

EARED GREBE: 1 StP 9 Dec (TL, NS, CLW!); 1 Aurora Bay 7 Jan and 5 Feb (SF, DNU, BM, SD), at least 13th consec winter.

WESTERN GREBE: 1 Myers 10 Jan and 26 Feb (CLW, JB, MY, JG, mob!), different individual birds; 1 StP, ESP, and ATSMP 31 Jan thru (TL, BW, JM, mob!); 2 village of Cayuga 8-11 Feb (TJ, JM, JGK, DW, FB, BS, mob!); *intro* for more details on ID.

Turkey Vulture: max 65 Ithaca 10 Feb (DS), very high; common throughout Region and period.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Golden Eagle: 1 Atwood Road CAYU 17 Dec (MY); 1 Caroline TOMP 18 Dec (Ske); 1 MRS 18 Dec (CLW); 1 Ledyard CAYU 29 Jan (TL, MSt, BW); 1 StP 31 Jan (KR, C&RT).

Merlin: 1 dtElm 3 Dec (BO); 1 StvR 30 Dec (LS); 1 dtlth 27 Jan (BE).

Peregrine Falcon: max 2 StP 19 Jan (TL, BW); 1 dtElm 3 Dec (BO); 1 Canandaigua 28 Dec (JA); 1 dtElm 21 Jan (MP); 1 dtCo 27 Feb (DS); regular other reports from StP thru.

Sandhill Crane: max 19 MNWR 3 Dec (TL); 4 MNWR 31 Jan thru (DNU, DK), rare in mid-winter.

Killdeer: max 5 Dryden 24 Feb (KM, JM); 1 SLSP 31 Dec (LJ, JA); 1 Aurora 15 Jan (SD, TL, BM); 1 StvR 7 Feb (KM); 1 KHAMO 17 Feb (J&SG), early relative to site's 27-year mean arrival date of 10 Mar.

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE: 1 StP and ESP 14 Jan (JB, JG, CLW).

THAYER'S GULL: 1 StvR and ATSMP 9-10 Dec (CLW, BW, LAVL, DNU, mob); 1 ATSMP 17 Dec (CLW).

Iceland Gull: max 3 Cayuga Lake SP 30 Jan (JT, DW); 3 Seneca Falls 2 Jan (TL, SD).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: max 3 SLSP 6 Feb (KB).

Glaucous Gull: 1 Seneca Falls 26 Jan (DK); 1 SP 14 Jan and 31 Jan (JGK, DNU, JM, SK, BW, TL); 1 ATSMP 19 Feb (TL).

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: 1 MNWR 18 Dec (TL); 1 Woolhouse Road (ONTA) 23-24 Dec (F&JB, B&DP, DD, LJ, JPo, DM); 1 Waterloo 27 Dec – 1 Jan (CK, mob!); 1 Jerusalem (YATE) 1 Jan (LD); 1 near Dresden YATE 11 and 25 Jan (VS); 1 Ovid 21 and 24 Jan (MS, MJW, MG, mob!); 1 Seneca Falls 27 Jan – 6 Feb (DNU, CK, mob); 1 Elmira Regional Airport 6 Feb (TM), previously present for “about a month.”

Short-eared Owl: max 8 Johnson Road YATE 19 Feb (JA).

N. Saw-whet Owl: 1 SW 26 Jan (WH).

hummingbird sp: 1 Auburn 14 Dec (CK).

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

E. Phoebe: 1 Dryden 24 Dec (MRe); 1 Ithaca 14 Jan (FK).

House Wren: 1 ATSM 14 Dec (CLW), latest record in eBird for Tompkins County, only report.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: 1 ESP 1 Jan (TL, GS); 1 MRS 1 Jan, 23 Jan (CLW, JM); 1 Lansing 8 Jan, 14 Jan, 6 Feb (JB, LAvL, KM, CLW, JGe).

E. Bluebird: max 26 Union Springs 5 Jan (FB).

Hermit Thrush: max 5 ICBC 1 Jan.

Gray Catbird: 1 MRS 20 Jan (CLW), only report.

Am. Pipit: max 16 Cayuga Lake 11 Feb (TL, JM, BW); sev rep from Myers 5 Jan thru (MC, DNi, DNu, JM, CLW, JG); sev StP 19 Jan (JM); 1 Ovid 22 Jan (FB, DNu); unusually frequent mid-winter records.

Bohemian Waxwing: 1 SHSF 20 Jan (CS), only report.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: max 15 Lansing 14 Jan (JB, CLW, JGe).

Snow Bunting: max 425 Lansing 14 Jan (JB, CLW, JGe).

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER: 1 dtlth 1-2 Jan (KR & TL on Ithaca CBC, JB, CLW), first record this CBC.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: max 8 Aurora 18 Dec (TL, BW); 1 Enfield 4 Jan (BB).

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

E. Towhee: 1 Brooktondale throughout Dec (MRA); 1 Ithaca 15 Jan, 21-22 Jan, 19 Feb (JH, JB, CLW); 1 Interlaken 5 Feb (MSc, MJW).

Field Sparrow: 1 Dryden 14 Jan (DNu).

Savannah Sparrow: 1 MNWR 15 Jan (SD, TL, BM).

Fox Sparrow: 1 Freeville (TOMP) 22 Jan (CLW), only report.

White-crowned Sparrow: 1 Canoga 15 Jan (SD, TL, BM).

“Cassiar” Dark-eyed Junco: 1 MRS 21 Jan (JB, CLW).

Rusty Blackbird: max 15 Aurora 11 Feb (HB, EG, GM, SM, TP); 1 CCBC 17 Dec.

Com. Grackle: max 1100 SW 27 Feb (JM), unusual early large migrating flocks; various scattered reports throughout mid-winter.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max ~200 StvR 21 Feb (JM); 30+ Union Springs 5 Jan (FB, BS); sev other rep scattered throughout Region thru.

Red Crossbill: 1 Caroline (TOMP) 23 Feb (SKe), only report.

White-winged Crossbill: max 48 SHSF 29 Jan (TL); numerous other reports from SHSF thru; 3 Horseheads 8 Feb (MP).

Com. Redpoll: numerous scattered reports mid-January thru.

Pine Siskin: max 120 SHSF 17 Dec (KR, JGe, TL); numerous other reports from SHSF thru; various other scattered reports of seven or fewer birds.

Evening Grosbeak: max 2 HHSF 15 Jan (JB, CLW); 1 Newfield 11 Jan (TR); 1 HHSF 28 Jan (JG).



Western Grebes, Cayuga Lake, just north of Union Springs, *Cayuga*, 8 Feb 2012, © Jay McGowan. There was some discussion regarding whether the paler bird might have been a Western x Clark's Grebe hybrid; see pp. 157-161.