

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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It was an exceptionally warm winter, with all three months averaging warmer than normal. December was the coolest month relative to average in Watertown, where the mean temperature of 30.1° F was 3.9° above normal. Monthly departures from normal increased through the winter, as January's mean temperature of 25.2° was 6.7° warmer than normal, and February's mean of 28.6° was 7.4° above normal. Total precipitation for the winter was slightly above average but not evenly distributed through the season. Precipitation was almost exactly normal for December, 2.2" above normal for January, and 0.7" below normal for February. Much of this precipitation fell as rain, and Watertown had just 41.6" of snow for the winter, about 40% of normal, and most of this snow melted soon after it fell.

The mild weather clearly affected birds in the Region. Half-hardies were plentiful, including several species that rarely occur in Region 6 during the winter, and mild conditions apparently allowed many of these birds to successfully over-winter. Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River also remained open for the entire winter, including many areas that usually ice over completely by mid-January. Open water on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River in Jefferson County allowed for the presence of many more waterfowl and water birds than are usually reported during winter, but farther downriver in St. Lawrence County duck numbers seemed much lower than usual. Perhaps ducks were present in typical number on the river but were never forced to congregate because the river was open all winter.

The abundance of waterfowl in Jefferson County included nearly every species that regularly occurs in Region 6, many in unusually high numbers and some that are rarely reported in winter. Snow Geese were reported throughout the winter, and it was clear that many December flocks were migrating south and the northbound migration began before the end of February, but it is not at all clear whether mid-winter reports were of late or early migrants or local or Regional wintering birds. Other late fall migrants not frequently reported during winter included Brant and Black Scoter. Unusual species included a mid-winter Cackling Goose on Pt. Peninsula, Northern Shoveler, an excellent three King Eiders, one Harlequin Duck on Lake Ontario, a hybrid Common x Barrow's Goldeneye at Fisher's Landing, and 14 Ruddy Ducks at Kring Point SP. Also noteworthy was a concentration of up to 3,000 Long-tailed Ducks and 465 White-winged Scoters in Lake Ontario off Black Pond WMA that were observed throughout the winter. In a normal year no open water would have been visible from land there after the middle of January.

Common Loons, Horned Grebes, and Double-crested Cormorants were all present in larger than usual numbers. One Red-throated Loon and four Red-necked Grebes were good winter totals for Region 6. Record numbers of

American Coots were reported, including an unprecedented winter gathering of 165 at Millen's Bay on the St. Lawrence River. Several non-birders observed up to five Sandhill Cranes using farm fields in Canton for two weeks in mid-December, but by the time this news got out to the birding community the cranes had departed.

Fairly good numbers of raptors wintered throughout the Region, particularly in traditional farming areas of northwest Jefferson County. It was the best winter for Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks since 2006-07, although numbers of both species were lower than in that particularly good year. Northern Harriers were plentiful in December but mostly departed after early January snow and ice storms, with a handful remaining in Jefferson County and few elsewhere. By late February harriers were already trickling back into Region 6. Bald Eagles continue to increase and are now so widespread and plentiful as to hardly warrant comment from observers, it seems. Merlin also shows continued increases, with double-digit reports this winter. The raptor highlight of the season was a dark morph **Gyr Falcon** that Gerry Smith was fortunate to see as it flew south past Montario Point on 1 February.

Both Snowy and Short-eared Owls were present in decent numbers throughout the winter. The Snowy Owl incursion was relatively modest by historic standards, but better than most recent years. The great majority of Snowy Owl reports were from areas along the immediate Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River shorelines, but these areas certainly received better coverage from birders than most inland agricultural areas. Short-eared Owl numbers at traditional roosts in Cape Vincent and Pt. Peninsula were relatively modest, but this species was also more widespread than usual in Jefferson County, with reports of one to three individuals at many locations.

The mild weather resulted in the presence of excellent numbers and diversity of half-hardies, many of which apparently survived the winter. Species such as American Robin, Eastern Bluebird, and Red-winged Blackbird are reported most winters in Region 6, but were more abundant than usual this year. Notable seasonal rarities included Wilson's Snipe, Red-headed Woodpecker, Winter Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Swamp Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, and Rusty Blackbird. Two examples illustrate just how exceptional this winter was. The Massena-Cornwall Christmas Bird Count tallied 1,609 American Robins, including 660 on the New York side of the circle, compared with a previous record high count of 129 for the entire circle. Even more unprecedented was the presence of scores of Yellow-rumped Warblers in red cedar woodlands on and near Stony Point in Henderson throughout the winter. Region 6 *Kingbird* reports dating back to the 1950s document fewer than ten winter records of Yellow-rumped Warblers for Region 6, nearly all consisting of single individuals. In contrast to the abundance of half-hardies, wintering open-country songbirds were generally scarce. Although a few sizeable flocks of Snow Buntings were reported, overall numbers were well below most years. Horned Larks were even scarcer, and Lapland Longspurs were very hard to find, even in portions of Jefferson County where they are

regular. Conversely, Northern Shrikes were present in typical numbers in most areas.

As often happens, a few novice birders observed bluebirds, robins, or blackbirds in February or even late January and announced that spring migration had started, but these species were present all winter and thus probably not early migrants. However, a few observations from 10-11 February were perplexing and might reflect an early movement of migrants. These reports included a Turkey Vulture Matt Medler saw on 10 February, an American Woodcock that flew in front of Eugene Nichol's car that same morning, and two Rusty Blackbirds I saw for the first time on 11 February in a swamp I had birded all winter. These observations suggest the possibility of an extremely early arrival of a few individuals, but this was such a bizarre winter that it wouldn't be too surprising if these birds had overwintered.

The 123 species reported this winter is the highest tally in recent years, and perhaps is a record, although previous Regional editors did not always document such statistics. By comparison, an average of 100.3 species was reported during the past six years, with a range of 90-112. The presence and abundance of many species rarely observed during the winter is certainly the highlight of the season. The relative bird bonanza presented to birders this winter makes it hard to come up with any real disappointments. The Gyrfalcon could have stuck around for more than one person to see and the Snowy Owl invasion was more modest than it could have been, but it's hard to complain about what was best winter for birding of any year that I've lived in Region 6.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart Is, T Massena; BPWMA – Black Pd WMA, T Ellisburg; BRB – Black Ri Bay; CBy – Chaumont Bay; CCSP – Coles Creek SP, T Waddington; CPSP – Cedar Pt SP; CV – T Cape Vincent; ED – El Dorado Shores Pres, T Ellisburg; FD – Fort Drum Military Res; FL – Fisher's Landing, T Alexandria; HH – Henderson Harbor; KC – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; KPSP – Kring Point SP; LRUD – Low's Ridge-Upper Dam Trail; MB – Millen's Bay; MCCBC – Massena-Cornwall Christmas Bird Count; MP – Montario Point, T Ellisburg; PilPt – Pillar Point; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; PtPen – Point Peninsula; SH – Sackett's Harbor; SLR – St. Lawrence Ri; SnBa – Snowshoe Bay, T Henderson; StPt – Stony Point, T Henderson; TP – Tibbitt's Point, T Cape Vincent;

ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; WBSP – Westcott Beach SP; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA; WI – Wellesley Is; WP – Whalen Park, T Louisville.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: 800 Copenhagen 8 Dec; 3000 SLR Waddington 10 Dec; 180 Hounsfield 20 Dec; 4000+ Watertown 24 Dec; 5000 Adams & Henderson 3 Feb; 350 Henderson 17 Feb; 800 Ellisburg 27 Feb, first obvious northbound migrants.

Brant: last Croil Is. 1 Dec (WS).

Cackling “Richardson’s” Goose: PtPen Jan (GS).

Mute Swan: 11 FL 22 Jan; 15 StPt 19 Jan; 8 WI 25 Jan; 15 PRWMA 14 Feb.

Trumpeter Swan: 3 PRWMA 15 Dec; 3 ULLWMA 18 Dec; PtPen 10 Feb.

Tundra Swan: max 400+ BRB 7 Dec; mid-winter max 97 SLR CV to Orleans 18 Jan; many reports smaller numbers JEFF mostly Dec & Jan.

Wood Duck: 2 ULLWMA 11 Dec; WHWMA 14 Dec; f Philadelphia 28 Jan.

Gadwall: max 170 PtPen 10 Feb; many reports 25-160/day SLR & L Ontario shore, high.

Am. Wigeon: max 22 WHWMA 14 Dec; 1-2/day FL Jan & Feb.

Mallard: max 600 CPSP 5 Jan.

Am. Black Duck: numbers low thru.

N. Shoveler: CB 4 Dec, rare in winter.

N. Pintail: 2 WHWMA 3 Dec; 2 WP 10 Dec; ULLWMA 11 Dec; PilPt 11 Dec; 4 PtPen 29 Dec; more than usual.

Green-winged Teal: max 21 Croil Is. 1 Dec; 18 Wilson Hill Island 3 Dec; 2 WP 10 Dec; ULLWMA 11 Dec; 2 WHWMA 14 Dec; 2 CPSP 5 Jan; more than usual.

Canvasback: SLR Lisbon 2 Jan; 20 Millen’s Bay 2 Jan; 5 SnBa 7 Jan; 3 SLR CV 18 Jan; Three Mile Bay 26 Feb.

Redhead: max 5000 Millen’s Bay CV 1 Jan; 1200 CPSP 5 Jan; 460 FL 10 Feb; smaller numbers SLR & L Ontario thru.

Ring-necked Duck: 290 ULLWMA 9 Dec; 126 MB CV 1 Jan; 75 CPSP 5 Jan; several reports 5-25 thru; more than usual.

Greater Scaup: 650 CPSP 5 Jan; 1900 SnBa 7 Jan; 220 FL 10 Feb; 350 PtPen 10 Feb.

Lesser Scaup: max 20 SLR Massena 4 Dec, SLR Lisbon 2 Jan & PtPen 20 Feb; several reports 1-7/day thru; more than usual.

King Eider: CCSP 3 Dec (JB); MP thru 20 Dec (GS); L Ontario off BPWMA 28 Jan (JB); rarely reported in winter.

Harlequin Duck: ad m PtPen 18 Feb (NL), rare in winter.

Surf Scoter: 12 L Ontario off BPWMA 13 Dec, 3 Feb; CCSP 14 Dec; PtPen 4 Feb.

White-winged Scoter: max 465 L Ontario off BPWMA 3 Feb (JB), high.

Black Scoter: CCSP 10 Dec (JB), only report.

Long-tailed Duck: up to 3000/day L Ontario off BPWMA thru; many reports low 100s L Ontario and S SLR thru (JB).

Bufflehead: max 75 PilPt 7 Jan.

Com. Goldeneye: 550 PilPt 15 Jan; 1099 SLR CV to Orleans 18 Jan; 450 FL 10 Feb; 600 WI 19 Feb; 600+ SH 19 Feb; generally low numbers SLR STLA.

Barrow’s Goldeneye: 2m & 1f Pt. Salubrious 30 Dec (EN); ad m CPSP 5 Jan perhaps same as m MB later same day & 18 Jan (JB, NL); f FL 3-10 Feb (JB).

Com. X Barrow’s Goldeneye: ad m FL 10 Feb (JB).

Hooded Merganser: max 196 WHWMA 3 Dec; mid-winter max 22 FL 31 Jan.

Com. Merganser: max 765 WI 25 Jan.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 360 Millen’s Bay 1 Jan; many reports 100+ SLR CV to Orleans thru.

Ruddy Duck: 14 KPSP 2 Dec, rare in winter.

Red-throated Loon: ED 13 Dec, only report.

Com. Loon: 2 PtPen 26 Dec; 2 MB 1 Jan; SnBa 7 Jan; CCSP 16 Jan; 2 SLR CV to Orleans 18 Jan; WI 25 Jan; StPt 28 Jan; 2 PtPen mid-Jan thru; more than usual.

Horned Grebe: 8 PtPen 26 Dec; 9 SnBa 7 Jan; 6 SH 7 Jan; 2 SLR CV to Orleans 18 Jan; 3 StPt 28 Jan; more than usual.

Red-necked Grebe: BI 3 Dec; 2 MB 7 Dec; 2 SH 7 Jan.

Double-crested Cormorant: 7 HH 13 Dec; 7 KPSP 16 Dec; HH 7 Jan; SH 7 Jan; SLR Ogdensburg 16 Jan; MP 21 Feb; more than usual.

Great Blue Heron: PtPen 29 Dec & 15 Jan; Leray 6 Jan; ULLWMA 19 Feb; only reports.

Turkey Vulture: Rutland 10 Feb (MM, early arr or wintering?); next PtPen 17 Feb (CC), record early; Hounsfield 20 Feb.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: numerous reports from all areas, including many locations far from water.

N. Harrier: widespread Dec, most departing by early Jan; max 12 PtPen 7 Jan; 1-3/day NW JEFF mid Jan thru.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 6 reports.

Cooper’s Hawk: 16 reports.

N. Goshawk: ad FD 22 Dec; imm FD 9 Jan; imm Lisbon 22 Jan; KC 4 Feb; PtPen 21 Feb, apparently migrating; good tally.

Red-tailed Hawk: 15-25/day traditional wintering areas NW JEFF.

Rough-legged Hawk: 15-40/day traditional wintering areas NW JEFF.

Golden Eagle: sub-ad CV 3 Dec & 2 Jan (GS); sub-ad Adams 24 Dec (GS); PtPen 21 Feb (MN).

Am. Kestrel: max 7 CV 20 Dec; scattered reports of apparently successful overwintering birds.

Merlin: 11 reports included at least 3 that successfully overwintered.

Peregrine Falcon: pr Long Sault Dam thru; Ellisburg 22 Jan (BP).

GYRFALCON: dark morph MP 1 Feb (GS).

Am. Coot: 28 PRWMA 15 Dec; ULLWMA 18 Dec; max 165 MB 1 Jan (NL); 1-9/day StPt 7 Jan thru; PtPen 30 Jan.

Sandhill Crane: 3-5/day Canton 2 weeks mid-Dec.

Wilson's Snipe: last CBy 4 Dec (EN).

Am. Woodcock: PtPen 10 Feb (EN), early migrant?

Bonaparte's Gull: 14 KPSP 2 Dec; last 5 CPSP 5 Jan.

Ring-billed Gull: 25-150+/day L. Ontario shoreline and SW end SLR thru; unprecedented mid-winter numbers; typically scarce to absent SLR STLA after early Jan

Iceland Gull: 3 SLR Ogdensburg 11 Dec; WBSP 20 Dec; WBSP 7 Jan; 3 BI 5 Feb; JEFF landfill 29 Feb.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: SLR Ogdensburg 16 Jan.

Herring Gull: 1000s moving SLR 11 Dec; mid-winter numbers higher than usual.

Glaucous Gull: FD 12 Dec; WBSP 13 Dec; WBSP 7 Jan; Sparrowhawk Pt. 15 Jan; SLR Massena 16 Jan; 5 BI 5 Feb; JEFF landfill 29 Feb.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: 24+ reports mostly along L. Ontario & SLR shorelines.

Short-eared Owl: 15 Lyme & Brownville 29 Dec; max 16 CV mid Jan; many reports 2-5 throughout N JEFF.

Belted Kingfisher: FD 21 Dec; SnBa 7 Jan; 25 CV 7 Jan; Chaumont 7 Jan; Rutland 11 Jan; Deferiet 7 Feb, more than usual.

Red-headed Woodpecker: imm Clayton early Jan thru (GS), rare in winter.

N. Flicker: 30+ reports.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 1-3/day thru.

Gray Jay: max 5 LRUD 4 Dec.

Blue Jay: max 210 at feeders in 2 adjacent yards New Boston 29 Feb (MT).

Am. Crow: 25,000-30,000 roosting Watertown Dec; dispersed by Jan hazing.

Horned Lark: max 125 Rutland 12 Feb; fewer than most years.

Tufted Titmouse: max 4 Henderson 21 Jan.

Carolina Wren: KC 12 Dec thru; Rensselaer Falls 22 Jan.

Winter Wren: BPWMA 13 Dec (JB); FD 22 Dec (JB); rare in winter.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: many reports.

E. Bluebird: 3-6/day StPt thru; 6 Massena 18 Dec; Canton 2 Jan; 3 PtPen 23 Jan; 3 Chaumont 2 Feb.

Am. Robin: 500-1000+/day StPt thru; 660 NYS side MCCBC 27 Dec; 320 Hammond 22 Jan; many reports smaller numbers lowlands thru.

Bohemian Waxwing: arr Colton & Stockholm 22 Jan (JC); max 325 FD 17 Feb; 300 Ellisburg 28 Feb; widespread flocks 30-150 mostly Feb.

Cedar Waxwing: max 2100 StPt 29 Feb (MT), where numerous smaller flocks thru.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: max 14 PtPen 25 Dec; scarce.

Snow Bunting: max 500 Carthage 17 Feb; apparent SW movement Dekalb & Gouverneur 27 Feb involved many flocks 20-50; numbers modest thru.

Com. Yellowthroat: KC 11 Jan (DB).

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 2 BPWMA 13 & 20 Dec; 27 ED 20 Dec; 3 CPSP 5 Jan where 1 still present 26 Feb; **6-40/day** StPt thru; 8 ED 20 Feb; unprecedented numbers in a Region where 1 in winter is noteworthy.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 35-50 in one flock FD 1 Dec.

Savannah Sparrow: CV 15 Jan (GS).

Song Sparrow: 9 reports included at least 2 that successfully overwintered Canton.

Swamp Sparrow: 2 Canton 29 Dec where at least 1 thru.

White-throated Sparrow: 5-6/day KC Jan & Feb; Canton 22 Jan; many fewer than previous winter.

Dark-eyed Junco: widespread 1-3/day thru.

N. Cardinal: max 6-10/day KC thru.

Red-winged Blackbird: WHWMA 3 Dec; WI 8 Jan & 17 Feb; Lisbon 21 Jan; 12 StPt 27 Jan; FD 2 Feb; 3 Canton 14 Feb; more than usual.

E. Meadowlark: MCCBC 27 Dec (T&EW); PtPen 10 Feb (JB); rare in winter.

Rusty Blackbird: 4 FD 1 Dec; 2 Canton 11 Feb where 1 singing 24 Feb (JB).

Com. Grackle: 5 Potsdam 23 Feb (AB), only report.

Brown-headed Cowbird: WCBC 17 Dec; 6 PtPen 29 Jan; 2 CV 10 Feb.

White-winged Crossbill: 23 LRUD 4 Dec; 4 Lisbon 22 Jan; 45 Montague 3 Feb.

Com. Redpoll: Horseshoe L. 4 Dec.

Pine Siskin: Large numbers in Adirondacks thru; generally scarce in lowlands with scattered local concentrations.