

REGION 1—NIAGARA FRONTIER

Mike Morgante

6405 Woodberry Court, East Amherst, NY 14051

morgm@roadrunner.com

Following two mild winters, the winter of 2013-2014 was especially harsh. December 2013 started with a warm first week but successive rounds of colder air moved southward from Canada. The average temperature was 28.0° F, 2.1° below normal. Monthly precipitation at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport was 4.93", 1.04" more than usual, with 28.5" of snow, 1.1" more than usual. There were two major lake effect snow events that brought higher totals to some parts of the Region. January 2014 brought several more lake effect and synoptic snow events and arctic air masses. The average temperature was 20.0°, 4.9° below normal and a whopping 10° below the average from last January. The monthly precipitation was 3.16", 0.02" below normal, with 42.4" of snow, 17.1" above normal. 6 January brought the first blizzard warnings for the Region since 1993. Lake Erie was mostly frozen by early January, the earliest freeze since the winter of 2001-2002. The cold temperatures continued into February. The average temperature was 19.8°, 6.5° below normal. The monthly precipitation was 3.62", 1.13" above normal, with 23.3" of snowfall, 6.0" above normal.

It was a hard winter for waterfowl. Numerous diving duck carcasses were observed along Lake Erie and to a lesser extent along Lake Ontario. There were reports of Red-breasted Mergansers dying by roadsides. As the season went on, diving ducks showed up at inland creeks with increased frequency. There may be a combination of reasons that brought on the heightened mortality. However, the probable cause was the especially cold weather, which brought increased ice and likely negatively impacted the availability of food. Birders remarked that there were many diving ducks in apparent weakened conditions and NYSDEC indicated that evaluation of several carcasses revealed emaciation. With the heavy ice conditions and scavenging by gulls, crows, eagles, etc., it is challenging to estimate the number of ducks affected, but it was likely on the order of thousands if not tens of thousands within this Region.

Overall waterfowl numbers were down. The weather conditions were mostly poor, for birds and birders, during the January Waterfowl Count and the totals for many species were lower than normal. Winter season waterfowl highlights included the Region's second **Tufted Duck** record. As he did last year, Jim Pawlicki found a female Tufted Duck among the scaup masses at Buffalo Harbor. Conceivably it was the same bird as last winter. The drake **Barrow's Goldeneye** wintered at Point Breeze again.

On a more positive note than the weather and waterfowl die-offs, birders will likely remember the winter of 2013-2014 for its **abundance of Snowy Owls**. Reports started in late November but rapidly increased in early December. The owls were widespread and too numerous to estimate the overall

numbers present in the Region, but it is safe to say that they were here in the largest numbers in the last 50+ years as per the Buffalo Ornithological Society records database that starts in the early 1960s. Project Snowstorm revealed owls using the ice on Lake Erie well away from the shoreline, likely finding ducks using the small openings in the ice.

Bald Eagles were also drawn to the pack ice on Lake Erie to feast on weak and dying waterfowl. Numbers swelled to 53 by mid-February near Dunkirk Harbor, which is a new winter maximum.

Black Vultures wintered along the Niagara River in Lewiston for the third consecutive year. Turkey Vultures were sighted in three locations in addition to the birds wintering in Lewiston.

A **Spotted Sandpiper** sighted by Kevin Rybczynski and Rick Thomas at Niagara Falls State Park on 28 December marked the second winter record for the Region and the second in consecutive years at this location. There were two **Purple Sandpiper** reports and a **Dunlin** lingering into December. Killdeer and Wilson's Snipe in December were somewhat typical for CBC season. A Killdeer flying north over the Bird Island Pier on 23 February was unusual only for being an early arrival in the midst of a cold season.

Bonaparte's Gulls were numerous on the Niagara River in December. However, they were absent following early January. Little Gulls were present in low numbers, and there were several **Black-legged Kittiwake** sightings, including an adult on the Niagara River in Buffalo. **Glaucous Gulls** were present in higher numbers than usual for the second winter in a row. Jim Pawlicki nicely photographed and documented a **Thayer's Gull** along the Niagara River in December.

A **Brown Thrasher** on the Hamburg-East Aurora CBC was an unusual find in winter. Julie Huber photographed an immature male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** at her feeder in Attica in December through early January. There were more Eastern Towhee reports than in recent years for mid-winter. **Lapland Longspurs** were present throughout the Region including the highest count (126) in decades. **Snow Buntings** gathered by the thousands in the Town of Wilson in mid-February creating a spectacle for birders.

Evidence of spring migration in February was sparse. Only a trickle of migrant waterfowl, blackbirds, and robins appeared.

It was not a good winter for finch variety. There were only two reports of **Common Redpolls** and a single report of **Evening Grosbeaks**. Purple Finches appeared mostly in the southern half of the Region and feeder reports and numbers increased in late January.

CONTRIBUTORS

Tim Baird, Sue Barth, Doug Beattie, Jim Berry, Corey Callaghan, Seaghan Coleman, Willie D'Anna, Joe Fell, Kurt Fox, Mike Galas, Joanne Goetz, Dennis Gralak, Andy Guthrie, Doug Happ, Paul Hess, Alec Humann, Julie Huber, Scott Kruitbosch, Jim Landau, Twan Leenders, Garner Light, David Mark, Tim McIntyre, Joe Mitchell, Mike Morgante, Celeste Morien, Brian Morse, Jim

Pawlicki, Betsy Potter, Jeff Reed, Jajeane Rose-Burney, Kevin Rybczynski, Richard Salembier, Debbie Sharon (DSh), Tom Simmons, David & Debbie Suggs (D&DS), Rick Thomas, Gale VerHague, William Watson, Jim Wojewodski, Peter Yoerg, Nick Ziembra.

ABBREVIATIONS

AISP – Allegany SP, CATT; AmSP – Amherst SP, ERIE; BeSP – Beaver I SP, ERIE; BufH – Buffalo Harbor, ERIE; BuSP – Buckhorn I SP, ERIE; BWWT – Batavia Wastewater Treatment Plant, GENE; ChauL – Chautauqua L, CHAU; DH – Dunkirk Harbor, CHAU; DLSP – Darien Lakes SP, GENE; FLC – Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo, ERIE; FMCSP – Four Mile Creek SP, NIAG; FNPS – Fort Niagara SP, NIAG; GHSP – Golden Hill SP, NIAG; INWR – Iroquois NWR, GENE/ORLE; LBSP – Lakeside Beach SP, ORLE; NF – Niagara Falls, NIAG; NFSP – Niagara Falls SP, NIAG; NPP – Niagara Power Project on NR, Lewiston, NIAG; NR – Niagara R; OOWMA – Oak Orchard WMA, GENE/ORLE; PB – Point Breeze, ORLE; PG – Point Gratiot, CHAU; RTPI – Roger Tory Peterson Institute, Jamestown, CHAU; Tiff NP – Tiff Nature Preserve, ERIE; TWMA – Tonawanda WMA, NIAG/GENE.

WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES

Gr. White-fronted Goose: last 2 INWR 10 Dec.

Snow Goose: 4 Dunkirk Airport 28 Dec; max 5 Amherst ERIE 30 Dec; 2 Porter NIAG 11 Jan; 2 FNPS 31 Jan; 3 Wilson NIAG 22 Feb.

Cackling Goose: Wilson NIAG 21 Dec; DH 5 Jan; Cambria NIAG 15 Feb; only reports.

Mute Swan: 5 PB 8 Dec; 5 DH 23 Dec; max 9 Lewiston NR 24 Dec; 4 BufH 4 Jan; 5 Barcelona CHAU 12 Jan; 5, 5 ChauL 1, 16 Feb.

Trumpeter Swan: 4, 5 DH 17, 23 (NZ, GV); 4 Barcelona CHAU 21-22 DH (TL); only reports.

Tundra Swan: 316, 203 ChauL 11, 16 Dec (TS, JB); max 450, 234 BeSP 15 Dec, 4 Jan (SC, DSh); 1, 2 DH 31 Jan, 15 Feb; arr 7 Cambria NIAG 22 Feb; fewer on NR than recent winters, especially after Dec.

Wood Duck: 2 ChauL 12 Dec; 2 Salamanca CATT 28 Dec; Hamburg ERIE 28 Dec; N Tonawanda NR 13 Jan; arr Wilson NIAG 19 Feb; PB 22 Feb.

Gadwall: max 27 Tonawanda NR 1 Jan.

Am. Wigeon: only a few scattered reports.

Am. Black Duck: 28 Buffalo NR 26 Dec; 29 Barcelona CHAU 31 Dec; max 38 Tonawanda NR 2 Feb.

N. Shoveler: Barcelona CHAU 8 Dec; 2, 1, 1 Buffalo NR 30 Dec, 4, 14 Jan; 2 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 3 Feb; only reports.

N. Pintail: max 29 DH 23 Dec (WD); scattered other reports of 1-3.

Green-winged Teal: arr PB 23 Feb (DSh).

Canvasback: 4000 NFSP 28 Dec; 900 BufH 14 Jan; 1050 Tonawanda NR 23 Jan; max 4106 Grand I ERIE 26 Jan; FLC 24 Feb, example of inland location.

Redhead: 42, 21 ChauL 6 Dec, 1 Feb; 250, 380 DH 21 Dec, 5 Jan; max 800 BeSP 1 Jan (DSh); 4, 6 FLC 18, 22 Feb.

Ring-necked Duck: 145, 122 BuSP 3, 15 Dec; low numbers in Jan, Feb.

TUFTED DUCK: fem Buffalo NR 9 Jan (JP! NYSARC), 2nd reg record, possibly same bird as last winter.

Greater Scaup: max 10000 BufH ERIE 14 Jan, 2 Feb (JP, RS, WW); 5 Delaware P ERIE 24 Feb.

Lesser Scaup: max 490 ChauL 17 Dec; 71 Tonawanda NR 18 Jan; 40 DH 26 Jan; 64 Buffalo NR 21 Feb; 5 FLC 22 Feb.

apparent Ring-necked Duck x Scaup sp.: male Buffalo NR 20 Feb (JP, photo).

King Eider: Buffalo NR 7 Dec, 11, 14 Jan, multiple individuals; PB 23 Dec (BM, CC); BufH 2 Feb (JP, WW); 3 PB 22 Feb (CM, JP), incl 1 ad male.

Harlequin Duck: NFSP 28 Dec - 1 Jan (AG); m DH 4 Jan (JG); f Buffalo NR 5, 12 Jan; m Buffalo NR 20, 21 Feb (SB, WW); good showing.

Surf Scoter: GHSP 8 Dec; 3, 4 PB 23 Dec, 30 Jan; 2, 1, 1 BuFH 14 Jan, 3, 23 Feb; BuSP 15, 26 Jan; 4 DH 20 Jan; about typical for season.

White-winged Scoter: max 700 PB 27 Dec; 27, 32 DH 12, 26 Jan; 17 ChauL 30 Jan; 118 BuFH 20 Feb (WW); higher than usual numbers away from L Ontario.

Black Scoter: 2, 1, 1, 1 PB 5 Dec, 12, 30 Jan, 14 Feb; FNSP 27 Dec; 1, 1 DH 8, 23 Jan; only reports.

Long-tailed Duck: Olean CATT 14 Dec (JR); max 300 Lewiston NR 29 Jan; 143 BuFH 20 Feb.

Bufflehead: max 1500 BuFH 9 Jan.

Com. Goldeneye: max 3200, 2950 BuFH 9 Jan, 20 Feb.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (R1): PB 1 Jan (CM, SB), likely same male that has wintered here in recent years.

Hooded Merganser: 48 Tiff NP 5 Dec; max 100 DH 8 Dec; 90 Mayville ChauL 11 Dec; 24, 68 N Tonawanda NR 13 Jan, 12 Feb.

Com. Merganser: max 5000 BuFH, Buffalo NR 25 Dec; 5 FLC 17 Feb.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 1000, 1000 BuFH 10 Jan, 2 Feb; 21 FLC 20 Feb; 34 Delaware P ERIE 24 Feb; seemed to be leader in waterfowl mortality, *intro*.

Ruddy Duck: 7, 3 BWWT 4, 10 Dec; 7, 8 DH 29 Dec, 4 Jan; 2 Barcelona CHAU 1 Jan; few reports.

Red-throated Loon: 10 S Valley CATT 19 Dec (JP), high flying migrants; 3 FMCSP 27 Dec; FNSP 19 Jan; BuFH 3 Feb; BuSP 24 Feb.

Com. Loon: 2 NFSP 1 Jan; 1, 1 DH 9 Jan, 16 Feb; ChauL 2 Feb; only reports beyond Dec.

Pied-billed Grebe: 5, 1 DH 5 Jan, 4 Feb; N Tonawanda NR 13 Jan; BuSP 13 Feb; only reports beyond Dec.

Horned Grebe: 1, 1 DH 4, 15 Feb; 2 Shadigee ORLE 14 Feb; BuSP 24 Feb; few reports.

Red-necked Grebe: 4 PB 3 Dec; 1, 1 BuFH 3 Dec, 2 Feb; Lewiston NR 4 Dec; 2 GHSP 8 Dec; 1, 1, 1, 2 DH 31 Dec, 4 Jan, 4, 15 Feb; 4 Tonawanda NR 23 Feb; only reports.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 130 DH 1 Jan; 11, 12, 30 Tonawanda NR 18 Jan, 2, 13 Feb.

Great Blue Heron: 10, 10 DH 21 Dec, 10 Jan; 48 Strawberry I. & Motor I NR; max 97 Motor I NR 23 Feb.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: 4-1 DH 28 Dec – 26 Jan (JG, mob); TWMA 9 Feb (PY); Tonawanda NR 10 Feb (JF); more locations than usual for winter.

Black Vulture: NF 1 Jan; up to 9 Lewiston NIAG Jan-Feb (mob), overwintered for at least 3rd consecutive year.

Turkey Vulture: up to 11 Lewiston NIAG thru (mob); Alexander GENE 13 Dec (PH); 1, 2 Jamestown CHAU 4, 17 Jan (JB); 2 Ellery CHAU 18 Jan; more locations than usual.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 10 Allegheny Reservoir CATT 1 Dec; 35, 40, 53 DH 8, 15, 17 Feb (D&DS, JG, GV), much higher numbers than usual; 7 lower NR 12 Feb (DG); well reported from other traditional wintering and breeding areas.

Red-shouldered Hawk: reported from 10 locations; more than usual.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 4 S Dayton CATT 31 Jan.

Am. Coot: 25 Barcelona CHAU 1 Jan; max 473 DH 5 Jan; only a few other reports along NR.

Killdeer: last Jamestown CBC 15 Dec; arr Buffalo NR 23 Feb (AH).

SPOTTED SANDPIPER: NFSP 28 Dec (KR, RT, video); 2nd winter report, in consecutive years.

Purple Sandpiper: BuFH 25 Dec (JP); NFSP 30 Dec (JP); only reports.

Dunlin: last DH 10 Dec (JP, JM).

Wilson's Snipe: last Jamestown CBC 15 Dec.

Black-legged Kittiwake: Olcott NIAG 4 Dec; 2, 1 NF 8, 15 Dec; NPP 11 Dec; Buffalo NR 15, 16 Dec; ad Buffalo NR 30 Dec – 1 Jan (JP, JM, WW, JRB, WD), adult sightings rare.

Bonaparte's Gull: 2500 Barcelona CHAU 8 Dec; max 4000 Buffalo NR 19 Dec; absent after first week of Jan.

Little Gull: FNSP 4 Dec; 2, 1, 1 DH 10 Dec, 22, 26 Jan; max 3, 1 Buffalo NR 19, 27 Dec; 1, 1, 1 BuFH 20, 30 Dec, 12 Jan; fewer reports than usual.

Herring Gull: 1220 DH 26 Jan; max 5000 FNSP 12 Feb (WD).

THAYER'S GULL: NFSP 23 Dec (JP! photo); sev other undoc reports NPP, NF.

Iceland Gull: max 20, 20 NPP 11 Dec, 1 Jan (WD, D&DS); 10 FMCSP 27 Dec (WD); Barcelona CHAU 31 Dec; 9 DH 26 Jan.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: max 10, 12 NFSP 1, 28 Dec (AG); 4 NPP 11 Dec; Delaware P Buffalo ERIE 12 Jan (JP), only inland report; 4 DH 21 Jan.

Glaucous Gull: 5 FMCSP 27 Dec; 17 DH 26 Jan (JP); 11, 7 BuFH 6, 20 Feb; 9 NFSP 12 Feb; 5 Buffalo NR 23 Feb; 10 Tonawanda NR 23 Feb; max 20 BeSP 24 Feb (DSh); good numbers this winter, 2nd winter in a row.

G. Black-backed Gull: max 675 DH 26 Jan (JP, AG); 308 FNSP 12 Feb (WD).

PIGEONS – PARROTS

Snowy Owl: 3 Lewiston Reservoir NIAG 1 Dec; 4, 5, 7 BufH 7, 25 Dec, 1 Jan; 4 Bethany GENE 22 Dec (DB); 4, 4 Oakfield GENE 30 Dec, 1 Jan; 4 Buffalo Airport ERIE 1 Jan; 4 NF Airport NIAG 16 Jan; 3 N Collins ERIE 4 Feb; over 60 other reports; unprecedented showing; *intro*.

Long-eared Owl: no reports.

Short-eared Owl: 3 Colden ERIE 1 Dec (JL, JW); 2 Jamestown Airport CHAU 1 Dec; 7 Royallon NIAG 3 Dec (GL); Clarence ERIE 17, 20 Dec; 7, 12, 8 Shelby ORLE 30 Dec, 1, 9 Jan (CC, GL, CM); max 8, 13, 12 Cambria NIAG 1 Jan, 6, 9 Feb (MG, JF, AH); Arkwright CHAU 14 Jan; 2, 6 TWMA 31 Jan (DM, PY); 4 INWR 9 Feb (TMC).

N. Saw-whet Owl: Jamestown CBC 15 Dec; only report.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 1, 1 LBSP 27 Dec, 10 Jan (CC, WD, BP); only reports.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: five reported on 4 CBCs Dec; Alexander GENE 7 Jan (KF); Fredonia CHAU 8-12 Feb (GV); Burt NIAG 16 Feb (AH); S Valley CATT 26 Feb (JP); only reports.

Merlin: max 2 Jamestown CHAU 6 Dec; 15 other reports throughout Reg.

Peregrine Falcon: reported from nine loc.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: well reported.

Com. Raven: INWR 10 Dec (WW); 2 Tonawanda ERIE thru, demonstrating nesting behavior 17, 21 Feb; DLSP 3 Feb (JM); GHSP 22 Feb; increasing reports in northern portion of Reg; regular in southern portion of Reg.

Horned Lark: max 70 Bethany GENE 15 Feb.

Winter Wren: 5 reported on 3 CBCs; three other reports.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Wilson-Lake Plains CBC 14 Dec; BuSP 15 Dec; only reports.

E. Bluebird: 141 on 8 CBCs; max 11 N Collins ERIE 4 Feb (RS).

Hermit Thrush: Olean CATT 14 Dec, only report.

Am. Robin: max 76 INWR 15 Jan.

Gray Catbird: 2 Jamestown Airport CHAU 3 Dec (SK); Cheektowaga ERIE 9 Dec; 3 reported on 3 CBCs Dec; only reports.

Brown Thrasher: Hamburg – E Aurora CBC 28 Dec, only report, rare in winter.

Am. Pipit: 12 Jamestown CBC 15 Dec; last Wilson NIAG 18 Dec (WD).

Cedar Waxwing: seemed to be fewer than usual.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: max 126 Wilson NIAG 18 Dec (WD), highest count in more than 20 years; 2 Bethany GENE 2 Dec; 17 Ransomville NIAG 27 Dec (MM); 6, 7 Oakfield GENE 27 Dec, 1 Jan; 3 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 1 Jan; Buffalo NR 1 Jan; 7 Barre ORLE 18 Jan; 30, 12 Yates ORLE 20, 30 Jan; 17 Medina ORLE 26 Jan; 10 Porter NIAG 26 Jan; 5 S Dayton CATT 15 Feb.

Snow Bunting: 1000 Oakfield GENE 5 Jan (JW); 634 Medina ORLE 26 Jan (CM); 4500, 5000 Wilson NIAG 12, 14 Feb (WD, DB), exceptional counts; 315 Yates ORLE 14 Feb; 350 S Dayton CATT 15 Feb.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 13 on 4 CBCs; 18 INWR 26 Dec (CC); 6, 3 BuSP 1, 13 Feb (SC, JF).

TOWHEES – WEAVERS

E. Towhee: 3 Dunkirk- Fredonia CBC 1 Jan; Medina ORLE 9 Jan; PG 12 Jan; Gowanda ERIE 1-10 Feb; Springville ERIE 6 Feb; Freedom CATT 14 Feb; 2 N Collins ERIE 15 Feb; more reports than usual.

Chipping Sparrow: Scio CBC 14 Dec; Hamburg – E Aurora CBC 28 Dec; Wilson NIAG 3 Jan, 15-16 Feb (BP, WD); only reports.

Field Sparrow: 10 Scio CBC 14 Dec; Jamestown CBC 15 Dec; max 21 Beaver Meadow CBC 21 Dec; AISP 31 Jan (TB).

Fox Sparrow: Alfred ALLE 3 Dec; Alden ERIE 31 Dec; only reports.

Swamp Sparrow: six rep Dec; BeSP 5 Jan; AmSP 2 Feb.

White-crowned Sparrow: max 8 Bethany GENE 3 Feb (DB); reported from five other loc, low numbers.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: Attica WYOM 14-16 Dec, 7 Jan (JH), imm male at feeder, only 2nd Dec record.

Red-winged Blackbird: few winter reports; max 12 Tonawanda ERIE 6 Feb; arr Newfane NIAG 23 Feb; only few migrants in late Feb.

E. Meadowlark: Dunkirk Airport CHAU 3 Dec (GV), only report.

Rusty Blackbird: Grand I ERIE 15 Dec, only report.

Com. Grackle: 22 Scio CBC 14 Dec; Buffalo ERIE 2 Feb, first arrival?; Marilla ERIE 22 Feb; E Amherst ERIE 24 Feb; Lancaster ERIE 27 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 88 OOWMA 27 Dec (KF); 23 Oakfield GENE 1 Jan; three other Jan, Feb reports.

Purple Finch: few reports in northern portion of Reg but some good numbers at feeders in southern half of Reg; 15 RTPI 30 Jan; 14 Wales ERIE 15 Feb; 12 Colden ERIE 19 Feb.

Com. Redpoll: 9 Beaver Meadow CBC 21 Dec; 20 Dunkirk-Fredonia CBC 1 Jan; only reports.

Pine Siskin: no reports.

Evening Grosbeak: 15 Scio CBC 14 Dec, only report.

