
REGION 2—GENESEE

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Back to a “good, old-fashioned winter;” the “good” maybe being a bit subjective. This winter season, more than most recently, was really dominated by weather and weather hype. So more than usual attention to this part of the report seems warranted. We can start with the simple averages and totals: December—temperature average 28.5° F, 1.5° below normal, with precipitation 2.99", 0.38" above normal, and snowfall 22.5", 0.70" above normal; January—temperature average 20.6°, 4.1° below normal, with precipitation 1.23", 1.18" below normal, and snowfall 20.8", 0.70" above normal; and February—temperature average 20.8°, 7.4° below normal, with precipitation 2.39", 0.44" below normal, and snowfall 26.3", 4.8" above normal. This weather left it the 25th coldest in 143 winters of records and the coldest since 2002-03, and the 49th driest, with snowfall on 63 of the 90 days, only four above normal, producing 69.6" of snow, just 1.9" below the 30-year average.

However, the impacts on birds and birding lie in the timing and details, not in the averages and totals, and we must contrast media hype with reality. We were blasted with superlative adjectives and repeatedly with the new boogeyman, the dreaded Polar Vortex. But take a look—even the averages aren’t that bad! As an example, we read of a persistently cold January, but the first day, nearly a week in the middle, and the final day were well above average temperatures, and we were back to bare ground after periods of 20+" of snow both after Christmas and in the middle of January. Average snow cover was not much different from last year, and the biggest snowfall was 12.7" on one day in February. Locally, it was tiresome at times and the timing was bad relative to some bird counts, but overall it was not that bad. A big issue was the timing. Early cold locked up most of the smaller lakes, bays, and ponds and even the Finger Lakes before the Christmas Bird Counts, and the patterns of cold and wind kept much of the water frozen through the whole season. Then later in February, when we hoped for a break and some early spring migrants, the cold settled in. We had 21 of the month’s 28 days’ highs below freezing. Back to the timing, an early, nasty snowstorm hit on the day of the Letchworth-Silver Lake CBC resulting in one of their lowest species counts at 54, though they still

recorded record highs for Wild Turkey, Rock Pigeon, and Dark-eyed Junco. The snow persisted through much of the night, and the Rochester CBC started with plows just opening the roads, parking difficult and deep, tiring snow to wade through to find birds. The count total of 87 was still near the recent average and record highs were tallied for Cackling Goose, Bald Eagle, Pileated Woodpecker, and Eastern Bluebird. Nearly two weeks later, on a Friday to beat the opening day of the second half of the waterfowl season, the Conesus-Hemlock CBC was held with better weather and logged a very good 87 species, with record highs for Trumpeter Swan, Bald Eagle, and Carolina Wren. Only a few days later most of the open water on Conesus Lake froze and waterfowl became much harder to find. There were enough open spots scattered about plus Lake Ontario mostly open for a good mid-January NYSOA Waterfowl Count. However, by late February the ice cover on most of the shallower water began to take a toll on some species.

Moving along to the birds of this winter, we start with the waterfowl. As noted in the weather section, the opening and closing of water on various lakes and bays greatly affected the location and finding of these species. After early December, there were essentially no more Snow Geese in the Region for the season. Canada Goose wintered in the higher numbers of recent years in many locations, and some Cackling Geese persisted through the season. Mute Swan totals reported were down, but likely largely due to moving about and scattering as their regular sites froze solid at times. We now are at the point where there can be ID issues between Tundra and Trumpeter swans in some locations with the smaller numbers later in the season. There were enough lingering puddle ducks to bolster CBC lists, but numbers were low, except for Mallard, and dropped after December. Among the diving ducks, we saw the continuing trend of Redhead and the scaup species being in better numbers on the Finger Lakes, until Conesus Lake froze, and Long-tailed Duck and Red-breasted Merganser high along the Lake Ontario shore. Peak counts for Ring-necked Duck, Hooded Merganser, and Ruddy Duck were still good but down from the very high counts of recent years. Canvasback and Bufflehead numbers were particularly low. Likely *the* male Barrow's Goldeneye returned to the Point Breeze area (shared with Region 1) by 23 December and was the only individual of the species reported this winter. A lone female Harlequin Duck was spotted passing off Rigney Bluff (Town of Greece) on 3 December by Kevin Griffith. A male Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser was found on 19 February at Braddock Bay by Greg Lawrence.

One of the main waterfowl stories of the season was **King Eider**. One or two individuals, immature males and females, were seen off and on at several sites through January. Then on 19 February three males and a female were spotted off Manitou Beach and by 23 February the count rose to five males and four females at that site, matching the Regional record high for a single spot. Later that day an adult male, an immature male, and a female were sighted at Point Breeze, about 25 miles west, though the adult male apparently remained a couple hundred yards into Region 1 through its stay. A second, less happy waterfowl story was the start of a significant number of dead and dying birds

being seen along the Lake Ontario shore and inland along roads and into fields beginning in late February. Many of these birds were Red-breasted Mergansers, but they included scaup and Long-tailed Ducks. Necropsies of birds picked up showed that they were starving, not succumbing to disease. It is worth noting that this is NOT a new phenomenon along the south shore of Lake Ontario. Since I began birding here in the '70s, in very harsh and prolonged winters there have been die offs of diving ducks at the last open water areas. Way back it was mostly scaup, but they were most numerous and there were few Red-breasted Mergansers here in winter. Looking at Waterfowl Count data, the first time the local count for Red-breasted Merganser was > 100 was 1984 (similar for our Region 1 and Region 5 neighbors). The first count over 1000 here was in 1993, but that was not repeated until 2006. Larger numbers have been recorded since, with the peak so far 11, 875 in 2009. Our count covers over 80 miles of shore from Point Breeze to Fairhaven. Earlier the species mainly wintered on the coast, with counts in Region 10 jumping a bit in 1984, then remaining stable since at between 3,100 and 6,100.

Loon and grebe numbers remained very low through the season, with no loons reported in February. An **Eared Grebe** was seen on Conesus Lake late on 1 January, but the wind shifted and the temperature dropped that night, freezing most of the open spots, and the bird was not relocated. Good numbers, for winter, of Double-crested Cormorant and Great Blue heron started the winter through the early CBCs, but dropped to very few by January and February. No Black Vultures were reported this season and Turkey Vulture numbers were well below those of recent years.

There were few diurnal raptor reports of great interest: Bald Eagle reports remained good, only one Northern Goshawk was reported, there was the usual scattering of single Red-shouldered Hawks, and Rough-legged Hawk was present in modest and decreasing numbers. Merlin and Peregrine Falcon reports were typical of recent years. The Sharp-shinned:Cooper's hawk ratio remained at our typical 1:2, which in the past was the reverse of most other areas for winter.

With the freezing of much of the open water even in marshes, a Virginia Rail was again located on 22 January in the small stream and pool along a trail near the NE corner of Quaker Pond in Mendon Ponds Park. Given the very limited open water, this bird was seen and photographed by many, birders and others, for the rest of the season. Rails have been seen at that site (and several other sites in the Region) pretty much back as far as we have records.

Among the shorebirds, we had only single Wilson's Snipe found on the Rochester CBC and in late February in Hamlin, both at typical seepage sites. A **Parasitic Jaeger** seen passing off Manitou Beach by Greg Lawrence on 13 January is a winter rarity. Among the gulls, Bonaparte's was not reported after December, Iceland, Lesser Black-backed, and Glaucous were present in good numbers, and Great Black-backed increased greatly toward season's end, especially on Irondequoit Bay when areas of water opened. No rarer gulls were reported.

This winter we find the next big story among the owls. The mega Snowy Owl invasion in the NE was a highlight of the season. There is no way to accurately tabulate the total number of birds passing through or wintering in the Region. In December we had over 300 different reports to eBird and geneseebirds even after trying to eliminate joint lists of people birding at the same place and time. At that early time birds were pushing through and often clearly showed rapid turnover at sites. By January the report total was down to about 105 of what seemed like about 107 individuals. But after recently talking with Tom MacDonald, some of the tagged winter “resident” owls had been seen to show up at multiple sites tens of miles apart on a single day, so separation of reports to individuals is way more difficult than one might anticipate and that total may be too high. By February a similar report assessment yielded about 70 reports and 32+ individuals but subject to the same caveats. The interested reader is urged to go online and access any of the many reports dealing with the northern Quebec origin of this invasion and to look at the website of Project SNOWstorm for stories and maps tracking a number of Snowy Owls trapped, fitted with new-style transmitters, and followed. Tom MacDonald, long time Snowy Owl bander and researcher, gave a talk on what is being learned about Snowy Owls at the HMANA Conference in Rochester in April 2014 and is completing a book for publication in late 2014. He and helpers banded over 60 birds locally in this invasion.

Continuing with the owls, we had a Long-eared Owl first located by Jim Adams in Oatka Creek Park on 31 December which turned out to be very human tolerant and also picked an open, easy-to-find roost and stayed until 28 February. It was seen and photographed by many, often a life bird for them. Finally, it was also a good winter for Short-eared Owls. The DEC has tracked and studied this NY State endangered species for several years and this winter project leaders Jenny Landry and Katlyn Hojnacki organized regular censuses by volunteers in addition to their own field work. Up to a dozen and sometimes even more owls were tallied at many old, known and a few new sites in the Region through the season and beyond into April. At season’s end there were still no owls found yet by the counting team in the “Owl Woods” area off Manitou Beach Road.

Looking over the rest of the list of non-passerine landbirds, there were a few more notes of interest. Slipping in a waterbird ringer, we had three Sandhill Cranes lingering in the Taylor Marsh area north of the village of Honeoye long enough to be found on the Conesus-Hemlock CBC on 27 December. The Eurasian Collared-Doves were still found periodically near the Greenwell farm in the Town of Hamlin. It is interesting that ten years after the first local report sightings remain sporadic and nearly all very near the same area. There was a period of a small increase and spread, but now reports are very local and usually of one or two birds. At Hamlin Beach SP, a good number of Red-headed Woodpeckers remained through the winter. There were no reports from elsewhere. It was also a good winter for lingering Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, with more than ten scattered reports across the Region and through the season. Finally, there were a few reports in January of 1-2 Monk Parakeets from the area

near where there was a nest on a cell tower last year. The nest has apparently been removed a number of times, but the birds have remained in the neighborhoods nearby.

Moving to the passerines, we can first look at species and groups that move south to winter here with some regularity. Numbers of most of the erratic irruptive species were low. Northern Shrike was present all season, with about 20 reports per month early, dropping to half that in February. Fish Crow reports were down, probably due to the backyard feeder where they had been easily found for several years not operating this season. Looking ahead, they were found in the usual area near the mouth of the Genesee River in late March. Out in the farmland fields, flocks of Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur, and Snow Bunting were present in good numbers, with tens of longspurs on occasion and Snow Buntings in the high hundreds depending on snow cover and road mileage covered. American Tree Sparrow did not seem especially abundant, with the maximum a CBC count of 320. With few exceptions, counts of winter blackbirds were low. In contrast with last winter, winter finches were conspicuously absent.

Among the usual lingering, half-hardy species, the list started out pretty good in December through the CBC period though with low numbers of individuals. But then reports dropped through the season, certainly due to a combination of the toll of the continuing bad weather and to lower than usual observer effort. After December there were only single Winter Wren reports each month, Hermit Thrush and Yellow-rumped Warbler dropped to none in February, and White-throated and White-crowned Sparrow reports were scarce. Even reports of Song Sparrow and Swamp Sparrow were few. Surprisingly, multiple reports of Eastern Towhee were turned in each month.

About 26,556 eBird records were received for the Region for the season. Again, there was a large jump in reports and reporters in February with eBird taking on the reports from the Great Backyard Bird Count. This is a mixed blessing; vetting remains an issue. The species total for the season was 131, a low total. Species counts for all three months were all below their 10-year averages by 4.8, 14.2, and 1.1, respectively.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

BB – Braddock Bay, T Greece, MONR; CHCBC – Conesus-Hemlock CBC; CL – Conesus L, LIVI; H – T Hamlin, MONR; HB – Hamlin Beach SP, MONR; IB – Irondequoit Bay, MONR; LSLCBC – Letchworth-Silver L CBC on 14 Dec; MB – Lake Ontario off Manitou Beach just west of Braddock Bay; MP – Mendon Pd P, MONR; NMWMAC – Northern Montezuma WMA, T Savannah, WAYN; PB – Point Breeze, T Carlton, ORLE; RCBC – Rochester CBC on 15 Dec; SB – Sodus Bay, WAYN; TCEA – Twin Cedars Environmental Area at Avon DEC offices; WP – Webster P, MONR.

WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES

Snow Goose: max 5000 N. Bloomfield 8 Dec (KHu); last 1 CL 1 Jan.

Cackling Goose: 1-7 TCEA 3-11 Dec; 3 rep, 4 ind BB 7-18 Dec; 4 CL 27 Dec; max 10 Mt Morris dam 18 Jan (JKi); MP 24 Jan; 2 BB 19 Feb; MP 23 Feb.

Canada Goose: max 8,000 TCEA 10 Dec (MW).

Mute Swan: max 136 BB 29 Dec (AG, RG).

Trumpeter Swan: max 16 T Savannah WAYN 16 Dec (Montezuma CBC); 5 Honeoye L 27 Dec (RSp), CHCBC record high; 14 NMWMA (Railroad Rd) 12 Jan (JMcG).

Tundra Swan: max 535 Savannah Mucklands 8 Dec (LAvL); arr 4 NMWMA (Morgan Rd) (JA).

Wood Duck: after 14 Dec only 5 rep of singles thru.

Gadwall: max off 43 Bear Creek WAYN 19 Jan.
Am. Wigeon: arr 3 BB 20 Feb; max 19 BB 22 Feb.
Am. Black Duck: max 156 CL 19 Jan (MW).
Mallard: max 3000 near Caledonia 19 Jan (MW); total 7402 Waterfowl Count 18-18 Jan.
N. Shoveler: last CL 31 Dec.
N. Pintail: 11 CHCBC 27 Dec; singles T Ontario WAYN & CL 19 Jan; arr 6 BB 20 Feb; max 31 BB 22 Feb.
Canvasback: arr & max 45 BB 28 Feb (GL).
Redhead: max 2975 CHCBC 27 Dec.
Ring-necked Duck: max 700 CL 8 Dec (JKi, RBAFT), down a bit from peaks in recent years.
Greater Scaup: max 1800 Waterfowl Count 18-19 Jan, low.
Lesser Scaup: max 297 Waterfowl Count 18-19 Jan, low.
King Eider: 1 imm m off Rigney Bluff Greece 13-24 Dec; 1 f PB 23-25 Dec; 2 f MB 8-31 Jan; 1 f SB 19 Jan (JeB, JiB, ph); 1 F HB 28 Jan; 1 imm m IB Outlet 31 Jan; 1 f IB Outlet 1-2 Jan; 3 imm m, 1f to 5 imm m, 4 f MB 19-23 Feb (ph), the latter tying the regional high; 1 ad m, 1 imm m, 1 f PB 23 Feb, mostly just west into Region 1 most of the time, *intro*.
Harlequin Duck: 1 f off Rigney Bluff Greece 3 Dec (KG), flyby.
White-winged Scoter: max 700 PB 27 Dec (BCI), again overlap with Region 1 on different days.
Long-tailed Duck: max 1050 MB 20 Feb (GL); max aggregated 1553 RCBC 15 Dec; 1550 Waterfowl Count 18-19 Jan.
Bufflehead: max 60 Waterfowl Count 18-19 Jan, low.
Com. Goldeneye: max 1466 Waterfowl Count 18-19 Jan. **Barrow's Goldeneye:** 1 m PB 23 Dec thru (mob), likely the same ind present for several winters, moves from the edge of Region 1 to a mile or so east into Region 2.
Com. Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser: 1 m BB 19 Feb (GL, ph).
Hooded Merganser: max 85 CHCBC 27 Dec, down from recent year peaks.
Com. Merganser: max 1138 Waterfowl Count 18-19 Jan.
Red-breasted Merganser: max 2972 Waterfowl Count 18-19 Jan.
Ruddy Duck: max 7 CHCBC 27 Dec, very low.
Wild Turkey: 35 LSLCBC 14 Dec, count record high; max 43 Cheese factory Rd 5 Jan (J&AH).
Red-throated Loon: last 2 off Rigney Bluff Greece 13 Jan.

Horned Grebe: max 17 off Bear Creek WAYN 13 Jan, low.
Red-necked Grebe: last 1-8 sev loc 1 Dec; 1 PB 23 Feb.
EARED GREBE (R2): 1 CL 1 Jan (CSp, R&SSp).
Double-crested Cormorant: max 26 IB 15 Dec; very few thru.
Great Blue Heron: max 41 RCBC 15 Dec; decreased to a few thru.
Turkey Vulture: 7 Riga Landfill 17 Dec & T Rush 18 Jan,

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: 4 RCBC 15 Dec, ties count max; 5 CHCBC 27 Dec, new count max; 30 eBird rec Dec; 32 eBird rec Jan; 48 eBird rec Feb.
N. Goshawk: 1 Rochester 12 Jan (LBR), only report.
Red-shouldered Hawk: 9 rep of singles sev loc Jan & Feb.
Rough-legged Hawk: total 18 in Dec, 16 in Jan, & 7 in Feb.
Virginia Rail: 1 MP 22 Jan thru, seen and ph by mob, *intro*.
Am. Coot: max 148 CHCBC 27 Dec.
Sandhill Crane: 3 T Richmond ONTA 27 Dec (KK), flew west from Taylor marsh during CHCBC.
Wilson's Snipe: T Spencerport 15 Dec (R&SSp); T Hamlin 28 Feb (GL, ph); scarce in winter.
PARASITIC JAEGER (R2): off MB 13 Jan (GL), flyby, rare in winter.
Bonaparte's Gull: max 160 Ontario Beach (Charlotte) 9 Dec, low max; last 23 RCBC 15 Dec, early departure.
Iceland Gull: approx totals – 12 in Dec, 23 in Jan, & 7 in Feb; max 5 HANA 4 Jan.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: totals approx – 15 in Dec, 3 in Jan, & 4 in Feb.
Glaucous Gull: totals approx. – 16 in Dec, 10 in Jan, and 15 in Feb.
Great Black-backed Gull: max 100 IB-N 15 Feb (Aga), preview of much larger gathering to come

PIGEONS – PARROTS

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE: single bird Hamlin (Greenwell farm) 8 dates thru.
E. Screech-Owl: 47 RCBC 15 Dec; 44 CHCBC 27 Dec; 29 Nations Rd 15 Feb (JKi); good counts.
Snowy Owl: ~300 rep many loc Dec; ~105 rep many loc Jan; ~70 rep many loc Feb; number of ind cannot be determined accurately, *intro*.

Long-eared Owl: 1 Owl Woods 26 Dec; 1 Oatka Creek P 31 Dec thru (JAd, mob), seen & ph by mob, *intro*; 1 Nations Rd 15 Feb.

Short-eared Owl: approx totals – 21 in Dec, 23 in Jan, and 33 in Feb, many loc, much overlap month to month; max 17 Sand & Taft Rds, W. Bloomfield 9 Feb (M&JT); *intro*.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 1-4 HB thru (mob), wintered in the park; no other rep.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: total 12 rep, 14 ind sev loc scattered thru, very good number for winter.

Merlin: total 11 all Dec; total 12 all Jan; total 8 all Feb.

Peregrine Falcon: total 7 all Dec; total 6 all Jan; total 4 all Feb.

MONK PARAKEET (R2): 2 Rochester (West Ridge Plaza area) 4, 29 Jan, *intro*.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: totals approx - 19 in Dec, 23 in Jan, & 12 in Feb.

Am. Crow: max 30,000 RCBC 15 Dec (DBas), found going to roost inside the Genesee River gorge north of downtown after earlier hazing from the usual roost.

FISH CROW (R2): 1 Rochester (Charlotte area) 10 Jan (GL), *intro*.

Horned Lark: max 200 Hamlin 3 Jan Dec (DD).

Red-breasted Nuthatch: 158 eBird records, <1/3 of last year's total, but an interesting 3x jump in Feb possibly due to multiple reports by GBBC observers.

Winter Wren: 1 Oatka Creek P 15 Jan, 1Feb (JAd), only rep after Dec.

Carolina Wren: max 30 CHCBC 27 Dec, count record high.

E. Bluebird: 38 RCBC 15 Dec, count record high.

Hermit Thrush: max 5 WP 29 Dec; only 3 Jan rep after.

Am Robin: single site max 1500 Sherwood Field P, Penfield 20 Dec (JPo).

Gray Catbird: Beatty Pt, Greece 15 Dec; Griswold Rd Marsh, Bergen 21 Dec; only reports.

Am. Pipit: last 1 Riga Landfill 2 Dec (BriM).

LONGSPURS – WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: max 15 Hamlin 3 Jan.

Snow Bunting: max 800Hamlin 29 Dec (AG); 500 Hamlin 1 Jan (AG); 500 Avon 31 Jan (MW).

Yellow-rumped Warbler: max 10 RCBC 15 Dec & CHCBC 27 Dec; 5 rep 3 loc 1-19 Jan; no Feb reports.

TOWHEES – WEAVERS

E. Towhee: 12 rep sev loc thru 20 Feb, high for winter.

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 320 CHCBC 27 Dec.

Chipping Sparrow: Honeoye Falls 7 Dec (BCI).

Savannah Sparrow: Nations Rd 16 Dec (KK); Groveland flats 3 Jan (JSt).

Dark-eyed Junco: max 410 RCBC 28 Dec, count record high.

N. Cardinal: 34 at feeder Bushnell's 5 Feb (CH).

E. Meadowlark: 1 Hamlin 27, 31 Dec (DB), only rep.

Rusty Blackbird: 1-3 Victor 23 Jan thru (BBER), at feeder.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 330 Turk Hill Rd, Perinton (M&JT).

Com. Redpoll: 1 RCBC 15 Dec.

