

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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It was a cold and brutal winter, with below normal temperatures carrying over from November and persisting right through February. The first sub-zero night of the season came on 13 December, which is unusually early, and the temperature dropped below zero on 24 days during the season, the coldest temperature of the season being -37° F on 22 January. The mean temperature for every month was below normal, ranging from about 3° below normal in December to 5° below normal in February. Numerous storms hit the area throughout the winter, with a significant ice storm in the days before Christmas and a two-day lake effect snow event that dropped 48 inches on Watertown in late January and was followed by another 30-inch storm less than two weeks later.

The weather clearly affected birds in several ways. Unusually cold weather during the late fall and early winter encouraged many birds to leave the Region, and, with a few exceptions, half-hardies were scarce. Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River, and all other bodies of water in the Region iced over earlier than they have in years and were more extensively frozen over than normal. Virtually all waterfowl and waterbird species were present in substantially lower than usual numbers, if present at all, especially after December. By February no open water was visible from the Lake Ontario shoreline anywhere in Jefferson County, and most waterfowl had long previously departed the Region, but at least three apparently starving Red-breasted Mergansers were found grounded in agricultural fields or along roadsides.

It was a poor year for raptors. Rough-legged Hawks were scarce in most areas, with daily counts exceeding one or two in just a few locations and then not by much. Red-tailed Hawks were somewhat more abundant than Rough-legs, but numbers were still well below that present most winters. Merlins were also scarcer than they have been in recent years, but American Kestrels seemed

to have good success making it through the winter. The only unusual diurnal raptor was a Red-shouldered Hawk on Fort Drum in early December.

Easily the most noteworthy avian event of the season was the largest irruption of Snowy Owls observed in Region 6 in many years and perhaps many decades. Snowy Owls were reported from all lowland portions of Region 6, but seemed to be most abundant in western and central Jefferson County. The highest density of Snowy Owls I know of was along and near State Highway 11 in the towns of Leray and Philadelphia, where on several dates I saw nine individuals along a five-mile stretch of highway and up to five more on side roads within one mile of Rt. 11. Apparently smaller but still significant concentrations were also noted in Clayton, Cape Vincent, and Lyme. **Great Gray Owls** were photographed in Canton and at Perch River WMA, but neither bird could be relocated after the date of their initial discovery. A few Short-eared Owls were present early on, but I received no reports after December and presumably heavy snow pushed these owls elsewhere.

Another of the winter's highlights was the relative abundance of white-winged gulls, especially in the vicinity of the Robert Moses Power Dam in Massena. During the Massena-Cornwall Christmas Bird Count 53 Iceland Gulls and 33 Glaucous Gulls were counted flying in to a roost at sunset, and both species were almost certainly undercounted, as several hundred gulls flew into the roost after it was too dark to identify them. Numbers of both species dropped substantially by early January but remained higher than most years into February. Another significant gull concentration was at a farm in Ellisburg throughout the winter, where hundreds of Herring Gulls were joined by small numbers of Iceland and Glaucous Gulls and at least two different Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

Among the generally scarce half-hardies was at least two Red-headed Woodpeckers that attempted to overwinter on Fort Drum, taking advantage of a very large acorn crop, although it isn't clear that they cached sufficient food to make it through this exceptionally long and cold winter. Two Eastern Towhees were more than are reported most winters, but other sparrows were scarce to absent. Stony Point was exceptional among Regional locations in having numerous half-hardies throughout the winter, mostly feeding on abundant red cedar berries. Particularly noteworthy were large numbers of Yellow-rumped Warblers that successfully made it through the winter here. Prior to 2011 Yellow-rumped Warblers were not known to occur in winter in Region 6 in any significant numbers, but it is becoming increasingly clear that Stony Point supports large wintering flocks during years when red cedar berries are plentiful. Also taking advantage of the abundant food on Stony Point were the largest flocks of American Robins and Cedar Waxwings reported in the Region. More unusual was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker on Stony Point on 15 February, the same day one was photographed at a feeder in Watertown.

This was not a winter for irruptive passerines, with just one or two reports each of Red Crossbill and Pine Siskin and no reports of White-winged Crossbill or Pine Grosbeak. Bohemian Waxwings were unreported for only the second winter in the past decade, although given the occurrence of this species nearby

in Canada it is likely that a very small number of Bohemians were present somewhere in Region 6 for at least some portion of the winter.

For the season I received reports of 109 species, down from the previous two winters but still higher than expected given the severity of the winter. The obvious highlight of the season was the large number of Snowy Owls that were a frequent topic of conversation among birders as well as North County residents who normally don't pay much attention to birds. The weather was the great disappointment of the season for a variety of reasons, but in this context because it made for very slow and uncomfortable birding, not to mention apparently causing high mortality for Red-breasted Mergansers, Wild Turkeys, and probably other species.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFWMA – Ashland Flats WMA; BI – Barnhart I, T Massena; BRB – Black River Bay; CBy – Chaumont Bay; CV – T Cape Vincent; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; FL – Fisher's Landing, T Alexandria; GPSP – Grass Point SP; HH – Henderson Harbor; HP – Hawkins Pt, T Massena; KC – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; KPSP – Kring Point SP; MCCBC – Massena-Cornwall Christmas Bird Count; MP – Montario Pt, T Ellisburg; PRWMA – Perch R WMA; PtPen – Point Peninsula; RMSP – Robert Moses SP, T Massena; SLR – St. Lawrence R; SnB – Snowshoe Bay, T Henderson; StPt – Stony Pt, T Henderson; TP – Tibbitt's Pt, T Cape Vincent; WBSP – Westcott Beach SP; WI – Wellesley I; WISP – Wellesley I SP.

WHISTLING-DUCKS—VULTURES

Snow Goose: max 30 KC 1 Dec; last 95 Hounsfield 14 Dec.

Mute Swan: max 23 FL 31 Jan; PRWMA 6 Feb, where no open water present; 3 Black River T Castorland 25 Feb, also unusual loc.

Tundra Swan: max 142 BRB 8 Dec; 8 GPSP 17 Jan, only report after 14 Dec.

Wood Duck: ad m AFWMA 9 Jan (NL); Pamela 15 Feb (JB); only reports.

Gadwall: max 349 PtPen 29 Dec (NL).

Am. Wigeon: Dexter Marsh 8 Dec; TP 20 Dec; 2 CV 28 Dec; Henderson 15 Feb; only reports.

Am. Black Duck: max 130 S Landing Road T Ellisburg 13 Jan; scarce elsewhere.

N. Pintail: max 21 CV 13 Dec (NL), high.

Green-winged Teal: Grass River T Potsdam 27 Dec, only report.

Canvasback: 3 PtPen 12 Dec.

Redhead: max 1500 SLR CV 28 Dec.

Ring-necked Duck: 5 Snowshoe Bay 13 Jan; max 6 WISP 15 Jan; no reports elsewhere.

Greater Scaup: max 1535 HH 8 Dec.

Lesser Scaup: few reports of up to 20/day CBy, BRB & HH thru 30 Dec; 1 WISP 13 Jan & 10 Brownville 20 Feb, only reports after Dec.

White-winged Scoter: max 26 PtPen 29 Dec.
Long-tailed Duck: max 425 MP 8 Dec.
Bufflehead: max 47 HH 8 Dec.
Com. Goldeneye: max 500 FL 13 Jan; thru mid Jan about half as abundant as normal, becoming scarcer later in winter.
Barrow's Goldeneye: f WI 13 Jan (NL), only report.
Hooded Merganser: max 46 PtPen 6 Dec;
Com. Merganser: max 627 SLR Ogdensburg 5 Jan.
Red-breasted Merganser: max 351 SLR Clayton 8 Dec; most departed Region after mid Jan as L Ontario iced over; at least 3 rep grounded birds JEFF after 15 Feb incl one on FD roadside far from water that subsequently died; FD 24 Feb; 51 Ogdensburg 23 Feb high for STLA stretch of SLR in winter.
Ruddy Duck: 2 KPSP 7 Dec, only report.
Wild Turkey: several observers commented on low winter survival of local flocks.
Red-throated Loon: BRB 8 Dec, only report.
Com. Loon: last RMSP 5 Jan, only report after 8 Dec.
Horned Grebe: max 22 StPt 8 Dec; SLR Massena 18 Jan, where rare in winter; last Rodman Landfill 30 Jan, injured bird, taken to rehabilitator.
Red-necked Grebe: MP & SnB 8 Dec, only reports.
Double-crested Cormorant: last SnB 8 Dec.
Great Blue Heron: max 2 FD 3 Dec; 2 other reports early Dec; Rossie 17 Feb, prob early spring migrant.
Turkey Vulture: last Ellisburg 4 Dec (TC).

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: widespread reports 1-7/day all lowland areas.
N. Harrier: virtually absent after 8 Dec.
Sharp-shinned Hawk: 7 reports in eBird.
Cooper's Hawk: 16 reports in eBird.
N. Goshawk: imm Fort Drum 14 Jan.
Red-shouldered Hawk: FD 3 Dec, rare in winter.
Red-tailed Hawk: widespread in lower than normal numbers.
Rough-legged Hawk: max 5-6/day CV thru; generally 1-3/day most open lowland areas R6; low.
Am. Coot: PtPen 27 Dec (NL), only report.
Killdeer: arr Ellisburg 22 Feb (AS), early.
Bonaparte's Gull: PtPen 6 Dec; Chippewa Bay 7 Dec; only reports.
Ring-billed Gull: up to 4/day in large gull flocks at Ellisburg farm thru, only reports after 12 Dec until small numbers arr L Ontario & SLR 21 Feb.

Herring Gull: max 660 HP 28 Dec; 240 SLR Ogdensburg 29 Dec; up to 520/day Ellisburg farm thru; no other counts above 100 and few above 30.
Iceland Gull: max 53 HP 28 Dec (JB), coming in to evening roost; 1-6/day same site thru 26 Jan; up to 4/day Ellisburg farm thru.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: 1st cycle Ellisburg farm 8 Dec; ad Ellisburg farm 13 Jan.
Glaucous Gull: max 33 at HP roost 28 Dec, probably low, as many large gulls came in after dark; this tally part of MCCBC count of 69 including observation from Canadian side SLR; reports of singles from 2 other locations SLR & 3 locations L Ontario.
Great Black-backed Gull: max 470+ at HP roost 28 Dec; 147 HP 13 Jan, only other count > 100.

PIGEONS – PARROTS

Snowy Owl: at least 95 individuals reported, probably many more; one-day max 14 Leray & Philadelphia, where at least 22 individuals suspected; best year in decades.
GREAT GRAY OWL: Canton 1 Jan (photos! WG); PRWMA 5 Feb (photos! report to NYSARC, ES); neither owl observed again.
Long-eared Owl: dead on barbed wire fence CV early Dec.
Short-eared Owl: 1-2/day CV Dec, where no reports Jan or Feb; Brownville 14 Dec.
Belted Kingfisher: last WBSP 8 Dec.
Red-headed Woodpecker: at least 2 attempting to overwinter FD last seen 13 Feb.
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: StPt & Watertown 15 Feb; only reports.
N. Flicker: at least 18 rep from lowland areas throughout.
Am. Kestrel: at least 9 rep, including several that successfully overwintered, nearly all roosting in barns.
Merlin: singles Canton, Henderson & Watertown; fewer reports than recent winters.
Peregrine Falcon: sev rep from BI area where resident; no other reports.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: about 30 reports, lower than usual.
Am. Crow: approx 12000 at Watertown roost 15 Feb.
Horned Lark: max 40 Canton 20 Dec; unusually hard.
Tree Swallow: 5 TP 8 Dec (NL); last Wilson's Bay CV 11 Dec (NL); rare in winter.
Carolina Wren: none reported Canton after 23 Jan following 2 years continual presence; Massena 8 Jan, only other rep.
Winter Wren: last KC 1 Dec.

E. Bluebird: max 9 T Lisbon 21 Dec; 10 other rep of another 35 ind.

Am. Robin: 300+/day StPt thru; modest numbers elsewhere mostly single digits.

N. Mockingbird: CV 2 Dec; Three Mile Bay 8 Dec; Brownville 14 Dec; more than usual.

Bohemian Waxwing: no reports for first winter since 2006-7.

Cedar Waxwing: max approx 1500 StPt 15 Feb, hundreds thru; 225 PtPen 27 Dec, only other rep > 100; scarce most areas.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: max 6 T Ellisburg 8 Dec; scarce thru.

Snow Bunting: max 200 T Hopkinton 17 Jan; fewer than most years.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 25-35/day StPt thru; 2 PtPen 15 Feb, only other report.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

E. Towhee: CV 1 Jan (NL); Constableville feeder thru at least 25 Jan (DE).

Song Sparrow: very few reports.

White-throated Sparrow: max up to 12/day KC thru (DB); 7 other reports of mostly singles.

Red-winged Blackbird: CV 8 Dec; at Potsdam feeder 26 Feb; only reports.

Com. Grackle: at Norwood feeder 14 Feb, only report.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 3 at Brasher Falls feeder 14 Feb; 2 other reports from feeders.

Purple Finch: 6-12/day StPt thru; about 12 other rep mostly at feeders.

Red Crossbill: 5 Canton 27 Dec (RM); 8 Brasher Falls 14 Feb (PM); only reports.

Pine Siskin: 2 at Watertown feeder 14-17 Feb, only report.

Evening Grosbeak: Parishville 27 Jan, only report.

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