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REGION 3—FINGER LAKES

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The 2014-2015 winter season was the harshest and longest winter for some time. December started off relatively mild, with a few cold nights early on leading into lows not dropping below the mid 20s F most of the rest of the month. 25 December was the warmest day of the season, with a daytime high of 57° F. The average December temperature was a full five degrees above the long-term normal. January brought a different story, with highs regularly into the teens by the second week and lows in the negative numbers for days at a time. Average January temperatures were nearly seven degrees below the long-term normal. The average high and low across the month were also both over five degrees below normal. Finally, February brought the coldest weather yet, with 14 days under 0° and an average daily low of 0°, 16.5° below normal. Snowfall in February was also above average, while it was below average in January and average in December.

Lingering half-hardies were present in good numbers this season, especially earlier on. Sparrows such as Field Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, and White-crowned Sparrow were all reported in low numbers, and Savannah Sparrows were around in higher numbers and more locations than usual. Other expected non-winter birds included Eastern Towhee, Gray Catbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Winter Wren, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, and American Pipit. Non-passerines included a few reports of Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, Wilson's Snipe, Bonaparte's Gull, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. More noteworthy half-hardies included a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** coming to a feeder near Dryden Lake, a **Yellow Warbler** in Ithaca in early December, and an **Orange-crowned Warbler** on the Ithaca Christmas Count on 1 January. Most notable of all and also on the Ithaca Christmas Count was a **Blue-headed Vireo** seen by Bob McGuire, a truly exceptional record for this species.

The early months of 2015 proved to be another awesome season for *Aythya* ducks on Cayuga Lake. A male **Tufted Duck** was found at the south end of the

lake on 17 January, conceivably the same bird that was around in the same area last winter. This bird continued to be seen in the same general area throughout the season and into March, at which point two individuals may have been present. In the same flock as the Tufted Duck, the *Aythya* hybrids outpaced even last year's amazing diversity. This winter, Canvasback x Redhead, Redhead x Ring-necked Duck, Redhead x scaup, and Ring-necked Duck x scaup were all recorded, as well as an ivory-colored leucistic Redhead also present last winter. Other noteworthy birds on Cayuga Lake included a rare-in-winter Black Scoter and an Eared Grebe that made its annual appearance in Ithaca and later in Aurora.

Winter gull numbers were good but unremarkable across much of the Region. Parts of Cayuga Lake and especially the waterfront at the north end of Seneca Lake had good concentrations that included Glaucous Gulls, Iceland Gulls, and a handful of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, perhaps fewer of the last than in recent winters. Two different first year **Thayer's Gulls** were photographed at the Cornell Compost Facility near Ithaca in January, and hybrids of Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring x Glaucous Gull, and Herring x Great Black-backed Gull were all reported. In addition to the gulls, a **Black Vulture** made a brief appearance at the compost on 20 December.

On the heels of last winter's amazing Snowy Owl show, this winter turned out to be just as rewarding, with dozens of Snowy Owls hanging around throughout the Region. The first of these were reported even before the season began and many lingered well into the spring season. While observers were out looking at owls, some were lucky enough to come upon a gray-morph **Gyr Falcon** that showed up several times in the same area south of Seneca Falls in Seneca County at the end of January and into February.

Winter finches were present in small numbers, with many reports of small flocks of Common Redpolls in January and February, as well as small numbers of Pine Siskins and a single report of an Evening Grosbeak. There were no reports of crossbills or Pine Grosbeaks.

In total, 133 species were reported in the Region during the winter season.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

Aurora – Aurora Bay, CAYU; Bluegrass – Bluegrass Lane, Ithaca, TOMP; CLSP – Cayuga Lake SP area, CAYU; Compost – Cornell University Compost Piles on Stevenson Rd., TOMP; EShore – East Shore P, Ithaca, TOMP; FLNF – Finger Lake National Forest, SCHU/SENE; Geneva – Geneva, especially Seneca Lake SP, SENE/ONTA; Knox-Mar – Knox-Marcellus Marsh area, Montezuma NWR, SENE (includes Towpath and East Roads); Mucklands – Savannah Mucklands, SENE; MyPt – Myers Point, Lansing, TOMP; PortPt – Portland Point, Lansing, TOMP; SaW – Sapsucker Woods, TOMP; SEnd – southern end of Cayuga L, TOMP; StP – Stewart P, Ithaca, TOMP; UnSp – Union Springs, CAYU.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Ross's Goose: 3 StP 14-15 Dec; SaW 8 Jan (CW).

Cackling Goose: many reports throughout season.

Tundra Swan: max 1700 Cayuga Lock CAYU (TL), high but not unusual concentration for the Region.

Gadwall: max 158 UnSp CAYU 31 Jan (JM, LSa).

Wood Duck: Auburn 4 Jan, 7-27 Feb; Waterloo 6 Feb; Canandaigua 26 Jan, 6-16 Feb; uncommon in winter.

N. Shoveler: max 6 Lamoka Lake SCHU 20 Dec (TL).

N. Pintail: max 100 Mucklands 23 Dec (GK).

Canvasback: max 500 UnSp 31 Jan (JM, LSa).

Redhead: max 25000 StP 17 Jan (KM).

CANVASBACK X REDHEAD (HYBRID):

EShore 1-11 Feb, possibly same bird as last winter.

REDHEAD X RING-NECKED DUCK

(HYBRID): SEnd 18 & 24 Jan; UnSp 30 Jan (JM, LSa)

TUFTED DUCK: Hog Hole 17-24 Jan; MyPt 21-28 Feb; third Regional record.

REDHEAD X SCAUP SP (HYBRID): SEnd 24 Jan, 7 Feb.

RING-NECKED DUCK X SCAUP SP (HYBRID): SEnd 18 Jan – 8 Feb.

Surf Scoter: SLSP 6 Dec; 2 MyPt 28 Feb, uncommon in winter.

White-winged Scoter: max 70 Aurora 21 Feb.

Black Scoter: max 7 EShore 21 Dec (GK); SEnd 14 Dec – 28 Jan; LoPt 21 Feb; rare in winter.

Ruddy Duck: max 50 Canandaigua ONTA (MG).

Red-throated Loon: sev reports from Seneca and Cayuga Lakes 11 Jan – 5 Feb, uncommon in winter.

Red-necked Grebe: max 17 PortPt 26 Feb (JM).

Eared Grebe: SEnd 15-21 Dec; Aurora 11-31 Jan; rare but annual on Cayuga Lake.

Black Vulture: Compost 20 Dec (GM).

HAWKS - LARIDS

Golden Eagle: Caroline TOMP 4 Jan (SKe), rare in winter.

N. Goshawk: FLNF 14 Jan (JS); Monkey Run TOMP 13 Dec & 24 Jan (CW, JB).

Sandhill Crane: max 84 Knox-Mar 5 Dec.

Wilson's Snipe: Bluegrass 26 Dec (TS), rare in winter.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 3 CLSP 13 Dec (TL), uncommon in winter.

THAYER'S GULL: Compost 20 Jan & 27 Jan, different birds.

Iceland Gull: max 5 Geneva 3 Feb (DW, JT).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: many scattered reports, fewer than in past winters.

Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull: Geneva 31 Jan (TL, BW).

Glaucous Gull: max 4 Geneva 21 Feb (TL, GW).

Herring x Glaucous Gull (hybrid): Compost 25 Jan (JM, L.Sa); Geneva 21 Feb (TL, GM).

Herring x Great Black-backed Gull (hybrid): many reports of a single bird, Compost and SEnd, 2 Dec – 14 Feb.

PIGEONS - PARROTS

Snowy Owl: many individuals overwintering.

Short-eared Owl: max 7 Shortsville Rd. ONTA (BMo).

N. Saw-whet Owl: Ithaca City Cemetery TOMP 14 Dec (TL); Ellis Hollow TOMP 22 Dec (EE); Monkey Run 1 Jan (GK).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: at least 16 different locations in area, usually very uncommon in winter.

GYRFALCON: Canoga area SENE 29 Jan, 22-24 Feb, probably all the same gray-morph bird.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

BLUE-HEADED VIREO: Hanshaw Rd. TOMP 1 Jan (BMc), extremely rare in winter.

Winter Wren: multiple reports thru, very uncommon in winter.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: PortPt 1 Jan (KM), very uncommon in winter.

Hermit Thrush: six reports thru, very uncommon in winter.

Gray Catbird: Brooktondale TOMP 1-2 Jan; UnSp 8 Feb (TL, GM), rare in winter.

Am. Pipit: Knox-Mar 11 Dec (WR, MR), uncommon in winter.

LONGSPURS – WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: max 22 King Ferry CAYU 8 Feb (JM, L.Sa).

Snow Bunting: max 550 King Ferry CAYU 8 Feb (BVD, BF, BB).

Orange-crowned Warbler: Cayuga Inlet, Ithaca TOMP 1-4 Jan, rare in winter.

YELLOW WARBLER: Downtown Ithaca TOMP 3 Dec (BE), rare in winter.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: four reports, uncommon in winter.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

E. Towhee: Brooktondale TOMP 1-3 Jan, fairly rare in winter.

Chipping Sparrow: Canoga SENE 13 Dec (TL), Eastern Heights TOMP 24 Jan thru, rare in winter.

Field Sparrow: 2 MyPt 24 Jan (CW, JB), fairly rare in winter.

Savannah Sparrow: max 7 Bluegrass 21 Dec (KR), exceptional numbers and locations, uncommon in winter.

Fox Sparrow: Ellis Hollow TOMP 8 Dec (NM), fairly rare in winter, perhaps a late migrant.

White-crowned Sparrow: at least 10 reports, uncommon in winter.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: Dryden Lake TOMP 6 – 14 Dec (NI), very rare in winter, f-type.

Red-winged Blackbird: max 100 Montezuma, very high for winter.

E. Meadowlark: Brooktondale TOMP 15 Dec (SF); Shortsville Rd ONTA 23 Jan (MP), fairly rare in winter.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 52 Summerhill CAYU 31 Jan (GK), high for winter.

Com. Redpoll: max 62 Ellis Hollow TOMP 24 Feb (EI), many reports, low numbers.

Pine Siskin: max 20 Pine City CHEM 15 Feb (BD).

Evening Grosbeak: Ithaca Airport TOMP 7 Feb (WH), only report.

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