

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

Jeffrey S. Bolsinger

98 State Street, Canton NY 13617

jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

The winter started out relatively mild, but temperatures dropped through the season and by the time it was over nearly all North Country residents agreed it was among the most brutal winters in recent memory. December's mean temperature in Watertown was 33° F, which is about 7° above normal, and relatively warm temperatures occurred on many days throughout the month, including a seasonal high of 60° on Christmas Day. January's mean temperature was 15°, or 4° below normal, and included four nights during the first half of the month with overnight temperatures dropping to at least -20°, resulting in extensive ice formation on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. January ended with seven consecutive sub-zero nights, and the cold intensified the following month, resulting in the coldest February on record. February's mean temperature was just 6°, an amazing 15° below normal, and the temperature dropped below zero on 20 nights during the month. It was also a very dry winter, with below average precipitation all three months.

Waterfowl diversity was fairly high in December, but duck numbers were generally low, and became very low as most lakes and rivers iced up in January. The first large southbound movement of Snow Geese noted all year came on 2 December, continuing the recent trend for progressively later fall goose migration. Seen at Montario Point on that date was a group of four Cackling Geese on Lake Ontario and single Greater White-fronted and Ross's Geese among the numerous flocks of Snow and Canada Geese passing overhead. Notable ducks included two Harlequin Ducks found by Mike Jeziorski at Montario Point on 1 December, and another Harlequin Duck Nick Leone found on the St. Lawrence River on 18 January. Only two Barrow's Goldeneye were found, both females on the St. Lawrence River, for a similar tally to the previous winter but fewer than most recent years.

Notable waterbirds included good numbers of lingering loons and grebes in December and early January. Red-throated Loons are seen infrequently during

winter, and the five off Sackett's Harbor on 16 December was exceptional. The year's last Red-necked Grebe was also seen in the same location that day. Several Great Blue Herons attempted to overwinter, including one that did so successfully by apparently spending nearly all of February inside the culvert at the Lower Lake outlet in Canton.

For the second consecutive winter, Snowy Owls were present in very high numbers, although seemingly not quite as abundant as the previous winter, and exhibited a slightly different Regional distribution. The largest concentration noted was on Point Peninsula and adjacent areas of northwestern Jefferson County, where many observers saw up to 15 individuals per day. This area is historically among the best places for Snowy Owls in the region, but oddly had relatively low numbers during the otherwise exceptional invasion of 2013-14. Large numbers of Snowy Owls were also reported this winter in the Black River Valley around Lowville, and in a broad swath from Fort Drum northward to the St. Lawrence River near Alexandria.

Most notable among several interesting woodpecker reports was a Northern Flicker with a red malar stripe Nick Leone saw in Orleans on 20 February. Unfortunately, the flicker flew off before Nick could see enough details to determine whether this was a Red-shafted Flicker or an intergrade. For the third consecutive winter Red-headed Woodpeckers overwintered on Fort Drum, this time one adult and two juveniles on the same territory that has been continuously occupied since May of 2012. Several consecutive large acorn crops appear to have allowed at least one Red-headed Woodpecker to make it through two very hard winters. Lee Ellsworth saw the only Yellow-bellied Sapsucker of the season at his feeders on 18 January.

A relatively long list of half-hardies was seen this winter, but numbers of individuals were low for nearly all species. Most notable among the seasonal rarities was an Orange-crowned Warbler at Southwick Beach State Park and a Winter Wren at Westcott Beach State Park, both on 26 December; a Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Anne Moomey's feeder in Stockholm for much of the winter, and an Eastern Towhee at Nancy Weal's feeder for more than a month mid-winter. Virtually every species of half-hardy that regularly winters in the Region was present in very low numbers, and some species, such as Song Sparrow, was virtually absent after December, with the only late season reports coming from feeders during the Great Backyard Bird Count. White-throated Sparrows were a little more common, with good counts at a few feeders, but by January were virtually impossible to find away from feeders. Northern Flicker, Eastern Bluebird, and American Robin were among other half-hardies that were unusually scarce.

Although several species of irruptives came south this winter, none were present in particularly high numbers. Redpolls were widespread in modest numbers, and mostly seemed to feed on natural seed sources until late January and February, when feeder-watchers started reporting them regularly. Five reports of six individual Hoary Redpolls included good details, all seen in

February. Pine Siskins were also present in modest numbers throughout. Other finch reports included two Red Crossbills over Taylor Creek State Forest on 24 January, and two reports of Evening Grosbeaks at feeders in lowland areas in January, both of which were seen on one day only. Bohemian Waxwings were unreported until late January, when small groups were seen in both the St. Lawrence Valley and the Black River Valley, but were not reported again until several flocks appeared in late February.

For the season I received reports of 114 species, about average for recent years. The season's highlight once again was Snowy Owl, with many observers seeing even more this winter than last. The very cold temperatures during the latter half of the season was clearly the "lowlight", as it not only resulted in poor birding but discouraged most birders from venturing into the field at all.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jeff Bolsinger, Richard & Marion Brouse, Carol Cady, Ann Chestnut, Joan Collins, Laura Cowger, Benjamin Dixon, Lee Ellsworth, Doug & Ann Emlin, Susan Favreau, Tara Fuller, Duncan Gillie, Michelle Gillie, Rebecca Heagle, Joan Howlett, Mike Jeziorski, Ann Kiehm, Tom Langen, Nick Leone, Jerry & Judi LeTendre, Collett McFarland, Ellen Miller, Anne Moomey, Jay Nagel, Eugene Nichols, North Leeds Birders, Bill Purcell, Rebecca Rivers, Mandi Roggie, Gerry Smith, Elizabeth Truskowski, Zachary Wakeman, Mary Beth Warburton, Nancy Weal, Tom & Eileen Wheeler.

ABBREVIATIONS

BPWMA – Black Pd WMA; BRB – Black River Bay; BRV – Black River Valley; 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; JCSP – Jacques Cartier SP; KC – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; MP – Montario Pt, T Ellisburg; PilPt – Pillar Pt; PtPen – Point Peninsula; PtS – Point Salubrious; PRGC – Partridge Run Golf Course, T Canton; SBSPvSouthwick Beach SP; SH – Sackett's Harbor; SLR – St. Lawrence River; StPt – Stony Pt, T Henderson; TIB – Thousand Islands Bridge; TP – Tibbitt's Pt, T Cape Vincent; ULLWMA – Upper & Lower Lakes WMA; WBSP – Westcott Beach SP; WI – Wellesley Island; WISP – Wellesley Island SP; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA.

WHISTLING-DUCKS—VULTURES

Greater White-fronted Goose: with large flock Snow and Canada Geese over MP 2 Dec (JB).

Snow Goose: first widespread southbound passage of "fall" 2 Dec; many moving thru 19 Dec.

Ross's Goose: MP 2 Dec (JB); SLR T Waddington 7 Dec (JB).

Cackling Goose: 4 MP 2 Dec (JB).

Mute Swan: max 29 FL 23 Jan.

Tundra Swan: max 157 Eel Bay 27 Dec.

Gadwall: max 237 TP 20 Dec.

Am. Wigeon: PtPen 30 Dec, only report.

Am. Black Duck: max 63 BPWMA 2 Dec.
N. Pintail: max 3 BRB 14 Dec; PtPen 31 Dec; f FD 4 Feb thru.
Green-winged Teal: pair FD 23 Jan thru.
Redhead: max 170 StPt 21 Dec; last WI 26 Jan.
Ring-necked Duck: 2 T Lowville 1 Dec; PtPen 4 Dec; 2 BRB 14 Dec; only reports.
Greater Scaup: max 500 StPt 21 Dec; no double-digit counts after Dec.
Lesser Scaup: 2 HH 1 Dec; 4 CV 2 Jan; only reports.
Harlequin Duck: 2 MP 1 Dec (MJ, NL); SLR between GPSP & TIB18-23 Jan (NL, JB).
Surf Scoter: PilPt 29 Dec.
White-winged Scoter: max 15 BPWMA 2 Dec.
Black Scoter: 2 WBSP 2 Dec, only report (JB).
Long-tailed Duck: max 890 MP 2 Dec.
Bufflehead: max 51 SLR T Massena 27 Dec.
Com. Goldeneye: max 816 SLR between FL & TIB 18 Jan.
Barrow's Goldeneye: f TP 23 Dec (NL); f SLR T Massena 11 Jan (JB).
Hooded Merganser: max 40 SLR T Massena 27 Dec (JB).
Com. Merganser: 2000 Pt. Salubrious 20 Dec (NL); max 4000 Eel Bay 27 Dec (NL).
Red-breasted Merganser: max 366 SLR between FL & TIB 18 Jan.
Red-throated Loon: MP 2 Dec; 2 SH 14 Dec; max 5 SH 16 Dec (JB).
Com. Loon: last 3 JCSP 28 Dec.
Horned Grebe: last SLR off WHWMA 11 Jan.
Red-necked Grebe: PtPen 4 Dec (ET); SH 16 Dec (JB); only reports.
Double-crested Cormorant: last HH 26 Dec.
Great Blue Heron: ULLWMA thru; 4 other Jan reports more than usual.

HAWKS—ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: unprecedented numbers throughout inland areas Jan & Feb; max up to 28/day T Champion Feb.
N. Harrier: PtPen 15 Dec & 15 Feb only reports.
Sharp-shinned Hawk: 9 reports but several suspected to be misidentified Cooper's Hawks.
Cooper's Hawk: many reports; estimated to outnumber Sharp-shinned Hawks 10-1.
N. Goshawk: imm ULLWMA 12 Dec; ad FD 17 Dec; only reports.
Red-tailed Hawk: 5-12/day typical most areas; modest winter numbers.
Rough-legged Hawk: max 12 PtPen 7 Dec; few counts of more than 4-6/day.

Golden Eagle: T Copenhagen 24 Feb (TF).
Am. Coot: FD 23 Jan thru, only report.
Bonaparte's Gull: max 2 MP 2 Dec; last PtPen 4 Dec.
Little Gull: 2 MP 1 Dec (NL).
Ring-billed Gull: max 21 WISP 3 Dec; virtually absent after Dec.
Herring Gull: max 350 WBSP 2 Dec.
Iceland Gull: max 7 HP 7 Jan where present to at least 6 Feb; T Ellisburg farm sewage lagoon 19 Jan only other report.
Glaucous Gull: max 5 HP 24 Jan where several other report Jan; BRB 14 Dec only other report.
Great Black-backed Gull: max 130 HP 7 Dec.

PIGEONS—FALCONS

E. Screech-Owl: T Stockholm 16 Feb only report.
Snowy Owl: up to 15/day PtPen thru; up to 9/day fields T Leray & Philadelphia including FD thru; up to 8/day BRV thru; smaller concentrations elsewhere in lowland areas; high.
Short-eared Owl: up to 9/day PtPen through; 1-4/day CV 15 Dec thru; PRWMA 15 Dec; flying over SLR T Waddington 11 Jan.
N. Saw-whet Owl: T Norwood 18 Feb, only report.
Belted Kingfisher: last CV 17 Dec.
Red-headed Woodpecker: 1 ad & 2 juv thru on FD territory that has been continuously occupied since May 2012.
Red-bellied Woodpecker: max 3 PtPen 19 Jan.
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Watertown feeder 18 Jan, only report (LE).
Northern Flicker: male with red moustache T Orleans 20 Feb flew before could be determined whether Red-shafted or Intergrade (NL!); 8 reports of Yellow-shafted, scarce.
American Kestrel: 6 reports overwintering birds through 11 Feb; all presumed to have perished by Feb.
Merlin: T Watertown 28 Jan, only report.
Peregrine Falcon: resident pair BI only reports.

FLYCATCHERS—WAXWINGS

Northern Shrike: about half as many reports as usual.
Horned Lark: max 56 T Alexandria 5 Jan, low.
Carolina Wren: T Watertown 3-8 Dec; CV 18 Jan; T Canton 18-22 Feb only reports.
Winter Wren: WBSP 26 Dec (JB), rare in winter.
E. Bluebird: MP 2 Dec only report, low.

Am. Robin: max 8 PilPt 12 Dec; very low.
Bohemian Waxwing: 20 T Lisbon (EW) and 2 T Lowville 24 Jan (AK) only reports until 20 Feb when several flocks arr; max 120 FD 25 Feb.

Cedar Waxwing: max 22 T Massena 27 Dec; scarce.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: 1-5/day NW JEFF; unreported elsewhere.

Snow Bunting: max 785 CV 14 Jan; generally low numbers.

Orange-crowned Warbler: SBSP 26 Dec (JB); rare in winter.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: PtPen 15 Dec, only report (NL).

TANAGERS—WEAVERS

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: at T Stockholm feeder 21 Dec to 2 Feb (AM, photos!), rare in winter.

E. Towhee: T Adams feeder early Dec to 9 Feb (NW!), rare in winter.

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 78 PS 2 Jan.

Field Sparrow: T Canton 21 Dec (TL!), rare in winter.

Song Sparrow: 3 reports on Great Backyard Bird Count 12-15 Feb; only one other report after 8 Dec.

White-throated Sparrow: generally scarce but good numbers at scattered feeders including max up to 15/day KC thru.

Red-winged Blackbird: 5 reports.

E. Meadowlark: last 2 PtPen 15 Dec.

Rusty Blackbird: SH 14 Dec, only report (JB, CC, LC).

Common Grackle: T Watertown 13 Feb only report.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 8 T Massena 14 Feb.

Purple Finch: 6 reports, scarce.

Red Crossbill: 2 Taylor Creek SF 24 Jan (JB), only report.

Common Redpoll: max 120 FD 9 Dec & PRGC 21 Feb; most reports of fewer than 30; modest flight year.

Hoary Redpoll: FD 11 Feb (JB!); 2 T Canton 13 Feb (RR!); T Potsdam 19 Feb (JN!); PRGC 21 Feb (JB!); T Canton 27 Feb (TW photos!).

Pine Siskin: max 27 T Lowville 10 Jan; small flocks throughout.

Evening Grosbeak: 3 T Orleans 3 Jan; T Stockholm 29 Jan only reports.