

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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Winter was mild and with much less snow than normal. December was especially warm, with high temperatures exceeding 50° F on 12 days and a maximum of 67° on 14 December. January and February were cooler but mostly mild, with daytime highs mostly in the 20s and 30s interspersed with periodic brief cold snaps during which temperatures were closer to normal. The most sustained cold of the season occurred 11-14 February, culminating in the coldest night of the year on the 14th, when the temperature dropped to -37° in Watertown, which is about as cold as it typically gets in Jefferson County. Snowfall was light all season, but freezing rain was a regular occurrence although there were no major storms.

Waterfowl diversity was better than most years, although maximum counts for some of the most common species were modest. The Snow Goose migration has been occurring progressively later in the year for more than a decade, but was especially late this winter, largely occurring during the last few days of December and first week of January. Until recently Snow Geese were unheard of after December. Rare geese included a single Cackling Goose and two reports of Greater White-fronted Goose. Impressive numbers of waterfowl congregated in Black River Bay during December, including an apparent Regional record count of **1150** Tundra Swans on 19 December. More than 5000 Greater Scaup were on Black River Bay that day as well, more than have been observed here in several years. Among the more significant duck reports were a single female King Eider at Montario Point 15 January and at least two different Barrow's Goldeneye at Fisher's Landing.

Several species of waterbird were present in above average and perhaps unprecedented numbers, most notably Common Loon, with more than 25 reports, many of multiple individuals. The four reports each of Red-throated Loon and Red-necked Grebe is above average. An immature **Great Cormorant** was in the St. Lawrence River in Massena on 6 December.

Except for Bald Eagle, which was widespread, raptor numbers were rather low. It was yet another poor year for Rough-legged Hawk, and Red-tailed Hawk numbers were down as well. Cooper's Hawks were among the bright spots as they seemed to be everywhere this winter, although I suspect many were misidentified as Sharp-shinned Hawks by some observers based on eBird data, which showed nearly identical numbers of Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks. By contrast a survey of a few of the most experienced birders in Region 6 suggests that Cooper's actually outnumbered Sharpies by 4 or 5 to 1.

A late Dunlin at Coles Creek State Park on 6 December was a welcome sight in a Region where any shorebird in winter is noteworthy. It was a rather

strange winter for gulls. Unlike most years, Ring-billed Gulls persisted throughout the winter, especially near Lake Ontario where they were relatively common. White-winged gulls were tough to find, especially Iceland Gull for which there was just one report. Glaucous Gulls also seemed to be scarce, although there were a few reports of multiple individuals from Hawkins Point.

Snowy Owls were much scarcer than the previous two winters and were tough to find away from western Jefferson County. It was also a modest year for wintering Short-eared Owls, although a few individuals apparently made it through the winter. Eastern Screech-, Long-eared, and Saw-whet Owls were all reported, something that doesn't occur most seasons.

The rarest bird of the season was a **Varied Thrush** that visited a Canton feeder briefly each day from early January through the end of the period. The homeowners didn't wish to have the bird advertised, but a few Canton-area birders were lucky enough to see it. Another surprise was a Boreal Chickadee that appeared at a Fort Drum feeder for a few days in January. Otherwise passerine highlights included more half-hardies than usual, most notably Winter Wrens at three locations, a Hermit Thrush at Lakeview WMA, a Nashville Warbler at Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, a Fox Sparrow at Perch River WMA, and a White-crowned Sparrow and an Eastern Meadowlark on Point Peninsula.

Bohemian Waxwings and most species of irruptive finch were present this winter, but mostly in small numbers. Scattered flocks of Bohemian Waxwings were present in central and northern St. Lawrence County but were scarcely reported elsewhere. Unlike the past few winters, Purple Finches were fairly common throughout the winter. Red Crossbills apparently nested in southern St. Lawrence County, but the few reports I received lacked details. A flock of 18 Pine Grosbeaks at Wilson Hill WMA on 31 January and six White-winged Crossbills at Upper and Lower Lakes WMA on 28 February were the only reports for these species. Common Redpolls were nearly as scarce, with one flock of 70 at Coles Creek State Park on 17 January and just three other reports at feeders.

For the season I received reports of 124 species, the highest winter tally in at least a decade and beating the species total from the winter of 2011-12, another unusually warm winter, by just one species. This season's tally was certainly a product of a mild winter, but also of the continuing increase in the number of birders regularly submitting checklists to eBird from nearly all portions of Region 6. The highlight of the season was certainly the Varied Thrush, although it's unfortunate that so few were able to see it. Perhaps the biggest disappointment was the scarcity of finches in a year when nearly every species of irruptive finch came south to some degree.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart I, T Massena; BRB – Black River Bay; BRV – Black River Valley; CCSP – Coles Creek SP; CPSP – Cedar Pt SP; CV – T Cape Vincent; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; FL – Fisher’s Landing, T Alexandria; GPSP – Grass Pt SP; HH – Henderson Harbor; HP – Hawkins Pt, T Massena; ICNC – Indian Creek Nature Center, T Canton; KC – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; LWMA – Lakeview WMA; MP – Montario Pt, T Ellisburg; PilPt – Pillar Pt; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; PtPen – Pt Peninsula; PtSal – Pt Salubrious; RWSP – Robert G. Wehle SP; SBSP – Southwick Beach SP; SLR – St. Lawrence Ri; SLV – St. Lawrence Valley; StPt – Stony Pt, T Henderson; ULLWMA – Upper & Lower Lakes WMA; WI – Wellesley I; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA.

WATERFOWL - VULTURES

Greater White-fronted Goose: 2 ICNC 12 Dec (JB); 2 CV 20 Dec (DM, ph).

Snow Goose: bulk of the “fall” migration 30 Dec to 9 Jan, late; max 5000 T Ellisburg 31 Dec.

Cackling Goose: CV 20-26 Dec (TLe, NL), only report.

Mute Swan: max 21 GPSP 31 Jan.

Trumpeter Swan: max 19 ULLWMA 12 Dec; 12 additional reports from PRWMA & Lake Ontario shoreline.

Tundra Swan: max **1150** BRB 26 Dec (JB), Reg record high.

Gadwall: max 104 PRWMA 19 Dec.

Am. Wigeon: max 3 SBSP 20 Dec; last T Orleans 24 Jan.

Am. Black Duck: max 185 BRB 26 Dec.

Mallard: max 285 BRB 19 Dec, low.

N. Shoveler: 5 BRB 19 Dec (JB); ULLWMA 22 Dec (RM); rare in winter.

N. Pintail: max 7 BRB 19 Dec; 7 other reports.

Green-winged Teal: ULLWMA 21 & 22 Dec (RM); PtSal 9 Jan (CN); only reports.

Canvasback: max 9 BRB 19 Dec; 10 other reports.

Redhead: max 330 RWSP 25 Jan.

Ring-necked Duck: max 90 PRWMA 19 Dec; StPt 31 Jan to 2 Feb, only reports after Dec.

Greater Scaup: max 5400 BRB 19 Dec.

Lesser Scaup: max 15 PRWMA 20 Dec.

King Eider: f MP 15 Jan (JB), only report.

Surf Scoter: HH & MP 15 Jan, only reports.

White-winged Scoter: max 59 HH 9 Jan.

Black Scoter: PtPen 30-31 Jan & FL 8 Jan, only reports.

Long-tailed Duck: max 620 MP 15 Jan, low for such a mild winter.

Bufflehead: max 125 WI 2 Jan, high.

Com. Goldeneye: max 550 WI 2 Jan.

Barrow’s Goldeneye: f FL 12 Jan to 28 Feb (NL, JB, RB); 1st win m FL 28 Feb (NL).

Hooded Merganser: max 16 BI 3 Dec.

Hooded Merganser X Com. Goldeneye: m & f FL 12 Jan to early Feb (NL).

Com. Merganser: max 750 PilPt 5 Jan; high count 310 CCSP 17 Jan, low.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 481 CV 26 Dec.

Ruddy Duck: FL 22 Jan (NL); StPt 31 Jan (AS); only reports.

Red-throated Loon: HH 1 Dec; StPt 4 Dec; BRB 19 & 26 Dec; only reports.

Com. Loon: max 7 CV 25 Jan (DM), high; 27+ reports more than usual.

Horned Grebe: max 7 StPt 12 Dec.

Red-necked Grebe: 2 BI 6 Dec; HH & StPt 13 -26 Jan; PtPen 20 Jan; CPSP 30 Jan; more than usual.

Double-crested Cormorant: last HH 15 Jan.

GREAT CORMORANT (R6): immature BI 6 Dec (JB).

Great Blue Heron: last KC 15 Feb.

Turkey Vulture: T Brownville 26 Dec (LE, ph), rare in winter; arr T Croghan & T Leray 26 Feb.

HAWKS - LARIDS

Bald Eagle: 85 reports to eBird; widespread.

N. Harrier: many Dec to early Jan; scarce after 15 Jan.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 15 reports to eBird of which many suspected to be Cooper's Hawks.

Cooper's Hawk: 15 reports to eBird.

N. Goshawk: imm T Canton 21 Dec.

Red-shouldered Hawk: T Parishville 15 Dec (DE, AE, ph), rare but possibly increasing in winter.

Red-tailed Hawk: fewer than most winters.

Rough-legged Hawk: mostly 1-4/day in favored locations; max 12 Line Road T Lisbon & Oswegatchie 21 Jan; another poor year.

Golden Eagle: PRWMA 4 Dec (AB).

Am. Coot: PilPt 6 Jan (AB); CV 15 Jan (NL); only reports.

Dunlin: last CCSP 6 Dec (JB), late.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 39 BRB 26 Dec.

Little Gull: PilPt 7 Dec (NL), only report.

Ring-billed Gull: small numbers persisted Lake Ontario & SLR thru.

Herring Gull: max 230 BI 6 Dec.

Iceland Gull: BI 7 Dec, only report!

Lesser Black-backed Gull: 3 reports BRB & Chaumont Bay 24-26 Dec.

Glaucous Gull: max 10 HP 22 Jan.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 225 HP 23 Jan.

PIGEONS - PARROTS

E. Screech-Owl: 2 reports NW JEFF.

Snowy Owl: many reports 1-2 W JEFF & BRV, scarce elsewhere; many fewer than previous 2 winters.

Long-eared Owl: T Potsdam 24 Dec, only report.

Short-eared Owl: 2-7/day CV thru; T Colton 2 Feb; 4 reports elsewhere W JEFF late Dec & Jan.

N. Saw-whet Owl: 2 PtPen 27 Dec.

Belted Kingfisher: last FL 25 Jan.

Red-headed Woodpecker: none FD, 1st winter since 2011-12.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: 35 reports to eBird mostly W JEFF but several T Canton.

N. Flicker: max 8 PtPen 25 Dec; 22 other reports mostly W JEFF and T Massena.

Am. Kestrel: 21 reports mostly Dec but at least two late Feb suggesting winter survivors.

Merlin: 6 reports, below average for recent winters.

Peregrine Falcon: T Hammond 19 Jan, only report away from T Massena & T Louisville where resident.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: 15 reports; scarce for 2nd consecutive year.

Horned Lark: max 300+ CV Feb (GS).

Boreal Chickadee: at FD feeder 5 Jan (EMo).

Tufted Titmouse: about 50 reports mostly T Watertown & Lake Ontario shore but 5 reports SLV.

Carolina Wren: ICNC 22 Dec; T Croghan 14 & 20 Feb; only reports.

Winter Wren: StPt 20 Dec (TL); MP 29 Jan (NL); ULLWMA 7 Feb (JB); rare in winter.

E. Bluebird: 8 rep Lake Ontario shore & 5 rep central SLV.

Hermit Thrush: LWMA 17 Jan (TL); T Canton late Jan (MG); rare in winter.

Am. Robin: max 585 KC 9 Feb; good numbers T Watertown, Lake Ontario shore, and SLR thru.

VARIED THRUSH: T Canton feeder early Jan thru (JA, MA, ph), *intro*.

Bohemian Waxwing: 20 reports N STLA where max 140 T Madrid 7 Feb; 2 MP 15 Jan & 72 T Lowville 8 Feb, only reports outside STLA.

Cedar Waxwing: max 150 StPt 20 Dec, where relatively common thru; mostly scarce elsewhere.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: 8 widely scattered reports; max 6 CV 4 Jan.

Snow Bunting: max 1000 CV Jan (GS).

Nashville Warbler: ULLWMA 21 Dec (RM!), rare in winter.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 3 reports T Henderson, where max 4 StPt 28 Feb; apparently wintered StPt in small numbers.

SPARROWS - WEAVERS

Am. Tree Sparrow: max 48 PtPen 22 Jan.

Fox Sparrow: PRWMA 28 Feb (JB), rare in winter.

Song Sparrow: more than 20 reports of up to 10/day, more than usual.

White-throated Sparrow: 50+ reports of up to 10/day, good numbers.

White-crowned Sparrow: PtPen 22 Jan (BP), rare in winter.

Dark-eyed Junco: 250+ plus reports including many groups 10-35, more than usual.

Red-winged Blackbird: 12 reports more than usual; max 10 T Croghan 29 Feb, may be early migrants.

E. Meadowlark: sev rep PtPen to 22 Jan.

Com. Grackle: 3 reports, scarce.

Brown-headed Cowbird: 4 reports, max 5 Ogdensburg 14 Feb.

Pine Grosbeak: 18 WHWMA 31 Jan (HVZ), only report.

Purple Finch: 50+ reports; max 32 T Colton 29 Jan; more than most recent winters.

Red Crossbill: sev rep Adirondacks lacked details; 5 T Potsdam 24 Dec (PA), only report outside Adirondacks.

White-winged Crossbill: 6 ULLWMA 28 Feb (JB), only report.

Com. Redpoll: 70 CCSP 17 Jan; only 3 other reports of 1-2 at feeders.

Pine Siskin: many reports of up to 45 at feeders.

Evening Grosbeak: max 11 T Stockholm feeder 2 Jan.