

REGION 1—NIAGARA FRONTIER

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It was a fairly typical December with cold winds and three lake effect snow events. The mean temperature was 31.2° F, 1.1° above normal. Monthly precipitation at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport was 4.06", 0.17" more than usual, with 30.1" of snow, 2.7" more than usual. January 2017 was warm and mostly mild, with 12 days that remained above freezing, the third most for January going back to 1880. The mean temperature was 31.0°, 6.1° above normal. The monthly precipitation was 2.92", 0.26" below normal, with only 11.0" of snow, 14.3" below normal, and lacking any deep snowpack. Lake Erie remained opened throughout the month. February's mean temperature was 34.8°, 8.5° above normal. The monthly precipitation was 2.26", 0.23" below normal, with only 5.0" of snowfall, 12.3" below normal. The mild winter allowed for more lingering waterfowl and other species less eager to fly south. The warmer February brought an early return for the first wave of spring migrants, including some record dates.

Overwintering Canada Geese were plentiful, and they were augmented in February by the arrival of migrants. Sightings of other goose species are still uncommon in mid-winter, with just a few Cackling and Snow Goose reports. A group of 122 **Snow Geese** on Lake Ontario in late January may have been early or facultative migrants. There were three reports of **Trumpeter Swans**, while sightings of Tundra Swans could be neatly categorized as fall departures, overwintering, and spring arrivals based on dates and locations. Several of the dabbling duck species overwintered more than usual, and all regularly occurring species arrived or increased in late February with the exception of Blue-winged Teal, which is typically the last to arrive since it has the longest migration.

Noteworthy diving duck sightings included two **King Eider** reports, with one staying around Point Breeze into early January. There were up to five **Harlequin Ducks** throughout the season in the rapids above Niagara Falls, plus sightings of two on the Niagara River in Buffalo and one at Fort Niagara SP. A **Black Scoter** at Cuba Lake was a rare inland report. Shelly Seidman photographed a **Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser** at Buffalo Harbor.

Red-throated Loons have been occurring more frequently on Lake Ontario in recent winters, but we haven't seen anything like the 47 reported by Peter Yoerg on the waterfowl count between Fort Niagara SP and Olcott. An **Eared Grebe** continued at Batavia WWTP into early December. Red-necked Grebes were uncommon this winter.

Shawn Doyle was delighted to discover and photograph an **American White Pelican** at Cuba Lake on 6 December. A **Cattle Egret** was also on the late side on that same date as found by Susanne Streeg at Barcelona Harbor.

Black Vultures wintered along the Niagara River in Lewiston for the sixth consecutive winter. Turkey Vultures were also present in Lewiston, including higher than normal numbers in December and a few were spotted elsewhere in the winter. The first likely spring arrival was 15 February.

There were no large concentrations of Bald Eagles reported this winter which seems to be on par with a mild winter. **Northern Goshawks** were reported in two locations. Rough-legged Hawks were not common this winter.

Sandhill Cranes were early to return in spring migration like many other species. Two were found at Iroquois NWR, a regular location, starting 23 February, and Lynne Landon was surprised to see a flock of 13 fly over her Youngstown yard on 28 February.

American Woodcock had only been reported once in February prior to this year, making this year's wave of early arrivals unprecedented. It started off with a report in Portland on 20 February. Many birders then went out to check their local spots for the excitement of the first woodcock of the spring and heard them. A **Lesser Yellowlegs** identified and photographed by Joel Strong in Porter was record early by weeks on 24 February. Killdeer made a widespread return on 22 February.

Chris Kundl identified an adult **Slaty-backed Gull** resting just off Goat Island at Niagara Falls SP on 1 January. Given the New Year's holiday, many birders rushed out to see this rarity. The gull was re-sighted in the same location somewhat regularly through 16 January. Iceland Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gull totals hit maxima in the 20s in January; this may owe more to diligent counting than a seasonal trend. With the mild winter some Bonaparte's Gulls remained on the Niagara River through the winter. There were three juvenile **Black-legged Kittiwake** reports and three **Black-headed Gull** reports on the Niagara River in December. Given regular daily movements it's hard to know if these involved the same individuals or not. A juvenile **Sabine's Gull** was a nice find at Devil's Hole SP on 10 December.

A farmer in Napoli found a feisty but injured **Snowy Owl** near a busy road on 20 December. Fortunately he was successful in flagging down help in the form of NYSDEC environmental conservation officers who captured the owl (NYSDEC ECO Highlights email). A few months later the owl was released after successful rehabilitation. This was the only Snowy Owl reported away from Buffalo Harbor or the Niagara River this winter. The maximum count at Buffalo Harbor was three. **Long-eared Owls** were reported from three locations, while **Short-eared Owls** were reported from six locations, most of which are at least semi-regular areas of occurrence. **Northern Saw-whet Owls** were reported at the SUNY Buffalo north campus and Allegany SP.

Northern Shrike reports were unremarkable. **Common Ravens** continue to increase in the northern parts of the Region after being limited to the southern portion of the Region for many years. **Fish Crows** were reported at Niagara Falls a few times in early January, including a group of six. There were regular reports just across the Niagara River in Fort Erie, Ontario again this winter.

The mild weather was likely a factor for some species sticking around this winter, but the species involved also fit the trend of gradual range modifications through climate change. Fox Sparrow was the most notable change this winter, with reports from 14 locations in December alone, 2-3 that wintered at Tiff NP, and a few reports in late February that may have been early arrivals. That's a leap from a species that was irregularly reported in winter even a few years ago. Winter sightings of Winter Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, and Gray Catbird, while still notable, are becoming less remarkable.

A group of five **Bohemian Waxwings** in Wilson on 1 December was the only winter report. An adult male **"Oregon" Junco** was photographed at a feeder in Orchard Park in January.

Blackbirds returned with the warmup in February as well as the first few Eastern Meadowlark reports. It was another slow winter for irruptive finches. There were scattered reports of Pine Siskins in low numbers. Evening Grosbeak reports were limited to two locations in Allegany County.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AlSP – Allegany SP, CATT; BeSP – Beaver I SP, ERIE; BMAC – Beaver Meadow Audubon Center, WYOM; BufH – Buffalo Harbor, ERIE; BuSP – Buckhorn I SP, ERIE; BWWT – Batavia Wastewater Treatment Plant, GENE; ChauL – Chautauqua L, CHAU; DH – Dunkirk Harbor, CHAU; DHSP – Devil's Hole SP, NIAG; EvSP – Evangola SP, ERIE; FMCSP – Four Mile Creek SP, NIAG; FNSP – Fort Niagara SP, NIAG; GHSP – Golden Hill SP, NIAG; INWR – Iroquois NWR, GENE/ORLE; LBSP – Lakeside Beach SP, ORLE; LESP – Lake Erie SP, CHAU; NF – Niagara Falls, NIAG; NFSP – Niagara Falls SP, NIAG; NPP – Niagara Power Project on NR, NIAG; NR – Niagara Ri; OOWMA – Oak Orchard WMA, GENE/ORLE; PB – Point Breeze, ORLE; PG – Point Gratiot, CHAU; RWNP – Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve, ERIE; Tiff NP – Tiff Nature Preserve, ERIE; TWMA – Tonawanda WMA, GENE/NIAG.

WATERFOWL - VULTURES

Snow Goose: DH 16 Dec; Hanover CHAU 1 Jan; 122 LBSP 28 Jan (DBem), high count for month, possible early movements; 6 Oakfield GENE 22 Feb; 100 Yates ORLE 23 Feb (DSh); 11, 14 Porter NIAG 24, 25 Feb.

Cackling Goose: 3 Buffalo ERIE 18 Dec; BeSP 22 Jan; 2 Wilson NIAG, 2 PB 6 Feb; John White WMA 22 Feb; max 5 Hartland NIAG 25 Feb.

Mute Swan: max 9 PB 4 Dec; 3 Grand I NR 8, 20 Feb; 2 Ellicott CHAU 27 Feb.

Trumpeter Swan: INWR 1 Dec (CM); Newfane NIAG 17 Dec (JS, RW); Wilson NIAG 11 Jan – 18 Feb (WD); only reports.

Tundra Swan: 45 BWWT 5 Dec; 63 Cassadaga CHAU 10 Dec; 109 Ellery CHAU 16 Dec; these 3 sightings indicative of late migration; 245 BuSP 30 Dec; 260 BeSP 1 Feb; these sightings indicative of wintering birds; arr 20, 259 INWR 19, 21 Feb; max 358 Ellicott CHAU 25 Feb.

Wood Duck: Wilson NIAG 17 Dec; PB 17, 21 Dec; Jamestown CBC 18 Dec; S Buffalo ERIE 1-31 Jan; arr 3 Tift NP, RWNP, 3 Pomfret CHAU 24 Feb.

Gadwall: 50 BWWT 5 Dec; 12 S Buffalo ERIE 6 Jan; 100 NFSP 11 Jan; arr 42 Ellicott CHAU 25 Feb.

Am. Wigeon: 4 Celeron ChauL 18 Dec; 4 NF 15 Jan; arr 7 Yates ORLE, SPWS 23 Feb; max 101 INWR 25 Feb.

Am. Black Duck: max 42 Gerry CHAU 5 Jan.

N. Shoveler: max 231, 3 BWWT 8 Dec, 22 Jan, wintered; arr 3 Pomfret CHAU 22 Feb.

N. Pintail: 4, 1 BWWT 16, 25 Jan, wintered; arr 16 BWWT 18 Feb; max 200 OOWMA 28 Feb.

Green-winged Teal: NFSP 1 Jan – 11 Feb; arr 10 GHSP 23 Feb.

Canvasback: 3000 NF 2 Jan (J&AS); max 3045, 3465 BuSP 20 Jan, 4 Feb (AH).

Redhead: max 1375, 1400 NF 13 Dec, 13 Jan; 700 BufH 27 Dec; 2, 22 BWWT 16, 25 Jan; 400 Ellery ChauL 25 Feb.

Ring-necked Duck: 175 BuSP 23 Dec; 6 Celeron ChauL 30 Jan; arr 57 BWWT, 75 INWR 22 Feb.

Greater Scaup: max 2506 Grand I NR 20 Jan; 2500 BufH 11 Feb.

Lesser Scaup: max 60 BufH 28 Dec; arr BWWT 19 Feb.

King Eider: PB 17 Dec – 1 Jan (AG, DBea); Wilson NIAG 21 Feb (WD); only reports.

Harlequin Duck: up to 5 NFSP thru 1 Feb, regular at this location in recent winters; 2 Buffalo NR 2, 21 Jan; FNSP 18 Feb (J&KL, JW).

Surf Scoter: 4 PB 17 Dec; 2 FNSP 23 Dec; 1, 2 BufH 29 Dec, 3 Jan; LESP 2 Jan; Ellicott ChauL 15 Jan (WS, RS); DH 1, 13 Feb; scattered other rep from same locs.

White-winged Scoter: max 135 PB 5, 14 Feb.

Black Scoter: max 5 DH 2, 5 Dec; 2, 1, 3 BufH 3, 25 Dec, 3 Jan; Cuba L ALLE 7 Dec (CG, AC), unusual inland; 3 PB 2 Jan; Buffalo NR 15-22 Jan.

Long-tailed Duck: max 200 Lewiston NR 24 Feb.

Bufflehead: max 600 Buffalo NR 3 Dec; 565 BeSP 18 Dec; arr 3 BWWT 19 Feb.

Com. Goldeneye: 1000 NFSP 5 Dec; 1200 Buffalo NR 1 Jan; max 2062 Grand I NR 20 Jan.

Com. Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser: BufH 3 Feb (SSe, ph.), rare.

Hooded Merganser: 73 INWR 1 Dec; max 131, 100 Cuba L ALLE 7, 12 Dec (CG, AC); 52 DH 31 Dec; 46 N Tonawanda NR 1 Jan.

Com. Merganser: max 225 Cuba L ALLE 12 Dec; 150 Buffalo NR 31 Jan; 175 DH 13 Feb.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 2000 Buffalo NR 13 Dec.

Ruddy Duck: max 349 BWWT 8 Dec; 2, 1 BuSP 17-31 Dec, 10 Jan; 3, 3 BeSP 20 Dec, 20 Jan; 5 DH 1-31 Jan; 3, 2 Barcelona CHAU 2, 17 Jan. arr 1, 11 BWWT 22, 25 Feb.

Red-throated Loon: max 47 FNSP to Olcott NIAG 19 Jan (PY); BeSP 13 Jan; 4 Wilson NIAG 21 Feb.

Com. Loon: FNSP 15 Jan; only report beyond Dec.

Pied-billed Grebe: DH 14 Jan; BeSP 14 Jan; Buffalo NR 21 Jan; only reports beyond Dec.

Horned Grebe: 15 PB, 7 EvSP 2 Jan; BufH 7 Feb; arr RNWP 24 Feb.

Red-necked Grebe: 4 Somerset NIAG 4 Dec; 6 Olcott NIAG 17 Dec; 2 PB 2 Jan; BeSP 10 Jan; max 7 Wilson NIAG 21 Feb.

Eared Grebe: BWWT thru 8 Dec (DBea).

Double-crested Cormorant: max 53 Buffalo NR 7 Jan.

AM. WHITE PELICAN: Cuba L ALLE 6 Dec (SD, ph.), rare.

CATTLE EGRET (R1): Barcelona Harbor CHAU 6 Dec (SSt), rare.

Black Vulture: 14, 7, 4 Lewiston NIAG 5 Dec, Jan, 18 Feb, overwintered for at least 6th consecutive year.

Turkey Vulture: 40, 10 Lewiston NIAG 5, 27 Dec, Jan; Buffalo NR 1 Jan; arr Pomfret CHAU 15 Feb; max 66 Orchard Park ERIE 24 Feb.

HAWKS - LARIDS

Bald Eagle: no large concentrations this winter; reported from other traditional wintering and breeding areas.

N. Goshawk: ad Willing ALLE 8 Dec, 8 Feb (CG, AC); Bethany GENE 13 Jan (PH); only reports.

Red-shouldered Hawk: two loc Dec, four loc Jan, ten loc Feb.

Rough-legged Hawk: only 6 on the 10 local CBCs; max 3 Dayton CATT 8 Feb; moderate presence.

Am. Coot: 210 Celeron ChauL 4 Dec; 80, 150 DH 13 Dec, 8 Jan; arr 4, 32 INWR 24, 25 Feb.

Sandhill Crane: arr 3 INWR 23, 25 Feb (PH, CM); 13 Youngstown NIAG 28 Feb (LL), flyover flock.

Killdeer: arr six locs 22 Feb.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS: Porter NIAG 24 Feb (JS! ph.), record early.

Am. Woodcock: arr Portland CHAU 20 Feb (CH), earliest ever; 2, 6 Forestville CHAU 22, 23 Feb (GV); Alden ERIE 23 Feb (JM); 4 Pomfret CHAU 24 Feb; Shelby ORLE 26 Feb; 1, 4 Grand Island ERIE 26, 27 Feb; unprecedented showing for Feb.

Black-legged Kittiwake: juv BuFH 1 Dec; juv Buffalo NR 2 Dec; juv Whirlpool SP NIAG 7, 11 Dec; possibly same bird.

Sabine's Gull: juv DHSP 10 Dec (CK), only report.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 1200 DHSP, 1000 Whirlpool SP NIAG, 1000 NFSP 11 Dec (AG); hundreds remained on lower NR thru winter.

Black-headed Gull: NPP 3 Dec; Whirlpool SP NIAG 4-13 Dec; Buffalo NR 18 Dec; possibly same bird.

Little Gull: max 3 Lewiston NR 20 Jan; relatively few reports.

THAYER'S GULL: regular reports from NFSP, some with photos, mid Dec through Jan; DHSP 4 Feb (WD).

Iceland Gull: 11 NPP 1 Jan; 10, 13 NFSP 6, 26 Jan; max 29 DHSP 25 Jan (CK).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: max 16, 21, 20 NFSP 3 Dec, 18 Jan, 25 Feb (CK); 2 Cuba L ALLE 10 Dec; 5 BuFH 8 Feb.

SLATY-BACKED GULL: NFSP 1-8, 14-16 Jan (CK, mob, ph., NYSARC), great New Year's Day find allowed many birders to see; 5th record for Reg.

Glaucous Gull: 5 NFSP 22 Jan; not reported in high numbers.

G. Black-backed Gull: max 120 NFSP 25 Feb.

PIGEONS – PARROTS

Snowy Owl: Napoli CATT 20 Dec, injured bird brought to rehabilitator; 1, 3, 2 BuFH 20, 24, 30 Jan, at least 1 thru Feb; BuSP 25 Feb; only reports.

Long-eared Owl: Jamestown CHAU 18 Dec (WS); 2, 1, 1 Newfane NIAG 3, 10, 17 Feb; Yates ORLE 14 Feb; only reports.

Short-eared Owl: 3, 3, 1 Shelby ORLE 3 Dec, 2 Jan, 17 Feb; Sheridan CHAU 13 Dec; 4, 2 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 19 Dec, 5 Jan (GV); Royalton NIAG 17 Jan; max 7, 3 Hartland NIAG 31 Jan, 16 Feb; John White WMA GENE 22 Feb.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Amherst ERIE 27 Dec (BM); AISP 21 Feb (CMA); only reports.

Red-headed Woodpecker: LBSP 5 Jan; PG 19 Feb; only reports.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: 7 on the 10 Reg CBCs; four Dec & one Feb rep.

Merlin: rep from 10 or more locs each month.

Peregrine Falcon: increasingly reported.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: apparently fewer than most winters.

Fish Crow: 1, 6 NF 2, 8 Jan (AH, CK); continued reports thru winter in Ft Erie, Ontario, some or all of these may come to roost in Buffalo.

Com. Raven: continue increasing reports in northern portion of Reg; regular in southern portion of Reg.

Horned Lark: max 500 Shelby ORLE 28 Dec (DBea); 220 Bethany GENE 30 Dec (DBea).

Winter Wren: 7 locs; more than usual.

MARSH WREN (R1): BeSP 1 Jan (JM!), few historical winter reports for Reg.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: NFSP 18 Dec; BuSP 28 Jan, 8 Feb; only reports.

E. Bluebird: 262 reported on the 10 Reg CBCs.

Hermit Thrush: Buffalo ERIE 18 Dec; TWMA 24 Dec; FMCS 27 Dec; Bethany GENE 5 Feb; only reports.

Am. Robin: max 617 LBSP 20 Dec (DBem).

Gray Catbird: Tiff NP 2 Dec; Porter NIAG 27 Dec; SPWS 16 Jan; only reports.

Am. Pipit: 2 Dunkirk Airport CHAU, 1 Clarence ERIE 17 Dec; last Jamestown CBC 18 Dec.

Bohemian Waxwing: 5 Wilson NIAG 1 Dec (MS), only report.

Cedar Waxwing: uncommon this winter.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: max 21 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 21 Dec (RS); 13 Somerset NIAG 6 Feb; rep 7 oth locs, small numbers.

Snow Bunting: max 300 N Collins ERIE 31 Dec.

Pine Warbler: Olcott NIAG 18 Feb (CM, SB, WD, BP), only report.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: BuSP thru (AH); Evans ERIE 24 Jan; Newfane NIAG 14 Feb (JS); only reports.

TOWHEES – WEAVERS

E. Towhee: Gaines ORLE 10-29 Dec (DBem); Bethany GENE 1 Jan (PH); only reports.

Chipping Sparrow: Fredonia CHAU 9 Dec (JG), only report.

Field Sparrow: 2 Scio CBC 17 Dec; Busti CHAU 21 Dec; Albion ORLE 28 Dec; only reports.

Fox Sparrow: 14 locs Dec; 2-3 Tifft NP thru; 2 Colden ERIE 26 Feb; 3 Independence ALLE 26 Feb; best winter showing ever.

Swamp Sparrow: 9 on Reg CBCs; 1, 1 SPWS 5 Dec, 21 Jan; BuSP 14 Dec; 2 BMAC; 2

Orchard Park ERIE 31 Dec; INWR 15 Jan; only other reports.

White-crowned Sparrow: 13 Sheridan CHAU 17 Dec; 15 Porter NIAG 22 Dec; 10 Albion ORLE 28 Dec; rep 6 loc Jan & 2 loc Feb.

“Oregon” Dark-eyed Junco: Orchard Park ERIE 30 Jan (SM, ph.); ad m at feeder.

Red-winged Blackbird: 21, 15 Tonawanda ERIE 18 Dec, 1 Jan; 35, 27 Tifft NP 28 Dec, 15 Jan; 22 Orchard Park ERIE 21 Jan; 33 Ripley CHAU 22 Jan; arr 40 Lewiston NIAG 19 Feb; many rep late Feb, early returns.

E. Meadowlark: arr 3 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 24 Feb; Somerset NIAG 27 Feb.

Rusty Blackbird: arr 2-7 BuSP 14-20 Feb (AH); 21 OOWMA 28 Feb.

Com. Grackle: 7 loc Dec thru early Feb; arr Portland CHAU 18 Feb; many rep late Feb, early returns.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 200 Alabama GENE 23 Jan.

Purple Finch: only 19 on the 10 Reg CBCs; max 31 Jamestown CHAU 14 Jan (TL).

Pine Siskin: only 9 rep in single digits; max 5 BMAC 20 Feb.

Evening Grosbeak: 2 Portville ALLE 1 Dec; 8, 15, 14 Whitesville ALLE 8, 31 Jan, 11 Feb; only reports.