

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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Winter was mild and a little wetter than usual. Most of the Region had temperatures one to three degrees above normal for December and more than seven degrees above normal for January and February, and all three months were slightly wetter than average. Daytime highs were mostly in the 30s and 40s F throughout the winter, with a smattering of days in the teens and twenties, but truly cold days were scarce. The temperature failed to rise above freezing just 24 days all winter, unusual in a Region that often stays well below freezing for weeks at a time. The warmest weather of the season came in late February, when the temperature in Watertown hit 61° on the 23rd and 64° on the 25th, as much as 30 degrees warmer than normal. Watertown's temperature dropped below zero on just eight nights that came during several brief cold spells scattered throughout the winter, each followed by an unusually warm spell.

The mild weather resulted in extensive open water on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River that largely persisted all winter. Despite the presence of abundant open water duck numbers were generally low, but the season's species tally included many ducks that are infrequently reported in winter, including Northern Shoveler, King Eider, and all three scoters. For at least the third consecutive year goldeneye numbers were unusually low, especially along the St. Lawrence River, where several traditional winter concentration spots hosted well below 50% of usual numbers. Three Barrow's Goldeneye is on the low side of the normal range seen in Region 6, not surprising given the Common Goldeneye numbers. The late February warm spell brought a significant early arrival of migrating waterfowl, including two Ross's Geese found by Sean Sime on 24 February, and Cackling Geese on the St. Lawrence River on the 26th and at Upper and Lower Lakes WMA on the 28th. The highlight among other waterbirds was a Pacific Loon Nick Leone found off Pillar Point, in an area where Nick has documented this species and possibly the same individual four consecutive years.

Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, and Red-tailed Hawk were all unusually scarce throughout the Region. The scarcity of Northern Harrier in December was especially surprising given the mild winter and presence of hayfields that were not covered by snow, conditions that often result in the persistence of many harriers well into winter. Raptor highlights included a seasonally rare Red-shouldered Hawk found by Tom and Eileen Wheeler north of Canton, a spate of adult Golden Eagle reports from northeast St. Lawrence County that was thought to represent one overwintering bird, and most surprisingly a Black Vulture at a farm on Point Peninsula 2-4 February.

At least two and possibly three Great Gray Owls at Robert Moses State Park

thrilled hundreds of birders, many traveling from throughout the northeastern United States to see them. These owls were first reported in local media by non-birders during January, and area birders had some difficulty tracking them down until Mary Curtis finally found one on 9 February. A second was found within a few days, and several birders believe they saw a third in the area. At least two other Great Gray Owls were reported from Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties but were not well documented, and as far as I can tell were only seen once each.

White-winged gulls were scarce through the first half of the winter but gathered in large numbers in the vicinity of the Moses-Saunders Dam during February. As is often the case, these gulls mostly roosted above the dam in areas that are closed to the public, so that they could only be seen from great distances under conditions that generally precluded species identification. Finally, as the St. Lawrence River started to freeze up these gulls roosted for a few nights below the Moses-Saunders Dam where viewing was much easier. Unfortunately, as soon as the river froze over the ice began to break up thanks to a record warm spell, and the gulls quickly moved back to their favored roost sites above the dam. During the four or five nights that they roosted below the dam a few birders were treated to apparently unprecedented numbers of Glaucous Gulls for New York State, with a high count of 76 on 18 February. That same day Shawn Billerman picked out a Thayer's Gull among the mobs of white-winged gulls, a species that was formerly seen here regularly but has not been documented in recent years. About two dozen Iceland Gulls and at least one Lesser Black-backed Gull were also present along with large numbers of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls.

It was another excellent year for half-hardies, with American Robin and Eastern Bluebird being especially abundant. Robins were widely reported, with especially impressive numbers just west and south of Watertown, including daily counts of as many as 2000 individuals. Other half-hardies seen in the general vicinity included Hermit Thrush, Northern Mockingbird, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. The majority of Eastern Bluebird reports came from central and northern St. Lawrence County, especially at or near Robert Moses State Park. Winter Wren was until recently thought to be generally absent from Region 6 in winter but has been reported at this season with increasing regularity, including three this winter. It remains unclear whether this increase in reports reflects an actual change in occurrence or better reporting as more birders use eBird. Other winter rarities observed this season included one or more Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers at Robert Moses State Park in February, and single Chipping and Fox Sparrows.

In addition to bringing a large, early push of waterfowl, late February's warm spell brought unusually large numbers of icterids into the area. Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles were unusually widespread during the last week of February, with a few flocks numbering in the low hundreds. Smaller numbers of Eastern Meadowlarks and Brown-headed Cowbirds also arrived early. This early blackbird pulse peaked on 25 February, when these

species were moving in numbers more typically seen in late March.

Thanks to the presence of generally very cooperative Great Gray Owls in Massena, far more birders than usual visited the Region in February, many exploring various portions of Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties in addition to chasing the owls. These visiting birders helped contribute to a seasonal tally of 120 species, higher than the long-term winter mean but about average for the past five or six years. There can be no doubt that Great Gray Owl was the bird of the season in Region 6, and the abundance of many half-hardies was another high point for the winter. The general scarcity of Bohemian Waxwings and failure of any serious finch irruption to develop was perhaps the biggest negative to an otherwise pretty interesting winter for birds.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

BRB – Black River Bay; BPWMA – Black Pd WMA; CV – T Cape Vincent; FL – Fisher’s Landing, T Alexandria; GPSP – Grass Point SP; HH – Henderson Harbor; HP – Hawkins Pt, T Massena; JEFF – Jefferson County; KC – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; KPSP – Kring Point SP; LB – Lisbon Beach; LWMA – Lakeview WMA; MP – Montario Pt, T Ellisburg; PilPt – Pillar Pt; PtPen – Point Peninsula; RMSP – Robert Moses SP; SLR – St. Lawrence R; STLA – St. Lawrence County; StPt – Stony Pt, T Henderson; TP – Tibbet’s Pt, T Cape Vincent; ULLWMA – Upper & Lower Lakes WMA; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA.

WATERFOWL - VULTURES

Snow Goose: max 50 T Colton 25 Sep; 5 rep of 1-2 ind each; virtually no movement thru.

Snow Goose: primary southbound migration 3-17 Dec; thousands moved into JEFF from S 22-23 Jan before retreating back S; northbound migrants arr 22 Feb.

Ross’s Goose: 2 T Lisbon 24 Feb (SS).

Cackling Goose: PilPt 3 Dec (WF, KM); 2 T Morristown 26 Feb (GL); T Canton 28 Feb (JB).

Mute Swan: max 33 PtPen 20 Jan.

Trumpeter Swan: 6 reports of 2-6 NW JEFF.

Tundra Swan: max 231 PilPt 9 Dec; few present NW JEFF thru.

Gadwall: max 14 CV 6 Jan.

Am. Wigeon: arr T Watertown & ULLWMA 26 Feb.

Am. Black Duck: max 200 ULLWMA 26 Feb.

Mallard: max 790 SLR Lisbon 15 Jan.

N. Shoveler: 2 arr ULLWMA 26 Feb (JB, BD), only report.

N. Pintail: arr & max 12 ULLWMA 26 Feb; 2 other reports 26 & 27 Feb; only mid-winter reports singles LB, RMSP & TP.

Green-winged Teal: TP 1 Jan only report until arr LWMA 27 Feb.

Green-winged Teal X Common Teal: LWMA 27 Feb (NL!).

Canvasback: Henderson Harbor 24 Feb (JB), only report.

Redhead: max 269 CV 31 Jan.

Ring-necked Duck: max 28 RMSP 25 Feb.

Greater Scaup: max 4000+ HH 22-29 Jan.

Lesser Scaup: max 30 HH 22 Jan.

King Eider: 2 HH 22-25 Jan (NL); at least one still present 29 Jan; only reports.

Surf Scoter: MP 6 Dec (BM), only report.

White-winged Scoter: max 62 StPt 28 Feb.

Black Scoter: max 10 MP 4 Dec; up to 5/day HH 22-29 Jan high for mid-winter; SLR Ogdensburg 11 Feb also unusual date & location.

Long-tailed Duck: max 650 BPWMA 16 Jan, low.

Bufflehead: max 60 PtPen 3 Dec.

Com. Goldeneye: max 700 GPSP 16 Jan; generally low numbers throughout.

Com. Goldeneye X Hooded Merganser: f FL 4-12 Jan (NL); m Collins Landing 1-12 Jan (NL).

Barrow's Goldeneye: f SLR T Hammond 6 Jan (JB); f PilPt 9 Jan (NL); m FL 15 Jan (NL); only reports.

Hooded Merganser: max 27 RMSP 11 Dec.

Com. Merganser: max 695 HH 29 Jan.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 300 TP 29 Jan.

PACIFIC LOON: PilPt 6 Dec same area for 4th consecutive year (NL, report to NYSARC).

Com. Loon: max 16 PilPt 6 Dec; up to 5/day SLR Massena thru early Feb, high for mid-winter.

Horned Grebe: last SLR T Massena 11 Dec.

Red-necked Grebe: last PtPen 10 Jan; 4 Dec reports.

Double-crested Cormorant: on T Croghan road 8 Jan & 2 flying over Moses-Saunders Power Dam 12 Feb, only reports after 6 Dec.

Great Blue Heron: 10 rep thru winter; max 3 T Croghan 19 Feb, early arrivals?

BLACK VULTURE (R6): PtPen 2-4 Feb (LE, JC, photos!).

Turkey Vulture: arr T Croghan 17 Feb; 10 reports 20 Feb thru.

HAWKS - LARIDS

N. Harrier: 4 reports CV; 4 rep rest of R6; unusually scarce given mild winter.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 9 reports to ebird.

Cooper's Hawk: about 20 reports.

N. Goshawk: KC 17 Dec; RMSP 14 & 22 Feb; T Pierrepont 20 Feb.

Red-shouldered Hawk: T Lisbon 11 Feb (EW & TW, photos!), rare in winter.

Red-tailed Hawk: fewer than most winters.

Rough-legged Hawk: low numbers; few reports of more than 2-3/day.

Golden Eagle: juv T Louisville 23 Dec; sev rep NE STLA 19 Feb thru, possibly same wandering ad.

Am. Coot: BRB 17 Dec (JB); SLR Massena 28 Feb (DF); only reports.

Killdeer: arr MP 24 Feb.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 11 KPSP 4 Dec; last PtPen 11 Dec.

Ring-billed Gull: small number SLR thru where usually absent mid-Jan to mid-Feb; widespread arr 23 Feb.

Herring Gull: max 480 HP 18 Feb.

THAYER'S GULL: HP 18 Feb (SB, mob).

Iceland Gull: max 18 HP 18 Feb.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: HP 10 Feb thru.

Glaucous Gull: max 76 HP 18 Feb (AG, MM, SB, mob, *intro*).

Great Black-backed Gull: max 510 HP 18 Feb.

PIGEONS - PARROTS

E. Screech-Owl: T Lyme 7 Feb & T Watertown 18 Feb, only reports.

Snowy Owl: singles multiple dates thru BRB, PtPen, T Hammond & T Philadelphia; only other report KPSP 4 Dec.

GREAT GRAY OWL: up to 3 per day RMSP, initially reported in local media Jan observed daily by birders 9 Feb thru (MC, mob, photos!); singles T Redwood & T Madrid included no details.

Short-eared Owl: CV 15 Jan (BB, DW, JJ), only report.

Belted Kingfisher: rep 8 loc; last T Rossie 19 Feb, winter survivor or early arr?

Red-bellied Woodpecker: about 12 loc St. Lawrence Valley, where increasing.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: several reports RMSP late Feb.

N. Flicker: 1-2/day RMSP & T Canton; 6 reports elsewhere.
Am. Kestrel: more than 20 reports mostly near L Ontario & SLR.
Merlin: 22 reports; continues to increase in winter.
Peregrine Falcon: many sightings resident pair T Massena; 5 reports scattered locations JEFF.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: scores of rep 28 loc, more than usual.
Horned Lark: max 130 CV 6 Jan.
Winter Wren: KC thru (RB); T Lisbon 28 Dec (JB); T Rossie 15 Jan (ET); more than usual.
E. Bluebird: max 14 T Massena 27 Dec; many reports RMSP and 28 other locations mostly St. Lawrence Valley.
Hermit Thrush: Evans Road T Hounsfield 29 Jan (JB, photos!), only report.
Am. Robin: max 2000+ T Hounsfield & Watertown 24 Dec; large numbers throughout R6 but especially W JEFF.
Bohemian Waxwing: max 97 T Canton 24 Feb; only 7 reports 11 Feb thru; low.
Cedar Waxwing: max 300 PtPen 21 Dec; 100+ reports.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: max 4 PtPen 5 Feb; only 8 other reports.
Snow Bunting: max approx 1000 T Hammond 7 Feb (ET); 850 CV 21 Dec (NL), another high tally.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: StPt 16 Jan (JB), only report.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

Chipping Sparrow: HP 10 Feb (JC), rare in winter.
Fox Sparrow: T Brasher 26 Feb (MF), rare in winter.
Song Sparrow: 9 reports Dec & Jan; modest influx 17 Feb thru.
White-throated Sparrow: max 17 KC 9 Jan-13 Feb & FD 10 Jan.
Red-winged Blackbird: T Waddington 10 Dec & PtPen 15 Dec, only reports before Feb; arr T Canton 22 Feb (WG), after which 40 add rep; max 150 RMSP 25 Feb (SM, PL), very high for so early.
E. Meadowlark: 5 arr RMSP 26 Feb (SM), early.
Com. Grackle: no reports Dec or Jan; arr T Canton 22 Feb, after which 22 add rep; max 400 RMSP 25 Feb (WG); very high for so early.
Brown-headed Cowbird: PtPen 10 Dec only report until arr T Hopkinton 19 Feb; max 75 T Hammond 26 Feb (GL), high for so early.
Purple Finch: only 5 reports; max 4 T Canton 3 Jan.
Pine Siskin: 5 reports; max 12 St. Lawrence University T Canton 15 Dec (BD).
Evening Grosbeak: migrants T Canton 3 Dec; up to 20/day in and near Brasher SF thru; max 50 T Pierrepont 20 Feb; 12 T Colton 20 Feb.

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