

## REGION 1—NIAGARA FRONTIER

**Mike Morgante**

6405 Woodberry Court, East Amherst, NY 14051  
morgm@roadrunner.com

After a snowless November, we were reminded in December 2017 what a harsh winter was like, with plenty of arctic air masses and lake effect snowfalls. The mean temperature was 25.4°F, 4.7° below normal, and the coldest December since 2000. Monthly precipitation at Buffalo-Niagara International Airport was 2.93", 0.96" less than usual, with 33.7" of snow, 6.3" more than usual, with 14 days with at least one inch of snowfall. The New Year started with a record low temperature on 1 January and then a roller coaster weather ride that included blizzard conditions on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, a sharp warmup that brought flooding from the rapid snowmelt, and then several cold fronts and snowfalls. The mean temperature was 24.2°, 0.7° below normal. The monthly precipitation was 3.73", 0.55" above normal, with 31.2" of snow, 5.9" above normal. Lake Erie reached the freezing temperature by 2 January. February's mean temperature was 31.9°, 5.6° above normal, with an average first two weeks and then very warm over the last two weeks of the month. The monthly precipitation was 3.61", 1.12" above normal, with 18.1" of snowfall, 0.8" above normal.

The harsh weather in December and January affected some CBCs and seemingly brought birder effort to less than usual. The warmup in the second half of February brought some of the first spring migrants, such as waterfowl, Killdeer, American Robins, and blackbirds, among others.

Among the many geese that came through in the latter half of February were more **Greater White-fronted Geese** than usual. There were multiple reports spanning four counties with a maximum of 12 geese in Hartland. There were two separate sightings of a **Ross's Goose** in late February, with one at Hartland and the other at Iroquois NWR. The passage of Tundra Swans was especially strong on 28 February, with counts in the hundreds from several locations and greater than 2,300 as viewed from Buffalo Harbor.

Nice finds among waterfowl included a **King Eider** at Fort Niagara SP in January and up to five **Harlequin Ducks** continuing above Niagara Falls as viewed from Three Sisters Islands. It has been a delight to have the "harleys" become so regular here in recent years. Alec Humann picked out a **Trumpeter Swan** among the many Tundra Swans around Beaver Island SP. It was then viewed throughout the winter.

At least three **Black Vultures** overwintered in the Lewiston area, which marks the seventh consecutive winter for this species in the area. Turkey Vultures were found in Lewiston as well as a few other locations, as it is becoming less rare during the winter season, even in a cold winter like this one.

The largest winter count of Bald Eagles was 18 near Dunkirk Harbor in February. An adult **Northern Goshawk** was photographed in Ellicottville on

New Year's Eve by Gary Hallick for the only winter report. There was a moderate presence of Rough-legged Hawks and an impressive number for wintering Red-shouldered Hawks, with sightings from many more locations than usual. David Crowe photographed a **Golden Eagle** in Wellsville on 21 February. It is hard to say if it was a wintering bird or moving north with the late February warm spell.

Paul Hess counted 21 **Sandhill Cranes** in Alabama in early December. He also had the first crane arrival, sighting two at Iroquois NWR on 27 February. There were single reports of Wilson's Snipe and **American Woodcock** in December, while woodcocks returned in late February for the second year in a row.

Gull numbers and diversity were unexceptional, at least for Niagara River standards. The cold conditions pushed most of the smaller gulls south by early in January. A juvenile **Black-legged Kittiwake** at Niagara Falls on 1 December was the only notable find.

Easily the most amazing find this season was an **Inca Dove** in Tom Simmons' Celoron backyard. The dove stuck around for just over one week and made infrequent feeder visits. If accepted by NYSARC, this will be a first State record. Inca Dove has developed a relatively light pattern of vagrancy to the Midwest, and there are also a few other records in the east.

A good number of **Snowy Owls** were around this winter, with reports from many locations and a maximum of four around Buffalo Harbor. **Short-eared Owls** were found at nine locations, most of which were locations of previous sightings. There was only one **Long-eared Owl** report.

A **Red-headed Woodpecker** took up winter residence near the nature center at Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve, allowing many birders to have a nice look. The species was found at three other locations as well. It was a decent winter for Yellow-bellied Sapsucker reports, with two to five per month. Sue Barth picked out a **Bohemian Waxwing** in a group of Cedar Waxwings in Boston on 21 January, which marks a rare sighting away from the Lake Ontario Plain. One at Fort Niagara SP in late December fit better within the usual context for sightings of this species.

Even in colder winters there are "half hardy" species to be found, perhaps in increasing numbers over time. Reports this winter included Eastern Towhee and Fox Sparrow both at four locations, three Chipping Sparrow reports, and one report each for Hermit Thrush, Gray Catbird, Field Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, and Eastern Meadowlark. Up to 22 Yellow-rumped Warblers were found on the Oak Orchard CBC, and they were present throughout the winter at Buckhorn Island SP. Up to ten Rusty Blackbirds also frequented the woods at Buckhorn Island SP this winter. A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, photographed visiting a feeder in Jamestown, was unusual for December.

Lapland Longspurs were found in a number of locations in low numbers, as well as being reported with a few counts between 30 and 50 on the Lake

Ontario Plain. Three American Pipits flying over Buffalo Harbor on 24 February were early arrivals.

It was not a good winter for finding northern finches, with just scattered reports of **Pine Siskins**, more so in the Southern Tier, and two reports of lone **Common Redpolls**.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Wendy Akin, Sue Barth, Doug Beattie, David Crowe, Willie D'Anna, Elaine Dart, Gary Hallick, Carol Hardenburg, Paul Hess, Alec Humann, Tom Kerr, Josh Ketry, Chris Kundl, Twan Leenders, Pat Martin, Vincent Meyer, Celeste Morien, Jeff Reed, Jajeane Rose-Burney, Shelly Seidman, William Seleen, Debbie Sharon, Tom Simmons, Joel Strong, Kirk Vanstrom, Gale VerHague, Chris Wood.

## ABBREVIATIONS

**BeSP** – Beaver I SP, ERIE; **BMAC** – Beaver Meadow Audubon Center, WYOM; **BufH** – Buffalo Harbor, ERIE; **BuSP** – Buckhorn I SP, ERIE; **BWWTP** – Batavia Wastewater Treatment Plant, GENE; **ChauL** – Chautauqua L, CHAU; **DH** – Dunkirk Harbor, CHAU; **DHSP** – Devil's Hole SP, NIAG; **FLC** – Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo, ERIE; **FNSP** – Fort Niagara SP, NIAG; **INWR** – Iroquois NWR, GENE/ORLE; **JAS** – Jamestown Audubon Society, CHAU; **LBSP** – Lakeside Beach SP, ORLE; **NF** – Niagara Falls, NIAG; **NFSP** – Niagara Falls SP, NIAG; **NR** – Niagara R; **PB** – Point Breeze, ORLE; **RWNP** – Reinstein Woods Nature Preserve, ERIE; **Tift NP** – Tift Nature Preserve, ERIE; **TBNP** – Times Beach NP, Buffalo, ERIE; **WoBSP** – Woodlawn Beach SP, ERIE.

### WATERFOWL - VULTURES

**Snow Goose:** N Collins ERIE 3 Dec; BuSP 25 Dec; 4 Centerville ALLE 26 Dec; 2 Dunkirk CHAU 30 Dec; arr 3 Hartland NIAG 23 Feb; max 8 Batavia GENE 24 Feb.

**Ross's Goose:** Hartland NIAG 22 Feb (JS ph); INWR 28 Feb (PH, CM ph); has become annual as spring migrant.

**Greater White-fronted Goose:** 7, 10, 12 Hartland NIAG 22, 23, 27 Feb (WD, PM); 3 Yates ORLE 25-26 Feb; max 23 Shelby ORLE 27 Feb (DSh); Somerset NIAG 28 Feb; 7 Alexander GENE 28 Feb (ED, DB); 4 Attica WYOM (ED, DB, SB, TK) 28 Feb; excellent spring showing.

**Cackling Goose:** six Dec rpts; DH 23, 27 Jan (GV), only Jan rpt; max 18 Somerset NIAG 28 Feb (WD).

**Mute Swan:** singles reported from five locs.

**Trumpeter Swan:** BuSP 8-14 Dec, 8-28 Jan, 13, 15 Feb (AH), likely same bird; 6 Sheridan CHAU, DH 1-24 Feb (GV); only reports.

**Tundra Swan:** 210 BuSP 11 Dec; 131 NF 28 Jan; max 2328 BufH, 400 N Collins ERIE, 357 Attica WYOM, 325 Hartland NIAG, 310 BWWTP 28 Feb, big flight day.

**Wood Duck:** five Dec rpts; FLC 3, 15 Jan; Tift NP 28 Jan; arr 2 Newstead ERIE 1 Feb.

**Gadwall:** 52 Tift NP 1 Dec; 50 NFSP 7 Jan; arr 5 Pomfret CHAU, 14 INWR 21 Feb.

**Am. Wigeon:** 8 NFSP 6 Jan; max 97 INWR 21 Feb.

**Am. Black Duck:** max 30 NFSP 8 Jan.

**N. Shoveler:** max 23 BWWTP 9 Dec; BuSP 23 Jan, only Jan rpt; arr 3 DH 22 Feb.

**N. Pintail:** 1, 6 DH 8, 24 Jan; arr 8 Newstead ERIE 1 Feb; 285 INWR 21 Feb; max 420 Hartland NIAG 27 Feb.

**Green-winged Teal:** three Jan rpts; arr 5 Orchard Park ERIE, 2 INWR 21 Feb.

**Canvasback:** max 7500, 8700 BuSP 10, 24 Jan (AH); 3000 BeSP 28 Jan.

**Redhead:** 198 Ellery ChauL 2 Dec; max 500, 800 BufH 16 Dec, 10 Jan; 500 BuSP 23 Jan; 250 DH 22 Feb; 88 BWWT 28 Feb.

**Ring-necked Duck:** 102 BuSP 14 Dec; 3 Carlton ORLE 13 Jan; arr 4 Wilson NIAG 21 Feb; max 674 INWR 28 Feb.

**Greater Scaup:** max 3500 BufH 4 Feb.

**Lesser Scaup:** max 1023 Ellery ChauL 2 Dec (WS); 25 BufH 20 Jan; 50 BeSP 28 Jan; arr 86 BWWT 28 Feb.

**King Eider:** Buffalo NR 9 Dec (TK, SS); FNSP 20 Jan (CW); only reports.

**Harlequin Duck:** up to 5 NFSP thru 23 Feb, regular at this location in recent winters.

**Surf Scoter:** 7 FNSP 3 Dec; PB 17 Dec; BuSP 29 Dec; FNSP 17 Feb; only reports.

**White-winged Scoter:** max 142 FNSP 20 Jan.

**Black Scoter:** max 6 FNSP 3 Dec; BufH 6 Dec; only reports.

**Long-tailed Duck:** 275 Lewiston NR 20 Jan; max 300 BufH 26 Feb.

**Bufflehead:** 195 Ellery ChauL 2 Dec; max 200 BufH 10 Jan; arr 19 BWWT 28 Feb.

**Com. Goldeneye:** 132 Ellery ChauL 2 Dec; 675 Grand I NR 20 Jan; max 1200 BuSP 15 Feb.

**Hooded Merganser:** max 250 Mayville CHAU 11 Dec (WA).

**Com. Merganser:** 128 Cassadaga L CHAU 3 Dec; 500 Buffalo NR 11 Jan; arr 44 BWWT 22 Feb.

**Red-breasted Merganser:** 500 LBSP 3 Dec; max 600 Buffalo NR 9 Dec.

**Ruddy Duck:** max 96 BWWT 3 Dec; 5 N Collins ERIE 3 Dec; BuSP 1 Jan; BufH 22-30 Jan; Fredonia CHAU 5 Feb; arr 14 BWWT, N Collins ERIE 28 Feb.

**Red-throated Loon:** BeSP 20 Dec, only Dec rpt away from L Ontario; PB 11 Jan; BufH 4 Feb; max 7 Wilson NIAG 17 Feb.

**Com. Loon:** BufH 9, 11 Jan, 10 Feb; only reports beyond Dec.

**Pied-billed Grebe:** ChauL 8 Feb, only report beyond Dec.

**Horned Grebe:** max 21 DH 1 Dec; N Collins ERIE 27 Feb, only inland report.

**Red-necked Grebe:** Buffalo NR 1 Dec; Wilson NIAG 4 Dec; Grand Island NR 9 Dec; BuSP 9,

14 Dec, 8 Jan, 12 Feb; BufH 11 Jan; only reports.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron:** BufH 12, 17 Dec; 1, 1 WoBSP 28 Dec, 28 Jan; only reports.

**Black Vulture:** 8, 3 Lewiston NIAG 1 Dec, 1 Jan, overwintered for at least 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive year; Wilson NIAG 16 Dec; 2 Youngstown NIAG 26 Feb.

**Turkey Vulture:** 5 Wilson- Lake Plains CBC 16 Dec; 31 NF CBC 27 Dec; 2 Hamburg-E Aurora CBC 30 Dec; 5 Lewiston NIAG 5 Jan; arr Newfane NIAG 14 Feb.

## HAWKS - LARIDS

**Bald Eagle:** 5 Caneadea ALLE 14 Jan; 7 Fredonia CHAU 18 Jan; max 18 DH 2 Feb (GV).

**N. Goshawk:** Ellicottville CATT 30, 31 Dec (GH), only report.

**Red-shouldered Hawk:** reported from four Dec, ten Jan, seven Feb locs; good winter season showing.

**Rough-legged Hawk:** max 4 Dayton CATT 3 Feb; moderate presence.

**Golden Eagle:** Wellsville ALLE 21 Feb (DC ph.), winter reports increasing near PA border.

**Am. Coot:** max 60 DH 24 Dec; arr BWWT 28 Feb.

**Sandhill Crane:** max 21 Alabama GENE 4 Dec (PH); arr 2 INWR 27 Feb.

**Killdeer:** three Dec reports; arr 3 Portland CHAU 20 Feb.

**Wilson's Snipe:** Ischua CATT 24 Dec (JR), rare in winter, only report.

**Am. Woodcock:** last Poland CHAU 29 Dec (VM); arr N Harmony CHAU 25 Feb (KV), early.

**Black-legged Kittiwake:** juv NF 1 Dec, only report.

**Bonaparte's Gull:** max 1000 FNSP 2 Dec, 1000 DHSP 8 Dec; mostly absent on NR by early January.

**Little Gull:** NFSP 3 Dec; DH 19 Dec; Lewiston NR 1 Jan; few reports.

**Iceland Gull:** max 9 DHSP 1 Feb; 6 BufH 27 Feb; relatively low numbers.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull:** max 10 NFSP 17 Jan; relatively low numbers for recent years.

**Glaucous Gull:** 3 NFSP 17 Jan; max 4 BufH 10 Feb; not reported in high numbers.

**Great Black-backed Gull:** max 250 DH 18 Jan (GV); 130 BeSP 16 Feb.

## PIGEONS – PARROTS

**INCA DOVE:** Celoron CHAU 4-12 Dec (TS! NYSARC), remarkable feeder visitor, State first if accepted by NYSARC, *intro*.

**Snowy Owl:** widespread reports; max 7 BuFH 5 Dec.

**Long-eared Owl:** Barre ORLE 29 Dec, only report.

**Short-eared Owl:** 2 Bethany GENE 7, 14 Dec; 2, 4, 4 Shelby ORLE 8 Dec, 13 Jan, 24 Feb; 2, 1 Dunkirk Airport CHAU 9, 18 Dec, 5 Jan; Ellery CHAU 17 Dec; max 6 Royaltown NIAG 22 Dec; 4 INWR 28 Dec; Kiantone CHAU 9 Jan; Hartland NIAG 9 Jan; Lockport NIAG 11 Jan.

**Red-headed Woodpecker:** FNSP thru 1 Jan; RWNP 31 Dec thru; Sturgeon Pt ERIE 9 Jan thru; Carlton ORLE 12 Jan; only reports.

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:** five Dec rep; four Jan rep; two Feb rep; increasingly reported in winter.

**Merlin:** reported from 10 or more loc each month.

**Peregrine Falcon:** increasingly reported.

## FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

**N. Shrike:** moderate to good showing this winter.

**Com. Raven:** continue increasing rep in northern portion; no longer rare anywhere in Reg.

**Horned Lark:** max 225 Oakfield GENE 15 Dec.

**Winter Wren:** 7 NF CBC 27 Dec; only three other Dec rep.

**Hermit Thrush:** St. Bonaventure CBC 17 Dec, only report.

**Am. Robin:** max 300 BeSP 18 Feb.

**Gray Catbird:** Tift NP 28 Feb, only report.

**Am. Pipit:** arr 3 BuFH 24 Feb (JRB), early.

**Bohemian Waxwing:** FNSP 27, 28 Dec (JK); Boston ERIE 21 Jan (SB), rare away from L Ontario.

**Cedar Waxwing:** uncommon this winter.

## LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

**Lapland Longspur:** 10 Yates ORLE 24 Dec; 3 Wellsville ALLE 27 Dec; max 50 Somerset NIAG (SS, JK) 28 Dec; 33 Porter NIAG 14 Feb (DSh); reported from four other loc in small numbers.

**Snow Bunting:** 300 Wilson NIAG 16 Dec; max 400 INWR 22 Dec; 294 Independence ALLE 25 Dec; 300 Porter NIAG 1 Jan; 300 Carlton ORLE 25 Jan; 250 Barre ORLE 29 Jan.  
**Yellow-rumped Warbler:** max 22 Oak Orchard CBC 28 Dec; three other Dec rep; 1-3, 12 BuSP 1-30 Jan, 15 Feb (AH, CK).

## TOWHEES – WEAVERS

**E. Towhee:** Ellery CHAU 16, 31 Dec; 2 Porter NIAG 27 Dec; Colden ERIE 1 Jan; Lockport NIAG 8, 16 Jan; only reports.

**Chipping Sparrow:** BuSP 9 Dec; Orangeville WYOM 23, 24 Dec; Portland CHAU 16-26 Feb (CH), early arrival or wintering?

**Field Sparrow:** Dunkirk Airport CHAU 27, 29 Dec, only report.

**Savannah Sparrow:** 3 Batavia GENE 9 Dec (DB), only report.

**Fox Sparrow:** RWNP 11 Dec; JAS 17 Dec; Gerry CHAU 17 Dec; Gaines ORLE 16 Jan; not as widespread as previous winter.

**Swamp Sparrow:** BuSP 1 Jan; TBNP 28 Feb; only reports beyond Dec.

**White-crowned Sparrow:** max 7, 7 Portland CHAU 10 Dec, 16 Feb.

**ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK (R1):** Jamestown CHAU 17 Dec (TL ph.), rare in winter.

**Red-winged Blackbird:** 32, 17 Tonawanda ERIE 17 Dec, 31 Jan; 75 Lockport NIAG 4 Feb; arrived in large numbers during late Feb warmup.

**E. Meadowlark:** Shelby ORLE 17 Jan (CM), rare in mid-winter.

**Rusty Blackbird:** up to 10 wintered BuSP thru; 27 Ellicott CHAU, JAS 17 Dec; only reports.

**Com. Grackle:** 11 loc Dec and Jan, more than usual; arrived in Feb warmup.

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** max 350, 286 Alabama GENE 15, 22 Dec; 18 Lancaster ERIE 10 Jan; arrived in Feb warmup.

**Purple Finch:** max 17 Jamestown CHAU 17 Dec; 14 Wellsville ALLE 8 Feb.

**Com. Redpoll:** Orangeville WYOM 4 Dec; Portland CHAU 22 Feb; only reports.

**Pine Siskin:** 17 Orangeville WYOM 24 Dec; 23 Gerry CHAU 30 Dec; 18 Bolivar ALLE 13 Jan; 15 Whitesville ALLE 17 Jan; 31 N

Harmony CHAU 11 Feb; 17 Lakewood CHAU 18 Feb; max 37 BMAC 22 Feb; not widespread this winter.