

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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It was another in a series of strange winters, this time brutally cold to start and ending with spring-like weather. December felt more like January or February, as most of Region 6 had mean temperatures for the month that ranged from 3° to more than 7°F colder than normal, and sub-zero temperatures were unusually

common for so early in the winter. January's temperatures were about average in the St. Lawrence Valley but 1-3° cooler than usual elsewhere, but the entire Region was at least 5° to more than 7° above normal for February. Areas east of Lake Ontario received above normal precipitation all three months for a seasonal surplus of 3-6" above normal, but the St. Lawrence Valley had about normal precipitation.

Very cold weather early in December led to rapid icing of most bodies of water, and as a result waterfowl numbers were generally low, and for some species very low. Were it not for a handful of species that lingered into the first few days of December the season's species tally would have been much lower, but sightings such as a Northern Shoveler at the Canton sewage ponds on 1 December and two Canvasbacks at Point Peninsula on 9 December added to a respectable species list. Similarly, Red-throated Loon, Horned Grebe, and Red-necked Grebe all lingered into the first week of the season but weren't seen again. The southbound Snow Goose migration through Region 6 is becoming increasingly hard to figure out. This year very few Snow Geese passed through the Region before December, and very modest numbers came through during the first half of that month, but the large southbound movement that usually passes through the Region never materialized.

Late February saw a nearly exact repeat of a phenomenon that occurred one year previously, with temperatures soaring into the 60s and many short distance migrants arriving very early. For the second year in a row multiple American Woodcock arrived during this warm spell and were heard peenting during the last week of February, a month with no woodcock records prior to 2017. Snow Geese and many other waterfowl species, Turkey Vultures, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gulls, and blackbirds were among the birds that streamed into the Region during this warm weather, contributing to a very spring-like atmosphere to end the season.

Many birders visited northern Jefferson County this winter to look for raptors, resulting in larger than usual numbers of eBird reports for Rough-legged Hawk and Red-tailed Hawk in particular. However, actual numbers of both hawk species were low, and in many places wintering hawks were unusually difficult to find. Northern Shrike numbers have seemed to be in decline for the past few years, but barely more than a dozen reports this season was an especially low total.

Surely the most bizarre report of the season was of a **Purple Gallinule** that was picked up by the side of the road near Lowville in Lewis County on 25 January. There remains some mystery about this report, as it appeared in eBird complete with a photo of the bird, but information I received about who picked it up and the rehabilitator it went to have not proven to be accurate. Rumors that I am still seeking to confirm indicate that this gallinule was in good health and was eventually transported to Florida. But as far as I know, the gallinule was not seen in the wild by any birder.

It was an impressive year for winter irruptives generally, although some species were absent. On the negative side this was only the second winter in the past decade with no Bohemian Waxwing reports. On the other hand, Red Crossbills and Pine Siskins nested in good numbers in the Adirondacks, where White-winged Crossbills were also present but were more locally distributed. The former two species also apparently nested on Fort Drum and locally elsewhere. An Evening Grosbeak heard over the town of Colton on 17 February was the season's only report, and Pine Grosbeaks didn't come south this year either.

Many of the species typically described as "half-hardies" were present in lower than usual numbers, although the tally of such species for the season seemed about average. Present in generally low numbers were Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, and Song Sparrow, typically among the most common of the half-hardies during winter. Conditions in some places resulted in better numbers, for instance a large crop of red cedar berries at Stony Point in the town of Henderson provided food for many American Robins and "Myrtle" Warblers, among other species. Notable half-hardies included Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers at three locations; at least four Red-headed Woodpeckers that successfully overwintered on Fort Drum thanks to abundant acorns; wintering Winter Wrens at Robert Wehle State Park and Kelsey Creek, the latter location also yielding the season's only Gray Catbird on 14 December; Chipping Sparrows from Adams and Colton; a Fox Sparrow at Jacques Cartier State Park on 2 January; a Rose-breasted Grosbeak at a Brownville feeder on 15 December; and a lingering Rusty Blackbird on Point Peninsula on 2 December.

For the season I received reports of 118 species, higher than the most recent 10-year average of 112 species and a pretty good total for a winter that started out so brutally cold. The clear choice for bird of the season based on rarity is Purple Gallinule, but no birders saw it as far as I am aware. Probably the high point of the season for many birders was the abundance of crossbills in the Adirondacks and adjacent areas. Otherwise it was a fairly uneventful winter throughout most of Region 6.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart I, T Massena; **BRB** – Black River Bay; **BRV** – Black River Valley; **CCSP** – Coles Creek SP; **CV** – T Cape Vincent; **CWF** – Canton Wastewater Treatment Facility; **FD** – Fort Drum Military Installation; **FL** – Fisher’s Landing, T Alexandria; **HP** – Hawkins Pt, T Massena; **JEFF** – Jefferson County; **KC** – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; **KPSP** – Kring Pt SP; **LWMA** – Lakeview WMA; **MP** – Montario Pt, T Ellisburg; **PilPt** – Pillar Pt; **PtPen** – Point Peninsula; **RMSP** – Robert Moses SP; **RWSP** – Robert Wehle SP; **SH** – Sackett’s Harbor; **SLR** – St. Lawrence Ri; **STLA** – St. Lawrence County; **StPt** – Stony Pt, T Henderson; **ULLWMA** – Upper & Lower Lakes WMA; **WBSP** – Westcott Beach SP; **WHWMA** – Wilson Hill WMA.

WATERFOWL - VULTURES

Snow Goose: small flight 1st half Dec; “fall” max 475 T Watertown 13 Dec; spring arr JEFF 24 Feb; spring max 2880 FD 28 Feb.

Mute Swan: max 79 FL 22 Jan.

Trumpeter Swan: max 18 PtPen 21 Dec (ET).

Tundra Swan: max 370 PtPen 2 Dec; last CV 3 Jan.

Wood Duck: arr T Watertown 27 Feb.

Gadwall: max 3 CV 2 Dec, low.

Am. Wigeon: 3 reports 2-3 Dec then none until arr BRV & T Watertown 21 Feb.

Am. Black Duck: max 62 WHWMA 9 Dec.

Mallard: max 134 WHWMA 9 Dec, low.

N. Shoveler: CWF 1 Dec (JBo), only report.

N. Pintail: up to 7/day WHWMA thru 10 Dec then none until arr BRV & T Watertown 21 Feb.

Green-winged Teal: pr FD 4-16 Jan, only report until arr BRV 21 Feb.

Canvasback: 2 PtPen 9 Dec (CN), only report.

Redhead: max 325 FL 22 Jan.

Ring-necked Duck: singles ULLWMA & WHWMA 1 Dec; 2 HP 10 Jan; only reports until arr LWMA 22 Feb.

Greater Scaup: max 15 FL 20 Jan, low.

Lesser Scaup: max 14 WHWMA 1 Dec; last 2 SH 16 Dec.

White-winged Scoter: 13 reports 1-3 L Ontario & SLR

Long-tailed Duck: max 350 MP 10-17 Feb.

Bufflehead: max 76 PtPen 4 Dec.

Com. Goldeneye: max 860 Chaumont Bay 2 Dec.

Barrow’s Goldeneye: m FL 2 Jan (JBo) joined by f 16-22 Jan (NL); m & f PtPen 22 Jan (NL).

Hooded Merganser: max 105 T Lyme 11 Dec.

Com. Merganser: max 235 Oak Pt T Hammond 22 Dec.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 82 BI 3 Dec.

Red-throated Loon: max 3 BRB 2 Dec; last BRB 4 Dec.

Com. Loon: max 6 SLR T Massena 2 Dec; last HP 27 Dec.

Pied-billed Grebe: T Alexandria 20 Dec (ML), only report.

Horned Grebe: 4 reports L Ontario shoreline 2 Dec, only reports.

Red-necked Grebe: last CCSP 9 Dec.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 7 CCSP 1 Dec; last T Alexandria 19 Dec.

Great Blue Heron: ULLWMA thru 15 Jan; last KC thru 2 Feb; only reports after 10 Dec.

Turkey Vulture: several reports between T Hounsfield & FD thru 29 Jan (GS, JBo), perhaps the same individual; arr T Watertown 28 Feb.

HAWKS - LARIDS

N. Harrier: Fish Creek WMA 4 Feb, only report between 11 Dec & arr 21 Feb.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 7 reports eBird.

Cooper’s Hawk: 19 reports eBird.

N. Goshawk: Lisbon Swamp 26 Dec; T Pinckney 21 Jan; FD 1 & 21 Feb; T Colton 18 Feb.

Red-shouldered Hawk: T Canton 14 Jan (BD); T Philadelphia 9 Feb (JBo); rare but increasing in winter.

Red-tailed Hawk: fewer than usual.

Rough-legged Hawk: many reports 1-5/day NW JEFF & N-central STLA; numbers generally low.

PURPLE GALLINULE: picked up T Lowville roadside 25 Jan, *intro*.

Am. Coot: T Hounsfield 16 Dec (JBo), only report.

Killdeer: arr FD 28 Feb.

Am. Woodcock: FD 4 Dec (JB) & T Watertown 9 Dec (MR) late; arr T Dekalb 28 Feb would be record late were it not for similar arr 2017.

Ring-billed Gull: up to 12/day Lake Ontario shoreline thru; scarce elsewhere after 10 Dec until widespread arr 21-28 Feb.

Herring Gull: max 850 BI 3 Dec.

Iceland Gull: max 4 HP 7 Jan.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: PtPen 9 Dec (CN); several reports HP & BI thru 23 Dec (JB); only reports.

Glaucous Gull: max 29 HP 7 Jan, where last 21 Jan; no reports anywhere else R6.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 190 HP 3 Dec.

PIGEONS - PARROTS

E. Screech-Owl: 2 T Pinckney 23 Jan, only report.

Snowy Owl: 60+ individuals from open areas throughout; max up to 6/day NW JEFF.

Short-eared Owl: 2 T Henderson 9 Dec (NY), only report.

N. Saw-whet Owl: T Parishville & Long Pond T Piercefield 22 Feb, only reports.

Belted Kingfisher: KPSP 19 Dec; KC & ULLWMA 24 Dec; only reports until T Parishville 17 Feb.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 4 ad FD thru.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: RWSP 3 Dec (BB); T Lyme 10 Jan (BM); 2 StPt 15 Jan (JBo, photos!); more than usual.

N. Flicker: 16 reports mostly W JEFF and along SLR; max 3 RWSP 11 Jan.

Am. Kestrel: T Henderson 25 Jan, only report after 11 Dec.

Merlin: 12 reports.

Peregrine Falcon: T Lyme 2 Dec & CV 4 Dec, only reports away from T Watertown & RMSP where resident.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

N. Shrike: only 13 reports; very low.

Horned Lark: max 220 Sand Road T Hammond 2 Jan; many fewer reports than usual.

Winter Wren: RWSP 3 Dec (BB); KC thru 21 Feb (RB); becoming annual in winter.

E. Bluebird: 5 reports; max 3 LWMA 24 Feb; low.

Am. Robin: max 130 StPt 15 Jan, where good numbers thru; low numbers throughout rest of R6.

Gray Catbird: KC 14 Dec (RB), only report.

N. Mockingbird: PilPt & T Hounsfield both 16 Dec (JBo), only reports.

Bohemian Waxwing: no reports for just 2nd winter since 2007.

Cedar Waxwing: max 36 StPt 15 Jan; generally scarce.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Lapland Longspur: 4 reports of 1-2 each.

Snow Bunting: max 300 T Hammond 2 Jan & T Ellisburg 15 Jan.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: max 14 StPt 15 Jan (JBo); only other reports 2 WBSP 3 Dec (GS) & T Hounsfield 16 Dec (JBo).

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: T Brownville 15 Dec (ET), rare in winter.

Chipping Sparrow: T Colton 1 Jan (JBa); T Adams 17 Jan (SW); becoming annual in winter.

Fox Sparrow: JCSP 2 Jan (JB, photos!), only report.

Song Sparrow: 13 reports, below average year.

Swamp Sparrow: 3 reports all N STLA more than average.

White-throated Sparrow: max 12 KC 1 Jan; about average.

Red-winged Blackbird: T Potsdam 13 Dec, only report until 1 T Massena 16 Feb; widespread arr 22 Feb thru.

Com. Grackle: T Clifton 1 Jan, only report until 18 Feb; widespread arr 24 Feb thru.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 110 T Waddington 1 Dec; 3 reports Jan & Feb.

Rusty Blackbird: PtPen 2 Dec, only report.

Purple Finch: scarce many locations but locally common Adirondacks & L Ontario shore.

Red Crossbill: widespread Adirondacks, Tug Hill, & Fort Drum.

White-winged Crossbill: max 8 Peavine Swamp 17 Feb; much less widespread than Red Crossbill.

Pine Siskin: abundant Adirondacks thru but spottily distributed at lower elevations.

Evening Grosbeak: T Colton 17 Feb, only report.

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