

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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December was mild, with an average temperature in Watertown of 27.7°F, which was 1.3° above normal. The 3.3" of precipitation that fell in December was within 0.2" of average and mostly fell as rain. Mild temperatures continued

into the first few days of January but very cold weather took hold by the second week of the year, and the mean temperature for the month was 16.5°, or 2.9° below normal. January also saw 2.0" more precipitation than average, mostly falling as snow but also as freezing rain during several ice storms. Generally mild weather returned in February, as the month averaged 1.5° above normal. The 2.2" of precipitation that fell in February was almost exactly the month's average. Wild temperature swings defined the winter, with numerous cold spells interrupted by brief periods with temperatures reaching into the 40s, 50s, or as high as 61° on 21 December.

Somewhat surprising given the mild start to the winter, waterfowl numbers and diversity were low throughout. For the second year in a row no large southbound Snow Goose flight was observed in Region 6, with even fewer sightings reported this fall and early winter than during 2018. Presumably the same Cackling Goose seen on consecutive days in early December in Cape Vincent was the only rare goose of the season. Four Canvasback reports, a Northern Pintail, and two Green-winged Teal were the most unusual ducks of the season, which is to say that no duck rarities were found. For the first winter season since 2006 no Barrow's Goldeneye were reported.

Following the early January freeze-up gulls almost entirely vacated the St. Lawrence River and were present in small numbers near Lake Ontario. The season's only Glaucous Gull report was of 41 individuals below the Moses-Saunders Dam on 21 January among hordes of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. This was the last large group of gulls seen all winter. Nine Iceland Gulls were also present in this aggregation, and another five single Iceland Gulls from Jefferson County were the only other reports of gulls aside from Ring-billed, Herring, and Great Black-backed Gulls.

Northern Harriers and Rough-legged Hawks were more numerous on Point Peninsula and a few nearby locations in western Jefferson County than during any winter since 2011-12, but were generally scarce elsewhere. The Point Peninsula area was also the best place in the Region to witness the winter's modest Snowy Owl irruption, and was the site of one of the two known Short-eared Owl roosts in Jefferson County, the other roost occurring in nearby Cape Vincent. For a few lucky birders the season's clear highlight was a **Gyr falcon** Gerry Smith found on Point Peninsula on 27 December that remained on the perch where it was first seen for several hours. Unfortunately, a couple of hours of cooperation was all this Gyr was willing to give and it was not seen again.

The combination of a relatively mild start to the winter and frequent visits by several birders from other Regions led to an unusually lengthy list of half-hardies and seasonally rare passerines. Among these visiting birders were Steve Kelling, Chris Wood, and Brian Sullivan, who on 5 January found a Boreal Chickadee on Point Peninsula, a very rare bird in Jefferson County. This group also found a Ruby-crowned Kinglet nearby for another great seasonal rarity. A Gray Catbird and a Vesper Sparrow on Fort Drum 14 December may have been part of a very late migratory movement as neither was found the following day.

The following day one each Eastern Phoebe and Marsh Wren was observed on the Watertown Christmas Bird Count. In addition to the Vesper Sparrow, seasonally rare Emberizids included Savannah and White-crowned Sparrows and Eastern Towhee.

For many birders the defining avian event of the season was a finch irruption that for most species was rather modest, but that included the largest Evening Grosbeak flight seen in decades. Evening Grosbeaks occurred throughout the Region, with some feeders attracting dozens and at least one feeder in Pierrepont exceeding 100. Long-time birders tell me that this was the best year for Evening Grosbeaks they've seen in at least 25 years, and I received several ecstatic reports from non-birders who were thrilled to have this flashy finch at their feeders. Pine Grosbeaks also came south this winter, although few were seen outside of St. Lawrence County. Redpoll numbers were generally modest although a flock estimated to include over 1200 individuals in Cape Vincent impressed participants on NYSOA's winter birding weekend 2 February. Given the size of this flock it was a little surprising that no obvious candidates for Hoary Redpoll were seen, although at least three Hoary Redpolls were documented elsewhere during the winter. Pine Siskin and Purple Finch were present in low numbers, and there were only eight reports of Bohemian Waxwing for the season.

The winter's tally of 119 species is six species above the mean for the previous 10 years, but about average for the eBird era. Those who saw it likely consider the Gyrfalcon the season's best bird, but most observers will remember this as the winter of the Evening Grosbeak. The assemblage of hawks, owls, and half-hardies on Point Peninsula drew birders from throughout New York, more than a few coming from the Ithaca area repeatedly though the winter. Such visits certainly bulked up the season's species total significantly, and a record species total may have been within reach had waterfowl and gull diversity not been so poor.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart Island, T Massena, STLA; **BPWMA** – Black Pd WMA; **BRB** – Black River Bay; **BRV** – Black River Valley; **CV** – T Cape Vincent; **ED** – El

Dorado Shores Preserve, T Ellisburg; **FD** – Fort Drum Military Reservation, JEFF & LEWI; **HP** – Hawkins Pt, T Massena; **JEFF** – Jefferson County; **KC** – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; **PtPen** – Pt Peninsula, T Lyme, JEFF; **RMSP** – Robert Moses SP, T Massena; **RRt** – Remington Recreation Trail, T Canton; **SHB** – Sackett's Harbor Battlefield; **SLR** – St. Lawrence Ri; **STLA** – St. Lawrence County; **StPt** – Stony Pt, T Henderson, JEFF; **ULLWMA** – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; **WI** – Wellesley Is.

WATERFOWL - GREBES

Snow Goose: single CV thru 18 Dec only report before Feb; spring arr & max 8 T Rossie 16 Feb.

Cackling Goose: T Lyme 5-6 Jan (SK, CW, BS) only report.

Mute Swan: max 155 WI 17 Feb (LK, ST).

Trumpeter Swan: 3 ULLWMA 5 & 23 Feb only reports.

Tundra Swan: max 340 BRB 15 Dec (JB).

Gadwall: max 8 T Lyme 4 Jan.

Mallard: max 300 SLR T Massena 13 Jan.

American Black Duck: max 55 PtPen 27 Dec.

Northern Pintail: SLR T Ogdensburg 5 Jan & FD 22 Jan only reports.

Green-winged Teal: 2 FD 15-22 Jan, only report.

Canvasback: 4 reports max 6 PtPen 5 Jan.

Redhead: max 158 SLR CV 14 Jan.

Ring-necked Duck: 2 PtPen 12 Jan only report.

Greater Scaup: max 1000 BRB 5 Dec.

Lesser Scaup: 6 reports 1-2 each; last T Watertown 2 Feb.

White-winged Scoter: max 62 StPt 6 Jan (SK, CW, BS).

Long-tailed Duck: max 670 BPWMA 5 Dec.

Bufflehead: max 38 StPt 5 Dec.

Common Goldeneye: max 525 WI 17 Feb.

Barrow's Goldeneye: no reports.

Hooded Merganser: max 18 RMSP 16 Dec.

Common Merganser: max 255 SLR T Hammond 23 Feb low.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 175 CV 5 Jan.

Wild Turkey: max 93 T Hounsfield 23 Dec.

Pied-billed Grebe: 2 T Rodman 11 Feb only report (GS).

Horned Grebe: 5 StPt 1 Dec & 2 StPt 5 Dec only reports.

Red-necked Grebe: Dexter boat launch 23 Feb only report (BM).

RAILS-LARIDS

Ring-billed Gull: max 24 T Lyme 4 Jan; T Henderson 3 Feb & 3 T Ogdensburg 21 Feb only reports after 12 Jan.

Herring Gull: max 140 HP 12 Jan.

Iceland Gull: max 9 HP 12 Jan (JB); 5 singles JEFF only other reports.

Glaucous Gull: 41 HP 12 Jan (JB) only report.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 345 HP 12 Jan.

LOONS-FALCONS

Red-throated Loon: BRB 5 & 15 Dec, only reports.

Common Loon: last ED 31 Dec.

Double-crested Cormorant: last StPt 5 Jan.

Great Blue Heron: T Lyme 1 Jan & ULLWMA 3 Feb only reports after mid-Dec.

Turkey Vulture: last fall migrant T Potsdam 7 Dec; spring arr T Croghan 21 Feb.

Golden Eagle: juv T Canton 22 Dec (EW & TW), 11 Jan (JB) & 15 Feb (JK).

Northern Harrier: many reports of up to 9 W JEFF thru especially PtPen; T Potsdam 15 Feb only report elsewhere.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 10 reports to eBird.

Cooper's Hawk: 31 reports to eBird.

Northern Goshawk: ad T Canton 9 Dec (JB); Pt Salubrious 4 Jan (RB); only reports.

Bald Eagle: 100+ reports; continuing to increase.

Red-tailed Hawk: numerous reports 1-6 W JEFF; smaller numbers elsewhere.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 24 PtPen 18 Jan (DW, DD); generally good numbers NW JEFF; low numbers elsewhere.

Eastern Screech-Owl: 10 reports more than usual nearly all found by visiting birders using playback.

Snowy Owl: many reports NW JEFF especially PtPen; smaller numbers BRV, T Leray & Philadelphia, T Canton; T Oswegatchie.

Short-eared Owl: 6 PtPen thru (mob); 3 CV thru (mob).

Northern Saw-whet Owl: 2 CV 5 Jan; PtPen 13 Jan.

Belted Kingfisher: last CV 28 Dec.

Red-headed Woodpecker: T Alexandria 19 Feb (RB!) only report.
Red-bellied Woodpecker: 14 reports STLA where still sparse but increasing.
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: StPt 3 Feb (LK, ST, AK) only report.
Northern Flicker: about 30 reports mostly NW JEFF.
American Kestrel: 1-3/day PtPen thru; 5 additional locations each CV & St. Lawrence Valley Gouverneur & Lisbon; T Brownville 12 Jan; StPt 23 Feb; more than usual.
Merlin: 9 reports.
GYRFALCON: PtPen 27 Dec (GS, JB, IM, ET) reports to NYSARC.
Peregrine Falcon: multiple sightings from traditional locations at BI & T Watertown; single reports SHB 30 Dec; T Ellisburg 31 Dec; different locations CV 5 Jan & 28 Feb; Thousand I Bridge 2 Feb.

FLYCATCHERS-SNOW BUNTING

Eastern Phoebe: Muskellunge Bay 15 Dec (JB) rare in winter.
Northern Shrike: reports of at least 38 individuals more than previous four winters.
Horned Lark: max 45 T Ellisburg 14 Feb.
Boreal Chickadee: PtPen 5 Jan (SK, CW, BS) rare outside Adirondacks.
Tufted Titmouse: 4 reports STLA where remains very thinly distributed.
Winter Wren: KC thru 20 Feb (RB) only report.
Marsh Wren: Muskellunge Creek T Hounsfield 15 Dec (JB) only report.
Carolina Wren: 4 reports more than most recent winters.
Ruby-crowned Kinglet: PtPen 5 Jan (SK, CW, BS, photos!) rare winter.
Eastern Bluebird: 11 reports max 8 StPt 14 Feb.
Hermit Thrush: PtPen 5 Jan (SK, CW, BS) & 18 Jan (JB) scarce in winter.
American Robin: max 193 StPt 6 Jan.
Gray Catbird: FD 14 Dec (JB) rare in winter.
Bohemian Waxwing: max 41 T Potsdam 24 Dec; only 7 other reports.

Cedar Waxwing: max 75 StPt 1 Dec.
Evening Grosbeak: widespread; max 104 T Pierrepont 18 Feb; best winter in many years.
Pine Grosbeak: 50+ reports mostly STLA; max 61 St. Lawrence University 21 Jan.
Purple Finch: only 15 reports but most of multiple individuals; max 15 T Potsdam 30 Dec.
Common Redpoll: max 1250 in one flock CV 2 Feb (JB, mob).
Hoary Redpoll: T Pierrepont 9 Dec (JB); T Croghan 8 Feb (MR); T Madrid 9 Feb (EW & TW).
White-winged Crossbill: RRt 9 Dec (JB) only report.
Pine Siskin: max 12 T Potsdam 20 Feb.
Lapland Longspur: max 5 CV 22 Jan & T Ellisburg 14 Feb.
Snow Bunting: max 430 T Ellisburg 14 Feb.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS-CARDINALIDS

Eastern Towhee: CV feeder thru 22 Jan (DM, photos!); scarce in winter.
American Tree Sparrow: just 15 on Canton-Potsdam CBC compared to 373 previous year; unusually scarce.
Vesper Sparrow: FD 14 Dec (JB) rare in winter.
Savannah Sparrow: PtPen 18 Jan (DW, DD, photos!); scarce in winter.
Song Sparrow: 18 reports; about average.
Swamp Sparrow: 4 at 3 locations; last FD 15 Jan.
White-throated Sparrow: reports from 30 locations; max 7 KC 18 Feb.
White-crowned Sparrow: juv T Croghan 2-3 Dec (MR, photos!); rare in winter.
Red-winged Blackbird: 7 reports; max 6 Clarkson University 5 Dec.
Brown-headed Cowbird: T Brasher 28 Dec & 3 PtPen 5 Jan only reports.
Common Grackle: 3 reports PtPen where last 17 Jan; T Norfolk 15 Feb only other report.
Yellow-rumped Warbler: max 3 StPt 1 Dec (DA); last 2 StPt 26 Dec; no reports away from this reliable winter location.

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