

REGION 5—ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

David Wheeler

20 Waterbury Dr., North Syracuse, NY 13212
tigger64@aol.com

Winter 2019-20 began with 7.3" of snow on the season's first day, but the month ended 9.2" below average with 23.5". The average high temperature of 37.9° F was 1.5° above normal. Both low and high average temperatures were more than 7° above average in January, leading to few water bodies freezing or remaining frozen. Snowfall was 17.8" below normal at only 16.2". The 11th produced a high of 67° and the month finished as the twelfth warmest on record. February's

average maximum was 1.6° above normal, but the daily average low was 3.6° higher than normal and snowfall a few inches above average. The overall warmer winter and occasional days in the 50s prevented all but the calmest, shallowest water from fully freezing. The Region's inland rivers never came close and Oswego Harbor quickly opened after any overnight freezing. Ditto for Onondaga Lake, which barely ever froze south of the marina.

Few Snow Geese were reported and only small numbers, with the max of 140 on 1 December and no migration evident yet at the end of the season. Tundra Swans found open water on Oneida Lake in January, while 105 on Onondaga Lake on 21 January was very unusual as the lake does not normally attract many even during migration. A count of 350 Mallards at Ditch Bank Road on 11 January is also noteworthy. Tim Kolb photographed a putative Mallard x Northern Pintail at Oswego Harbor. Dabbling ducks returned for the last week of February with good counts of Northern Pintail and American Wigeon for the date, seen mostly in the Montezuma area at the Loop Road floodland which now sports a new overlook. Onondaga lake again hosted large numbers of Redheads and Common Mergansers, while Woodman Pond had excellent counts of Ring-necked Duck early and late in the season. An adult male Harlequin duck continued from the prior season, while Mickey Scilingo found an adult male Barrow's Goldeneye on the Oswego River at Phoenix. Gregg Dashnau added a female at Oswego Harbor. All were long-staying. On 13 February David Wheeler found an adult male **Tufted Duck** on Little Sodus Bay at Fair Haven, keeping company with several hundred scaup. Viewing the near shore looking south from the state park boat launch, Wheeler noted it one of the most frustrating observing conditions imaginable due to trees overhanging the water's edge. Oswego yielded good numbers of Long-tailed Duck and White-winged Scoter with the lack of widespread freezing making an easy winter for waterfowl. 37 American Coot on Skaneateles Lake was a good count on 8 December.

As often happens in milder winters, few big gull concentrations emerged and winter specialties occurred in smaller numbers than possible during extensive cold spells. While lakewatching on 15 December at Derby Hill, David Wheeler and Deborah Dohne enjoyed the close flyby of a Black-legged Kittiwake. It was the only one of the entire lakewatch season, a sad commentary on the fragile state of this activity in the absence of favorable winds. During a big snowstorm on 19 January, Gregg Dashnau spotted a **Black-headed Gull** accompanying larger gulls on the ice near Marble Island in Baldwinsville. The bird was also seen from the Onondaga Lake marina intermittently for the next ten days. Good numbers of gulls attended the ice edge, which spread across the lake's one-mile width. Killdeer failed to make an early showing in February.

A single Golden Eagle was reported on 18 January by Larry Hall, while an early Red-shouldered Hawk passed Derby Hill on 23 February. It did not feel like a good winter to see Rough-leggeds and few lingered in the area. Disappointing reports from hotspots north of the Region implied the species may not have moved south into NY in any great number. Ditto for Snowy Owl, which was seen

occasionally from typical spots but absent from many others. A Short-eared Owl was reported from the town of Fairfield on 22 January. Red-headed Woodpeckers successfully overwintered at Fair Haven and Verona Beach after having been seen caching food in fall. Few Northern Shrikes lingered. As many Merlin were reported as Kestrel this winter, and nearly as many as Sharp-shinned Hawks, the first species almost unknown to the season as recently as the late 1990s but now as common as the other small hawks. The editor points out the potential for confusion as the falcon can be easily mistaken for the small accipiter when strafing feeders.

Presumed expansion of Fish Crow away from traditional areas has continued, mostly along waterways and in busy suburban areas. A pair seen repeatedly on Route 11 in North Syracuse seemed partial to the poles and trees around a Burger King, while a few miles north another occupies a similar niche. The editor has long surmised that when away from water the birds are drawn to locations with strong smells of food. Would increased sensitivity to crows in these areas confirm the theory? What will the forthcoming Breeding Bird Atlas show? As more are reported hopefully observers will continue their due diligence in separating from American Crow and Common Raven, especially when these are giving low, nasal, single-note calls. Raven continues to become “common”, with 16 reported from Little Moose Lake by Gary Lee on 17 December and 13 near Pulaski on 21 February. Reports were scattered about the Region both at typical locations and even more developed areas.

Lingering half-hardies such as Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Winter Wren, Gray Catbird, and Hermit Thrush were represented no more than usual, perhaps surprising given the milder winter. The editor points out, however, that migrants have no more idea of the winter to come than do human observers. Overall it was a very poor year for winter finches. Purple Finch was reported from usual places in Herkimer and Madison Counties but absent from the Oneida and Lake Ontario plains. Redpoll and Pine Siskin were reported two and four times respectively, all less than a handful of birds. Larry Hall reported finding a White-winged Crossbill on 25 January in the town of Ohio, the only crossbill report, and Evening Grosbeak was missed altogether. Apparently food supplies north of the Region were adequate. 1000 Snow Buntings graced a field in Richland, but it was a poor year for Lapland Longspurs. Without a lot of snow cover, few field birds were forced into conspicuous manure spreads or onto rural road-sides ripped up by snowplowing.

Chipping Sparrows were more common than normal this winter at feeders, continuing from fall through virtually the entire winter season. Other lingering sparrows such as Eastern Towhee, Swamp Sparrow, Field, and White-crowned were reported in typical numbers. A single Fox Sparrow was seen on 8 December by Andrea Burke near Navarino in southwest Onondaga County. One of the season's great highlights was a **Lark Sparrow** found by Matt Brown at his feeders in Pulaski on 7 January. Brown documented the bird with excellent photos and kept the birding public apprised of its comings and goings, observing it was

frequently one of the last birds of the day still feeding. The bird continued throughout the period and was seen by many. How long would it remain into spring?

Rusty Blackbird was reported on 22 December and 16 February. In spite of the milder winter it was not a particularly early or vigorous arrival of Red-wings or Grackles, with maximum counts of only 100 and 300 occurring in late February. No more than the usual few appeared to winter in the Region. An Ovenbird was found by Gregg Dashnau on 4 December near Baldwinsville, record-late (by almost a month) if considered a fall migrant and a second Regional record for winter. Marge Rusk wrote in referring to the prior bird “at feeder in East Syracuse, 17 December 1972 – 25 January 1973. Ate mix of chopped suet, hamburger, other meats, chopped sunflower seed”. Last but not least, a female **Dickcissel** was found by Lisa Mather near Marcellus on 20 January. The bird was seen by many and continued through 24 February.

This season a total of 131 species and five hybrids were reported, which is three below the recent average for the Region and 13 less than last winter. Highlights of the season included: Mallard x Northern Pintail (hybrid), **Tufted Duck**, Harlequin Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser (hybrid), Black-legged Kittiwake, **Black-headed Gull**, Golden Eagle, Short-eared Owl, White-winged Crossbill, **Lark Sparrow**, Ovenbird, and **Dickcissel**.

Winter 2019-20 produced 42,485 eBird records for Region 5, and were processed by Swan Swan Hummingbird v5.1. Reports were contributed by 392 people.

CONTRIBUTORS

Dennis Anderson, Sue Boettger, Carla Bregman, David Bohrer, Joseph Brin, Matthew Brown (MB), Ken Burdick, Andrea Burke (AB), Jerry Case, Richard Cohen, Karl Curtis, Gregg Dashnau (GD), Rose DeNeve, Deborah Dohne (DD), David Dubois, Sarah Dzielski, Kaye Fenlon, Elizabeth Frascatore, Bill Gruenbaum, Barbara & Larry Hall, Tyler Hodges, Gene Huggins, Tim Kolb (TK), Renee Kittleman, Alison Kocek, Gary Lee (GL), Fred Leff, Jason Luscier (JL), Mary Magistro, Lisa Mather (LM), Jason Mauro, Kevin McGann, Jay McGowan, Tom McKay, Gary Meyers, John Moore, David Nash, Kevin Pace, Scott Peterson, Matt Perry, Bill Purcell, Paul Richardson, Carter Riley, Linda Salter, Steve Schwab, Mickey Scilingo (MS), Ida Sheppard, Tony Shrimpton, Gerald Smith (GS), Rick Stevens, Judy Thurber, Sasha Torman, Andrew VanNorstrand, Matt Voelker, Drew Weber, Tom Weickert, David Wheeler (DWh), Terry White, Robert Whitman (RW), Robert G. Williams III, Judy Wright.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADK – Adirondacks, n. HERK; **BLNC** – Beaver L Nature Center, Baldwinsville; **Brew** – Oneida L at Brewerton; **BRH** – Bishop Road Hawk Watch, T Richland;

Bville – Baldwinsville; **CM** – Clay Marsh, Clay; **Const** – Oneida L at Constantia; **DB** – Ditch Bank Rd & vicinity, T Sullivan/Lenox; **DC** – Deer Creek Marsh, T Richland; **DH** – Derby Hill, T Mexico; **DL** – Delta L; **Dolge** – Dolgeville, HERK; **FH** – Fair Haven, Little Sodus Bay, and West Barrier Bar; **Fult** – Fulton area including Oswego Ri, Indian Pt, L Neatahwanta; **GB** – Great Bear Rec Area, Fulton; **GLSP** – Green Lakes SP, Fayetteville; **HF** – Highland Forest Co P; **HI** – Howland I WMA, CAYU; **HV** – Happy Valley WMA, Parish; **KK** – Kindred Kingdom Wildlife Center, Pennellville; **LH** – Labrador Hollow Unique Area; **L Ont** – L Ontario; **LoopR** – Loop Rd, Montezuma NWR, CAYU; **MCL** – Madison Co Landfill; **MexPt** – Mexico Pt SP; **MSI** – Madison St Impoundment, Hamilton; **MW** – McKoons Rd Wetland, Colombia Center, s. HERK; **OakC** – Oakwood Cemetery, Syracuse; **OF** – Old Forge; **OLC** – Onondaga L Creekwalk; **OneiL** – Oneida L; **OnonL** – Onondaga L; **OLP** – Onondaga L P (east and west shore); **OSP** – Oneida Shores P, Brewerton; **OswH** – Oswego Harbor; **Phx** – Phoenix dam area; **Ppt** – Oneida L at Phillips Pt, W Monroe; **RCFS** – Rice Creek Field Station, Oswego; **RRP** – Radisson Ri P, Three Rivers confluence, Phoenix; **SBP** – Sunset Bay P, Scriba; **SFNS** – Spring Farm Nature Sanctuary, Kirkland; **SH** – Southern Highlands of ONON & MADI; **SHTF** – Sky High Turf Farm, Chittenango; **Skan** – Skaneateles; **SNC** – Sterling Nature Center, Sterling; **SP** – Sandy Pd and vicinity; **SSSP** – Selkirk Shores SP; **SVB** – Sylvan & Verona Beach; **Syr** – Syracuse; **TNP** – Tuscarora Nature P, MADI; **TR** – Three Rivers WMA, Lysander; **UM** – Utica Marsh; **VBSP** – Verona Beach SP; **WH** – Whiskey Hollow; **WP** – Woodman Pd, Hamilton.

WATERFOWL-HUMMINGBIRDS

Snow Goose: max SSSP 1 Dec; few reps.
Cackling Goose: max 3 Fulton 9 Feb (DWh, DD).
Canada Goose: 1000 WP 11 Dec; 1500 SkanL 2 Feb; 1740 GLSP 21 Jan; max 2300 Caz L.
Mute Swan: 14 SSSP 28 Feb; 14 OLP 13 Dec; 98 FH 10 Jan, high counts this loc.
Trumpeter Swan: 5 Fult 9 Feb; 10 Brew 23 Feb; 16 FH 10 Jan.
Tundra Swan: 105 OLP 21 Jan, good count for loc; max 200 OneiL 3 Jan.
Wood Duck: few singles thru; max 3 Middleport 18 Jan.
Northern Shoveler: last & max 2 OLP 10 Dec; arr 2 OLP 16 Feb.
Gadwall: small nums var locs thru; max 15 OLP 10 Dec.
American Wigeon: Middleport 18 Jan; max 55 WP 3 Dec; last 2 OLP 10 Dec; arr mid-Feb var locs.
Mallard: 350 DB 11 Jan, unusual loc for num; 350 WP 3 Dec; 370 OswH 23 Jan; max 400 Bville 22 Dec.

American Black Duck: max 34 OswH 19 Jan & OLP 24 Jan.

Northern Pintail: small nums thru, mostly OLP; arr & max est 350 Loop Rd MNWR 25 Feb, good num.

Mallard x Northern Pintail (hybrid): OswH 2 Feb (TK, ph).

Green-winged Teal: max 4 Eaton 10 Dec; several singles Dec & Jan; arr SSSP 26 Feb.

Canvasback: small nums var locs; 8 FH 23 Feb; max 49 OLP 25 Feb.

Redhead: 1240 SkanL 31 Jan; max est 2000 OLP 26 Jan & 1 Feb.

Ring-necked Duck: 45 OLP 1 Feb; max 560 WP 4 Dec.

TUFTED DUCK: ad m FH 13 – 25 Feb (DWh, ph, mob); 6th Reg rec.

Greater Scaup: max 400 OLP 1 Feb.

Lesser Scaup: max 300 OLP 26 Jan.

Aythya sp: est 2000 OLP 26 Jan.

Harlequin Duck: OswH thru, continuing from Nov.

Surf Scoter: FH 22 Jan, 14, 16 Feb; OswH 23 Jan; only reps.

White-winged Scoter: 140 FH 14 Feb; max est 400 OswH 9 Feb.

Black Scoter: small nums OswH thru; max 4 OswH 9 Feb.

Long-tailed Duck: max 1070 OswH 17 Feb.

Bufflehead: 48 SkanL 8 Feb; 50 OLP 22 Feb; 59 SSSP 28 Feb.

Common Goldeneye: 315 FH 22 Feb; max 500 OLP 1 Feb.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE: ad m Phoenix (MS, ph, mob) 9 – 15 Feb; f OswH 14 – 22 Feb (GD, ph, mob).

Hooded Merganser: 38 Bville 21 Dec; 53 Otisco L 8 Dec; max 58 OLP 16 Dec.

Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser (hybrid): Port Ontario 2 Feb thru (MB, ph).

Common Merganser: max 1800 OLP 1 Feb, good counts Jan - Feb OLP.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 182 New Haven, LOnt 20 Jan.

Ruddy Duck: OnonL & IH 26 Jan thru.

Ring-necked Pheasant: several dozen reps, small nums.

Ruffed Grouse: several dozen reps, small nums.

Wild Turkey: small flocks thru; max 71 DB 2 Jan.

Pied-billed Grebe: small nums thru, mostly OnonL; max 4 OnonL 16 Dec.

Horned Grebe: only 6 reps, none in Jan; max 27 OswH 11 Feb.

Red-necked Grebe: few reps thru, all OnonL & LOnt; max 2 OnonL 4 Dec.

Rock Pigeon: flocks widespread.

Mourning Dove: small flocks widespread; max 94 Dolge 3 Jan.

RAILS-TROPICBIRDS

American Coot: 14 OLP 4 Dec; max 37 SkanL 8 Dec, good nums at loc thru.

Killdeer: 2 OLP 4 Dec; OLP 10 Dec; only reps.

Black-legged Kittiwake: imm DH 15 Dec (DWh, DD, ph); only rep.

Bonaparte's Gull: small nums OnonL & OneiL thru 11 Dec.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (R5): Bville 19 – 24 Jan (GD, ph, mob); OnonL 24 Jan – 1 Feb (mob); 12th Reg rec, 3rd for winter.

Ring-billed Gull: max 850 Bville 21 Jan.

Herring Gull: 1000 MCL 2 Jan; 1200 OLP 1 Feb; max 1500 DB 12 Jan, good num for loc.

Iceland Gull: 4 DB 2 Jan; 5 IH 20 Feb; max 8 MCL 2 Jan.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: max 2 DB 1 Jan, OnonL 12, 29 Feb.

Glaucous Gull: 2 DB 11 Jan, OLP 12 Feb; max 3 MCL 2 Jan.

Great Black-backed Gull: 73 MCL 3 Jan; max 80 IH 20 Feb.

Herring x Great Black-backed Gull (hybrid): SSSP 7 – 8 Dec (MB).

LOONS-PARAKEET

Red-throated Loon: max 5 OswH 15 Dec; low nums otherwise.

Common Loon: max 5 OswH 12 Dec; 1-2 var locs thru.

Double-crested Cormorant: 52 OnonL 14 Dec; 64 Bville 19 Jan.

Great Blue Heron: max 3 OLP 24 Jan; singles thru.

Turkey Vulture: max 19 Fayetteville, 11 Feb; most reps refer to same loc around Jamesville.

Golden Eagle: Little Falls 18 Jan (BLH); only rep.

Northern Harrier: max 2 DB 3 Dec; singles typ locs thru.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: singles thru.

Cooper's Hawk: max 2 OLP 1 Feb; good num singles thru.

Northern Goshawk: Erieville 30 Dec; only rep.

Bald Eagle: max 23 OnonL 16 Feb; no huge concentrations.

Red-shouldered Hawk: DH 23 Feb, early migrant (GS); only rep.

Red-tailed Hawk: max 6 DB 16 Dec; small nums widespread thru.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 2 DH 9 Jan & Richland 8 Jan; singles thru.

Eastern Screech-Owl: singles small nums mostly southern part of Reg.

Great Horned Owl: small nums thru.

Snowy Owl: 1-2 typical locs thru.

Barred Owl: singles thru.

Short-eared Owl: Fairfield 22 Jan (BLH); only rep.

Northern Saw-whet Owl: no reps.

Belted Kingfisher: max 3 DB 23 Feb; singles typ loc thru.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 1-2 SVB, FH, Scriba thru; known nesters wintering.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: max 5 Fayetteville 11 Dec.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: 5 reps thru, mostly Fayetteville area.

Downy Woodpecker: max 8 Pulaski 15 Jan.

Hairy Woodpecker: max 4 Dolge 8 Feb.

Northern Flicker: max 6 Oswego 10 Jan, good num. Singles thru.

Pileated Woodpecker: small nums thru.

American Kestrel: few singles, var locs, thru.

Merlin: few singles thru, rep as often as Kestrel (!), *intro*.

Peregrine Falcon: singles thru, winterers & presumably some local nesters.

FLYCATCHERS-SNOW BUNTING

Northern Shrike: few singles, typ locs, thru.

Blue Jay: max 25 DB 2 Jan; typ nums thru.

American Crow: max 2000-5000 Syr thru, roost flights. Typ nums elsewhere.

Fish Crow: max 8 Bville 13 Jan; most reps OnonL & Bville, *intro*.

Common Raven: 13 Pulaski 21 Feb (MB); max 16 Little Moose L 17 Dec (GL);

Horned Lark: max 90 Manlius 25 Feb; best nums & most reps Feb.

Black-capped Chickadee: nums 20-50 rep over distance, else typ nums.

Tufted Titmouse: max 9 Bville 15 Dec.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: max 11 Boyleston 2 Jan; very few away from typ upland locs.

White-breasted Nuthatch: max 11 BLNC 5 Feb; typ nums.

Brown Creeper: 6 BLNC 5 Feb; max 7 Cicero 14 Dec; 1-2 thru, thinly distributed.

Winter Wren: max 2 Kirkville 23 Feb, others same day imply early migrants; singles Dec imply late mirants; 2-3 possible winters.

Carolina Wren: max 4 Sterling 23 Feb (RW), unusual loc; else typ nums/locs Syr.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 6 Pulaski 21 Feb; small nums thru.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: 6 individuals rep, BLNC, Erie Canal, OLP, Carpenter's Brook; presumed winterers, various dates, early/late may be migrants.

Eastern Bluebird: max 13 Pulaski 11 Feb; small groups widespread typ locs thru.

Hermit Thrush: LeMoyne woods 14 Dec (JL); only rep.

American Robin: 150 Sherrill 15 Feb, poss early mig; else small flocks widespread thru but not an exceptional winter for species.

Gray Catbird: Erie Canal 14 Dec; only rep.

Northern Mockingbird: singles/pairs typ loc, mostly around Syr.

European Starling: max est 2000 MCL 9 Jan.

Cedar Waxwing: 80 WP 25 Dec; 104 Oswego 18 Dec; max 110 Skan 29 Dec; small groups thru.

House Sparrow: typ nums thru.

House Finch: max 67 Fayetteville 21 Dec.

Purple Finch: max 6 several locs & dates; no real presence away from SH & other trad upland locs.

Common Redpoll: Pulaski 18 Feb; 2 near Norway HERK 7 Dec; only reps, no irruption.

White-winged Crossbill: T Ohio 25 Jan (BLH).

Pine Siskin: Fabius 17 Feb; 2 OF 3 Feb; 3 OakC 15 Jan; max 5 Waterville 4 Nov; only reps.

American Goldfinch: max 103 Dolge 9 Feb; best nums from upland locs.

Lapland Longspur: Warners 23 Jan; Fabius 11 Feb; max 2 Fabius 23 Feb; only reps.

Snow Bunting: max 1000 Pulaski 16 Jan (MB); flocks typ locs thru.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS-CARDINALIDS

Eastern Towhee: Oriskany 20 Jan – 17 Feb; Pompey 21 Jan; only reps.

American Tree Sparrow: max 65 OLP 1 Feb.

Chipping Sparrow: Syr 29 Dec thru; Syr 9-10 Dec, 18 Jan; 1-3 Manlius 9 Dec thru; 2 other reps.

Field Sparrow: Const 8 Jan thru; OLP 12, 16 Dec; TR 14, 25 Dec; only reps.

LARK SPARROW (R5): Pulaski 7 Jan thru (MB, ph, mob), 3rd Reg rec, first for winter.

Fox Sparrow: Navarino 8 Dec (AB); only rep.

Song Sparrow: 13 OLP 14 Dec; max 15 OLC 31 Jan, good num; small nums thru.

Swamp Sparrow: OLP 10 Dec; TR 24 Jan; max 3 Warners 24 Jan; only reps.

White-throated Sparrow: max 20 SFNS 13 Jan & OLP 11 Jan; small nums widespread thru.

White-crowned Sparrow: max 4 Bville 10 Dec; OLP 14 Dec; Jamesville 15 Feb; 2

Jamesville 11 Feb; Meridian 14-16 Feb; only reps.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 35 Canastota 20 Feb.

Red-winged Blackbird: few reps small nums thru; max 100 Manlius 25 Feb & 2 other locs late Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: singles, small flocks thru; max 35 DB 4 Feb.

Rusty Blackbird: 6 Camillus 22 Dec; only rep (AB)

Common Grackle: 30 Elbridge 9-12 Dec; few reps small nums thru; max 300 Syr 26 Feb.

Ovenbird: Bville 4 Dec (GD), presumed rec late migrant, 2nd winter rec for Reg, *intro*.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 3 Kirkville 14 Dec; Kirkville 29 Dec; 2 OSP 29 Dec; only reps.

Northern Cardinal: 18 Pulaski 29 Feb; max 19 Elbridge 18 Jan.

DICKCISSEL (R5): fem 20 Jan – 24 Feb (LM, ph, mob); 5th winter rec for Reg.