

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

Jeffrey S. Bolsinger

98 State Street, Canton NY 13617
jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

Temperatures was generally mild, with the mean monthly temperature in Watertown exceeding long-term averages by 3.8° F in December and 2.8° in January. Relatively cold weather finally arrived late in the winter, and February's mean temperature of 18.5° was 2.6° below normal. There were no sustained periods of very cold temperatures this winter, so that large sections of the St. Lawrence River and near-shore Lake Ontario remained open for most or all of the season. Precipitation varied from normal by just 0.05" in December, but was below normal by 1.7" in January and 0.6" in February. Much of the Region saw relatively little snow, and for the first half of the winter what snow fell typically melted quickly, with a consistent snow pack not developing until the second half of the winter in many places.

It was a somewhat strange year for waterfowl. Thanks to mild weather to start the season and the lack of significant ice cover on the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario, duck numbers were fairly high overall. However, ducks were scarce at some locations where they are reliably found most winters, perhaps because the extensive open water didn't force them to concentrate. At the start of the winter good numbers of Gadwall, Northern Pintail, and Ring-necked Duck were still present at Wilson Hill WMA and other locations on the St. Lawrence River downstream where ice would normally have pushed them out by the end of November. Notable ducks included an adult female **King Eider** Nick Leone found at Pillar Point on 2 December and one each first-year male and female King Eider I found with White-winged Scoters at Henderson Harbor on 15 January. The five **Barrow's Goldeneye** seen at four locations was a relatively good tally, many found by Nick Leone, who also found a Common Goldeneye X Hooded

Merganser hybrid at Grass Point State Park on 15 December, and an apparent Common Goldeneye X Barrow's Goldeneye hybrid at Tibbett's Point on 11 February. Nick also saw a female Red-crested Pochard at Millen's Bay on 30 December, likely the same suspected escapee seen by many at Wilson Hill WMA in the fall.

Among the season's rarities was an adult **Great Cormorant** I found on a breakwater in the St. Lawrence River near the Massena-Cornwall bridge on 15 February and likely saw a week earlier when poor viewing conditions prevented certain identification. The cormorant remained until at least 27 February, allowing a number of local birders to see it. Most other waterbirds were present in typical numbers, but gulls were quite disappointing. A few pulses of gulls moved through the St. Lawrence River but seemed to consist almost entirely of Herring Gulls, and white-winged gulls were unusually scarce. For the first winter in many years no Glaucous Gulls were reported at Hawkins Point, which is often the best site for this species in New York State, and this species would have been missed entirely if not for a single report from Lake Ontario. Among the surprises of the season was a Spotted Sandpiper Vanessa Rojas and Steve Stevens saw at Whalen Park on 11 December. Other than the occasional Killdeer shorebirds of any species are rarely seen in Region 6 during winter.

Large numbers of raptors on and near Point Peninsula drew birders from around the state. On 10 January Mike Tetlow and Dominic Sherony carefully counted hawks on Point Peninsula, coming up with 23 Northern Harriers, 21 Red-tailed Hawks, and 55 Rough-legged Hawks. A few concentrations of Rough-legged Hawks were noted elsewhere, most notably more than two dozen on Fort Drum, but generally buteos were more widely scattered away from northwestern Jefferson County. Formerly extremely rare in winter, Red-shouldered Hawks seem to be nearly annual at this season now, with adults in Philadelphia and Lowville in February. American Kestrel also appears to be increasing in winter, and the more than 30 reported this winter seemed exceptionally high; also fairly unusual was the large number that appeared to survive the winter. A **Gyr Falcon**, apparently a juvenile dark morph individual, was observed perched on a large building adjacent to the airfield at Fort Drum on 11 January, but in typical fashion quickly flew off and was not seen again.

It was a good year for Short-eared Owls, with the largest roost on Point Peninsula, where as many as 25 were reported on a NYSDEC survey in late December but more modest numbers were generally seen. At least six Short-eared Owls were on Fort Drum and two more at Perch River, with rumors of additional roosts that lacked details. It was not a particularly big year for Snowy Owls, with a few scattered around the Region and again the largest number at Point Peninsula, where at least five were observed by many.

This winter's songbird list is unusually long for Region 6. Several birds not normally reported in winter were seen at feeders or in yards, most notably a Baltimore Oriole at a Rodman feeder until 13 December, and a Pine Warbler that showed up at a feeder in Denmark on 31 January. Until ten years ago Winter

Wren, Marsh Wren, and Hermit Thrush were considered great Regional rarities in winter, but are now found almost every year, including multiple individuals this winter. The five Winter Wrens and eight Hermit Thrushes reported is high by recent standards, although most of the Winter Wrens were seen in December and not again. Other unusual half-hardies include Gray Catbirds at Westcott Beach State Park and in Massena, a Brown Thrasher in Canton until mid-December, probably the same Eastern Towhee at two locations in Canton about one mile and six days apart in late December and early January, a Chipping Sparrow at a Canton feeder until 10 January, and a White-crowned Sparrow at a Carthage feeder to 26 January.

It was also a good year for irruptive finches. Evening Grosbeak and Common Redpoll were widespread in good numbers. Numerous Hoary Redpoll reports were submitted, of which 19 included photos or convincing details, quite a bit more than during most recent irruptions. Pine Grosbeaks were fairly common in northern St. Lawrence County but were scarce and widely scattered elsewhere. Very few adult male Pine Grosbeaks were observed. Red Crossbills were seen in eight locations and White-winged Crossbill in one location, all in lowland areas outside the Adirondacks. Presumably crossbills nested in the Adirondack portion of St. Lawrence County, but if so they were not detected by any birders.

For the season I received reports of 127 species, the highest winter tally in at least 15 years and ten species higher than the most recent ten-year average. The great diversity of half-hardies, lingering fall migrants, and irruptive finches all contributed to the high species total. The Great Cormorant was probably the bird of the season, but the raptor show on Point Peninsula was certainly the Region's biggest draw. The biggest disappointment was the scarcity of white-winged gulls, especially at Hawkins Point.

CONTRIBUTORS

Tom Auer, Beth Barnes, Steven & Linda Clark Benedict, Brian Berg, Jeff Biby, Jeff Bolsinger, Robin Booth, Darlene Bourdeau, Joseph Brin, Richard Brouse, Janet Burrows, Carol Cady, Benjamin Dixon, Deborah Dohne, Sarah Dzielski, Deborah Earl, Michelle Eichner, Harold Ellingsen, Doug & Ann Emlin, Will Gallup, Amber Gauthier, Michael Greenwald, Hollis Harrington, Rebecca Heagle, Susan Hochgraf, Janelle Hoh, Tamara Jolly, Nick Kachala, Steve Kelling, Patty LaLonde, Tom Langen, Monica LeClerc, Jorge de Leon Cardoza, Rachel Lewis, Nancy Loomis, Brian McAllister, Irene Mazzocchi, Brian Miller, Daniel Miller, Steven Mix, Bill Monroe, Anne Moomey, David Pechey, Bill Purcell, Asa Reed, Emily Reichert, Mandi Roggie, Vanessa Rojas, John Rupp, Ernest Scribner, Dominic Sheron, Eric John Smith, Gerry Smith, Raymond Spahn, Lynn Sprott, Janet Stein, Steve Stevens, Ila Terry, Michael Tetlow, Elizabeth Truskowski, Julian Warren, Drew Weber, Tom & Eileen Wheeler, Sue Willson.

ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart I, T Massena, STLA; **BPWMA** – Black Pd WMA; **BRB** – Black River Bay; **CCSP** – Coles Creek SP; **CV** – T Cape Vincent; **FD** – Fort Drum Military Reservation, JEFF & LEWI; **FdIP** – Fort de la Presentation; **FL** – Fisher’s Landing, T Alexandria; **GPSP** – Grass Pt SP; **HH** – Henderson Harbor; **HP** – Hawkins Pt, T Massena; **JEFF** – Jefferson County; **KC** – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; **KPSP** – Kring Pt SP; **MM** – Massawepie Mire, T Colton & Piercefield, STLA; **MP** – Montario Pt, T Ellisburg; **PilPt** – Pillar Pt, JEFF; **PRWMA** – Perch Ri WMA, JEFF; **PtPen** – Pt Peninsula, T Lyme, JEFF; **RLT** – Richard’s Landing Trail T Massena; **RMSP** – Robert Moses SP, T Massena; **SBSP** – Southwick Beach SP; **SH** – Sackett’s Harbor; **SLR** – St. Lawrence Ri; **STLA** – St. Lawrence County; **StPt** – Stony Pt, T Henderson, JEFF; **TP** – Tibbetts Pt; **ULLWMA** – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; **WBSP** – Westcott Beach SP; **WHWMA** – Wilson Hill WMA; **WP** – Whalen P, T Louisville.

WATERFOWL – HUMMINGBIRDS

Snow Goose: 8 reports southbound flocks thru 4 Jan; southbound max 500 2 Jan; singles FdIP 22 Jan & HP 9 Feb only other reports.

Canada Goose: max 4450 SLR T Waddington 24 Dec.

Mute Swan: max 106 FL 13 Feb.

Trumpeter Swan: max 22 ULLWMA 24 Jan; increasing.

Tundra Swan: max 565 PtPen 3 Dec.

Wood Duck: 2 T Watertown 1 Dec (BM) only report.

Gadwall: max 52 RLT 31 Dec;

American Wigeon: max 3 HP 31 Jan; 1-2 each from 3 other locations.

Mallard: max 935 HP 31 Jan.

American Black Duck: max 98 WP 13 Dec.

Northern Pintail: max 36 WP 1 Jan where last 9 Jan.

Green-winged Teal: max 5 WHWMA 13 Dec.

Canvasback: max 6 HH 29 Dec.

Redhead: max 1400 Millens Bay 30 Dec.

Ring-necked Duck: 400 WHWMA to 5 Dec; 35 StPt 15 Jan only other report of more than one; last WHWMA 31 Jan.

Greater Scaup: max 230 StPt 15 Jan.

Lesser Scaup: max 13 PtPen 16 Jan.

King Eider: ad f PilPt 2 Dec (NL); 1st year m & f HH 15 Jan (JB).

Surf Scoter: f T Watertown 5 Jan (BM) only report.

White-winged Scoter: max 64 HH 15 Jan.

Black Scoter: max 4 CCSP 4 Dec & MP 8 Dec.

Long-tailed Duck: max 620 MP 15 Jan.

Bufflehead: max 49 PtPen 1 Jan.

Common Goldeneye: max 1500-2000 FL early Jan.

Common Goldeneye X Hooded Merganser: GPSP 15 Dec (NL).

Barrow’s Goldeneye: m & f S tip PtPen 1 Dec (NL); ad m isthmus PtPen 1-10 Jan (NL, BM); f FL 10 Jan & 18 Feb (JB, NL); ad m FL 14 Jan (RB).

Barrow’s Goldeneye X Common Goldeneye: ad m TP 11 Feb (NL).

Hooded Merganser: max 65 RMSP 27 Dec.

Common Merganser: max 2600 RLT 27 Dec.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 405 HH 19 Dec.

Ruddy Duck: 4 Dexter Marsh 12 Dec only report.

Spruce Grouse: MM 6 & 14 Dec only reports.

Pied-billed Grebe: BRB late Dec (NL).

Horned Grebe: max 3 PtPen 5 Dec; last WBSP 19 Dec.

Red-necked Grebe: MP 15 Jan (JB) only report.

RAILS – TROPICBIRDS

American Coot: 12 WHWMA to 5 Dec (high for winter) only report.

Spotted Sandpiper: WP 11 Dec (VR, SS) very rare in winter.

Bonaparte’s Gull: 5 T Lyme 5 Dec only report.

Ring-billed Gull: last PtPen 23 Jan until arr BI 28 Feb.

Herring Gull: max 1000 BI 17 Jan; numbers low most of winter.

Iceland Gull: SLR T Massena 27 Dec & MoP 3 Jan only reports.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: ad SLR T Massena 17 Jan only report.

Glaucous Gull: SBSP 3 Dec only report; none HP & RMSP where usually present.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 228 HP 27 Dec.

LOONS – PARAKEET

Red-throated Loon: 2 BRB 5 & 19 Dec only reports.

Common Loon: max 5 BI 19 Dec; PtPen 14 Feb only report after 18 Jan.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 11 HH 6 Dec; 5 KPSP 10 Jan high for Jan; last 3 SLR Massena 18 Jan.

GREAT CORMORANT (R6): ad SLR T Massena 15-27 Feb (JB, mob) rare R6.

Great Blue Heron: reports from 13 locations throughout season.

Northern Harrier: max 23 PtPen 10 Jan where unusually common thru; few reports away from NW JEFF.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 18 reports.

Cooper's Hawk: 40 reports.

Northern Goshawk: T Louisville 24 Dec & FD 7 Jan only reports.

Bald Eagle: common & widespread even by recent standards; max 17 T Martinsburg 11 Feb.

Red-shouldered Hawk: T Philadelphia 8 Feb (JB) & T Lowville 16 Feb (MR); rare but increasing in winter.

Red-tailed Hawk: max 21 PtPen 10 Jan.

Rough-legged Hawk: max 55 PtPen 10 Jan; 21-27/day FD thru.

Eastern Screech-Owl: 8 reports all but 1 W JEFF more than usual.

Snowy Owl: up to 5/day PtPen; few away from NW JEFF.

Short-eared Owl: as many as 25 PtPen late Dec but 4-11/day more typical thru (mob); 2 PRWMA 9 Feb (IM); 6 FD 7 Jan (JB).

Belted Kingfisher: CV thru (DM); FD thru at least 4 Feb (JB); KPSP 18 Dec (BP).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: KC thru 19 Feb; FD 1 Feb; T Rutland 14 Feb.

Northern Flicker: max 4 CV 10 Jan; singles from 17 other locations.

American Kestrel: max 1-3/day PtPen thru; reports from more than 30 other locations; high.

Merlin: reports from 15 locations about average for recent years.

GYRFALCON: presumed juv dark morph perched on building adjacent to FD airfield 11 Jan (JB).

Peregrine Falcon: BI & T Watertown thru; 8 additional reports; increasing.

FLYCATCHERS – SNOW BUNTING

Northern Shrike: reports from about 30 locations modestly higher than previous 3-4 years.

Horned Lark: max 38 CV 27 Jan.

Tufted Titmouse: 150+ reports from 30+ locations; continuing to increase.

Winter Wren: Kip Trail T Canton thru 3 Jan (JB); BPWMA 6 Dec (BB); Muskellunge Bay & WBSP 19 Dec (JB); T Watertown 25 Jan to 2 Feb (LS); increasing in winter although rare after Jan.

Marsh Wren: 2 PRWMA 19 Dec (JB); rare but increasing in winter.

Carolina Wren: reports from 8 locations more than recent years.

Eastern Bluebird: max 8 T Canton 28 Jan; reports from 16 additional locations.

Hermit Thrush: max 2 T Clayton 21 Feb (RB); 6 additional reports all JEFF high for winter.

American Robin: max 75 T Watertown 6 Feb; modest numbers throughout.

Gray Catbird: WBSP 18 Dec (NL); T Massena 3 Jan (HE); rare in winter.

Brown Thrasher: T Canton thru 17 Dec; rare in winter.

European Starling: max 1100 CV 16 Dec.

Bohemian Waxwing: max 130 RMSP 15 Feb; 6 other reports of 15 or fewer.

Cedar Waxwing: max 140 RMSP 23 Feb; generally low numbers throughout.

American Pipit: RLT 27 Dec (BM, JS) rare in winter.

Evening Grosbeak: max 60 T Constableville 24 Dec; many reports throughout.

Pine Grosbeak: max 20 T Carthage 13 Jan; about 65 reports mostly STLA; very few adult males reported.

Purple Finch: scarce thru.

Common Redpoll: max 800 T Lyme 10 Jan; widespread in modest numbers with a few large flocks.

Hoary Redpoll: 19 reports with photos or reasonable descriptions; high.

Red Crossbill: max 12 T Croghan 16 Jan & T Potsdam 6 Feb; 6 other reports all from lowland areas.

White-winged Crossbill: RMSP 4 Jan (AB) only report.

Pine Siskin: max 24 T Clayton 13 Feb; generally modest numbers.

American Goldfinch: max 36 T Hammond 22 Feb.

Lapland Longspur: max 15 CV 7 Jan.

Snow Bunting: max 165 T Massena 15 Feb.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS – CARDINALIDS

Eastern Towhee: different locations about 1-mile apart T Canton 29 Dec (JB) & 4 Jan (EJS)

Chipping Sparrow: T Canton thru 10 Jan (BB); rare in winter.

Savannah Sparrow: FD 11 Dec (JB); T Ellisburg 19 Dec (JB); PtPen 29 Dec (SH, JLC); last T Leray 7 Jan (JB); more than usual for winter.

Song Sparrow: reported from 13 locations; a little below average.

Swamp Sparrow: Muskellunge Bay 19 Dec (JB); FD 7 & 11 Jan (JB); only reports.

White-throated Sparrow: max 21 T Watertown 13 Feb.

White-crowned Sparrow: T West Carthage feeder thru 26 Jan (RH) rare in winter.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 29 Burnham Pt SP 13 Feb; widespread in mostly small flocks.

Eastern Meadowlark: T Watertown 1 Jan (RB) only report.

Baltimore Oriole: T Rodman feeder thru 13 Dec (HH) rare in winter.

Red-winged Blackbird: max 7 StPt 15 Jan; 5 additional reports.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 6 T Watertown 22 Jan; T Rutland 14 Feb only other report.

Common Grackle: max 7 T Canton feeder 29 Jan (JR) where 1 5 Feb; 8 other reports.

Pine Warbler: T Denmark feeder 31 Jan (MR) very rare in winter.

EXOTICS

Red-crested Pochard: f Millens Bay 30 Dec (NL).