

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

Jeffrey S. Bolsinger

98 State Street, Canton NY 13617

jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

Winter alternated between mild and seasonably cold, with few lengthy spells of either. December was mostly mild, with a mean temperature in Watertown of 31.7° F, which is 4.4° above normal. High temperatures topped 50° on six days in December, reaching as high as 63° on 17 December, the warmest day of the winter. Mild weather continued into the new year, with a high of 50° on 2 January, but most of that month was cold, as indicated by a mean monthly temperature of 10.6°, which is 9° below normal. Temperatures dropped below zero on the last 11 nights of January, including the season's low of -19° on 30 January, but daytime temperatures during this period often rose into the 20s or even 30s. Temperatures moderated in February, and that month's mean temperature of 21.0° was within 0.3° of normal. About 3.5" of precipitation fell in each of December and January, both totals within 0.3" of normal, but February's 4.6" inches of precipitation was about 2.1" higher than average. Watertown's 36.9" of snow in February was just a couple of inches shy of the total for December and January combined.

Snow Geese barely showed up in Region 6 during the fall, but up to 14,000 were on the St. Lawrence River at Coles Creek State Park during early December, and on 5 December two **Ross's Goose** were among them. Trumpeter Swans continue to increase at all seasons, as evidenced by a Regionally high count of 42 at Wilson Hill WMA on 16 December. Unfortunately, Mute Swans are also increasing in the Region, most noticeably during winter along the St. Lawrence River near Wellesley Island, where 207 were counted on 2 February.

Despite the presence of open water throughout the winter, waterfowl numbers seemed quite poor along the Lake Ontario shore, and ducks were scarce at all but a few favored locations. However, dabbling ducks lingered in unusually high numbers at and near Whalen Park on the St. Lawrence River into early January. For instance, counts of more than about five pintail are exceedingly rare anywhere

in Region 6 during winter, but as many as 127 were at Whalen Park to at least 8 January. Other dabblers present in higher than usual numbers included Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, and Green-winged Teal. During the mid-winter waterfowl count on 16 January one each first-winter male **Harlequin Duck** was at Tibbetts Point and Lisbon Beach, more than 60 miles apart, the only reports of the season of this Regionally rare duck. The season's only Barrow's Goldeneye, a female, was at Hawkins Point in early January.

For the second consecutive year white-winged gulls put in a dismal showing, with just one Iceland Gull and two Glaucous Gulls. A Little Gull at Pillar Point 1 December and a Lesser Black-backed Gull on the St. Lawrence River in Massena 31 December were the only other noteworthy gulls. Gull numbers seemed remarkably low on the St. Lawrence River for most of the winter, but good numbers of Herring Gulls and a few Ring-billed Gulls were on Lake Ontario through the season.

Raptor numbers were mostly down from the previous, very good winter, but many species were still present in average or higher numbers. Northern Harrier was especially down, with maximum counts of no more than three on Point Peninsula and Cape Vincent, where as many as 22 were seen daily last winter. Maximum counts for Rough-legged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and Short-eared Owl were roughly half that of the previous winter. The season's only Northern Goshawk, an immature, was on Point Peninsula on 21 January. A **Black Vulture** over Adams and a Golden Eagle over Leray were the only reports for each species, both occurring on 20 February. Black Vultures are rarely reported in Region 6 but probably occur more frequently than reports suggest given increases elsewhere in northern New York and Ontario.

It was a good winter for half-hardies, perhaps not surprising given the mild start to the winter. At least five Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, three Winter Wrens, and four Hermit Thrushes continue a string of winters each species has been documented, suggesting that they now occur annually in winter. This was also the fifth consecutive winter that Gray Catbird has been observed; during the previous decade catbirds were reported no more than once every two or three winters. The six Red-headed Woodpeckers that successfully overwintered at Fort Drum represents a seasonal high count for Region 6, but was not unexpected given this year's bumper acorn crop.

The season's tally of three warbler species was certainly the highest Region 6 winter tally in the last 20 years and likely is unprecedented. Completely unexpected was a Black-throated Green Warbler Dick Brouse and Rachel Lewis found on Point Peninsula **14 January** and that remained to at least **19 January**. Somewhat less surprising but still unexpected was a Common Yellowthroat on Fort Drum 5 January that was not found again. The extensive red cedar stands near Lake Ontario and more locally along the St. Lawrence River included many cedars loaded with berries, so the presence of scattered small groups of Yellow-rumped Warblers was not a surprise. However, it is not clear whether these birds made it through the winter, as large flocks of European Starlings apparently

decimated the berry crops in many cedar stands, and by mid-February few cedar berries seemed to be present and Yellow-rumped Warblers were hard to find.

Crossbill numbers in southeast St. Lawrence County were disappointing given the reportedly historic irruption reported elsewhere in the Adirondacks. Red Crossbills and White-winged Crossbills were observed in several places and almost certainly nested in the Region, but at most locations were only seen as flyovers or obviously transient individuals, and none were found in many places where nesting has been confirmed in previous years. Cone crops seemed mostly poor in the northwest Adirondacks, especially north of State Highway 3, and other than a couple of locations near Wanakena there seemed to be little evidence that either crossbill nested in Region 6. Among other finches, Pine Siskin and Common Redpoll were widespread in low numbers, and there were just three reports of Evening Grosbeak and six reports of Pine Grosbeak.

The 123 species reported this winter is a little more than four higher than the most recent 10-year mean. The abundance of half-hardies and presence of seasonally rare songbirds like Black-throated Green Warbler and Common Yellowthroat accounted for the relatively high total. There were no truly outstanding rarities, with Harlequin Duck, Ross's Gull, and Black Vulture representing the rarest species of the season. Perhaps the season's big disappointment was relative scarcity of crossbills given the widespread nesting event documented throughout much of the Adirondacks.

CONTRIBUTORS

Janet Akin, Marilyn Badger, Brian Berg, Jeff Biby, Jeff Bolsinger, Connie Bond, Robin Booth, Jim & Deborah Busby, Carol Cady, Bernie Carr, Laura Desmond, Benjamin Dixon, Harold Ellingsen, Lee Ellsworth, Doug & Ann Emlin, Will Gallup, Rick Gould, Barbara Hostetler, Joan Howlett, Janelle Jones, Nick Kachala, Joan Kogut, Jennifer Lang, Tom Langen, Nick Leone, Rachel Lewis, Broan McAllister, Bill McConnell, Kaley McHale, Brian Miller, Daniel Miller, Ellen Miller, Steven Mix, Neil Paprocki, Asa Reed, Mandi Roggie, Vanessa Rojas, Sarah Sirsat, Gerry Smith, Raymond Spahn, Elizabeth Truskowski, Mary Beth Warburton, Tom & Eileen Wheeler, Sue Willson.

ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart I, T Massena, STLA; **CCSP** – Coles Creek SP; **CV** – T Cape Vincent; **FD** – Fort Drum Military Reservation, JEFF & LEWI; **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; **LB** – Lisbon Beach, T Lisbon; **LBSF** – Lonesome Bay State Forest; **LSB** – Little Sucker Brook P, T Waddington; **LWMA** – Lakeview WMA; **MP** – Montario Pt, T Ellisburg; **PilPt** – Pillar Pt, JEFF; **PtPen** – Pt Peninsula, T Lyme, JEFF; **RLT** – Richard's Landing Trail, T Massena; **RMSP** – Robert Moses SP, T Massena; **RRT** – Remington Recreation Trail, T Canton; **RWSP** – Robert G. Wehle SP; **SBSP** – Southwick Beach SP; **SLR** – St. Lawrence Ri; **SLU** – St. Lawrence University; **SnB** – Snowshoe Bay, Stony Pt, T Henderson; **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.

Snow Goose: max 14000 CCSP 5 Dec; scarce after 20 Dec; last 67 T Rutland 7 Jan.

Ross's Goose: 2 CCSP 5 Dec (JBo).

Mute Swan: max 207 GPSP 2 Feb (JBo); high, increasing.

Trumpeter Swan: max 42 WHWMA 16 Dec (JBo), increasing.

Tundra Swan: max 255 PilPt 18 Dec.

Wood Duck: Black Ri Fishing site T Watertown 8 Dec (B. Miller) only report.

Northern Shoveler: 4 WP 5 Dec (JBo) only report.

Gadwall: max 62 RLT 31 Dec high for winter; last 6 RMSP 22 Jan.

American Wigeon: SnB 13 Jan only report.

Mallard: max 590 Leishman Pt 16 Jan.

American Black Duck: max 115 WP 8 Jan.

Northern Pintail: max 127 WP 8 Jan where last 13 Jan; T Oswegatchie 21 Feb early arr?

Green-winged Teal: max 26 WP 11 Dec high for winter; last WP 8 Jan.

Canvasback: 2 PilPt 4 Dec only report.

Redhead: max 30 SnB 13 Jan.

Ring-necked Duck: max 200 SnB 13 Jan.

Greater Scaup: max 260 PilPt 5 Dec.

Lesser Scaup: max 6 SnB 13 Jan.

HARLEQUIN DUCK (R6): 1st winter m LB (JBo, T. & E. Wheeler, N. Kachala) & TP (N. Leone) 16 Jan seen simultaneously; rare R6.

White-winged Scoter: max 30 SBSP 31 Dec.

Black Scoter: max 2 MP 3 Dec; WP 11 Dec & CCSP 12 Dec only other reports.

Long-tailed Duck: max 835 MP 3 Dec.

Bufflehead: max 50 PilPt 5 Dec.

Common Goldeneye: max 1045 GPSP 2 Feb.

Barrow's Goldeneye: f HP 8-9 Jan (JBo, E. Wheeler).

Hooded Merganser: max 45 RMSP 29 Dec.

Common Merganser: max 2065 SLR T Massena 16 Jan.

Red-breasted Merganser: max 67 HH 3 Dec.

Horned Grebe: max 6 RWSP 29 Dec; singles same area 14 Dec & 13 Jan only other reports.

Red-necked Grebe: HH 3 Dec; BI 5-10 Dec; WHWMA 12 Dec & BI 10 Jan only reports.

Little Gull: ad PilPt 1 Dec (N. Leone).

Ring-billed Gull: vacated SLR by 20 Dec; scattered reports 1-9/day W JEFF Jan & Feb.

Herring Gull: max 1200 WBSP 1 Dec.

Iceland Gull: 1st cycle HP 8-16 Jan only report, low.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: RLT 31 Dec.

Glaucous Gull: 1st cycle HP 8 Jan; FL 20 Jan; only reports, low.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 295 HP 8 Jan.

Red-throated Loon: CCSP 5 Dec.

Common Loon: last 2 BI 16 Jan.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 17 HH 3 Dec; last 2 Dexter Marsh 18 Dec.

Great Blue Heron: reports from 7 loc; ULLWMA thru 20 Feb only loc after Dec.

BLACK VULTURE (R6): T Adams 20 Feb (C. Bond) only report.

Turkey Vulture: arr T Alexandria 27 Feb only report.

Golden Eagle: 20 Feb T Leray (J. Lang) only report.

Northern Harrier: 1-3/day NW JEFF thru; 8 reports of 9 ind STLA where last T Hammond 16 Jan; far fewer than previous winter.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: at least 18 ind from 13 loc.

Cooper's Hawk: at least 28 ind from 46 loc.

Northern Goshawk: imm PtPen 21 Jan (S. Kelling) only report.

Bald Eagle: 200+ reports; max 37 at deer carcass T Carthage 3 Jan; 27 PilPt 7 Jan & 23 at deer carcass T West Turin 3 Feb other notable concentrations.

Red-tailed Hawk: 5-12/day NW JEFF thru; many fewer than previous winter.

Rough-legged Hawk: 12-22/day NW JEFF thru; fewer than previous winter.

Eastern Screech-Owl: FD 1 Feb only report.

Snowy Owl: 31 reports of about 10-13 ind JEFF thru; T Lowville 24 & 31 Jan only reports away from JEFF.

Short-eared Owl: 2 T Lyme 1 Dec & 21 Jan; up to 6/day CV where last 5 Feb; 3 T Brasher 20-26 Jan; T Orleans 22 Jan.

Northern Saw-whet Owl: FD 15 Feb only report.

Belted Kingfisher: last FD 5 Jan.

Red-headed Woodpecker: imm KC 28 Dec; 6 ad FD thru high for winter.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: CV 27 Dec to 17 Jan (R. Booth); RLT 31 Dec; RWSP 13 Jan (JBo); T Lawrence 16 Jan (J. & D. Busby); T Canton 29 Jan (B. Dixon); more than usual.

Black-backed Woodpecker: T Colton 28 Jan only report.

Northern Flicker: max 6 RMSP 29 Dec; at least 35 additional reports.

American Kestrel: 1-2/day NW JEFF thru; scarce elsewhere.

Merlin: 15 reports of at least 12 individuals.

Peregrine Falcon: many reports from traditional sites at BI, RMSP, T Watertown; also RWSP 14 Dec & 28 Feb; T Rutland 7 Jan.

Northern Shrike: 40 reports of at least 37 ind.

Horned Lark: max 69 CV 22 Jan.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 5 T Orleans 16 Dec.

Bohemian Waxwing: none.

Cedar Waxwing: max 70 RRT 29 Jan; generally low numbers.

Winter Wren: Baker Woods Pres 21 Dec (S.Mix); Kip Trail SLU 22 Dec (JBo); last T Canton 28 Dec (JBo).

Carolina Wren: reports from 13 loc.

Gray Catbird: T Orleans 22 Jan (S. Kelling).

Northern Mockingbird: LWMA 3 Dec & 13 Jan (JBo).

European Starling: max 5000+ PtPen 21 Dec.

Eastern Bluebird: max 9 RWSP 3 Dec & T Stockholm 29 Dec; reports from another 26 loc thru; more than usual.

Hermit Thrush: State Park Rd PtPen 21 Dec (JBo); CV 7 Jan (N. Paprocki); StPt 19 Jan (N. Leone); Pine Woods Rd PtPen 21 Jan & 6 Feb (S. Kelling); rare but increasingly regular in winter.

American Robin: max 86 LBSF 20 Feb; widespread in mostly low numbers.

Evening Grosbeak: max 4 T Clifton 18 Feb; only 2 other reports.

Pine Grosbeak: max 8 T Pierrepont 28 Jan; only 5 other reports.

House Finch: max 53 T Brownville 3 Jan.

Purple Finch: max 23 T Parishville 23 Feb; widespread mostly small numbers.

Common Redpoll: max 50 CV 26 Feb; generally low numbers.

Red Crossbill: max 6 SUNY ESF Ranger School T Fine; 1-4 at 6 other loc; generally scarce.

White-winged Crossbill: max 10 T Colton 30 Jan; reports from 10 other loc; modest numbers.

Pine Siskin: max 20 T Colton 20 Feb; widespread in low numbers.

American Goldfinch: max 120 T Potsdam 18 Feb.

Lapland Longspur: max 6 LSB flying across SLR 12 Dec.

Snow Bunting: max 600 CV 13 Feb.

Chipping Sparrow: T Potsdam 30 Dec (S. Sirsat)

American Tree Sparrow: max 95 T Brasher 26 Jan.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 31 T Lyme 20 Feb.

White-throated Sparrow: max 42 KC 23 Jan, generally good numbers.

Savannah Sparrow: T Hounsfield 20 Dec (B. Miller) only report.

Song Sparrow: max 4 T Louisville 5 Dec; about 20 other ind.

Swamp Sparrow: different locations FD 10 Dec & 5 Jan (J. Bolsinger) only reports.

Eastern Towhee: PtPen 14-24 Jan (R. Brouse, R. Lewis, mob).

Eastern Meadowlark: 2 T Orleans 1 Dec (S. Kelling) only report.

Red-winged Blackbird: max 4 KC 21 Feb; 18 other reports all but 5 after 25 Jan.

Brown-headed Cowbird: 15 reports from 7 loc; max 15 T Clayton 26 Dec.

Rusty Blackbird: T Massena 12 Dec (JBo) only report.

Common Grackle: 4 reports max 9 T Massena 18 Feb.

Common Yellowthroat: FD 5 Jan not found again (JBo) very rare in winter.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: max 16 StPt 13 Jan where many reports; also 5 PtPen 21 Dec & 2 T Hammond 23 Jan; all in red cedar.

Black-throated Green Warbler: PtPen 14-19 Jan (R. Brouse, R. Lewis, K. McHale, B. McConnell) very rare in winter.