

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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It was a very mild winter with little snow except for an epic lake-effect snowstorm 24-27 December. Watertown's mean temperature for December was 29.2° F, or 1.6° above normal, and the month's precipitation total of 6.6" was 2.3" above normal; about half of this precipitation fell during the Christmas snowstorm. Official weather records show that Watertown received 49" of snow during this four-day storm, but numerous reports of well over 50" of snow came from many places in northern Jefferson County, with some tallies exceeding 70". Temperatures rose to 54° by New Year's Eve virtually eliminating snow cover in many areas, and most of Region 6 had snow cover for only about half of the winter. January was especially mild, with a mean temperature of 27.4° that was a whopping 7.0° above normal. January's precipitation total was 5.2", or 1.8" above normal, more than half of which fell as rain. February's mean temperature of 24.3° was a more modest 3.0° above normal, and the only serious cold spell of the winter came 3-5 February, the first sub-zero nights of the winter, with temperatures dropping to -27° on 4 February and -24° on 5 February. The only other subzero night of the winter was 25 February, when the mercury dropped to -2. A period of unseasonably warm weather fell between these two cold spells, beginning on 14 February and with especially springlike high temperatures of 52° on 15 February and 59° on 16 February.

Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River remained mostly open until late January, and even then many areas that freeze over most winters remained open throughout the winter. Ice cover peaked in late February, at which time the bays and near-shore Lake Ontario were iced over from Stony Point north, but the lake south of Stony Point remained mostly open. At the same time large stretches of the St. Lawrence River froze over, but some areas that frequently freeze over by late January remained open all winter.

Waterfowl numbers were generally higher than usual, perhaps not surprising given the abundance of open water most of the winter. Two Cackling Geese were among a flock of southbound Canada Geese in Leray on 7 December, and Reuben Stoltzfus picked out three more Cackling Geese among the thousands of wintering Canadas in Cape Vincent on 6 January. Two Blue-winged Teal Brian Berg and Harold Ellingsen saw at Grass Point State Park on 12 February must have been exceptionally early migrants, but in any case represents a very rare winter record for the Region 6. The six Barrow's Goldeneye reported in January and February are more than are reported most winters and included a pair off Pillar Point on 8 January, with the rest coming from the St. Lawrence River. The 17 Canvasbacks at Point Peninsula on 5 January was the highest winter tally since 2006, and the 13 Ruddy Ducks at Grass Point State Park present for much of January was the highest winter total since 2011. Long-tailed Duck, on the other hand, seemed

unusually scarce, with the highest count at Montario Point of just 208, far below typical high counts that are often in the high hundreds or low thousands.

It was a generally poor year for open country raptors. High counts for Rough-legged Hawk and Northern Harrier were in the three to five per day range in Cape Vincent and on Point Peninsula, well below what would be seen in a “good” winter. Short-eared Owls were reported from four locations, with just one or two individuals at each location. Snowy Owls were observed at five locations, but apparently just for one or a few days each. The raptor highlight of the season was an immature Golden Eagle that wintered between Canton and Potsdam, first found by Natalie Aldritch in late January and seen by many birders through the end of February. Also seen in the same area was an adult Golden Eagle for about two weeks in late February, and up to 16 Bald Eagles, the highest concentration reported anywhere in Region 6 this winter, although Bald Eagles seemed to be everywhere all winter.

Several species that historically went unreported most winters are now documented at this season annually or nearly so; such birds seen this winter include Northern Pintail, Red-shouldered Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, Chipping Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. The recent regularity in reporting of these species likely represents an actual increase in winter occurrence, but improved reporting with increasingly widespread adoption of eBird could also account for much of the apparent increases in winter presence. Among other half-hardies sparrows were a mixed bag, with reports of Fox Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow, two species absent most winters, but fewer than usual White-throated Sparrow and Song Sparrow, and no Swamp Sparrow at all. A Common Yellowthroat that lingered in a Lisbon marsh to 4 December made it two winters in a row for this species, which prior to a January 2022 record from Fort Drum had never been documented in Region 6 during the winter reporting season.

Perhaps the most exciting find of the year was a Boreal Chickadee that Nick Leone discovered at Grass Point State Park near Alexandria Bay. Found on 20 December, this obliging chickadee remained throughout the winter and was observed by many birders, some having it feed out of their hands. Many visitors chasing the chickadee went on to bird nearby sections of the St. Lawrence River, with the result that this portion of Region 6 was covered much more thoroughly than it is during most winters.

It was a decent but somewhat mixed winter for irruptives. Bohemian Waxwings were present in northern St. Lawrence County throughout the winter, but there was just one report from Jefferson County and none from Lewis County. Modest numbers of Pine Grosbeaks were present, again mostly in northern St. Lawrence County but with some reports from Lewis County. Evening Grosbeaks were widely reported all winter, often in good numbers at feeders, but were less common in Jefferson County than the rest of Region 6. A couple of flocks of Common Redpolls were noted, including one of nearly 200 individuals at Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, but for the most part redpolls were scarce, as were Pine Siskins. No crossbills were reported from Region 6 this winter.

“Spring” migration got off to an early start this winter, with Snow Goose, Turkey Vulture, Red-winged Blackbird, and Common Grackle arriving between 12 and 20 February, and by the last week of the month these species were moving in numbers more typical of mid-March. On 20 February, just one day after the first Turkey Vultures appeared, Dick Brouse spotted a **Black Vulture** roosting near his house, presumably part of the influx of vultures into the area. Black Vulture is another species that seems on the verge of becoming annual in Region 6, although it is still rarely reported.

This winter’s species tally of 119 species is virtually identical to the most recent ten-year mean of 118.6 species. Given the mild winter, abundance of open water leading to better than usual waterfowl numbers, and decent half-hardy and irruptive lists, it seems like the season’s species tally should have been higher. The bird of the season was surely the Boreal Chickadee at Grass Point State Park that put on a great show for many and allowed a fair number of long-time Region 6 birders to finally add this species to their Jefferson County lists. In fact this chickadee was a Region 6 first for some of the area’s newer birders, given that Boreal Chickadee appears to have vanished from most of the traditional nesting sites in southeastern St. Lawrence County.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart I Marina; **BPSP** – Burnham Pt SP; **BPWMA** – Black Pd WMA; **BRB** – Black River Bay; **CCSP** – Coles Creek SP; **CV** – T Cape Vincent; **FD** – Fort Drum Military Reservation, JEFF & LEWI; **GPSP** – Grass Pt SP; **HP** – Hawkins Pt, T Massena; **ICNC** – Indian Creek Nature Center, T Canton; **JCSP** – Jacques Cartier SP; **KC** – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; **KPSP** – Kring Pt SP; **LPd** – Leonard Pd trail, T Colton; **LWMA** – Lakeview WMA; **MP** – Montario Pt, T Ellisburg; **PilPt** – Pillar Pt, JEFF; **PRWMA** – Perch Ri WMA; **PtPen** – Pt Peninsula, T Lyme, JEFF; **RMSP** – Robert Moses SP, T Massena; **RRT** – Remington Recreation Trail, T Canton; **RWSP** – Robert G. Wehle SP; **SH** – Sackets Harbor; **S BSP** – Southwick Beach SP; **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: last southbound T Martinsburg 22 Dec; northbound arr T Watertown 14 Feb; max 10000 KC 22 Feb.

Cackling Goose: 2 T Leray 7 Dec (JSB); 3 CV 6 Jan (R. Stoltzfus)

Canada Goose: max 5000 BRB 5 Feb.

Mute Swan: max 84 GPSP 20 Dec.

Trumpeter Swan: max 26 PRWMA 26 Feb.
Tundra Swan: max 425 PtPen 2 Dec; 42 CCSP 7 Jan high winter count STLA.
Blue-winged Teal: 2 GPSP 12 Feb (B. Berg, H. Ellingsen) rare in winter; early migrant?
Gadwall: max 20 RMSP 1 Jan.
American Wigeon: max 8 Jericho Road T Watertown 15 Feb; reports from 7 additional loc thru.
Mallard: max 310 BRB 5 Feb.
American Black Duck: max 125 StPt 16 Jan.
Northern Pintail: max 30 WP 22 Dec; 9 additional reports from 6 loc thru; increasing winter.
Green-winged Teal: T Gouverneur 11 Jan (H. Ellingsen) only report.
Canvasback: max 17 PtPen 5 Jan (M. Mau, S. Phillips) high.
Redhead: max 870 BPSP 2 Jan.
Ring-necked Duck: max 560 CCSP 3 Dec.
Greater Scaup: max 800 StPt 16 Jan.
Lesser Scaup: max 32 CV 11 Feb.
Surf Scoter: BPWMA 16 Jan only report.
White-winged Scoter: max 43 BPWMA 16 Jan.
Long-tailed Duck: max 208 MP 16 Jan low.
Bufflehead: max 58 Pt. Salubrious 2 Dec.
Common Goldeneye: max 710 GPSP 11 Feb.
Barrow's Goldeneye: m BPSP 2 Jan (JSB, photos!); f GPSP 6 Jan (R. Stoltzfus); m & f PilPt 8 Jan (N. Leone); m 25 Jan (R. Brouse); f JCSP 26 Feb (N. Kachala & R. Buckert); good showing.
Hooded Merganser: max 36 RMSP 19 Jan.
Common Merganser: max 310 KPSP 2 Jan.
Red-breasted Merganser: max 94 TP 29 Jan.
Ruddy Duck: up to 13/day GPSP 2 Jan to 22 Jan (JSB, mob); 2 T Massena 4 Jan (H. Ellingsen); more than usual for winter.
Horned Grebe: max 2 PtPen 2 Jan & RWSP 12 Jan; last CCSP 21 Jan.
Red-necked Grebe: 4 WHWMA 2 Dec only report.
American Coot: max 3 PtPen where last 7 Jan (B. Miller, mob); T Clayton 6-10 Feb (R. Brouse, R. Lewis, N. Dean).
Bonaparte's Gull: TP 3 Dec only report.
Ring-billed Gull: Jan max 16 T Clayton 8 Jan; increasing by 18 Feb.
Herring Gull: max 850 WBSP 16 Jan.
Iceland Gull: HP 14 Jan; CCSP 28 Jan; BI 18 Feb; only reports.
Glaucous Gull: HP 5 & 7 Jan; 2 BI 18 Feb; only reports.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 315 HP 14 Jan.

Red-throated Loon: 4 SH 17 Dec (JSB) only report.

Common Loon: max 6 KPSP 2 Jan (JSB) high; 4 CCSP 21 Jan (JSB) also high; last live loon HP 28 Jan (R. Gould); 3 dead on beach SBSP 13 Feb (J. Chapman).

Double-crested Cormorant: last T Clayton 18 Jan.

Great Blue Heron: reports from 9 loc thru; max 2 ULLWMA 22 Jan & T Hammond 19 Feb.

Black Vulture: KC 20 Feb (R. Brouse) rare but increasing.

Turkey Vulture: Otter Creek Pres 2 Dec (B. Purcell) late; arr KC, T Brownville & T Potsdam 19 Feb.

Golden Eagle: imm T Canton & T Potsdam late Jan thru (N. Aldritch, mob) joined by ad for 2 weeks late Feb.

Northern Harrier: max 3-5/day NW JEFF.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 14 reports.

Cooper's Hawk: 46 reports from 39 loc.

Bald Eagle: max 16 T Canton 22 Feb; 200+ reports, ubiquitous.

Red-shouldered Hawk: T Stockholm 5 Dec (A. Moomey); T Canton 22 Jan (JSB); becoming nearly annual in winter.

Rough-legged Hawk: 1-5/day in open country throughout; no large concentrations noted.

Eastern Screech-Owl: PRWMA 12 Dec only report.

Snowy Owl: PtPen 2 & 9 Jan; 3 reports same area CV 2 Jan to 27 Feb; T Massena 3 Jan; T Clayton 5 Jan; FD 11 Jan; only reports.

Short-eared Owl: PRWMA 2 Dec where 2 on 6 Dec (A. Randazzo); 2 T Clayton 6 Dec (J. McKay); T Hammond 7 Dec (P. Egan) & 19 Feb (E. Saphier); 2 CV 4-6 Feb (R. Brouse, R. Lewis).

Northern Saw-whet Owl: responding to imitated toots mid-day ICNC 22 Jan (JSB); only report.

Belted Kingfisher: PilPt 17 Dec (JSB); FD 20 Dec & 27 Feb (JSB); SUNY-ESF Ranger School 6 Jan & 22 Feb (J. Fogden); T Ellisburg 20 Feb (L. Eggleston); T Philadelphia 24 Feb (R. Brouse); KC 25 Feb (R. Brouse); more than usual for winter.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: KC 24 Dec to 4 Feb (R. Brouse); T Brasher feeder 1-2 Feb (J. Deshane); only reports.

Black-backed Woodpecker: LPd 2 Jan only report.

Northern Flicker: max 5 RMSP 19 Feb; 12 additional reports.

American Kestrel: 33 reports from 16 loc W JEFF thru; just 5 reports elsewhere.

Merlin: 10 reports W JEFF thru; T Massena 21 Jan only other report.

Peregrine Falcon: multiple reports from vicinity of 4 known or suspected nest sites thru; only other reports T Denmark & T Carthage both 22 Dec.

Northern Shrike: 14 reports; low.

Canada Jay: 3 LPd 2 Jan only report.

Common Raven: max 15 T Morristown 26 Dec.

Boreal Chickadee: GPSP 20 Dec thru (N. Leone, mob) rare JEFF.

Horned Lark: max 125 CV 28 Jan.

Bohemian Waxwing: max 230 RMSP 26 Feb; 14 additional reports N STLA 10 Dec thru; 42 FD 8 Feb only other report.

Cedar Waxwing: max 85 CV 7 Jan.

Winter Wren: RRT 13 Jan (B. Berg).

Carolina Wren: KC 4 Dec thru; T Champion 12 Dec & 13 Jan; only reports.

European Starling: max 900 T Louisville 4 Dec.

Eastern Bluebird: max 8 RMSP 21 Jan; reports from another 10 loc N STLA; 3 LWMA 19 Feb only other report.

Hermit Thrush: GPSP 12 Feb (S. Kelling); only report.

American Robin: max before mid-Feb 20 Leishman Pt 5 Feb; generally scarce; 41 T Watertown 2 Feb & 24 Feb & 43 PRWMA 26 Feb suggests some late-season movement.

Evening Grosbeak: max 80 T Fine 19 Feb; widespread at feeders throughout LEWI & STLA; few reports JEFF where max 9 T Adams 24 Feb.

Pine Grosbeak: max 22 T Canton; 27 additional reports mostly N STLA.

House Finch: max 35 CV 24 Dec.

Purple Finch: max 3 T Massena 17 Feb; just 8 reports; unusually scarce.

Common Redpoll: 185 ULLWMA 22 Jan (JSB); 35 Crooked Creek Pres (J. McKay); 110 ULLWMA 19 Feb (JSB) another 12 widely scattered reports of 1-7 ind; generally scarce.

Pine Siskin: CV 11 Dec; T West Turin 21 Dec; max 2 T Canton 19 Jan; only reports.

American Goldfinch: max 60 T Stockholm 24 Dec.

Lapland Longspur: max 2 T Clayton 8 Feb; 4 reports widely scattered singles.

Snow Bunting: max 700 T Leray 22 Feb.

Chipping Sparrow: T Hounsfield 28 Feb (R. Spahn) only report.

Fox Sparrow: T. Croghan 4-10 Dec (M. Roggie).

American Tree Sparrow: max 28 T Stockholm 27 Dec.

Dark-eyed Junco: max 32 T Canton 17 Feb.

White-crowned Sparrow: T Alexandria feeder 26-27 Dec (A. Reed).

White-throated Sparrow: max 6 T Watertown 18 Feb; fewer than most winters.

Song Sparrow: 12 ind from 11 loc; fewer than most recent winters.

Swamp Sparrow: none.

Eastern Meadowlark: T Orleans 21 Dec (N. Paprocki) only report.

Red-winged Blackbird: lingering T Canton to 14 Jan; arr T Clayton 12 Feb; widespread by 14 Feb.

Brown-headed Cowbird: max 350 T Louisville 4 Dec high; 3 T Clayton 18 & 26 Dec; singles T Fine 16 Dec, T Canton 1 Jan & T Stockholm 29 Jan only other reports.

Rusty Blackbird: T Potsdam 28 Dec (B. Miner, J. Sausville).

Common Grackle: T Canton 17-19 Dec; T Alexandria 26 Dec; arr CV 13 Feb; max 10 T Watertown 20 Feb.

Common Yellowthroat: T Lisbon 4 Dec (JSB) rare in winter.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: StPt 16 Jan (JSB) only report.

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