

Western Great Lakes Region

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Observers in Wisconsin categorized the winter of 1994–1995 as “the winter that almost was not.” The same report came from Michigan and Minnesota. In all three states temperatures were mild, particularly in December, and precipitation was below normal. There were a few cold snaps, particularly in early January and mid-February, but for the most part the winter was unseasonably mild.

As expected, because of the mild weather, the trend over the winter was for autumn migrants to linger farther north than normal and for irruptive winter species to be absent. The only really rare species anywhere in the Region were a Tufted Duck on the St. Clair River in Michigan (which actually spent most its time on the Canadian side), and the continued presence in Minnesota of the Calliope Hummingbird from the fall season. Birds which were more widespread than usual included Short-eared Owls in all three states and waterfowl in Michigan and Wisconsin. Species which

were notable by their absence included Snowy Owls and redpolls.

Christmas Bird Count data has been omitted from this report to avoid duplication, unless there was a particularly significant record.

Loons to Grebes

Unusual for Michigan were reports of three Red-throated Loons on the New Buffalo CBC, *Berrien* and one Dec. 31 at Tawas Pt., *Iosco* (RW, SR). Common Loons remained at several sites into December in Wisconsin, with the latest being three Dec. 26 at Madison (ME, *et al.*); Michigan had good numbers throughout the season including a northerly individual at Sault Ste. Marie, *Chippewa* Feb. 9 (JH). Also farther north than usual was a Pied-bill Grebe which overwintered for the 2nd consecutive year in Oneida, WI (PB). A Horned Grebe was reported to Jan. 15 in *St. Louis*, MN (JG), and to Dec. 23 at Port Washington, WI (TU). All 3 states reported lingering Red-necked Grebes. In Wisconsin one remained to Feb. 6 in Fond du Lac, providing a new winter late date. In Minnesota a bird remained in *St. Louis* to Feb. 26 (*vide* KE) while Michigan's latest bird was one Dec. 31 at Munising, *Alger* (CSw). A W. Grebe remained in Wisconsin to Dec. 17 at Middleton, while Minnesota had a new late date with an individual at *Hennepin* Dec. 10.

Waterfowl

Tundra Swans lingered in good numbers in Michigan with impressive high totals of 3400 Dec. 3 at Nyanquing, *Bay* (RW, SR)

and 1200 Dec. 22 at Point Mouillee, *Monroe*, while individuals overwintered at several locations. Wisconsin also reported good numbers of this species lingering into December, with the latest birds seen to Jan. 3 in *Dane* (PA, KB). The **Ross' Goose** originally discovered in November at Shiawassee N.W.R., MI remained to Dec. 8 (DP *et al.*). The mild weather induced a number of duck species to overwinter. Green-winged Teal were found in all 3 states with an exceptional concentration of 23 birds in *Dakota*, MN (PJ). A ♂ Blue-winged Teal was reported Dec. 9 and two females Feb. 26 in La Crosse, WI (JD). Northern Shovelers overwintered at several locations in Wisconsin, including Neenah/Menasha for the first time. Canvasback, Redhead, both scaup and Ring-necked Duck were reported overwintering in all 3 states. Michigan had good numbers of diving ducks this season. High totals on the St. Clair River included 21,000 Canvasback on the Anchor Bay CBC, 6500 Redhead Jan. 7 (DL), and 7000 Greater Scaup Feb. 16 (DL). Also noteworthy were 8000 Greater Scaup Dec. 3 at Nyanquing, *Bay* (RW, SR) and 5000 scaup sp. (likely Greater) Jan. 13 on s. Lake Michigan at Stevensville, *Berrien* (MW). The only eider report came from Wisconsin, where an eider sp. was seen Dec. 3 at Harrington Beach S.P. (DT). Reports of Harlequin Duck were up in all 3 states. Michigan had reports of one Dec. 3–10 at Saugatuck, *Allegan* (JW, JGr), a male to Jan. 1 at Oscoda, *Iosco* (JGi), and one Jan. 29 in Marquette, *Marquette* (TF). Minnesota had reports of two–three birds overwintering in *St. Louis*, individuals in 2 locations in *Cook*, and >two birds in *Lake*. Wisconsin recorded an individual from Dec. 8–9 in *Dane* (KB), two Jan. 15–25 at Milwaukee, and, incredibly, four males and one female wintered at Sheboygan. Oldsquaw were reported on the Great Lakes from all 3 states, the largest concentrations being from Michigan where 10,000 were present Jan. 16 in *Manistee* (BA), and 555 were seen at Tawas Point, *Iosco* in late December (BB, RW, SR). Inland records of this species are less common in the Region, making the one that overwintered on a small pond in *Hennepin*, MN and the individual to Jan. 1 on Madison Lakes, WI (SRo) worthy of note. Wisconsin reported an unprecedented movement of scoters along L. Michigan. Most were seen along *Ozaukee* where 25 Blacks, 105 Surfs and 15 White-wingeds were reported Dec. 3 (DT). There were smaller numbers seen at that location into January, as well as farther south along the coast to Milwaukee and north to *Door*. Minnesota reported record-late dates for Black Scoter Dec. 2 at *Cook* (DS) and Dec. 10 at *Wabasha* (CK, JS, *et al.*), and White-winged



Scoters Dec. 18–20 in *Dakota* (TT, AB) and *Wabasha* Feb. 25–27 (CK, JS *et al.*). Curiously, Michigan had no reports of Black Scoter and only one report of Surf, but it did have good concentrations of White-winged with 700 Dec. 28 and 300 Dec. 31 in *Iosco* (RW), and 200 Feb. 25 in *Benzie* (BA). Excellent numbers of Com. Goldeneye were reported at Virmond Park, *Ozaukee*, WI, which had several thousand present to mid-January. Michigan had 1600 Jan. 7 at the Karn Plant, *Bay* (JS, GS), and 600 Dec. 4 on Chippewa Lake, *Mecosta* (SRs). Reports of Barrow's Goldeneye in Minnesota included a female Jan. 1–2 (WW *et al.*) and a male Dec. 25–Jan. 29 (AH *et al.*) in *Dakota*. Wisconsin had a pair in early December at Virmond Park, *Ozaukee*, the male remaining to mid-January and then reappearing in *Kenosha* in mid-February. All 3 states had overwintering Hooded Mergansers, while both Michigan and Wisconsin reported Ruddy Ducks staying through the season.

Raptors to Cranes

Unprecedented for Wisconsin was the overwintering of 25 Turkey Vultures at Devil's Lake S.P. (KL, MM *et al.*), while individuals Feb. 23 in *Walworth* (PP) and Feb. 28 in *Washington* (BD) may have been early migrants. Northern Harriers remained in what was considered "remarkable numbers" in the s. two-thirds of Wisconsin, particularly in the e. portions. All 3 states reported increased numbers of wintering Rough-legged Hawks. In Minnesota, the Sax-Zim CBC reported an astounding >140 Rough-leggeds, 100 of which were still present to Jan. 7, but virtually all were gone by Jan. 10! Wisconsin reported a few Rough-leggeds at the beginning of the season, but numbers increased in February when totals reached 20–30 birds in some marshes. Golden Eagles were reported from 5 counties in Minnesota, including an adult from Jan. 15–25 in *Roseau* (PS, SM, DMi), north of normal. Michigan had reports from 5 counties, while Wisconsin had 3 in *Monroe* (EE), 4 in Necedah N.W.R./Meadow Valley Wildlife Area and one in mid-February in *Sauk* (KH). Merlins were much more common in Michigan this winter, with records of individuals on 3 CBCs and singles Dec. 14 in *Wexford* (MJ), Dec. 19 in *Berrien* (MW), Jan. 12 in *Newaygo* (ES, GW), Jan. 21 in *Huron* (TH), and Feb. 22 in *Muskegon* (BJ). Wisconsin reported wintering birds from Ashland (DV) and Green Bay as well as individuals Dec. 16 in *La Crosse* (JD), Dec. 30 in *Winnebago* (DN), and Dec. 30 in *Ozaukee* (TU). A Prairie Falcon overwintered in *Hennepin*, MN (*vide* AH). Peregrine Falcon reports in Michigan included two birds on the Detroit R. CBC and individuals Dec. 2 in *Ingham* (JP) and 3 times

during the winter in Grand Rapids, *Kent* (*vide* CV). The traditional Sault Ste Marie, MI Gyrfalcon was seen through the period, while additional records from that state included individuals Jan. 4 in Marquette and Jan. 9–10 at Shiawasee N.W.R., *Saginaw* (DP). An additional Gyrfalcon was reported from *Roseau*, MN Jan. 16 (SM, DMi). Atypical were reports of Virginia Rails from all 3 states. Michigan reported a bird Jan. 25 at Metrobeach, *Macomb* (TH), Minnesota had an individual from Feb. 9–12 in *Hennepin* (JDa, SC) which was thought to have overwintered, while Wisconsin had a bird Dec. 11–17 in Madison (PA). Sandhill Cranes were reported to linger in Wisconsin to Dec. 26 in *Oconto* (JSm, KS) and returned early Feb. 18 in *Vernon* (JSt), Feb. 25 in *Dane* (*vide* KH), and Feb. 26 in *Jefferson* (*vide* KH). In Michigan, Sandhills are becoming an increasingly regular overwintering species, particularly near Waterloo State Game Area, *Jackson*, where 20–40 remained through the period (MB, MI).

Shorebirds to Gulls

Wisconsin reported a Killdeer wintering in *Vernon*, (JD) and first spring migrants in Milwaukee Feb. 22 (SD). Michigan had the species to Jan. 1 at Point Mouillee, *Monroe* (MP) and Jan. 30 in Berrien Springs, *Berrien* (WB), with first migrants Feb. 19 in both *Berrien* (KM) and *Washtenaw* (DC). A Purple Sandpiper was seen to Dec. 26 at Muskegon S.P., MI (JHo, ABY, PC) while on the other side of L. Michigan one was reported on Dec. 13 at Sheboygan, WI (BD). Tying the previous late date for Michigan was a *Dunlin* Jan. 1 in *Monroe* (CP). Unusual for Wisconsin were two Com. Snipe which remained to mid-February, possibly overwintering, at Bonbuel (MPe).

As has been the trend over the past few seasons, a good variety of gulls were reported throughout the Region. A Bonaparte's Gull Dec. 3 in *Hennepin* (SC) provided the 3rd latest date for Minnesota. Much rarer in winter was a *Laughing Gull* Dec. 26 at Grand Haven, *Ottawa* (JP). A Franklin's Gull was found in the company of Ring-billed Gulls Dec. 3 in Genoa, WI (JD). *Mew Gulls* have become regular in the Region over the past several years. This year one was found in Michigan Dec. 26 at Grand Haven, *Ottawa*; and in Wisconsin different birds were found Dec. 12 & 16 at Port Washington (TU) and Feb. 18–22 (ST, TU). Thayer's Gulls were reported from various sites along L. Michigan from both Michigan and Wisconsin. The very similar Iceland Gull was reported from all 3 states. On the Great Lakes, Lesser Black-backed Gull reports continued to increase in Michigan with reports Dec. 3 at Whitehall, *Muskegon* (GWr, JGr), Jan. 1 in *Monroe*

(CP), and Jan. 16 at Three Oaks, *Berrien* (KM). The Lesser Black-backed that appeared in Madison, WI in late September remained to Dec. 9 (KB, SRo). The individual from the fall at metro-lakes in Minnesota stayed to Dec. 9 (PBa), while another was found in Ramsey Jan. 1 (CS, *et al.*). Great Black-backed Gulls are also increasing in the w. portion of the Region. This season birds in Wisconsin included individuals at Two Rivers/Manitowoc, Kewaunee, and Milwaukee. Minnesota had a first-winter bird Dec. 9 & 17 and Jan. 8 in Duluth (PS). Also at that location was a Black-legged Kittiwake Dec. 26 (PS), providing the 17th state record of this species and the latest to date. In Michigan, where the species is more regular, a very rare inland sighting was reported from Ford L., *Washtenaw* (CSw) Jan. 8.

Owls to Wrens

Snowy Owls were scarce throughout the Region. Wisconsin reported the lowest numbers in recent memory. Minnesota slipped from 351 in the winter of 1993–1994 to only about a dozen this season, while Michigan could only muster six–eight individuals Northern Hawk Owls included a brief appearance of one–two individuals in Sault Ste. Marie, MI Dec. 27–Jan. 9 (JR) and singles seen briefly in Minnesota at Cotton and Duluth, both in *St. Louis*. Great Gray Owls were also scarce, with singles during January on Neebish Island, *Chippewa*, MI (WPa), and 4 reports from *St. Louis* and two birds in *Roseau* in Minnesota. Long-eared Owls were reported from 3–4 roost sites in Wisconsin and in exceptional numbers in Minnesota.

SA The Long-eared Owl is considered a rare winter visitor in Minnesota, primarily in the south-east. All reports are noteworthy and most are of single birds. The 10-year average each winter is less than 3 reports. This winter no fewer than 45 birds were found, nearly all in s. Minnesota. One *Hennepin* willow tree held eight birds Dec. 27 (DN), and 16 were in *Dakota* Jan. 10 (AH).

Wisconsin reported unprecedented numbers of Short-eared Owls in the e. third of the state. The highest concentration was found at Koberg, *Door*, where 70 individuals were present. Other notable concentrations included >30 at Killsnake Cr. Wildlife Area, *Calumet* and >20 at White River Wildlife Area, *Green Lake*. Minnesota had a northerly record of Short-eared Jan. 1–12 in *St. Louis* (AH, BY). Michigan also had records n. of normal with individuals in *Chippewa* through the period and other reports from several other n. Michigan locations.

Minnesota had a very tardy Ruby-throated Hummingbird which remained to Dec. 7 in *Goodhue* (RJ), the latest record for that state by a month. The ♀ **Calliope Hummingbird** from the fall season remained to Dec. 5 in *Hennepin* (mob). Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers remained in the region in atypical numbers, including one to Jan. 30 in *Hennepin*, MN (JP); there are only 3 records of this species overwintering in that state. The only reports of Three-toed Woodpeckers came from Minnesota, which had five individuals, four of which were seen in *Lake*. Also more common this season were N. Flickers, which remained in better numbers and farther north than usual. Minnesota, where the species is quite rare in winter, had reports of overwintering birds in *Cook* and *St. Louis* and into February in *Wilkin* and *Clay*. Quite late were two Barn Swallows to Dec. 3 at L. Erie Metropark, *Wayne*, MI (WP). Marsh Wrens were reported overwintering in *Hennepin*, MN (SC, TT *et al.*) and remained to Jan. 1 in *Dane*, WI (PA).

Thrushes to Warblers

In Minnesota, E. Bluebirds present to Jan. 7 in Duluth and three to Dec. 31 in *Kanabec* were considered n. of normal. Townsend's Solitaires were reported from all 3 states, with Minnesota having the bulk of the records: five individuals, including one that overwintered in Duluth (ML, SL *et al.*). Wisconsin had three birds at Devil's Lake S.P., of which at least one and possibly two overwintered, and Michigan had one report Dec. 17 in *Manistee* (KW). Varied Thrushes also made a good showing, particularly in Minnesota where a record 28 birds were reported, 3 times the previous high total. Michigan had a report of one Dec. 10+ in Marquette; amazingly it was joined by a 2nd bird Feb. 9 (LT). Wisconsin had 10–12 birds of which six wintered in the e.c. to n.c. portion of the state. Keeping with the trend of lingering species were two mid-December Gray Catbirds in Minnesota, while in Wisconsin individuals were seen Feb. 11 near Ashland, Feb. 19 in *Door* (RL, CL), and from Dec. 1–12 in Antigo (BP). Michigan also had birds far north on the Marquette and Leelanau CBCs. Brown Thrashers lingered in Minnesota to Dec. 9 in *Winona* (CS), Dec. 10 in *Cook* (SL, OL), Jan. 28 in *Carver* (BM, DMA), and overwintered in *Kandiyohi* (RF). In Wisconsin an individual was present to Dec. 19 in Ashland (DV) and overwintered at Green Bay, while two overwintered in *Door*. Bohemian Waxwings were scarce this season in Wisconsin and Michigan; however, the latter did have a report of 400 Jan. 8 near Paradise, *Chippewa* (JGr, GWr). All 3 states reported excellent numbers of N. Shrikes including an impres-

sive 30 individuals in *St. Louis*, MN. New for Michigan CBCs was a **Solitary Vireo** Dec. 17 on the Grand Rapids count (CF).

An impressive number of warbler species were recorded during the season. Michigan recorded 4 species, including Pine Warbler on the Niles CBC and another Jan. 14 in *Ottawa* (AK, DG), a **Palm Warbler** on the Allegan CBC, Com. Yellowthroats on the South Kalamazoo CBC and one near Manistee (BA) Dec. 3, and the expected Yellow-rumped Warbler, which wintered at several locations. Minnesota reported Yellow-rumped Dec. 12 in *Rice*, and 12 Feb. 8 in *Hennepin* (*fide* SC), a **Yellow-throated Warbler** to Dec. 10 in *Wright* (*fide* RG) provided a record-late date for the state, and a Com. Yellowthroat to Dec. 5 in *Hennepin* (RG, mob). Wisconsin also reported Yellow-rumped Warblers from several locations, along with a Pine Warbler through December in Manitowoc (CS).

Sparrows to Finches

A Chipping Sparrow Jan. 2 in *Hennepin* (SC) provided Minnesota with its 10th winter record. Michigan had reports in December in *Chippewa* (AS), Dec. 26 in *Berrien*, and Jan. 1 in *Wayne* (WP). Record late for Wisconsin, and very rare anywhere in the Region, was a **Clay-colored Sparrow** from Dec. 23–27 near Denmark (JK). A Lark Sparrow from Dec. 17–18 in *Rice* (FS, KSt, GB) provided Minnesota its first winter record and the latest date by more than 2 months. As might be expected from the mild conditions Fox, Song, Swamp, and White-throated sparrows overwintered in all 3 states, as did White-crowned Sparrows in Michigan and Wisconsin. Harris' Sparrows were recorded Jan. 1 in *Ottawa*, MI (SM) and wintered in Appleton (SB) and *Kenosha* (BS) in Wisconsin. Very impressive was the report of 50 Brewer's Blackbirds Jan. 26 at Horicon Marsh in Wisconsin (DT). A Yellow-headed Blackbird on the Muskegon CBC was noteworthy in Michigan, as was a tardy N. Oriole to Dec. 5 in *Ramsey*, MN (*fide* WL). After last winter season's tremendous finch flight, this season was extremely disappointing. Wisconsin observers rated it "the worst flight in memory," with redpolls nearly absent, and only small numbers of Pine Grosbeaks and Red and White-winged crossbills reported; there were scattered small pockets of decent numbers of Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and Evening Grosbeaks. Minnesota had average numbers of Pine Grosbeaks and good arrivals of Pine Siskins in late January, while redpolls were virtually nonexistent and crossbills were scarce. The situation was almost identical in Michigan, with the exception of Pine Grosbeaks, which were quite scarce. Surprisingly

Am. Goldfinches remained in above-average numbers and farther north than normal in both Michigan and Minnesota.

Addendum

A California Gull was located Oct. 13 in Sheboygan, WI (SB).

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