

# Ontario Region

## RON RIDOUT

While the Farmer's Almanac may have predicted an easy winter, southward movements of many "northern" species early on indicated otherwise and ultimately proved to be correct. The winter actually began in November in all regions of the province with significant snowfalls occurring and remaining on the ground. Accumulations reached record amounts in the northern and central regions by December, with depths of several feet commonplace. Only the very southwestern region was spared. While temperatures were close to average everywhere, the usual January and February thaws were short-lived and had no significant impact.

Southern incursions of owls were the major story of the winter. The "invasion" of Great Grays into central and southern Ontario rivaled the record movement of 1978. Boreals were also encountered in numbers in the south. Perhaps most sig-

nificant of all was the high number of Barred Owls away from their usual haunts. Winter finches moved south early on and were practically non-existent from late December on. Despite the weather, several individuals of migrant species lingered well into December and many waterbirds attempted to winter on open bodies of water.

Noteworthy rarities during the period included Black-tailed Godwit, Ross' Gull, and Thick-billed Murre. All rarities mentioned in this report are subject to the approval of the Ontario Bird Records Committee.

Abbreviations: Pelee (*Pt. Pelee N.P. and vicinity*); O.B.R.C. (*Ontario Bird Records Committee*); P.E.Pt. (*Prince Edward Pt.*). Algonquin, Presqu'ile and Rondeau are Provincial Parks. Place names in italics refer to counties, districts, or regional municipalities.

## Loons to Waterfowl

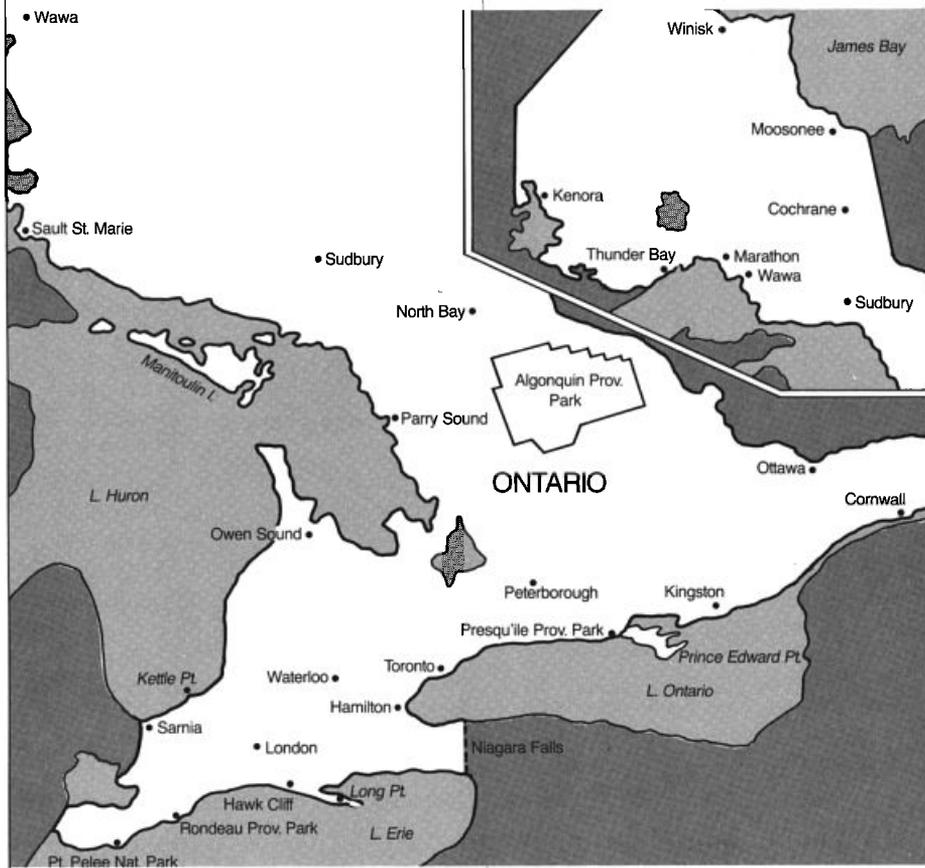
For the 4th consecutive year, a Pacific Loon was recorded at the e. end of L. Ontario, this time at Kingston Dec. 16 (JE, RDW). Wintering Pied-billed Grebes were seen at Hamilton Jan. 1 (m.ob.) and Ft. Erie Jan. 21 (m.ob.), while one at Presqu'ile Feb. 26 (CK) was considered an early spring migrant. Several reports were

received of Red-necked Grebes lingering or wintering on the lower Great Lakes. Inland, one was record-early at Katchewanooka L., *Peterborough*, Feb. 26 (PB), while another at Foleyet Feb. 6 (ND) was even more remarkable. An Eared at Ft. Erie Dec. 2 (RA) furnished a rare winter record. A N. Fulmar at Ottawa Dec. 7 (RP) was the 6th for e. Ontario. An Am. White Pelican at Holiday Beach, *Essex*, Dec. 4 (FU) was exceptionally late. Eleven Double-crested Cormorants at Port Weller, *Niagara*, Jan. 31 (m.ob.) represented a high mid-winter count.

The annual L. Ontario Mid-Winter Waterfowl Inventory Jan. 6-7 recorded a record 162,775 individuals of 34 species (WE). The dramatic increase in numbers involved mainly diving ducks feeding on Zebra Mussels, particularly Oldsquaw and White-winged Scoter. Numbers were again highest in the east, though the overall distribution was more even than 1995. Leading totals included 52,318 Oldsquaw, 25,812 Greater Scaup, 21,533 Com. Goldeneye, 20,315 White-winged Scoter, and 20,077 Canada Geese.

Indicative of a gradual shift away from Long Pt. as a autumn staging area was a record count of 1502 Tundra Swans at Rondeau Dec. 17 (m.ob.). The first spring migrants from the e. coast arrived early at Dundas Feb. 22 (UKo). The increasing success of the Trumpeter Swan reintroduction program can be measured by counts of 12 birds at Pickering Jan. 1 (m.ob.) and 11 at Burlington Jan. 14 (G&DL). A record 126 Snow Geese counted at Rondeau Dec. 17 (BG) reflected a general increase in the species' numbers in the province. Following suit were two Ross' Geese seen at Vittoria Feb. 25-26 (JM, GP). A ♀ Wood Duck was very late at Manotick Jan. 6-8 (BD), while a Blue-winged Teal at Toronto Feb. 18-Mar. 3 (NM) was a rare winterer. First arrival spring migrants, following a brief mild spell, involved three record-early Green-winged Teal at Hillman Marsh, *Essex*, Feb. 25 (AW), a N. Pintail at Dundas Feb. 18 (RDa), a N. Shoveler at London Feb. 20 (PR), individual Gadwall at Hillman Marsh (AW) and Rondeau (SC) Feb. 25, two Am. Wigeon at Hillman Marsh Feb. 24 (AW), a Canvasback at Port Rowan Feb. 24 (JM), a Ring-necked Duck at Erieau Feb. 25 (KB, JB, SC), and a Hooded Merganser at Pelee Feb. 24 (AW).

Unusual species included three ♂ Eur. Wigeon at Nanticoke Jan. 14 (KBu) and a lone male at Kingston Jan. 27-Feb. 1 (TM); individual ♀ Tufted Ducks at Hamilton Dec. 22 (KM) and Toronto Jan. 7-Feb. 19 (RY *et al.*), and lone males at Kingston from Jan. 8+ (TM, mob.) and





**Immature Ivory Gull at Sombra on the St. Clair River, Ontario, December 24, 1995. Photograph/Jim Flynn.**

Burlington Jan. 11 & 20–22 (JM *et al.*); single King Eiders at Port Weller Dec. 9 (GC), Port Dover Dec. 10 (JM, GP), and Toronto Feb. 10–11 (NM, v.o.), and  $\leq$ eight birds at Burlington Jan. 16+. A total of 16 Harlequin Ducks were reported—most from L. Ontario, though the largest single group was four males at Sault Ste. Marie throughout the winter (EC). Sightings of Barrow's Goldeneyes included two males at Ottawa through the period and single birds at P.E. Pt., Dec. 16 (JE, RDW), Kingston Dec. 22 (MH, AK, SB), and Sombra Dec. 30–Jan. 2 (DR, AR).

#### **Vultures to Gulls**

Southbound Turkey Vultures were noted throughout December in several locations. The last birds were reported at Kingston Jan. 17 (RDW). Following a recent trend, wintering birds included a single at Niagara Falls Feb. 4 (KR) and  $\leq$ eight birds near Hagersville throughout January and February. The first spring migrant was at Leamington Feb. 26 (MT). Bald Eagle sightings totaled 94, down from previous years, in particular along the St. Lawrence R. A Sharp-shinned Hawk turned the tables on a N. Shrike, killing and eating it at a Guelph feeder Jan. 2 (BW). Red-tailed subspecies reported included single rufous-morph *calurus* at Paris Dec. 1 (WL) and Appin, *Middlesex*, Feb. 18 (PR, AWh), a dark *calurus* at Burlington Dec. 20–Jan. 28 (RC, m.ob.), and a Harlan's at Toronto Jan. 8–31 (MK, m.ob.). Golden

Eagle sightings totaled 11; most were southbound migrants in December. Merlins totaled 15, all in the south and spread throughout the period. Single Peregrines were at Wolfe I., *Frontenac*, Dec. 17 (GV, RDW), Dundas Dec. 30 (RH), Niagara Falls Jan. 1 (RK, MJ), and different birds at Hamilton Jan. 22–23 (LM, AS) and Feb. 21–27 (NMa *et al.*). Fifteen different Gyrfalcons were reported, an outstanding total that was likely a result of the very difficult winter in the north. The most southerly bird was at Pelee Dec. 29 (TH), representing that park's 3rd record.

Two Sharp-tailed Grouse reported at Delta Dec. 2 (AM) were thought to be the progeny of an introduction several years ago. Thirty-three N. Bobwhite were reported on the Walpole I., *Kent*, CBC, the last toehold for this species in the province. A Killdeer at Dorland Jan. 18 (JMH) furnished *Oxford's* first winter record, while singles at Windsor (SP) and Jarvis (JM, SM) Feb. 25 were the spring's first arrivals. Ontario's 2nd Black-tailed Godwit found at Kingston Dec. 8–21 (TM, m.ob.) followed the province's first record in September and was likely the same bird. Apart from the usual birds at Niagara Falls (m.ob.), two Purple Sandpipers were at Kettle Pt., Dec. 26 (AR) and lone birds were at Douglas Pt., *Bruce*, Feb. 6 (DF) and Pickering Dec. 31+ (PH, MB). While often found on the CBC, three Com. Snipe at Blenheim Dec. 10–Feb. 29 (KB) were the first ever to winter in *Kent*.

Sixteen Little Gulls at Niagara-on-the-Lake Feb. 24 (GB) was a good total that late in the winter. A California Gull at

Cobourg Jan. 18 (BO) furnished *Northumberland's* first record. Of the 26 Lesser Black-backed reported, one at Cobourg Dec. 16 (J&CG) was believed to be *intermedius*. A gull at Wildwood L., *Oxford*, Dec. 24 (JMH) was believed to be a Nelson's (Glaucous x Herring). *Niagara's Ross' Gull*, first seen in mid-November, was last seen at Ft. Erie Jan. 1 (MF *et al.*). An imm. Ivory Gull at Sombra Dec. 23–26 (BM, m.ob.) completed the province's sweep of the 2 rare n. gulls in one season. Two imm. Sabine's Gulls at Niagara Falls lingered until Dec. 25 (m.ob.).

#### **Alcids to Woodpeckers**

Ontario's first Thick-billed Murre since 1953 was found at Ottawa Dec. 5–6 (BD, v.o.). Mourning Doves wintering in the north included three at Matheson throughout the period (CKE) and individuals at Longlac Jan. 21 (FL) and Thunder Bay Feb. 3 (NE). A Barn Owl reported without details on the St. Catharines CBC Dec. 17 (*vide* MEH) may have been a released bird from the nearby Owl Rehabilitation and Research Foundation facility. Snowy Owls are slowly recovering from the rock bottom numbers of 1994. Reports were received from a variety of locations with the exception of the southwest.

**SA** Not since 1978 has the province experienced a s. incursion of n. owls as occurred during this winter. Unlike the year's exodus, all species of owl normally found in the north were affected. Record snowfalls began in November and continued through the winter, building to accumulations of several feet in most localities. While Great Grays in particular were affected by these accumulations, it seems that all owls were forced to leave the north in some numbers. Sightings of N. Hawk Owls involved singles at Green Bay, Manitoulin, Dec. 3–Feb. 18 (CB), Ottawa from Dec. 9+ (PD), Sault Ste. Marie Jan. 1 (SM), Port Perry Jan. 10–11.

A Red-headed Woodpecker at Newmarket throughout January (JD) was unusual there. Red-bellieds continued their increase. Birds wintered as far north as Elliot L. (EM) and Sudbury (EMo). While there were scattered reports of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, four at Kingston Dec. 17–27 (v.o.) was a good count.

#### **Flycatchers to Shrikes**

While E. Phoebes are regularly found in the south in December, at least one managed to survive until Jan. 15 at Saltfleet

(BWi). Northbound Horned Larks returned in force Jan. 9 with 60 birds at Wheatley Harbour (AW). A Gray Jay at Kaladar Jan. 21 (JE, RDW) was noteworthy there. What appears to be Thunder Bay's resident Black-billed Magpie was seen Dec. 26 (NE, SMA). Tufted Titmice were counted in excellent numbers at 2 sites, with 63 tallied on the Walpole I. CBC (m.ob.) and 30 in *Niagara* during the winter (m.ob.). One even wintered at Van Kleek Hill (BD). A Brown Creeper at Atikokan Jan. 11 (DG) was record-late there, while a Carolina Wren at Kincardine Dec. 30 (MP) was the farthest north in a winter not hospitable to this species. Returning to its previous winter haunt, a ♀ Mt. Bluebird was found at Wheatley P.P., Dec. 18–Jan. 1 (TH, v.o.). Individual Townsends' Solitaires included *Bruce's* first at Kincardine Dec. 30–Jan. 14 (MP), near Greensville Feb. 4 (WS, PW, JC), and Sault Ste. Marie Jan. 17–19 (TW, EC). Varied Thrush sightings totaled 5, including lone birds at Goulborn Twp., *Ottawa Carleton* Dec. 1–12 (CBe), Stoney Cr., Dec. 10–Jan. 31 (JX), Brooklin Dec. 10–Feb. 24 (BH), Whitevale Dec. 12–Feb. 10 (E&EMi), and Branchton Dec. 21–24 (WR, TC). The only Gray Catbird reported was at Hamilton Dec. 15–24 (RW, v.o.). Brown Thrashers braving the n. winter involved singles at Evansville Dec. 1–Feb. 20 (RCl), Whitefish Dec. 1–31 (KC), and Pancake Bay, *Algoma*, and Sault Ste. Marie, both Feb. 6 (TW). After the 1994–1995 winter's poor showing, Bohemian Waxwings rebounded spectacularly, with counts of 378 at Meaford Dec. 28 (m.ob.), 700 at Peterborough Feb. 17 (PB), and 738 at Presqu'île Dec. 17 (m.ob.) noteworthy among many good tallies across c. Ontario. Northern Shrikes moved S early, with many CBCs reporting record numbers. Reports tailed off in January as they moved through the province for parts farther south.

### Warblers to Finches

Very late warblers included an Orange-crowned at Port Colborne Dec. 1–Feb. 24 (NS, mob.), a Nashville at Delta Dec. 16 (m.ob.), a Yellow at Niagara Falls until Dec. 3 (m.ob.), a Cape May at Wheatley Harbour Dec. 7 (AW, v.o.), a Black-throated Blue at Mallory Beach, *Bruce*, Dec. 1 (SG), a Pine at Toronto Jan. 1–Feb. 9 (JE, m.ob.), a Worm-eating at Leamington until Dec. 2 (AW), and single Ovenbirds at Kitchener Dec. 1 (HW), Thickson's Woods, *Durham* (DBa), and London Dec. 24 (MBd). The only Dickcissel was at Kitchener Dec. 3 (DH). Eastern

Towhees were scattered across the south in December with one at Manitoulin I., Dec. 1–31 (JL) the farthest north. Ironically, just as the species was returned to full status, single Spotted Towhees wintered at Hamilton Dec. 2+ (U&MKo, m.ob.) and at Bronte Dec. 17+ (AKu, m.ob.). The species is extremely rare in the province. Harris' Sparrow sightings dropped to 2 this winter with individuals at Hanover Dec. 1–Jan. 6 (DN *et al.*) and Ottawa Dec. 2–Feb. 29 (RG, v.o.). "Oregon" Dark-eyed Juncos numbered three different birds: *Niagara-on-the-Lake* Dec. 8–31 (NDe, KR), *Vandercaar* Dec. 10 (JMH), and St. Anns Dec. 17 (RC). Large flocks of Snow Buntings included 600 at Jerseyville Dec. 30 (MS) and 1000 at Port Bruce Jan. 28 (DM, LW).

As with waterfowl, the first spring migrant blackbirds appeared with a warm spell in the 3rd week of February. Not surprisingly, the first wave arrived at Pelee with 50 Red-winged Blackbirds and 20 Brown-headed Cowbirds Feb. 20 (P&JW) and 12 Com. Grackles Feb. 24 (AW). Other areas experienced numbers within a day or two. Up to 18 E. Meadowlarks wintered at Blenheim (KB, JB, SC), a high number for this uncommon winterer. A Yellow-headed Blackbird at Mitchell's Bay Jan. 21 (JLa) was the only one reported. Movements of winter finches were pretty well finished by the period's beginning. Reports of Purple Finches and Evening Grosbeaks were of scattered individuals for the most part. Much the same was true for Pine Grosbeaks, though a flock of 100 at Kingston Dec. 15 was the largest of several present there for a short period in December (K.F.N.). Across the north most winter finch populations were thinly scattered. Crossbills were seen in small numbers here and there and for the most part did not appear in the south. Two Red Crossbills at Wolfe I., *Frontenac*, Dec. 17 (RDW) and four at Rideau Ferry Dec. 28 (v.o.), as well as one White-winged at Dorland Dec. 13 (JMH), two at Ancaster Dec. 26 (RPe, IS), and three at London Jan. 22 (WLi) were the only exceptions. Redpolls were the only finch to appear in reasonable numbers, particularly in the south. Large flocks of Commons were reported in many areas; among these numbers, 16 Hoarries were seen.

**Subregional editors (boldface), contributors (italics), and cited observers:** *R. Andrie*, D. Bailey, M. Bain, M. Baker (MBa), M. Barned (MBd), D. Barry (DBa), C. Bell, G. Bellerby, C. Bennett (CBe), S. Blaney, *D. Bucknell* (DBu), K. Builder (KBu), K. Burk, J. Burk, *P. Burke*,

G. Carpentier (GCa), S. Charbonneau, T. Cheskey, R. Clark (RCl), G. Coady, J. Cram, R. Curry, K. Cushnie, E. Czerwinski, R. Dawson (RDa), N. Dawson, N. Dekker (NDe), B. DiLabio, R. Dobos, P. Dunn, J. Dunn, *W. Edmunds*, J. Ellis, N. Escott, J. Fairchild, D. Fidler, M. Foster, S. Giiick, J. & C. Goodwin, R. Gorman, D. Graham, B. Groves, D. Hall, D. Hammarlund (DHa), M.E. Hebb, R. Henry, B. Henshaw, T. Hince, M. Holder, P. Holder, J.M. Holdsworth, E. Hunter, M. Jacklin, C. Kerr (CKe), M. King, A. Kingsley, Kingston Field Naturalists, R. Knapton, U. & M. Kolster (U&MKo), C. Koot, A. Kuhnigh (AKu), S. LaForest, J. Lamey (JLa), W. Lamond, T. Land, J. Lemon, F. Leppanen, G. & D. Lewington, J. Macey (JMa), S. MacGregor (SMc), N. Mahony (NMa), B. D. Martin, S. Mauser (SMA), K. McLaughlin, E. Meissner, A. Mess, L. Michalak, S. Miles, J. Miles, T. Miller, E. & E. Milley (E&EMi), E. Moratz (EMo), N. Murr, D. Newton, B. Olsen, M. Parker, R. Peterson (RPe), S. Pike, W. Pond, G. Pond, R. Poulin, W. Read, P. Read, *A. Rider*, K. Roy, D. Ruch (DRu), D. Rupert, N. Salvage, A. Senior, R. Smith, I. Smith, W. Smith, M. Smout (MSm), M. Street, M. Tourangeau, R. Tozer, F. Urie, G. Vance, W. Lindley (WLi), R. Waldhuber, P. Walker, T. Walker, H. Walker, P. & J. Watson (P&JWa), R. D. Weir, A. White (AWh), B. Wilson (BWi), L. Wladarski, A. Wormington, B. Wyatt, J. Xuereb, R. Yukich.

—Ron Ridout, Long Pt. Bird Observatory, P.O. Box 160, Port Rowan, ON, Canada NOE 1M0.