

Western Great Lakes Region

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It was an extremely quiet season in the Region, with very few rarities reported and—other than northern owls—very few irruptive species present. While the birding was quiet, the weather was tumultuous. Throughout the northern portions of the Region, snow fell in records amounts. In Minnesota, 40 of 87 counties were declared disaster areas for snow removal. Temperatures were average to below average throughout the season, and there were several very large storm systems which lasted several days. In all, the weather was considered by most observers to be miserable.

To avoid duplication, Christmas Bird Count data is omitted unless otherwise noted.

Loons to Ibises

Red-throated Loons seem to be becoming more regular in Michigan in early winter; this season \leq five birds were seen from Dec. 11–Jan. 8 off the St. Joseph R. mouth in

Berrien (AB, KM, m.ob.). A Pacific Loon present at Muskegon S.P., *Muskegon*, from Dec. 13–14 provided Michigan a rare record away from Whitefish Pt., *Chippewa* (BBo, DM). In Wisconsin, an individual on Big Cedar L., *Washington*, Dec. 1 (BD) would provide a record-late date. A Pied-billed Grebe overwintered in Wisconsin at Fremont on the Wolf R. (DT, DN), while in Minnesota one wintered in *Ouertail* (DM, SM) and another was present to Jan. 1 in *Todd* (JK, SK). Wisconsin had Red-necked Grebes to mid-December on Madison L. (PA *et al.*) and to Dec. 15 on L. Michigan at Virmond Park, *Ozaukee* (TW). Also on Madison L., WI, was a Western Grebe to mid-December (PA); in Michigan, where the species is much rarer, one was seen at St. Joseph, *Berrien*, Dec. 17 and Jan. 4–5 (KM, AB, JG). Minnesota had overwintering Am. White Pelicans in *Goodhue* (HH, CS) and *Dakota* (DJe, m.ob.). An injured individual in Wisconsin was discovered on L. Delevan Dec. 21, captured, rehabilitated, and taken to Florida and released. Double-crested Cormorants overwintered in their normal locations in *Monroe*, MI, but, unlike previous years, did not remain through the period in Wisconsin. An imm. Black-crowned Night-Heron was found in *Bay*, MI Jan. 20 (JS, GS). Unusual far north for Minnesota was a Great Blue Heron, which successfully overwintered in *Ramsey* (KB).

Waterfowl

In Wisconsin, several flocks of 90 Tundra Swans were seen in *Jefferson* (KH) and

Madison (SR) until mid-December, with smaller numbers until late December—early January in *Madison* and *Ozaukee*. Minnesota had one overwintering in *Wright* (KB). Michigan had good Tundra Swan numbers that stayed through the period in *Wayne* and the Saginaw Bay area. Reports of Trumpeter Swan continue to increase in that state, as well. Also in Michigan, Greater White-fronted Geese were seen in *Wayne* and *Muskegon* to Dec. 11 and in *Monroe* Feb. 28. Snow Geese overwintered at *Menasha* (DN) in Wisconsin and in *Ramsey/Dakota* (KB) in Minnesota.

Wisconsin had a good variety of overwintering ducks, including Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, N. Pintail, N. Shoveler, Gadwall, Am. Wigeon, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Hooded Merganser, and Ruddy Duck. More noteworthy from that state were a ♀ King Eider from Jan. 7–29, a wintering ♀ Harlequin Duck on L. Michigan at Milwaukee (m.ob.), and a ♂ Barrow's Goldeneye which remained in Virmond Park to mid-December. Scoters in Wisconsin included a Black Scoter at Milwaukee Dec. 21 (DG, BB), 25 Surf Scoters in *Kenosha* Dec. 11 (BB), and single Surf Scoters at Virmond Park, *Ozaukee* Dec. 15 (TW), Harrington Beach S.P., Jan. 14 (DT), and Milwaukee Jan. 19 (JF). Single White-winged Scoters were reported in Manitowoc Dec. 4 (DT) and in Milwaukee between Jan. 7–Feb. 15. Waterfowl records deemed worthy of note in Minnesota included an overwintering N. Pintail in *Dakota* (PJ), an overwintering Greater Scaup in *Ramsey* (KB), an imm. Harlequin Duck on the French R. in *St. Louis* from Dec. 19–21 (*fide* KE), a first county record of Oldsquaw with seven at Moorhead, *Clay* (RO), and an overwintering Barrow's Goldeneye in *Scott* (*fide* AH) at the same location as last year. Unusual in Michigan was a Brant at Pt. Mouillee, *Monroe*, from Dec. 10–15 (TW *et al.*), a first year ♂ King Eider which overwintered at Sault Ste. Marie, *Chippewa* (m.ob.), and Harlequin Ducks through December in *Benzie* (BA, KW) and in December at Copper Harbor, *Keewenaw* (SA). Less unusual in that state, but still noteworthy, were three Black Scoters and three Surf Scoters at St. Joseph, *Berrien*, Jan. 8 (AB) and a ♂ Oldsquaw inland on the Grand R. in *Ingham* Feb. 3–8 (DW *et al.*).

Raptors to Grouse

The Black Vulture which was reported in Wisconsin in November reappeared in mid-December in *Sheboygan* in desperate shape; it was captured, but the attempt to rehabilitate the bird failed and it died Jan. 1 (DD). Also in Wisconsin, a Turkey Vul-



ture was seen in *Green* Jan. 6 (EL). Minnesota reported unusual numbers of Cooper's Hawks for the 2nd consecutive year. Golden Eagles in the Region included one in *Allegan*, MI Feb. 15 (MWa), two in *Kittson* Feb. 16 (PS), as well as overwintering birds in *Houston* and *Winona* in Minnesota, and seven in *Monroe* (DK) and three along the *Jackson*, *Wood*, *Juneau* county lines in Wisconsin. Merlins included one in *Marquette*, MI Dec. 27. In Wisconsin, an injured bird was found in *Milwaukee* Dec. 27 (SD), and there were singles in *Kewaunee* Dec. 28 (JH), and in *Dane* Jan. 4 (PA). In Michigan, Peregrine Falcons were reported in *Wayne* Feb. 19 and *Monroe* Feb. 20, while in Wisconsin birds were seen at Superior Dec. 31 (RJ) and returned to Green Bay Jan. 30, with another appearing in late February (m.ob.). A Gyrfalcon overwintered at its normal location at Sault Ste. Marie, MI, while others were seen in *Houghton* Dec. 14 (JY), at the Muskegon Wastewater System from Dec. 27–29 (JW, JH *et al.*), and at *Marquette* Jan. 5 (TN, FT). Minnesota had one Gyrfalcon in *Polk* Dec. 9 (SS). As usual, the only Prairie Falcon report in the Region came from Minnesota, with one in *Moorhead*, *Clay*, Jan. 19 (CF). Gray Partridge reports were up in Minnesota, with sightings from 19 counties; even more unusual was the report by Millard of this species and Greater Prairie Chickens feeding in unharvested sunflower fields.

Rails to Gulls

Three Virginia Rails were present during most of December in the University of Wisconsin Aboretum, with the last being heard Jan. 5 (PA). Also in Wisconsin was a Sora in *Antigo* March 1, thought to be an early migrant rather than an overwintering bird. In Michigan, a Purple Sandpiper was found at *Muskegon* Dec. 28 (GW, ES) and a Red Phalarope was present in *Milwaukee*, WI Dec. 3–7 (m.ob.). Unusually far north in Minnesota were two Ring-billed Gulls along the L. Superior shoreline at *Grand Marais* Jan. 8 (AH). A California Gull was observed in Wisconsin at *Kewaunee* Dec. 10 (DT). The typical number of Thayer's Gulls were seen throughout the Region, with Michigan reporting two in *Berrien*, Wisconsin having good numbers along the L. Michigan and L. Superior shorelines, and Minnesota reporting nine in *Ramsey* to Dec. 6 (KB) and five–six at Superior to Dec. 21. Iceland Gulls were similarly reported in Michigan, with individuals in *Marquette* Dec. 14 (LT) and *Bay* Jan. 5 (DP, MW). Wisconsin had "a few intermittently seen" along the L. Michigan and L. Superior shorelines.



This adult gull at the landfill at Superior, Wisconsin, December 7, 1996, was first identified as a possible Slaty-backed, but later consideration focused on the possibility of a hybrid. Photograph/Karl Bardon.

Minnesota reported first-winter Icelandals at Superior in December. Michigan had 5 reports of Lesser Black-backed Gull in December in *Genesee*, *Monroe*, and *Wayne*, and one each in *Monroe* and *Wayne* in January. In Minnesota, an odd dark-backed gull found at the Superior landfill Dec. 7 was tentatively identified as a Slaty-backed Gull, but further analysis of photos ruled this out. Observers now tend to believe it was a hybrid, possibly of Herring x Lesser Black-backed Gull. The slides have been sent out for expert opinion. Maximum numbers of Glaucous Gulls found in Wisconsin included 15 at Two Rivers-Manitowoc and 15–35 at Superior. Good numbers of Great Black-backed Gulls were found in that state, with reports from Superior, *Kewaunee* (max. six), *Two-Rivers-Manitowoc* (max. five–ten), *Sheboygan* (max. six), and *Milwaukee*.

Owls

Snowy Owls made a major influx into the w. portions of the Region, with nearly 100 reported in Minnesota, >75 in Wisconsin, and lesser numbers in Michigan. To emphasize the migration in Minnesota, when the spring 1997 and fall 1996 records are added to the winter totals, the influx will be second only to the record migration in 1993–1994 of 351 birds. Northern Hawk Owls made a similar invasion in Minnesota with 80 individuals, second only to 1991–1992, when 159 were recorded. It was unusual that many of these individuals came south into the Twin Cities area. Wisconsin tied their record of seven birds, including individu-

als at *Dorchester* Dec. 1, w. of *Park Falls* Jan. 3, at *Eagle River* Jan. 21, at *Spencer* Feb. 2–12, near *Antigo* in mid-February, and in *Superior* and *Nekoosa* from January–February. Michigan fared less well, with a maximum of four birds s. of *Sault Ste. Marie* in January (RB, JG, m.ob.). Great Gray Owls followed the trend, with record numbers of 73 in Wisconsin, >120 in Minnesota (less than last season's 342), and approximately 14 in Michigan. Even more unusual was how far south this species reached. In Minnesota they were found to *Faribault*, *Goodhue*, *Rice*, and *Winona*, and in Wisconsin to *Avon Bottoms*, *Rock*. In Michigan, birds were found s. to *Isabella*, where one was found dead Dec. 4 (LF). Unlike the previously mentioned bird, most individuals seen were healthy, and the number of dead birds, beside roadkills, were much lower than in the previous invasions. Minnesota had only 2 reports of a Long-eared Owls, with singles in *Dakota*. Wisconsin had about 20 birds from 4 locations, a bit more than normal, and Michigan only had a single report from *Sarrett NC*, *Berrien*. Short-eared Owls were also less numerous in the latter state, with only three in *Hillsdale* at the location that hosted 24 last winter (JR). Wisconsin, on the other hand, reported a good winter, with 45–50 individuals in the s. portion of the state, while Minnesota had individuals in *Jackson* Dec. 7 (*vide* AH) and in *Wilkin* Dec. 8 (DM, SM). Wisconsin completed their banner year of n. owls with a record 51 Boreal Owls. These, added to the 10–15 banded in the fall, will nearly double the previous

record of last winter. Unfortunately, many of the Wisconsin birds were found dead or dying, as was the case in Minnesota, where 100 individuals were recovered. This, it seems, is the norm for this species in invasion years. In Minnesota, during the record invasion of 1995–1996, of the 212 birds reported, 176 were found dead or dying. One wonders what the true abundance of this secretive, nocturnal species is as so many reports are of dead birds, perhaps the easiest way to find it. The two Boreal Owls reports in Michigan were of live birds, one in Marquette Feb. 3–5 (LT) and another in McClain S.P., *Houghton*, in mid-January (SA).

Hummingbirds to Warblers

The Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird in Michigan at the feeder near Fowlerville was last seen Dec. 10 (RL, NL). Three-toed Woodpeckers were quite scarce in Minnesota this season, with reports only from the Spruce Rd. in *Lake*. Black-backed were also scarce in that state, with reports in *Lake* and *St. Louis*, while in Michigan this species was seen s. of normal at a feeder in *Lake* (WL). An E. Phoebe remained to Dec. 9 in Madison, WI. (PA). Red-breasted Nuthatches were scarce in s. Wisconsin, in sharp contrast to last year's numbers. A Carolina Wren in Marquette into December (TN) represented only the 2nd recent record of this species in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Late for Wisconsin was a Marsh Wren Dec. 22 in *Fond du Lac* (SB, TS). The only Mt. Bluebirds in the Region came from Minnesota, where a male and female were reported in *Scott* Jan. 26–Feb. 15 (AH *et al.*), and a female provided a first county record near Rochester, *Olmstead*, Feb. 20 (DA, BE). Very late was a Wood Thrush found feeding on buckthorn berries in Milwaukee Dec. 1–21 (JS, KS, JF *et al.*), providing a new late date for Wisconsin. Townsend Solitaire reports included one in Michigan at W.P.B.O., Jan. 4. In Minnesota, individuals were present from Jan 4 through February in *Weaver*, *Wabasha* (CS, HT), and *Roseau*, *Roseau*, both providing first county records; \geq eight other individuals were found in the state, including four in *Winona*. Incredibly, the bird in *Roseau* was found in a flock of chickadees, jays, and nuthatches which were mobbing a dead Boreal Owl frozen on its perch in a dogwood tree! There were 16 reports of Varied Thrushes in Minnesota, including first county records at *Hayward*, *Freeborn*, Dec. 14–28 (ABa) and from November through Dec. 8 at *Welch*, *Goodhue* (AH, RJa). Wisconsin had a terrible winter for this species, with only 2 confirmed reports, one in *Wau-paca* Dec. 21–28 (JBU) and in *Wausau* Jan.

1–9 (CB, JBe). Michigan was able to muster five during the period, one each in *Alpena*, *Berrien*, *Lake*, *Manistee*, and *Van Buren*. Gray Catbirds lingered in Michigan in Muskegon to Dec. 7, in Marquette Dec. 17 (LT), and in *Benzie* Jan. 2 (KW *et al.*), while in Wisconsin one was present in Madison to Dec. 22 (PA). Reports of Brown Thrasher were more numerous than normal in Minnesota, with the most northern bird surviving to Feb. 2 in *Kanabec* (CM). Bohemian Waxwings were scarce throughout the Region, with only a few good size flocks reported, such as >200 in mid-January in Ashland, WI (DV), and 130 in mid-February in *Roseau*, MN (PS). Northern Shrikes were also relatively scarce Regionwide. Truly remarkable was a Nashville Warbler which was late and north in Rogers City, *Presque Ile*, MI Dec. 16 (BG).

Cardinal to Finches

Northern Cardinals are living up to their name by wintering ever farther north in Michigan and Minnesota. In the latter birds overwintered in *Kittson* (KB, PS) and in *Cook* (OL, SL), while in the former birds wintered in the northernmost part of the state, the Keweenaw Pen. (SA). The exact status of the recently split Spotted Towhee is unclear. This season the only report was of an overwintering bird in Minnesota at Rochester, *Olmsted*. Observers in that state believe this species is a rare but regular migrant in s.w. Minnesota, and casual to rare elsewhere. In Michigan and Wisconsin it is likely even less frequent. A Savannah Sparrow was quite late in *Ozaukee*, WI Dec. 20 (BB). North of normal in Minnesota was an Am. Tree Sparrow which overwintered in Duluth, *St. Louis* (*vide* KE). Unusual in Michigan were Chipping Sparrows from Dec. 18–22 at a feeder in *Lenawee* (DO) and Jan. 18–Feb. 25 in *Berrien* (DS). Also in that state, a White-crowned Sparrow wintered n. of normal in Marquette. Harris' Sparrow reports included an immature which wintered at the University of Wisconsin Arboretum in Madison and individuals unusually far north in Minnesota in *St. Louis* Jan. 20–Feb. 1 (DK) and in *Aitkin* Dec. 14–Jan. 4 (WN), as well as scattered reports through the s. part of that state. Snow Buntings were considered to be "unbelievably abundant" in Wisconsin, with flocks of 400–2500 sighted in many areas. Blackbird numbers were about average in Michigan, with most species seen scattered through the s. portions of the state, while in Wisconsin numbers have been depressed over the past several winters. A Baltimore Oriole lingered in the latter state too long in Eau Claire and was captured Dec. 24 for rehabilitation; it only lived a few days. Winter

finches presented a mixed bag of abundance this season. Purple Finches were more common than normal in Michigan and Minnesota, and all 3 states had good numbers of White-winged Crossbills. But only Minnesota had numbers of Red Crossbills. Redpolls were virtually absent from all 3 states, but siskins were found in good numbers, and Am. Goldfinch remain in unusually high numbers in n. Michigan. Pine Grosbeaks were very scarce throughout the Region, while Evening Grosbeaks were found in average numbers.

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