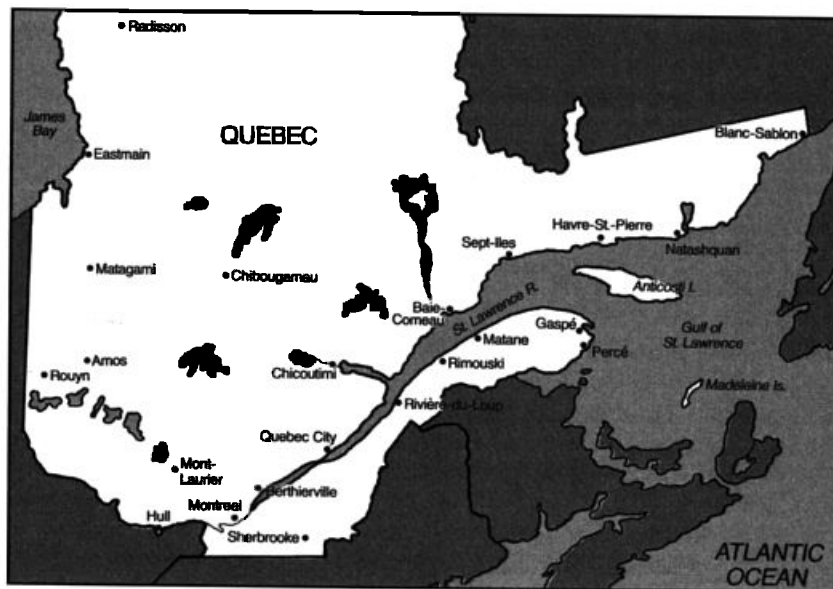


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After several mild winters, it was a return to a typical Canadian winter. The above-normal precipitation and the absence of any extended thaw were responsible for a heavy snow cover throughout the Region. On the other hand, the temperature remained pleasantly cold, with no extreme variations. Birding was excellent, owing to an abundance of northern owls, while an excellent fruit crop contributed to the presence of large numbers of American Robins and both species of waxwings. Northern finches were scarce in the

south except for White-winged Crossbills and American Goldfinches, but most finches were more common in northern regions. Due to an early onset of the cold weather in December, fewer than usual late migrants lingered into the Region.

Loons Through Gulls

Accidental in mid-winter, a Red-throated Loon at Gentilly 27 Feb+ may be considered our earliest ever (*vide* S. Houle). Seldom reported in Feb, single Common Loons were present at Les Escoumins 13 & 15 Feb (CA, CG), Baie-Sainte-Catherine 16 Feb (P. Otis et al.), and Grande-Rivière 18 Feb (DM, A. Couture). The Horned Grebe that was observed at Les Escoumins 4 Jan & 2 Feb probably overwintered locally (CA), while a Red-necked Grebe at Pointe-Saint-Pierre 4 Feb was a good find for the period (PP, DM, JRL, G. Roy).

Two ad. Greater White-fronted Geese at Lévis 1–5 Dec (R. Lepage et al.) and one immature at Berthier-sur-mer 1 Dec (JL) were the first ever reported in Dec in the Québec City area. The 25 Canada Geese at Caplan 4 Feb were unexpected at this time of the year in Gaspésie region (JM. Pitre). A Mute Swan of unknown origin continued to be present at Beauharnois until the end of the period (*vide* SD). The Wood Duck found at Shipshaw 27 Jan–4 Feb represented the first winter record in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area (F. Riverin et

al.), while 4 males overwintered at Beauharnois (D. Daigneault et al.). The male Eurasian Wigeon found at Île des Soeurs 3 Dec was record late (PB). Unreported in Feb since 1996, a female Redhead at Sainte-Catherine 3–28 Feb+ was a good mid-winter find (SD). An impressive count of 6158 Common Eiders was tallied at the Matane C.B.C. 17 Dec. Also rare in mid-winter was a White-winged Scoter at Gentilly 3 Feb (RB).

With almost 30 records, Gyrfalcons made their best appearance in years (*vide* PB). Wild Turkeys were sighted in new localities in the Outaouais area with an individual killed at Luskville 15 Dec (M. Macquart) and another seen alive at Val-des-Bois 20 Jan (M. Peck).

Six Ruddy Turnstones at Rivière-Hâtée 6 Dec were the latest of the season (R. St-Laurent). A Common Snipe at Matapédia 8 Feb represented the first winter record for the species in the Gaspésie region (C. Pitre). Four imm. Black-headed Gulls were still present at Cap-aux-Meules 14 Jan (DGG). A second-winter Mew Gull, apparently of the European subspecies, was discovered at Port-Daniel 29 Dec, providing a new record late date by one day (É. Arsenault). A Lesser Black-backed Gull throughout the season at Les Escoumins provided one of few overwintering records for the Region (CA, CG). An imm. Ivory Gull was discovered by a young teen birder 1 Jan at Saint-Gédéon (FC. Simard et al.), and was relocated the day after by local birders; another bird, also an imm., was observed flying over the frozen St. Lawrence R. at Rimouski 2 Jan (G. Gendron).

Owls Through Blackbirds

Owls were the dominant feature of the winter. Snowy Owls appeared to be in above-average numbers, although it was not considered a peak year. Northern Hawk Owls continued to move s., with new birds appearing regularly until late Jan in almost every region of the province. As predicted in the last Fall report, the final count through mid-March totaled 209 individuals (*vide* SB). Great Gray Owls staged their second largest invasion in the Region, with a total of 104 birds reported through mid-March (*vide* SB). Most of the reports originated from the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean and the Québec City regions. Few birds reached the easternmost and the southernmost regions. Finally, Boreal Owls numbered 35 individuals through mid-March (*vide* C. Nadeau).

Considered irregular in winter, the Belted Kingfisher was nonetheless well reported, with singles at Québec City 17 Dec–28 Feb+ (JL et al.), Bécancour 21 Jan–28 Feb+ (RB), Pointe-Calumet 7–28 Feb (LS), and Saint-Faustin 20



One of two Harris's Sparrows found in the province over the winter was this bird at l'Ange-Gardien. It was seen from 5 December through the winter. Photograph by Michèle Lafleur.

Feb (M. Renaud). A Red-bellied Woodpecker at Gros-Cap 12–23 Jan provided the second record only for Îles de la Madeleine (DGG, L. Lapierre, m.ob.). Northern Flickers away from the southwest were found in good numbers as shown by totals of 7 in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, 4 in the Lower St. Lawrence, 2 in Îles de la Madeleine, and one on the North Shore. Extremely rare in Dec, an Eastern Phoebe made quite a surprise at Irlande 13 Dec (B. Lemay). As expected, 8–9 Carolina Wrens were tallied in the s. part of the province with the northernmost appearing at Loretteville 1–6 Dec (M. Comeau, G. Cyr). A Marsh Wren, the second ever for the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, caused great excitement at La Baie 3 Dec (CC, GS, et al., ph. S. Tremblay).

No fewer than 4 Townsend's Solitaires visited the Region: one was at Sillery 1 Dec (O. Barden), one at Roxton-Sud 22–24 Dec (D. Pontbriand), one at Saint-Anaclet 27–28 Jan (JLM), and one at Les Escoumins 4 Feb (CA). The only Varied Thrush of the season brightened Saint-Ambroise-de-Kildare 9–28 Feb+ (M. Desroches, m.ob.). For the third consecutive year, a **Fieldfare** turned up briefly in the Region, this time at Cap-à-l'Aigle 1 Jan (M. Robert). American Robins overwintered in large numbers as far e. as the North Shore and the Lower St. Lawrence regions. In the south, flocks of 1600 at Montréal 5 Jan (B. Barnhurst, M. McIntosh) and 850 at Sainte-Catherine (Montreal C.B.C.) were noteworthy. Both species of waxwings were much in evidence.



This Marsh Wren, photographed at La Baie 3 December, was the second ever for the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region. Photograph by Serge Tremblay.

Best counts of Bohemians were 8000 at Chicoutimi 17 Jan (N. Duchesne), and 6000 at Saint-Irénée 19 Jan (J. Hardy) Unexpectedly, the Cedar Waxwing was best reported away from the southwest, with a peak count of 200 at La Baie 7 Jan (D. Gervais, M Tremblay).

Single Yellow-rumped Warblers successfully overwintered at Matane (C. Durette, J. Durette et al.) and Rimouski (F. Proulx), while one was present at Les Escoumins 10 Dec–3 Feb (CA, CG). The other warblers of the season included a Pine at Beaconsfield late Dec–early Feb (PB) and the last fall long-standing Kentucky that survived in the Montréal Botanical Gardens until 5 Dec (*vide* PB).

A female Spotted Towhee delighted many at Beauport 5 Jan–28 Feb+ (*vide* JL, m.ob., ph ML), while single overwintering Eastern Towhees at Maria (C. Lamarre, B. Leblanc) and Bonaventure (*vide* PP) were worthy of mention. Considering the harsh December weather in the Montréal area, single Savannah Sparrows at Mirabel 11 Dec (LS), Saint-Constant 16 Dec (P. Wery), and Saint-Janvier 16 Dec (Y. Gauthier, S. Morand) were amazingly late. Out-of-season Fox Sparrows were found at Matane 20 Jan (Y. Lemieux) and at Chandler 16 Feb+ (R. Garrett, M. Garant et al.). A Swamp Sparrow at Chandler 28 Dec–28 Feb+ was a first overwintering record for the Gaspésie region (JRL et al.). Remarkable western strays included single Harris's Sparrows at l'Ange-Gardien 5 Dec–28 Feb+ (É. Razurel, m.ob., ph. ML), and at Granby 15 Dec–6 Feb (*vide* B. Hamel, m.ob.). Worthy of mention among the half-dozen reports of the White-crowned Sparrow were single imm. *gambelii* at Les Escoumins 23 Nov–3 Dec (CA, CG), Saint-Janvier late Dec–28 Feb+ (S. Aubin), and Château-Richer 1 Jan–28 Feb+ (JM. Giroux) The only Oregon Junco spent the season at Laurierville (N. Labrie, D. McCutcheon) Single Rusty Blackbirds at Les Escoumins 30 Dec (CA, CG) and Cap d'Espoir 21 Jan–28 Feb+ (PP et al.) were noteworthy.

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