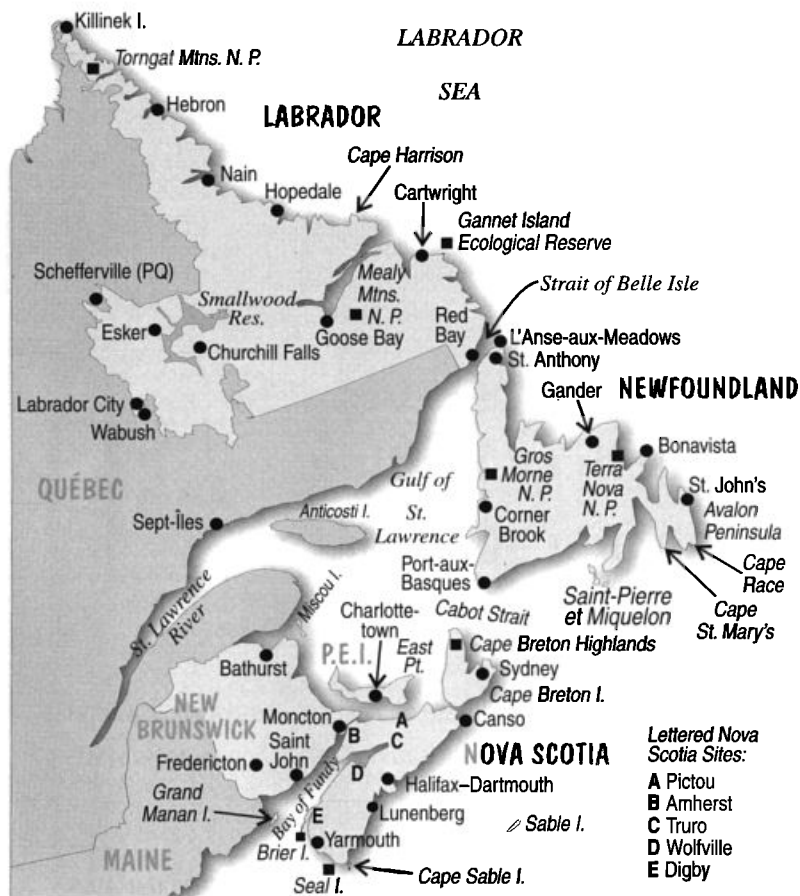


Atlantic Provinces & St. Pierre et Miquelon



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The winter of 2002-2003 was especially bitter, so much so that most observers under the age of 50 could not recall the last time it had been so cold for so long. "The old ones among us had to hearken back to the 1940s and 1950s to remember such prolonged and intense cold weather," wrote Fred Dobson from the south shore of Nova Scotia, where many saltwater harbors and inlets were frozen (or ice-filled) for the first time in a decade. Deep cold arrived in early January and continued unabated until mid-March. The now-traditional seven-to-ten-day "spring" thaw that usually occurs in the southern Maritimes in January or February never materialized, allowing a fair snow

pack to accumulate—even though the season was somewhat drier than normal.

Winter was more "normal" in Newfoundland, Labrador, and New Brunswick, where Mike Lushington noted from the north shore on 5 December that the entire Restigouche River estuary had a skim of ice. "This is the earliest that I have seen this within the past 10 years at least," he wrote, adding that: "All of this has had the effect of concentrating birds, or moving them out of the area completely." St. John's, Newfoundland was hit by no fewer than four blizzards during the period, extinguishing the last of the half-hardy warblers by mid-December (locals had come to expect them into January or late). Winter birding on the Avalon Peninsula was characterized as "dull from beginning to end" by Bruce Mactavish.

The harsh weather kept many observers close to home and relatively inactive, resulting in a paucity of reports noted by more than one editor. Still, birders in Nova Scotia managed to rack up 192 species (Blake Maybank) during the period, while their neighbors to the west in New Brunswick found a respectable 160 (Stuart Tingley). As usual, several splendid rarities were discovered on Christmas Bird Counts, underscoring the value of this winter activity in getting birders afield at a season when they might otherwise be inclined to stay at home. Finally, reports of starving European Starlings in February at Cape Sable Island, NS indicate that mortality of other less-hardy species in the Region may have been significant.

Abbreviations: C.S.I. (Cape Sable I., NS); G.M.I. (Grand Manan I., NB), H.R.M. (Halifax Regional Municipality); NL (a new official postal code for "Newfoundland & Labrador").

LOONS THROUGH HERONS

Most Red-throated Loons have left the Region by early Jan, so 4 in the Biscay Bay/Portugal Cove South, NL area on 23 Feb "bordered on extraordinary" (BMT, JC, DP). Common Loon appears to be doing well, with a record high of 474 found on Nova Scotia C.B.C.s. Farther e., around Saint Pierre, at least 100 "rather widespread" birds wintered (RE). The only Pied-billed Grebe of the autumn in St. John's, NL was out of habitat in the harbor starting 6 Dec (BMT et al.). An Eared Grebe in St. Pierre Harbour 13-20 Dec (Bruno Starck et al.) was photographed 19 Dec (Pascal Asselin), a first for the French islands. Significant concentrations of Red-necked Grebe occurred at St. Pierre et Miquelon 29 Dec, when 168 were found (RE), and 5 Jan at Grand Manan Island, NB, with 145 on its C.B.C. About as far e. as possible was a pair of Horned Grebes in Biscay Bay, NL during Jan, thought to be the same birds that wintered there last

year (TB, TS et al.).

Upwards of 10,000 Northern Fulmars were reported over the Grand Manan Banks throughout the fall (William Townsend), so it was not surprising 200 were found off Brier I., NS on its C.B.C. 22 Dec. Greater Shearwater is showing a recent tendency to linger into Dec over outer Bay of Fundy waters. A record 10 were found during the Brier I. C.B.C., while one off Southern Head, G.M.I. 6 Jan (Peter Wilcox) established a new late date for New Brunswick. Northern Gannets moved quickly offshore and s. and were generally not seen by land-bound observers following the onset of harsh cold in early Jan.

An American Bittern lingered until 21 Dec at Tynemouth Cr., NB (D. Kelly). Great Blue Herons were fairly regular early in the period in Nova Scotia, but most fled the province or perished after heavy icing conditions in Jan (fide UH). An imm. Black-crowned Night-Heron made it until 14 Dec at Shag Harbour, NS (MN), while an ad. was found at Seal Cove, G.M.I. on 3 Jan (Durlan Ingersoll). The latest Great Egret was one at Conrad's Beach, H.R.M. until at least 2 Jan (BMy). Two separate Cattle Egrets just made it into the first week of the period in Lilydale and Felzen South, Lunenburg, NS, but they perished shortly thereafter (fide JH), likely due to starvation-induced hypothermia.

VULTURES THROUGH DUCKS

Up to 5 wintering Turkey Vultures were seen at Brier I., NS throughout the period (June Swift), while just to the s., 14 were found 5 Feb around farms at Chebogue, Yarmouth (MN). One at Inkerman, Northumberland, NB 16 Dec was notably late for the n. of the province (Jean-Guy Robichaud). A Black Vulture 6 Dec at Canso, Guysborough, NS (Tom Kavanaugh) was likely the same one present at nearby Fox I. for a month previous.

Four or 5 Eurasian Wigeons were noted during the period in Nova Scotia (fide FD), and 2 females wintered at St. John's, NL (BMT). American Black Duck continues its welcome increase, with a record 24,449 found on Nova Scotia C.B.C.s, and an excellent count of 580 came from Miquelon, SPM 25 Dec (RE). A hen Blue-winged Teal 13 Dec—3 Feb at St. Pierre (Laurent Jackman et al.) was a first wintering record for the islands. Up to 5 drake Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal wintered around St. John's (BMT), with an additional drake at Harbour Grace 19 Jan (Paul Linegar, BMT). The only Redheads reported were single drakes at Sullivans Pond, Dartmouth, H.R.M. 5 Dec (JW) and Brier I., NS 24-28 Jan (Carl Haycock).

A total of 16 Tufted Ducks was noted, with 10 throughout the winter at St. John's (BMT), 4 at Pictou Harbour, NS (KM et al.), one on the Halifax-Dartmouth C.B.C., and

one at Saint John, NB beginning 26 Jan (EP). The largest count of wintering Lesser Scaup that came to light was of 50 in Pictou Harbour, NS 1 Jan during the C.B.C. Harlequin Duck is rare in winter along the ice-bound Prince Edward I. shore, so an imm. male 22 Jan at Cardigan (Rosemary Curley) was a good find. Around White Head I., G.M.I., about 105 were present in late Feb (VDG), the highest count of the species. A good early-season count of Barrow's Goldeneye was 30 off the Inch Arron Pt. Lighthouse in Dalhousie, NB 9 Dec (Mike Lushington).

RAPTORS THROUGH CRANES

The annual midwinter raptor count in Kings, NS revealed 425 Bald Eagles 9 Feb, consisting of 215 ads., 200 imms., and 10 not aged (fide JW). Cooper's Hawk appears to be increasing as a winter resident in the Region, especially in New Brunswick, where individuals were reported from Sussex (BED), Fredericton (C.B.C.), Memramcook (Yoland LeBlanc), Barachois, and Shediac Bridge (S. Tingley). Notably far n. was one at St. Leonard, Madawaska in early Dec (Roy Lapointe), while another at Shag Harbour, NS 11 Dec (Terry Crowell) provided the only report from that province. Red-shouldered Hawk is less than annual in the Region in winter, so an ad. along Herman I. Rd., Lunenburg, NS 25 Jan (Elizabeth Doull) was notable. Likely the same bird was seen at nearby Risser's Beach P.P. 27 Jan (D. Farner, S. Diebler).

Three imm. Broad-winged Hawks were reported by reliable observers, which is about average for recent winters, although photographs still remain elusive. One was found at Mount Hebert, PEI 28 Dec (Dan McAskill, Bill Bowerbank); another was near Bridgewater, NS 6 Feb (Joan Czapaly); and the 3rd was found during the Kings raptor count 9 Feb (Mike Russell). There are still no unassailable winter reports for New Brunswick. The high count of Red-tailed Hawk, as usual, came from the Annapolis Valley, where 83 were tallied on the raptor count 9 Feb (fide JW). Single Golden Eagles were an imm. at G.M.I. 2 Dec (Valmond Bourque et al.) and 5 Jan (BED); an ad. 14 & 19 Jan at Shepody, Albert, NB (m. ob.); an imm. near Dorchester, NB 28 Jan (Alain Clavette); and another imm. around C.S.I. during the first half of Feb (JN, MN). An ad. unusually far n. near Labrador City in early Jan was apparently surviving on abundant caribou remains (fide Cheryl Davis). A white-morph Gyrfalcon at White Head, G.M.I. survived the winter on Razorbills and other alcids captured by making (up to) 17-km round-trips out over the Bay of Fundy (VDG).

Goodly numbers of Gray Partridge remain only on Prince Edward I., where 31 were found on the Prince Edward Island N.P. C.B.C. 14 Dec, and 28 on the Montague

C.B.C. 4 Jan. Sharp-tailed Grouse, introduced to the island in the early-mid 1980s, are still restricted to limited areas of suitable habitat but continue to persist in small numbers. For example, 9 were found on the Hillsborough C.B.C. 28 Dec, and 7 were at Hampton 7 Jan (Joanne MacQuarrie). An imm Purple Gallinule found freshly-dead along the roadside in Oban, Richmond, NS 5 Feb (WM) fits an established pattern of autumn and early-winter vagrancy for this species into the Region; one wonders how long the bird had been present in the area, as the autumn 2002 flight of five birds to upstate New York and s. Canada occurred in a fairly narrow window 23 Sep—20 Oct. A banded Sandhill Crane survived the winter in Newfoundland, perhaps the first to do so in the Region. First noted around a silage pile in The Goulds, Avalon Peninsula in late Dec, it was still present in early Mar (BMT, et al.).

PLOVERS THROUGH TERNS

A Black-bellied Plover at Stephenville, NL 3 Jan was notably late for the w. coast of the province (B. Windsor). An amazing 57 were found on the C.B.C. at C.S.I. 14 Dec, with 9 still present 15 Feb (MN, JN). A few Killdeer lingered in Nova Scotia into Dec, such as 5 at Yarmouth 15 Dec (MN), but most were gone by month's end. The latest report of a Lesser Yellowlegs came from Melbourne, Yarmouth, NS 8-24 Dec (MN et al.). High counts of Red Knot were 45 at C.S.I. 14 Dec (C.B.C.) and 17 at Grand Barachois, SPM 15 Jan (RE). There were still 18 at C.S.I. 18 Feb (MN). Hardy Sanderlings, all 520 of them, provided a record high for Nova Scotia C.B.C.s, with 400 at C.S.I. 14 Dec and 104 at Port L'Hebert 22 Dec.

Wintering White-rumped Sandpipers now seem annual on C.S.I., with 4 found on the C.B.C. still present 1 Jan (MN). Exceptionally high numbers of Dunlin were found on C.B.C.s early in the period, such as 450 at C.S.I. and 110 at Port L'Hebert. A very tame imm. Ruff (Reeve), the star of the winter shorebird show, was present at Sullivans Pond, Dartmouth, H.R.M. 23 Nov—14 Dec (m. ob.). A late dowitcher at Cole Harbour, H.R.M. 12 Jan (Fulton Lavender) was thought to have been a Long-billed. An American Woodcock at Canso, NS 5-10 Jan stayed in a backyard in town, trying to feed by probing over and over in the snow (fide SF).

An estimated 400+ Black-headed Gulls were thought to have wintered in Nova Scotia (BMy). Best count for New Brunswick was 10 in late Feb at Blacks Harbour (Jim Wilson). The Halifax Thayer's Gull returned for a 4th winter to Pier 9 (BMy), though it was not often seen. Another was reported from Charlottetown, PEI 26 Jan (DS), but without details. White-headed ad. Yellow-legged Gulls in St. John's were one pho-

tographed at Quidi Vidi L. 9-11 Dec (BMT, D. Brown) and at the Robin Hood Landfill 31 Jan (BMT, P. Adriaens), where 2 birds were photographed. A few Ivory Gulls were seen at the tip of the Northern Peninsula, NL in early Jan (BMT). There was a remarkable influx of Forster's Tern into Nova Scotia, starting with 2 birds between Conrads Beach and Cow Bay, H.R.M. from late Nov to at least 14 Dec, with one still present 11 Jan (m. ob.). Six were at West Baccaro, *Shelburne* 8 Dec (MN), one at Broad Cove 30 Dec (David Young), and one flew by Sand Beach, *Yarmouth* 6 Jan (MN). New Brunswick got its first winter record with one at Saint John 28 Dec—1 Jan (Rose-Alma Mallet, Janet Whitehead, EP).

ALCIDS THROUGH PHOEBES

For the most part, alcids remained well offshore, out of sight of land-bound observers this winter, with very few reports of significant numbers. Best Dovekie count was 2059 during the St. Pierre C.B.C. 22 Dec, with runner-up being 500+ on the Brier I., NS C.B.C. on the same day. The best place to see wintering Razorbill in the Region continues to be off e. G.M.I., where 25,000+ were present in early Jan (VDG). Atlantic Puffin had mostly moved offshore by Dec, but onshore winds still brought a few close to shore, such as 100 tallied on the Brier Island C.B.C.

Photographs of Nova Scotia's 22nd White-winged Dove 7-23 Dec at Stellarton (KM) suggest it was of the subspecies *asiatica*, which has been increasing in numbers and spreading beyond Florida in recent decades. At least some that occurred here in earlier years were of the paler, grayer southwestern form *mearnsi* (fide IM). Mourning Dove numbers have about doubled on C.B.C.s in the Region since the mid-1990s, despite a much more modest increase in observers and party-miles. It was definitely not a Snowy Owl winter, with very few noted in the Region. The only Northern Hawk Owl reported outside Newfoundland was discovered near Jemseg, NB 23 Jan (Jim Edsall). An abundance of meadow voles at C.S.I. attracted up to 13 Short-eared Owls in late Jan, but most had either left or perished as winter snows deepened by late Feb (JN et al.).

An unidentified hummingbird that struck a window in Murray River, PEI in early Jan was taken inside, revived, and released (fide DS). Odds would favor it being a w. species rather than a Ruby-throated. Only single Red-bellied Woodpeckers were found—in Woodstock, NB and Halifax, NS—quite a change for a species that had become a regular winter visitor during the late 1990s. There were two reports of Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, an imm. female at Spa Springs, *Annapolis*, NS 14 Dec (Jane & Jim Ludlow)

and another imm. coming to suet at Chester, *Lunenburg* 2 Feb (fide JH). An Eastern Phoebe was intermittently seen in Kings, NS 7 Dec—5 Jan (fide JW), while a most resilient Say's Phoebe toughed it out at Gagetown, NB 28 Dec—9 Jan (Don Gibson, David Myles et al.). It frustrated many birders by foraging about a large area.

WRENS THROUGH WARBLERS

Formerly a great rarity in Nova Scotia, there was a modest influx of Carolina Wrens for the 2nd successive winter, with birds at Berwick, Kings early Dec—10 Jan (fide JW) and Westhaver Beach, *Lunenburg* 22 Dec—16 Jan (fide JH). Amazingly, 2 birds were found together at a feeder in n. New Brunswick at Campbellton until at least 16 Dec (M. Maltais). A midwinter Winter Wren was a good find at an open spring near Notre-Dame, Kent, NB 26 Jan (Roger LeBlanc). A single Marsh Wren was discovered at Westville, *Pictou*, NS 14 Dec (Steve Vines). The only report of Blue-gray Gnatcatcher for the period was at Yarmouth, NS 24 Dec (MN). A Northern Wheatear reported at Fredericton, NB 16 Dec (Beverly Schneider) could not be relocated.

Outstanding in Nova Scotia was a Mountain Bluebird, a female, seen at several locations starting at C.S.I. 14-15 Nov (m. ob.), then probably moving to Melbourne, *Yarmouth* by 22 Dec (Paul Gould et al.), and finally back to C.S.I. 17 Jan (fide Grant Milroy); there are only three or four prior records for the province. Newfoundland's 3rd Mountain Bluebird was seen briefly just w. of St. John's at Mt. Pearl 7 Dec (D. Brown). North America's 11th (and the province's 7th) Redwing was with a flock of 2000 American Robins feeding on berries at the St. John's Golf Club 12 Jan (BMT, B. Dodelson) and 13 Jan (PL, DP). Thousands of American Robins and many hundreds of Bohemian Waxwings converged on St. John's in mid-Jan and ate all the Mountain Ash berries in a matter of two weeks, then departed (BMT). Waxwings occurred in fair to moderate numbers Regionwide, usually in separate flocks, and there seemed to be an equal chance of encountering either Cedars or Bohemians.

An Orange-crowned Warbler at East Port Medway, NS 18 Jan (Andy Dean) appeared to be of the subspecies *orestera* from the Rocky Mountains. Curiously, a Black-throated Blue Warbler 3-4 Dec at Antigonish, NS (Randy Lauff) was only a few km from last winter's only Nova Scotia report. Single Yellow-throated Warblers were present until 6 Dec at Riverview, NB (D. Duplessis et al.) and Priest Pond, PEI (Dwayne Oakley). None of the half-dozen Black-and-white Warblers or several Yellow-breasted Chats present in St. John's made it beyond 12 Dec (BMT), making for the "poorest" late-

autumn warbler watching there in 20 years. An Ovenbird must have had access to an oven to survive until at least 31 Dec on the Kingston Peninsula, NB (Alan Gorham). A Wilson's Warbler made it until 14 Dec at Greenwich, Kings, NS (fide BMy).

TANAGERS THROUGH FINCHES

A Scarlet Tanager was in the s. end of Halifax 1 Dec (fide BMy), and a very confiding ad. male Western Tanager attended feeders at Shediac Cape, NB 28 Dec—19 Jan (T. Dupuis, m. ob.). Unlike a year ago, this was not a sparrow-rich winter in the Region, with only a few rarer species located. A male Lark Sparrow was a good find at Graham's Pond, PEI 2 Jan (G. Jackson). Very good numbers of American Tree, Song, and White-throated Sparrows were found on Nova Scotia C.B.C.s. An imm. Rose-breasted Grosbeak visited a feeder in Oban, *Richmond*, NS 15 Dec (WM). The spectacular male Painted Bunting first discovered at C.S.I. in late Nov apparently moved to nearby West Pubnico 7 Dec (Athelda Murphy et al.), where it remained for at least two weeks. Very few Dickcissels were found in the Region this winter, with the easternmost being one with House Sparrows at St. Brides, NL 21 Dec (PL, J. Pratt).

It was definitely not a finch winter, with only small numbers of most species present. Exceptions to the rule were Purple Finch and American Goldfinch, reported in fair to good numbers in all four Atlantic provinces. The goldfinch continues to consolidate recent gains in s. insular Newfoundland, where as many as 50 attended a feeder at St. Pierre, SPM throughout (Dominique Gouverne). Evening Grosbeak numbers have dwindled remarkably since their spruce-budworm-induced peak of the 1980s, and they were uncommon at best in the Maritimes this winter. However, surprisingly good numbers were found on Cape Breton I., NS and in Newfoundland, especially on C.B.C.s. Common and Hoary Redpolls were at a low in their biannual cycles, probably picking this season to stay well n. into Nunavik (n. Quebec & Labrador) and Baffin Island. Seed-laden alders, a favorite food, now grow commonly along the e. shore of Frobisher Bay, compliments of global warming.

Contributors (subregional editors in bold-face): Todd Boland, David Christie, J. Clark, Brian E. Dalzell, Fred Dobson, Roger Etcheberry, Sylvia Fullerton, Virgil D. Grecian, James Hirtle, Ulli Höger, Paul Linegar, Bruce Mactavish (BMT), Blake Maybank (BMy), Dan McAskill, David McCorquodale, Kenneth McKenna, Ian McLaren, Murray Newell, Johnny Nickerson, Weldon MacPhail, Doug Phelan, Eileen Pike, David Seeler, T. Smith. 🐦