

After a rather mild December, January turned out very cold, and February was even colder. Only the Ungava Peninsula showed above normal temperatures. Precipitation was generally below average, especially along the St. Lawrence valley, while it was above normal in the Hudson Bay area. It was one of the duller winters in years. Winter finches did not show up in the inhabited areas of the South, while northern owls, hawks, and gulls were scarce anywhere. In the South, the numbers of wintering ducks were down by half compared to last winter. Finally, almost no rarities were reported, the only exception being an extraordinary Ipswich Sparrow overwintering at Québec City.

### LOONS THROUGH OWLS

Quite surprising was the occurrence of a Red-throated Loon at Pointe-au-Père 28 Feb (JL. Martel). The latest Common Loon of the season was reported at Les Escoumins 31 Jan (CA, CG). A Pied-billed Grebe lingered through 9 Feb at the mouth of the Saint-Louis R., Beauharnois, where one had successfully overwintered in 2002 (AQ, R. Fortin, m. ob.). A late Horned Grebe visited Sainte-Catherine 29 Dec (PB), while a Red-necked Grebe was identified at Sherbrooke 9 Feb (MC, RC). Noteworthy were single Turkey Vultures at Lac-Etchemin 13 Jan (S. Daigle), Saint-Georges-de-Beauce 5 Feb (M. Gélinas, *vide* A. Beauchamps), and Bonaventure 8 Feb—1 Mar (JM. Pitre).

A Mute Swan was quite unexpected at Fabre, *Témiscamingue* 6-24 Dec (JF). Rare but almost annual in winter was a female Wood Duck at Laval 5-9 Jan (S. Robert, m. ob.) and 3 individuals at Beauharnois through the period (AQ et al., m. ob.). Less than annual in winter, Green-winged Teal included a pair at Laval 15-30 Jan (L. Simard), with the male staying until 19 Feb, one at Sillery through the period, and one at Matapédia 19 Jan (C. Pitre). Now scarce in the Region, 4 Canvasbacks stopped at Île Perrot 7-8 Dec (D. Ouellet, m. ob.). A Lesser Scaup at Baie-Sainte-Catherine 9 Feb was remarkable (G. Lemelin). Away from the Gaspé Pen., an imm. male Harlequin Duck was located at Île Sainte-Hélène, Montréal 11 Dec—6 Jan (S. Mathieu, m. ob.) and a male at Verdun 1 Jan (P. Lamontagne). Interesting hybrid ducks included a Northern Pintail x Gadwall hybrid at Sainte-Catherine 26 Dec (PB) and a Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser hybrid at Lachine 30 Dec—3 Jan, possibly the same individual that had overwintered there in 2002 (PB).

Northern Goshawks made an excellent showing. The increase in wintering Bald Eagles in the Outaouais region was substantiated by 10 of different ages at Eardley 26 Feb (H. Tremblay). Always rare in winter, an ad. Golden Eagle was reported at Kiamika 12

# Québec



Jan and 8 Feb (MA. Montpetit, PJ. Guay), a first-winter bird at Eardley 26 Jan—28 Feb+ (G. McNulty et al.), and another one at Weir 26 Jan (M. Morin, L. Laramée). A Merlin at Ville-Marie, *Témiscamingue* 26 Feb was unusual for the date (JF). Gyrfalcons were not particularly abundant, but a few dependable individuals delighted observers at Québec City, Sherbrooke, and Montréal. Despite marginal habitats (but probably helped by a ban on hunting), Wild Turkeys are still holding their own in extreme s. Québec, where they first appeared 20 years ago following their introduction into n. New York state. This winter, some were reported n. of their range, very close to Montréal, e. g., 6 at Châteauguay 15 Feb (F. Viau, J. Beaulieu) and 3 at Chambly 2 (MC, RC) & 19 Feb (*vide* JG. Papineau). About 50 birds trapped in Ontario were released in the Gatineau area in Feb, raising the hopes of hunters for a possible open hunting season in the near future (*vide* DT).

Over 200 Purple Sandpipers spent the winter at Les Escoumins (CA, CG). A Dunlin at Chandler 5 Jan was very late (D. Mercier et al.). Wilson's Snipe wintering farther n. than usual included one at Val d'Or, *Abitibi* 26 Dec+ (G & P. Éthier, AL, *vide* L. Vigneau), one or 2 that survived through the

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An Ipswich Sparrow (at right), the *princeps* subspecies of Savannah Sparrow, overwintered at Québec City, providing an extraordinary record away from the Atlantic coast (here 23 January 2003). Photograph by Michèle Lafleur.

**SA** One of the most unexpected discoveries in recent years was the **Ipswich Sparrow** identified 17 Jan in Québec City harbor; the bird was present through the end of the season (JM. Giroux, JP. Ouellet et al.). The Québec City sparrow was feeding on spilled grain alongside House Sparrows, over which it seemed dominant. This appears to be the first time that an Ipswich Sparrow has been found farther away from the Atlantic coast than 100 km (a 1966 record from Concord, Massachusetts is exceptional), and it is conceivable that the bird hitch-hiked its way on one of the many ships that pass near its home range of Sable I., where an average of a little over 1,500 pairs nest.

Michel Gosselin provides context on the status of this taxon. "When they were first discovered in 1872, Ipswich Sparrows were considered a full species, but, presumably on account of the occasional hybrid pair [documented on only a few occasions in Nova Scotia—*ed.*], they were merged with Savannah Sparrow in the great wave of lumping that took place in 1973 (a number of these lumpings have since been reversed). It is difficult, for example, to see why the status of Ipswich Sparrow should in any way be different from that of McKay's Bunting. There is no indication that the distinctive features of Ipswich and Savannah Sparrows are being eroded by introgression over time. Surprisingly, the only monographic study on Ipswich Sparrows (Stobo and McLaren 1975) did not support the demotion of *princeps* to subspecies. Stobo and McLaren have hypothesized that the unique features of these sparrows are adaptations to wintering on coastal dunes as much as to nesting on Sable Island. It is interesting to note, in this respect, that the Madeleine Islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence have only Savannah Sparrows, despite similarities in habitat to Sable Island."

season at Beauport, where the species is considered regular in winter (JFR), and one at Matapédia, Gaspésie 10 Jan (P. Beaupré). Lesser Black-backed Gulls are now increasingly reported in winter; this season's birds included a second-year individual at Sherbrooke 12-26 Dec (FR, SB) and single ads. in the same locality 15 Dec—10 Feb (SB et al.), Lachenaie 3-30 Jan (FR), and Les Escoumins 24 Feb (CA, CG). All n. owls were very scarce away from their usual haunts. Short-eared Owls showed up nicely in Feb, with up to 4 at Saint-Basile (SD), 3 at Saint-Hyacinthe (R. Gauvin), 15 at Ile aux Fermiers (Y. Gauthier), and 2 at Sainte-Catherine (PB).

### KINGFISHERS THROUGH SPARROWS

A few Belted Kingfishers attempted to spend the winter in the Region, with singles at Valleyfield 15 Dec+ (AQ et al.), Bécancour 20 Dec into Feb (R. Barbeau), Mont-Laurier 18 Dec—23 Jan (A. Boisclair), and Victoriaville through the end of Feb (J. Boissonneault).

Although Red-bellied Woodpeckers are now expected in s. Québec, a female at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle 7 Jan—1 Mar (C. Morin, D. Daigneault, L. & H. Boivin, m. ob.) and a male that made a brief appearance on Mount Saint-Hilaire 14 Jan (G. Arbour) were both notable. Following an excellent fall flight, Three-toed Woodpeckers were well in evidence this year, with numerous sightings.

Records of Tufted Titmice in s. Québec dropped from 75 last winter to only 29 this season. On the contrary, after their best winter ever in 2002, Carolina Wrens were even more in evidence this year, with 33 records, which included single vagrants as far n. as at Lac-Kénogami, Lac-St-Jean through 24 Dec (L. Boulay), and Val d'Or, Abitibi 1 Dec (AL), as well as 2 at Kipawa, Témiscamingue at the end of Jan (J. Poitras, *fide* JF). Also noteworthy in winter, a Winter Wren was at Plessisville 4-15 Jan (CR, J. Goyette). A Varied Thrush at Bergeronnes 3 Dec—1 Jan provided a good find for the North Shore (G. Ross, E. Bouchard). The only Townsend's

Solitaire of the season made a one-day appearance at Sainte-Blandine, Lower St. Lawrence 20 Jan (L. Brisson, *fide* JR. Pelletier). Eastern Bluebirds showed up again this year, despite the very cold temperatures, with 3 on Ile Bizard 8 Jan (S. Bérubé), up to 7 at Hemmingford 1 Dec—18 Jan (P. Chartrand), and 3 at Saint-Jacques-de-Leeds in Jan (*fide* DM). One was still present 1 Feb at Saint-Jacques-de-Leeds (DM, L. Lemoine). For the first time since 1988, 2 Hermit Thrushes successfully made it through the winter: one feeding on cherries and suet at Sherbrooke (S. Brûlotte) and another lingering at a Pointe-au-Père feeder (M. Huard).

A Gray Catbird at Hull 14 Dec was late (DT, R. Vanasse). Two Brown Thrashers spent the whole winter at feeders, one at Lotbinière (L. Roy, m. ob.) and the other at Hemmingford (C. Thompson, *fide* D. Smith, ph.). An Orange-crowned Warbler at Ile Sainte-Hélène 14 Dec was the 5th ever to be seen in Dec (G. Zenaitis, SD, D. Mulholland). Almost incredible, an Ovenbird in downtown Montréal survived the extreme cold 10 Dec onwards but unfortunately died in early Mar (C. Claude). More expected was a Common Yellowthroat 1-13 Dec in Beauport (JFR).

Rare in winter, Chipping Sparrows were seen in many localities this year; singles were at Chicoutimi 15 Dec—3 Jan (D. Roy, K. Gagnon), Hull 21 Dec and 22 Feb (F. Bédard), Stoke 1 Dec—11 Jan (J. Turgeon), and Sept-Îles 31 Dec—10 Jan (JFL). Also unusual in winter, single Fox Sparrows showed up at Sept-Îles 1-31 Dec (JFL), Philipsburg 2 Jan (R. Gaudreault et al.), Cap Tourmente through at least 8 Feb (R. Lepage), and Mont-Joli 6 Dec—17 Jan (C. Brassard, G. Michaud). Single White-crowned Sparrows overwintered at Saint-Janvier (S. Aubin) and Saint-Polycarpe (L. Bouchard).

**Addenda:** An Indigo Bunting at Saint-Félicien 19-23 Nov 2002 was record late (J. Tremblay, R. Tremblay), while an imm. male Yellow-headed Blackbird at Saint-Gédéon 23-25 Jun 2002 was the 3rd record only for the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean area (M. Desmeules, S. Garneau, R. Bergeron et al.).

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