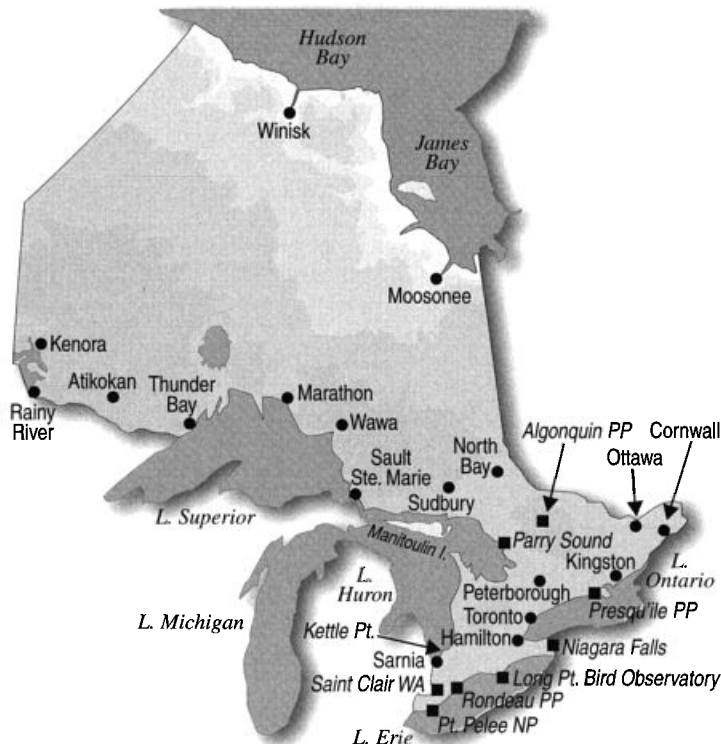


# Ontario



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December was fair to mild, and the Christmas Bird Count period was marked by generally benign weather conditions. There was open water in the south, but around the fifth of January, a deep freeze set in for a month. Again and again, we would note the latest date for a half-hardy species would be 6 or 7 January. February was only slightly milder than January but was also much colder than the longtime average.

Abbreviations: P. E. Pt. (Prince Edward Point); W.R. (Wildlife Refuge).

### LOONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

Red-throated Loons were generally scarce, so the count of 21 on the Niagara Falls C.B.C. was quite outstanding. There were a few scattered Horned Grebe reports, but an Eared Grebe (DP) was a good find 20 Jan near the mouth of the Credit R. Increasingly in recent years, imm. Northern Gannets seem to be discovering the Niagara R. in late fall. On 8 Dec,

there were 2, one at the Whirlpool Rapids and the other downstream from the Adam Beck Generating Station. One flew past Sayers Park 13 Dec in Stoney Cr. (BCh), and on 16 Dec it or another flew past Whitby.

The only American Bittern report came from the Presqu'ile C.B.C. 21 Dec; it was a few km w. of the park. A Black Vulture was at Prinyer's Cove 17 Jan (*fide* RTS). Turkey Vultures began migrating early, with a pair on 27 Feb at Grimsby. The last of the diehard Tundra Swans were seen going s. off the tip of Point Pelee on 6 Jan. Earliest to return was the flock of 19 near Hillman Marsh 21 Feb. There were several Greater White-fronted Goose reports until the big freeze. The first 4, all juvs., were above Niagara Falls 10 Dec (HC, RP). There were 2 at Lasalle Park in Hamilton 13–25 Dec (KN) and a single at Jack Miner's 28 Dec–3 Jan (DW). A flock of 13 on 3–5 Jan (GC, MPe) was at the Smithville Sewage ponds (NS, JB), with a final single at Sarnia 8 Jan (JMi). West of the usual migration route were single Brant on the Fisherville C.B.C. 14 Dec and at Port Stanley 27 Dec (JS).

A Wood Duck at Hillman Marsh 22 Feb (DW) was very early, as was a Green-winged Teal there that day. At Algonquin Park, both the American Black Duck on the Madawaska R. 3 Jan (MP, DS) and the Mallard 3 Jan at Whitefish L. (DT) were the first ever in Jan at this frozen inland location. An oddity was the sight of 580

Mallards flying s. off Point Pelee 3 Jan (AW). An interesting hybrid Gadwall x Mallard (or "Brewer's Duck") was found by AJ at Humber Bay West 2 Jan. A Blue-winged Teal on the St. Clair W.R. was new for that C.B.C.; another was on the Desjardins Canal in Hamilton 11–20 Jan (JC). These observations were dwarfed by the count of 30 on the Fisherville C.B.C.—a record-high count for any Canadian C.B.C. A Eurasian Wigeon discovered 18 Dec (PV) was tallied on the 21 Dec Toronto C.B.C., a new species in the 105-year history of that count. It remained on the Leslie Spit until 7 Jan.

A Tufted Duck (KR) on the Weller Canal at St. Catharines was observed 24 Jan–29 Feb. A Common Eider was at P. E. Pt. 17 Feb (RTS). Harlequin Ducks were widespread, with singles 1 Dec (FP) at Stoney Creek and 14 Dec on the Blenheim C.B.C., the Fisherville C.B.C., and on Wolfe I. (RDW, GFV). There were 3 on the Bruce Peninsula C.B.C. 17 Dec. Twenty-three Surf Scoters were at East Beach, Point Pelee on the late date of 3 Jan (DW). A male Barrow's Goldeneye turned up at a traditional place from the early 1990s, just s. of Lakefield 15 Dec; another drake was at Wolfe I. 8–13 Dec (CM, MCr), and a female was at P. E. Pt. 20–21 Jan (JHE, BR). Others were noted on the Ottawa R.. The count of 391 Ruddy Ducks at Windermere Basin 20 Dec (RC, GS) was very high.

### HAWKS THROUGH OWLS

At Point Pelee, AW counted 37 Rough-legged Hawks moving s. 19 Jan. Northern Harriers overwintered in good numbers: there were 20 on the Oshawa C.B.C. 21 Dec, and 45 were on Wolfe I. on 14 Dec. A gray-morph Gyrfalcon (JHE) at Kingston 25 Jan was s. of the normal range. Counters tallied 6 Northern Bobwhite at Walpole I., which has become the only location in Ontario for that declining species, on the Wallaceburg C.B.C. A Purple Gallinule at Ottawa 30 Nov was taken to a rehabilitation center, where it recovered. Noteworthy Sandhill Crane reports include 31 at London 2 Dec (ML) and a flock of 110 at Big Creek that diminished to none by the end of Jan.

A Killdeer on the 14 Dec Marathon C.B.C. was exceptionally far north. A Greater Yellowlegs at Featherstone Pt., Lake Erie 7–10 Dec was late (A&DT). A Least Sandpiper at Bluffer's Park in Toronto was last seen 17 Dec (m. ob.); another was on the Fisherville C.B.C. 14–18 Dec at the Taquanyah C.A., and yet another was at Sturgeon Cr. 1 Dec. (DM). Single Purple Sandpipers were at Spencer Smith Park in Burlington 7 Dec (BCh, DD) and at the mouth of Mimico Cr. 17 Dec (m. ob.). Again this year, they were scarce above the Niagara Falls. A Wilson's Snipe on the Marathon C.B.C. 14 Dec was very far north. Not quite as surprising was the discovery of 2 at Ottawa 14 Dec, one of which survived until 1 Feb (BC).

The number of Black-headed Gull reports is increasing each winter. On 8 Dec, there was one at the Whirlpool and another at Queen-

ston (m. ob.). The bird at Queenston remained at least until 8 Jan (RJ), and another was seen on the evening flyby at Niagara-on-the-Lake until 16 Jan, when there were 2. By this time, there were practically no Bonaparte's Gulls present. Another Black-headed was at Kingston 2 Jan (KH). An ad. Mew Gull was found above Niagara Falls 7 Dec (CJ) and again just n. of Adam Beck 14 Dec. The usual California Gull was at Adam Beck and near the falls 1 Dec–16 Jan (m. ob.). Unusual was the sight of an imm. Black-legged Kittiwake at Amherst I. on 21 Dec (RDW). The **Band-tailed Pigeon** at London was a frequent target of *Accipiter* attacks but survived with help briefly from a local rehabilitation center, from where it was released; it remained in London to the end of the period. A Northern Hawk Owl was first found 8 Dec (CB) near Almonte. It disappeared for six weeks, then returned 18–29 Feb. Another was discovered at Bracebridge 4 Jan (MP). Great Gray Owls got no farther s. than Algonquin (where possibly resident), and Boreal Owls were not found in s. Ontario at all this season. A count of 36 Long-eared Owls 14 Feb in the Pelee area was an all-time record high for the Region. Northern Saw-whet Owls were somewhat scarce, with a peak report of 7 on Amherst I. 21 Dec.

### HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH FINCHES

The Rufous Hummingbird remained just e. of Kingston until 7 Jan. A Red-bellied Woodpecker present throughout the winter at Atikokan was the first ever in that area. It frequently dined on dog kibbles. Another was a good find on the Thunder Bay C.B.C. Several C.B.C.s had record-high counts of the species, including Owen Sound (6), West Elgin (117), and Strathroy (49). There were reports of Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: at Dundas 26 Dec (MCI), at Aldershot 26 Dec (JC), at Brantford 7 Jan (SM), and at Shoreacres 18–19 Jan (Arlene & Jim McCaw). Another was at a Thunder Bay feeder 27 Jan (BL), very far n., and still another at London (BDM). The usual smattering of American Three-toed Woodpeckers included C.B.C. singles at Burks Falls 18 Dec, Algonquin 3 Jan, and Dunrobin 3 Jan. There were 2 at Ottawa 12 Dec. Algonquin had four or five reports over the winter.

Certainly the bird of the winter in Ontario was the **Gray Flycatcher** (ph.) found on the Fisherville C.B.C. 14 Dec. The 3rd ever for Ontario, it was later witnessed by hundreds and remained until 7 Jan. An oddity at Kaministiquia was an albino Gray Jay. Blue Jays were scarce everywhere, apparently owing to a shortage of acorns and beech nuts. American Crow winter populations have shifted dramatically because of the West Nile virus. Only 76 were found on the Toronto C.B.C. (approximately 7% of the long term average). The count of 90 on the Mississauga–Oakville C.B.C. was also extremely low, as was St. Catharines' at 105 and Niagara's 144. Hamilton was 30% above the 10-year

average of 1993–2002, but locals say the city population is way down. Other areas had normal crow counts.

The Kettle Point C.B.C. turned up 21 Tufted Titmice, and Wallaceburg had 70, but their numbers there seem to fluctuate: Wallaceburg had 19 in 2002 but 69 in 2001. A House Wren remained at Wheatley Harbour until 27 Dec (DW), and another was on the West Elgin C.B.C. Solo Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were along the Pelee Woodland Nature Trail 2–9 Dec (DM, MA), at Rondeau 7 Dec (BM), and on the Fisherville C.B.C. 14 Dec. The count of 122 Eastern Bluebirds on the West Elgin C.B.C. was quite high. A Townsend's Solitaire was discovered at Inverary 7 Feb (JV) and remained until 20 Feb. There were only 3 Varied Thrushes reported: at Marathon 23 Dec (PC), at Thunder Bay until 8 Feb (*vide* NE), and ne. of Sudbury 4–31 Dec (M. & Y. Lavoie). American Pipits staged a major movement in mid-Dec. On the 14 Dec Fisherville C.B.C., over a hundred were estimated, and 247 were tallied off the tip of Pt. Pelee on their C.B.C. the next day.

Bohemian Waxwings were noted in good numbers in late winter. There were 20 at King City 22 Jan (AL), 25 at Guelph 28 Feb (LM), and 120 near Kirkwall 17 Feb (RD). By 29 Feb, there were bigger flocks, with 155 e. of Ottawa and 250 at P.E. Pt. There was a Nashville Warbler on the Peel-Halton C.B.C. Truly amazing was the female Yellow Warbler found on the St. Catharines C.B.C. 15 Dec at the base of the Port Weller peninsula. Cape May Warbler has been turning up in late fall in recent years. There was one at Hanlan's Pt. in Toronto 3 Dec (GB). Yellow-rumped Warblers were at a peak of 43 on 20 Dec on the P. E. Pt. C.B.C. There were 2 Pine Warblers at Turkey Pt. 20 Dec (DD et al.). An Ovenbird was at High Park 28 Dec–2 Jan (SL).

Northern Cardinals continue to expand their range northward. North Bay had 15 all winter; the first area record came only in 1987. A young male Rose-breasted Grosbeak was seen 31 Jan at Kitchener (DJ). A first-winter Black-headed Grosbeak was discovered 24 Nov–28 Dec near Almonte (BJ); on 25 Dec, it had moved to a different feeder, where the occupants discouraged visitors. A first-winter male Dickcissel visited a feeder near Woodstock 23 Dec–7 Jan (DC). An Eastern Towhee was found on the West Humber C.B.C. 15 Dec, and another was at a feeder in Marathon 2 Dec (PC, BC). There were 2 Field Sparrows at Cranberry Marsh in Whitby 3 Jan (MW), and one remained until the 12th. Three more were at Port Stanley 26 Dec (JS). A Vesper Sparrow was at the Leslie Spit 2 Jan, one was on the London C.B.C. 20 Dec, and another was at Cultus 18 Dec (RZ). Savannah Sparrows were at Turkey Pt. 12 Dec (DP), on the London C.B.C. 20 Dec, on the Long Point C.B.C. 20 Dec (2), and along the North Dike Road at Pelee 25 Jan (AW). Far rarer in winter, a single Grasshopper Sparrow on the Fisherville

C.B.C. 14 Dec was only the 6th ever on a Canadian C.B.C. Amazingly, another Grasshopper Sparrow was found recently dead (PR) in London 8 Dec. There was a Fox Sparrow in the far n. at a Current River feeder 13 Dec–6 Jan. For the first time in the Rainy River District, a Lincoln's Sparrow survived the winter. It was at Dave Elder's feeder in Atikokan. Another was in a backyard in Thunder Bay 4 Dec–11 Jan (MC). A Swamp Sparrow was discovered on the Atikokan C.B.C. 15 Dec. A Harris's Sparrow was on Manitoulin I. 18–21 Dec (CB). A tally of 9290 Snow Buntings on the Pt. Pelee C.B.C. likely includes some duplication but is an impressive figure nonetheless.

An imm. male Yellow-headed Blackbird was seen in the onion field n. of Pelee 2 Jan (DW). A single Brewer's Blackbird was observed on 15 Dec at Peacock Pt., there were 3 at Turkey Pt. on the Long Point C.B.C. 20 Dec, one was at Kingsville 31 Jan, and one on the Wallaceburg C.B.C. 27 Dec. A major rarity was the female **Great-tailed Grackle** (ph.) seen 7–8 Feb at Turkey Pt. (GBe, KK, RR, DL). A Baltimore Oriole was found on the West Humber C.B.C. 15–19 Dec, another was a first ever for the Long Point C.B.C. 20 Dec, and yet another was on the Port Hope-Cobourg C.B.C. 20 Dec. Red Crossbills continue to be scarce in Ontario at all seasons, but there were 5 on the Algonquin C.B.C. White-winged Crossbills were more numerous, with 149 that day, but there was no sign of breeding over the winter. There were no Evening Grosbeaks in Algonquin all winter, but 125 were tallied at nearby Minden on their C.B.C. 14 Dec, and there were 48 on the Petroylyphs C.B.C. 28 Dec.

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