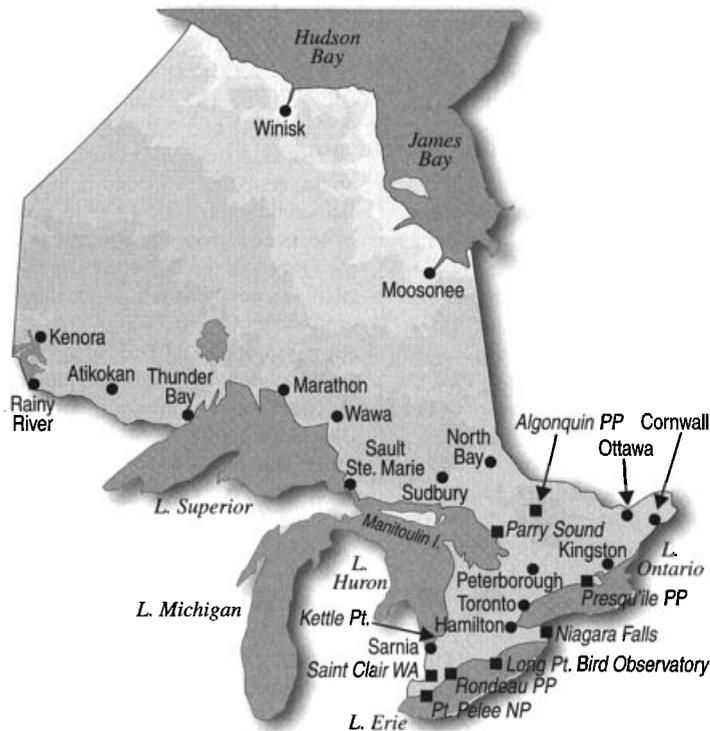


Ontario



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The weather remained fairly benign until about 19 December, when it turned extremely cold and windy, even in southern Ontario. There was plenty of snow by Christmastime, and it remained on the ground until 28 February. By the time of the Lake Ontario Mid-Winter Waterfowl Inventory on 9 January, there was considerable ice close to the shore of Lake Ontario. From early January to the end of the period, both the eastern portion of Lake Ontario and most of Lake Erie were frozen. Snowfall amounts varied by location but were generally above average. Winter finches were generally scarce except for redpolls, but northern owls staged a major irruption toward the south.

Abbreviations: P.E. Pt. (Prince Edward Pt.), P.P.B.A. (Point Pelee Birding Area), P.P.N.P. (Point Pelee N.P.), K.F.N. (Kingston Field Naturalists), L.O.M.W.W.I. (Lake Ontario Mid-Winter Waterfowl Inventory), S.L. (Sewage Lagoons), ROMZ (Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology).

LOONS THROUGH FALCONS

Red-throated Loons outnumbered Common Loon sightings over the winter: there were 2 at Darlington P.P. on the Oshawa C.B.C. 19 Dec and singles at P.E. Pt. 5 Dec and 9 Jan (JHE, RDW), Erieau 2 Dec (AW), and Port Hope 1–3 Jan. Truly remarkable, however, was the count of 62 at Niagara-on-the-Lake 4 Dec (AW, KO et al.). Noteworthy so far n. were the 2 Common Loons on the Minden C.B.C. 19 Dec. The count of 70 Red-necked Grebes 28 Dec in Hamilton Harbour (KMCL) was high. An Eared Grebe (JF) at Humber Bay East, Toronto 10 Dec was a good find. The flock of up to 53 Double-crested Cormorants in Hamilton Harbour 18 Jan (PS) was an indication of this species' increasing presence year-round. An American Bittern discovered 13 Jan in the Point Pelee Marsh was a rarity for the date (TA, CA). A Great Egret was noted on the Pt. Colborne C.B.C. 2 Jan, and another at the Valley Inn Marsh, Burlington 1–15 Dec (m.ob.) became a new winter tick for many listers.

A Greater White-fronted Goose 4 Dec at Komoka Pits (PF) was a good find, as were 3 in Whitby Harbour 10 Dec. Snow Geese are no longer a rare sight in winter. There were 6 in Whitby Harbour on the Oshawa C.B.C. 19 Dec, and the count of 3 on the Kitchener C.B.C. was locally a record high. At Thedford 10 Dec, there were 6 Snow

Geese, of which 4 were blue morphs. A pair of Ross's Geese at Jack Miner's in Kingsville 22 Feb were the only ones reported (DW). Mute Swans have reached alarming numbers, as evidenced by the record high total of 790 on the L.O.M.W.W.I. Tundra Swans have become increasingly common in early winter, but the counts of 354 on 9 Jan (KFN) and 2139 on the Long Point C.B.C. 18 Dec were especially high. Newly arriving spring migrants included 23 at Lake Pond, P.P.N.P. 10 Feb (AW), only 32 days later. A male Eurasian Wigeon 23 Feb at Hillman Marsh, P.P.B.A. (DW) was rare and record early, and there was a pair (although not together) at Erieau 2–3 Dec (m.ob.). Also very early was the pair of American Wigeon at Lake Pond P.P.N.P. 15 Feb (AW). A pair of American Black Ducks 27 Feb at the Pog Lake Dam in Algonquin P.P. (B&CW) were early so far north; the peak of 2650 tallied on 9 Jan (L.O.M.W.W.I.) was heartening, because this species is declining overall. A Northern Pintail, recorded on the Peterborough C.B.C. 19 Dec, was the first for the count there since 1956. A male Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal at Niagara 5 Dec (originally discovered 29 Nov) was a good find (BL, DG).

Counts of 7500 Redhead along the St. Clair R. and 9272 on L.O.M.W.W.I. were record highs. A Tufted Duck × Greater Scaup hybrid was at Burlington 9 Dec (RD, BC, CE). The count of 8000 Common Goldeneye 7 Feb at P.P.N.P. (AW) was exceptionally high. Barrow's Goldeneye was represented by 2 males on the Ottawa River (m.ob.) and another male off Stoney Creek 8 Dec (LS et al.). There were 241 Ruddy Ducks on the L.O.M.W.W.I. at Hamilton Harbour, where they have congregated in recent winters, but the count of 25 at Humber Bay East on 14 Dec (BY) was high for Toronto. Another 71 were found on the Long Point C.B.C. 18 Dec. Wild Turkeys are flourishing and spreading northward. The count of 66 on the 18 Dec Minden C.B.C. was record high, as was the total of 8 observed on the Gravenhurst–Bracebridge C.B.C. the next day.

Bald Eagle numbers are on the increase at all seasons, but the count of 17 on the ice at P.P.N.P. (AW) 7 Feb was a record single-day high count for the park. On 23 Jan, 46 Rough-legged Hawks, deemed southbound migrants, were observed flying westward at Sturgeon Creek during an all-day hawk-watch. Another 7 were at Pelee Marsh on the same day. The recent apparent decline of American Kestrels was brought into focus by the record low of 5 on the West Elgin C.B.C. 27 Dec, just 6 on the Woodhouse C.B.C. 19 Dec, and the same number on the Toronto C.B.C.—the lowest since 1959. The usual smattering of Gyrfalcons included singles s. to Kingston 5 Dec (BRp, JRp) and 12 Feb (RB), and to Cobourg 8 Dec (CG). At Thunder Bay, where they are more usual, 2 were

SA Great Gray Owls staged a major invasion. They passed through Canadian Shield country mostly in Dec and early Jan but stopped at plentiful vole areas n. of Lake Ontario. These locations were different from previous irruptions. High counts or estimates were 250 for *Simcoe*, 40 for *Durham*, about 100 for *Peterborough*, 93 from the Kingston region, and 28 elsewhere in e. Ontario; at least 111 were within 50 km of Ottawa. These are observed counts, not estimates, so the actual numbers of birds involved would obviously be much greater. The owls were most easily found in early Jan, when they hunted both day and night due to their starved condition. Many were found as road-kills: 61 injured birds had been taken to the Owl Research Foundation in Vineland as at time of writing. Of the 26 specimens recovered (*ROMZ), 20 were female, and all were adults. Hundreds were killed in the bordering United States, mostly in Minnesota.

seen along the waterfront (BM, NE), and there were 2 on the North Bay C.B.C.

RAILS THROUGH OWLS

A Virginia Rail was at Whitby Harbour 19 Dec on the Oshawa C.B.C., and another was found on the Pt. Colborne C.B.C. 2 Jan at the Taquonyah C.A. One Sandhill Crane lingered on the Whitby waterfront until well into Feb (m.ob.); the count of 106 on the Long Point C.B.C. 18 Dec was record high. A Killdeer at Kingsville 6 Feb was a remarkably early spring migrant (DW). The hardy Black-necked Stilt at the Ridgeway S.L. remained until 10 Dec (m.ob.). Two White-rumped Sandpipers at the Harrow S.L. became record late for all of Ontario when they remained until 5 Dec (RPH, RAH). There were more Purple Sandpiper reports than usual: 13 on Sebastopol I., Presqu'île on 3 Dec (2 remained until the Presqu'île C.B.C. 19 Dec), plus singles at Cobourg Harbour (MB), at Niagara Falls 4 & 22 Dec (WD'A), on the boardwalk of Ward's I. on the Toronto C.B.C. 19 Dec, and at Darlington P.P. the same day on the Oshawa C.B.C. A Wilson's Snipe returned to Ottawa at the usual location near Montreal and Blair Roads 1-20 Dec (BCe, LS); another was found on the Peterborough C.B.C. 19 Dec.

The California Gull at Adam Beck, Niagara R. remained until at least 12 Dec (WD'A). Lesser Black-backed Gulls reached a peak count of 11 on 5 Dec along the Niagara River (WD'A). A Sarnia Slaty-backed Gull 6-28 Feb (AR) awaits O.B.R.C. decision. An ad. Ivory Gull was found on the Presqu'île C.B.C. 19 Dec. Remarkably, this species also appeared on that C.B.C. in 1967; even more remarkably, a different Ivory Gull was seen nearby 21 Dec (PH).

A Barn Owl was found dead near Mt. Forest 6 Dec, and another was "count week" for the Fisherville C.B.C. of 23 Dec. Snowy Owls were somewhat scarce overall, although 6 were recorded on the 4 Jan Casselman C.B.C. Northern Hawk Owls were found in at least 10 locations s. of their regular haunts. Of these, 3 long-staying birds were close to the biggest human population centers. These were at Bolton 3 Dec+, Port Hope 24 Dec+, and Bracebridge 21 Feb+. Single Boreal Owls were reported at Omeme, *Simcoe*, Amherst I., and from Leslie Spit in Toronto, and there were 3 in the Ottawa area. Discoveries of roosting Bo-

reals are routinely suppressed due to a perceived danger from overzealous photographers.

HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH WAXWINGS

The female Rufous Hummingbird at Niagara Falls was banded by A. Chartier 2 Dec and was later found dead, on 18 Dec. A pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers wintered at Constance Bay near their breeding site (m.ob.); a single was at Tobermory 15 Dec, and yet another was found on the Dunrobin C.B.C. 18 Dec. Single Red-bellied Woodpeckers were unusual at Atikokan and Kingston, but record-high C.B.C. counts at more expected locations included Kitchener (9), Strathroy (57), West Elgin (55), Ingersoll (21), Niagara Falls (33), and St. Catharines (27).

A Fork-tailed Flycatcher discovered at Hillman marsh near P.P.N.P. 5 Dec (MS, DS) was found dead the next day (*ROMZ); it was determined by Mark Peck to be of the nominate subspecies, a long-distance South American migrant. A White-eyed Vireo was discovered 1 Dec (BY) at High Park in Toronto, where it remained until 19 Dec. At P.P.N.P., a Red-eyed Vireo was record late 1 Dec. The Blue Jay count was extremely low on the Toronto C.B.C. 19 Dec, with only 18 (fewest since 1949), but other counts had record highs, such as Huntsville 14 Dec with 340. American Crow counts displayed a sim-



This Sandhill Crane was seen for several weeks at Lynde Shores Conservation Area, Whitby, Ontario (here 1 January 2005). It disappeared sometime in January, but there was second-hand report of it at the end of February. It would be quite remarkable if this bird survived the winter here; it may have departed for a more hospitable location for a short while. Photograph by Willie D'Anna.

ilar pattern, with only 26 in Toronto (fewest since 1959) and 72 on the Oakville C.B.C. 18 Dec making for the 3rd lowest count ever; however, the count of 13,681 on the Ingersoll C.B.C. 28 Dec tripled their previous high. The mosquito responsible for West Nile Virus, an urban dweller, is surely to blame for the low counts in urban areas. Common Raven is spreading southward: the Huntsville C.B.C. 14 Dec tallied a record 134, and there were even 2 in the south at Hamilton 26 Dec (JM).

Tufted Titmouse is another species on the increase, although, strangely, none at all were recorded on the Canadian side of the Niagara C.B.C. One spent the winter attending a feeder in Kingston (RS), another wintered at Almonte (RG), and there were high counts of 5 on the London C.B.C. 18 Dec and 19 on the St. Catharines C.B.C. the next day. The lone Blue-gray Gnatcatcher reported to us was found on the Long Point C.B.C. 18 Dec. A Townsend's Solitaire was found 28 Feb near Pete Chapman's home in Middlesex; and another was at Ottawa 2-24 Feb (JP). There were seven Varied Thrush reports, many more than usual: Hamilton 17 Dec (DP), P.P.N.P. in the White Pine Picnic area through 12 Dec (AP), Moscow 22 Dec-14 Feb (K.F.N.), Rodney 27 Dec-early Jan, a window-kill at Nepean, Ottawa 21 Dec (AB, TB), near Orillia (GB), and at Thunder Bay (G&RC). The latter 2 remained throughout the period. European Starling's C.B.C. numbers have declined over the past seven years for the two biggest counts at Hamilton and Toronto. Hamilton's total was down to 8525 in 2004. At Toronto, the numbers have declined from over 25,000 in 1998 to 9603 on the 19 Dec C.B.C.; however, most of the decline occurred when the e. portion of the Gardiner Expressway was demolished in 1999, thus eliminating a key roosting area. A Bohemian Waxwing was unusually far s. at P.P.N.P. 1 Dec-20 Dec (AR). Otherwise, Bohemians were widely distributed and common in Canadian Shield country, e.g., 76 on the Petroglyphs C.B.C. 28 Dec and 723 on the Sudbury C.B.C. 27 Dec.

WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

An Audubon's Warbler (AA) was found on Toronto I. 22 Dec and re-found in early Jan. Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers were generally scarce, even at the usual wintering places like Pelee. A remarkable discovery was a Black-throated Gray Warbler at High Park 6-16 Dec (SF), a 2nd Toronto winter record (the other was last seen 19 Dec 1952; HC). Pine Warblers were at Mississauga 21 Dec on the Oakville C.B.C., at Lambton woods, Toronto 16 Dec-13 Jan, at Shell Park in Bronte 26 Dec+, and at Kingston 18 Jan (RS). An Ovenbird was found on the Kitchener C.B.C. 18 Dec. The third member of the

amazing High Park trio was the Wilson's Warbler 1-18 Dec (SF), after which it must have succumbed to the -30° C wind chill. The Summer Tanager at Woodstock was found dead 6 Dec (ph. MM). An Eastern Towhee was counted at Carleton Place on the C.B.C. 27 Dec, and a female came to a feeder in Middlesex 1 Dec+. The only Spotted Towhee was in the north, where it attended a feeder at Ignace (ph. DPe). A Field Sparrow, also quite far n. of usual, frequented a feeder at Deep River—count week for the C.B.C. and still present 10 Jan. At P.P.N.P., there were very few White-throated Sparrows this winter. An imm. Golden-crowned Sparrow continued to be seen along Hall's Road in Whitby until about 10 Dec. Notable reports of White-crowned Sparrow included a single on the Warton C.B.C. 19 Dec, 8 on the Oshawa C.B.C. 19 Dec, 15 on the Woodhouse C.B.C. 19 Dec, 50 on the St. Clair C.B.C. 1 Jan, and 70 in the P.P.B.A. 20 Dec. Harris's Sparrow reports included one at Atikokan 20 Dec-15 Jan (DHE), one at Welcome 18 Dec-17 Jan, one found dead 28 Jan at Staples (MR), and one at Orillia 19 Jan+ (MSc).

A total of 5 Northern Cardinals spent the winter at North Bay, and there were 2 found far n. on the Thunder Bay C.B.C. 26 Dec. Po-

tentially a first for Canada, a female *Pyrrhuloxia* found on the West Elgin C.B.C. 27 Dec (ph. BC) was later seen by many until 1 Jan. While its identity is not questioned, the O.B.R.C. will no doubt have discussions about its provenance; there was a minor irruption of this species out of range in late fall and winter. The only Rose-breasted Grosbeak was reported 19 Dec on the Woodhouse C.B.C. Three Brewer's Blackbirds, all males, were at Erieau 2 Dec (AW), and a single was at Long Point 18 Dec for the C.B.C. A major highlight this winter for Ontario birders was the Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (interior race) at the feeder of John Somerset near Chelmsford, Sudbury. It arrived 19 Dec and remained until 25 Feb. (ph. CE). Red Crossbills were exceptionally scarce, although a few were seen 16 Dec along the Barron R. road in Algonquin Park (MRu). Common Redpolls came southward in good numbers, along with a few Hoary Redpolls: one at Darlington P.P. 13 Feb (TH), 2 at Moscow 25 Jan (OW), one at Camden East 28 Feb (PJG), 2 at the Siberian Bed & Breakfast w. of Orillia, and one on the Ontario side of the Ottawa C.B.C. 19 Dec. At North Bay, the count of Evening Grosbeaks was just 79 on the 19 Dec C.B.C., while on the Ottawa C.B.C., none were noted.

Corrigendum: The 4 Greater White-fronted Geese at Sturgeon Creek (N.A.B. 57: 340) were seen 23 Mar, not 23 May.

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Eastern Highlands & Upper Ohio River Valley



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The winter period is by far the most dynamic for avian activity in the Region. Between late fall migration and early spring migration, winter incursions of cyclical irruptives and facultative migrants were punctuated by real surprises, such as this season's Chuck-will's-widow near Cincinnati, perhaps a reversed migrant, along with three new species for Pennsylvania. As in surrounding areas, the warm late fall caused waterfowl to delay their departure until severe Arctic blasts began in mid-December. An early January thaw offered a brief respite, perhaps inducing vulture and cranes to remain when normally they are