

Western Great Lakes Region

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It was a remarkable winter in the Region, with a good mix of straggling species, rare overwintering species, good numbers of winter irruptives including northern owls, and some unexpected rarities—including some first state records. In the latter category, Michigan finally got its first suitably-documented record for Ivory Gull, and Minnesota's first Glaucous-winged Gull continued from the fall season. But it was Wisconsin that had the best season, with first state records for Glaucous-winged Gull and Scott's Oriole.

Weather made headlines throughout the Region. Minnesota had the dubious honor of breaking its all-time coldest temperature with a reading of -60° F, and the Duluth area had its second-highest snowfall on record. Wisconsin fared no better, with record-low temperatures ranging from -25° to -45° F and near-record high snowfalls. The northern portions of Michigan suffered the same weather, although Lake Michigan did moderate the worst weather

in the southern portions of the state. In summary, the coldest weather arrived in mid-December and remained through mid-February. Snowfall was above average in much of the Region, while temperatures were much below normal. There was a very brief warm-up at the end of February.

For the most part, Christmas Bird Count data has been left out of the report to avoid duplication with the CBC summary.

Abbreviations: M.B.R.C. (*Michigan Bird Records Committee*).

Loons to Herons

The only Red-throated Loon was reported in Michigan from Feb. 7–15 at the Karn Plant, Bay (RW, JS, GS). Pied-billed Grebes returned early to all 3 states, with first migrants found in Wisconsin in Menasha (DT) Feb. 23 and two at Manitowoc Feb. 25 (DN); in Michigan Feb. 19 in *Iosco* and Feb. 25 in *Monroe*; and in Minnesota a new early arrival date was set Feb. 26 in *Dakota* (RJ). Rare inland was a Red-necked Grebe at Holloway Dam, *Genesee*, MI Feb. 21 (SJ). Also in Michigan was an *Aechmophorus* grebe at the Karn Plant, Bay, Feb. 6 (DD). An Am. White Pelican was late in Michigan Dec. 2–6 at Mott L., *Genesee* (AS, ES, MW). An Am. Bittern attempted to overwinter in Wisconsin in *Antigo* but was not seen after mid-January (MG).

Waterfowl

The number of Trumpeter Swans continues to increase in the Region, with reports

from all 3 states including 160 overwintering in *Wright*, MN (KB). A Greater White-fronted Goose was reported Dec. 9 in *Kandiyohi* in Minnesota. Wisconsin had a record-high 77 Feb. 25 on Mud L., *McFarland* (PA). Michigan also had good numbers of spring migrants, with 11 reported from Feb. 17–25 at Erie Metropark (CP), while a lingering bird stayed Dec. 16–28 at Metrobeach, *Macomb* (DL). A Ross' Goose Feb. 29 on the Wolf R. in *Winneconne* represented a new early arrival date for Wisconsin (DN). Three N. Pintail arrived Feb. 21 in *Cottonwood*, providing a new early-arrival date for Minnesota (ED). A ♀ King Eider was seen Feb. 24–26 in Milwaukee, WI (AS, DM). Harlequin Duck reports included an individual Feb. 7 in *Koochiching* (PL, KL) and ≤ 4 through Jan. 7 in *Lake* (*vide* KE) in Minnesota; a female during the first half of January in Milwaukee, WI; and in Michigan individuals from Dec. 27–30 in Marquette (LT, TF), Jan. 21 in *Iosco* (BB), three from Dec. 30–Jan. 2 in *Ottawa* and Jan. 13–16 at St. Joseph, *Berrien*. This species seems to be increasing in the Region. **Barrow's Goldeneye** were reported from all 3 states. In Minnesota a male was reported Dec. 2+ in *Scott* (CMA *et al.*), while in Michigan a report of a female Feb. 4 at Erie Metropark (WP) is pending review by the M.B.R.C. Perhaps the same male which overwintered last season in Wisconsin at Virmond Park was seen intermittently at that location this year, while a female was reported in early January in Milwaukee (TS).

Raptors to Rails

Late Turkey Vultures included an individual Dec. 31 and five Jan. 14 in *Lenawee*, MI (DO), and one Jan. 27 in *Lafayette*, WI (CM). Impressive were reports of hundreds of Bald Eagles wintering along sections of the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers in Wisconsin. Minnesota had Golden Eagle reports from 6 counties, the most unusual being individuals Dec. 30 in *Roseau* (PS) and Jan. 13 in *Renville* (KB). Michigan had an unfortunate report of one shot and killed Dec. 21 in *Manistee*, while others reports included two in *Manistee* Jan. 30 (CS), one in *Wexford* Feb. 9 (CS), one at Shiawassee N.W.R., *Saginaw* Jan. 25 (DP), and two Jan. 6 and one Feb. 23 in *Allegan* (BM, SM). Wisconsin had reports from *Dodge* Dec. 2 (SR), *Grant* Dec. 2–January (ST), *Jackson* Jan. 12 (JD), *Buffalo* Jan. 13 (JP), and two–three through the period in *Monroe* (DK). Red-shouldered Hawks remained in Michigan in better-than-average numbers and farther north to *Manistee* and *Benzie*. As in the past, the only reports of Prairie Falcon came from Minnesota,



with individuals Jan. 2 & 24 in *Cottonwood* (ED), and overwintering in *Hennepin*. A Peregrine Falcon overwintered in Wisconsin at Milwaukee, another was seen Jan. 13 in *Walworth* (PP), and one returned to Green Bay Feb. 15. Gyrfalcons staged a minor incursion, being reported from all 3 states. Wisconsin reported a gray morph during the 2nd half of January in Superior (CM), perhaps one of the two birds present Jan. 8–21 in Duluth, MN (DE). Michigan had reports of the traditional bird at Sault Ste. Marie and another bird farther south Dec. 28–Jan. 14 at the Karn Plant, *Bay* (MW, *et al.*). Sandhill Cranes returned to Baker Sanctuary, MI Feb. 9, while they lingered in Wisconsin at Mazomanie to Dec. 27 (DG).

Shorebirds to Gulls

Michigan had an uncommon number of Purple Sandpiper reports, including individuals at New Buffalo, *Berrien*, Dec. 4 (MW, CN), at Port Sheldon, *Ottawa*, Jan. 1 (BM) and Jan. 6 & 26, and two at Muskegon Jan. 3 (ES, GW). Wisconsin reported a very early Am. Woodcock Feb. 22 in *Oconoto* (TE). An unprecedented winter record for Wisconsin was a **Laughing Gull** first seen Feb. 13 in Milwaukee (JPe) and then farther north in Kewaunee from Feb. 24–25. The only Little Gull report came from Wisconsin, with an individual Dec. 2 at Kewaunee (JR). A first-winter **California Gull** was reported Dec. 19 in Marquette, MI (TF, LT); the record is pending review by the M.B.R.C. An inland report of an ad. Thayer's Gull Dec. 6–7 in *Clinton*, MI (JK, RBr) is worthy of note. Iceland Gulls are considered casual in Minnesota, making the reports of different individuals Dec. 1 & 2 in *Dakota* significant (BF, KB). Lesser Black-backed Gull reports continue to increase Regionwide. This season Michigan had reports from 6 counties; Wisconsin had 3 reports, including individuals at Port Washington Dec. 4 and Jan. 2 (TU *et al.*), and Milwaukee Feb. 2 (JF). Minnesota reported an adult through Dec. 5 in *Dakota*. The **Glaucous-winged Gull** reported from last fall continued through Dec. 23 at Black Dog L., *Dakota*, MN (KB, PBu, BF, m.ob.). Remarkably, Wisconsin had 3 additional reports of this w. coast larid, with adults at Port Washington Jan. 1–4 (TU, NC) and Superior Jan. 22 (JO), while a 2nd-year bird was reported in Two Rivers Feb. 25 (DO). These reports constituted the first through 3rd state records and will certainly receive appropriate scrutiny to ascertain proper identification and elimination of possible hybrids. Wisconsin also reported unusually high num-

bers of Glaucous Gulls, a possible 50 at Superior in late January/early February. No less remarkable were reports of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** from all 3 states. Michigan had reports of a first-winter bird to Dec. 4 in *Genesee* (JBU) and five adults Feb. 25 in *Manistee* (BA); the latter requires review by the M.B.R.C. Wisconsin reported an individual at Port Washington Dec. 13 (TU), and their first January record there Jan. 6 (JB, TS). Minnesota reported about its 20th state record, a first-winter bird from Dec. 1–2 in *Dakota* (BF, m.ob.). Michigan finally got its first thoroughly-documented report of **Ivory Gull**, a first-winter individual Dec. 22 in Marquette (TF).

Owls to Thrushes

Snowy Owls made a good showing in both Minnesota and Wisconsin; in Minnesota there were reports of ≥ 45 individuals, while Wisconsin had >30 birds. Inexplicably, Michigan missed out on the movement and only small numbers were reported from the traditional n. locations. **Northern Hawk Owls** invaded Minnesota, with 40 birds reported, the best showing since the record 159 in 1991–1992. Wisconsin had 3 reports, which constituted an invasion for that state, the best since their record eight in 1962–1963. These included individuals near Park Falls Dec. 24 (BBr), near Brule, *Douglas*, in January (BBa, CG), and near Glen Oak, *Marquette*, Feb. 7+ (DC). The latter record was one of the southernmost records in Wisconsin. Michigan had two N. Hawk Owls: one in Sault Ste. Marie through much of the period, a nearly annual occurrence, and another in Calumet Feb. 10–11 (JPr, JPr, *vide SA*), a much more unusual location. **Great Gray Owls** were found in even greater numbers Regionwide. Minnesota will likely break the record of 218 set in 1991–1992 when all the migration reports are tabulated. As significant was the fact that Great Grays came very far south, showing up in the s.e. corner of the state. Wisconsin will also approach, or exceed, the record set in 1988–1989, when 42 were found. A preliminary count indicates the total will fall somewhere between 40–50 individuals. As in Minnesota, the owls came very far south, reaching Milwaukee and LaCrosse. Observers in both Minnesota and Wisconsin found many of the birds in very poor condition, emaciated and starving. The mortality was reported high. Michigan seemed to miss out on the big numbers, recording only about three individuals around Sault Ste. Marie. However, an individual did appear Feb. 19–21 in *Lee-*



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lanau (CSi, PSi, LG), providing the southernmost record in recent memory. Long-eared Owls were rather scarce this season, with only a report of one in Vernon Marsh, WI Jan. 6 (TW). Short-eared Owls were reported in good numbers in Michigan, with reports from 12 counties. Wisconsin had a sharp decline over last year's exceptional numbers. Minnesota reported the species in average numbers. Boreal Owls suffered the same fate as Great Grays. All 3 states reported exceptionally high numbers, but most were dead birds found as either roadkills or starved near feeders. At the time of this writing, Minnesota had reported 100 Boreal Owls, of which 60 were found dead. Wisconsin reported >15 birds, a record total. Some of the sightings were outside the season, although four did occur in the winter. These included one Jan. 5 at Wauwatosa (SD), one found dead at Harrington Beach S. P., and two dead in Grantsburg (JH). Michigan also had an invasion, with reports from 6 counties s. to *Manistee*; many of these were also dead birds. High mortality rates of Boreal Owls have been reported in the past, but the death of so many Great Grays is unusual.

Minnesota had only 2 reports of Three-toed Woodpeckers, a low number for that state, while one near Whitefish Pt.,

Chippewa, Dec. 29 (JRe) was considered exceptional for Michigan. Boreal Chickadees were reported farther south than normal in Wisconsin, with individuals in Wausau and Shawano (MP, *et al.*). Red-breasted Nuthatches were found in high to exceptional numbers throughout the s. portions of the Region. The only Carolina Wren report for Minnesota was in *Dakota* (JC, CC). The species was also rare in Wisconsin with just a few reports, while Michigan had average numbers through the season. Golden-crowned Kinglets were very low in numbers in Wisconsin and virtually absent in Michigan. Wisconsin had a Townsend's Solitaire Dec. 16–Jan. 14 in *Ozaukee* (JF, *et al.*), Minnesota had two birds in *Houston* Jan. 19–20 (JD, BL, RJ) and Jan. 24 in *Winona* (CS), and Michigan had one Jan. 6–Feb. 25 in *Leelanau* (KW). Minnesota had reports of Varied Thrushes from *Beltrami*, *Cook*, *Crow Wing*, *Ramsey*, and *Rice*. Many less than last winter, Wisconsin had a single report of a female through most of the period in *Ozaukee*, and Michigan had one Dec. 19 at Glen L. (RGa, *vide* LG).

Mimids to Sparrows

Brown Thrashers wintered unusually far n. in all 3 states. In Michigan, one overwintered in *Benzie* and another remained to Jan. 6 in *Delta*. In Minnesota, one remained to Feb. 1 in *Beltrami*, and in Wisconsin one wintered in Appleton and another remained to Jan. 28 in Green Bay. Bohemian Waxwings were reported in good numbers in the n. two-thirds of Wisconsin and in n. Michigan. In the latter state some flocks moved S in January, making it to the Indiana border. All 3 states reported excellent numbers of N. Shrikes. The only Loggerhead Shrike came from Wisconsin, where a sick bird was found Dec. 4 near Birchwood, *Langlade*, and rehabilitated for later release (MG). In Minnesota a Yellow-rumped Warbler wintered to Dec. 22 in *Ramsey* (*vide* AH) and one was seen to Jan. 21 in *Vernon* in Wisconsin (JD). Michigan reported a Pine Warbler Feb. 25 in *Bay* (RB, MB, DD) and a Com. Yellowthroat to Feb. 10 in *Wayne*. Also in that state was a Rose-breasted Grosbeak which lingered to Dec. 1 in *Kalamazoo* (JG). In Wisconsin a *Shawano* feeder played host to two towhees through the winter, which by virtue of recent splits by the American Ornithologists' Union yielded 2 species, an E. Towhee and a **Spotted Towhee** (RA). In Michigan a Chipping Sparrow was reported Feb. 25 in *Monroe* (CP, TWe). Even rarer was a **Clay-colored Sparrow** Dec. 9–18 in *Grafton*, *Ozaukee*

(*vide* DG), providing only the 2nd winter record for Wisconsin. Minnesota reported its first overwintering record for Savannah Sparrow, an individual in *Hennepin* (OJ). Michigan had an individual Feb. 25 in *Monroe* (CP, TWe). Other sparrow records in Wisconsin included a Fox Sparrow overwintering at L. Mills (*vide* KH) and a Lincoln's Sparrow to Jan. 15 in *Calumet* (CR), one of few winter records for that state. Surprising in light of the extreme cold in Minnesota were five–six Swamp Sparrows which lingered to Jan. 21 in *Hennepin* (SC). Wisconsin reported exceptional numbers of wintering White-throated Sparrows, but lower-than-normal numbers of White-crowned Sparrows. An ad. Harris' Sparrow came to a feeder in *Wau-paca* in s. Wisconsin through January, while Michigan had individuals Dec. 30 and Jan. 6 in *Ottawa*.

Blackbirds to Finches

Red-winged Blackbirds arrived in Michigan and Wisconsin in excellent numbers in the last week of February. Those 2 states also reported several E. Meadowlarks overwintering, or attempting to do so. A **Western Meadowlark** Jan. 10 in Buena Vista Marsh, *Portage*, WI provided a very rare record for the Region (DN). Perhaps the most remarkable bird of a remarkable season was a **Scott's Oriole**, present in Wisconsin late November–Feb. 3 near Adams (RN, RA, m.ob.). Birders first learned of the bird when the homeowners called a state radio conservation/nature show in January to tell about their bird. A rush of birders followed, documenting this first state record and 2nd for the Region. Pine Grosbeaks were present in excellent numbers in the n. halves of Michigan and Wisconsin, but few made it to the s. portions of these states. All 3 states had good numbers of White-winged Crossbills, including an impressive flock of >400 in *Aitkin*, MN (SC). Redpolls were also common throughout the Region, with numbers reaching the s. portions of both Michigan and Minnesota, but remaining n. in Wisconsin. As might be expected, there were also numerous reports of Hoary Redpolls in all 3 states.

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