

# Atlantic Provinces Region

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Winter started out benignly, but became increasingly blustery, with frequent rain in southern New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and more snow elsewhere. Cold spells, however, were neither deep nor prolonged until later in the season. Cone and berry crops were widely depressed. Some routine landbirds seemed scarce throughout. If evicted from the north by snow and food depletion, they could disperse in the more open terrain of southern New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Waterfowl and seabirds certainly benefited: Ice did not form in Northumberland Strait until January and the normally frozen Chaleur Bay remained open.

Unattributed records are *fide* subregional compilers.

Abbreviations: S.P.M. (*Saint Pierre et Miquelon*), G.M.I. (*Grand Manan I., N.B.*), P.E.I. (*without locality, Prince Edward Island*)

## Grebes to Waterfowl

A Pied-billed Grebe wintered in Dartmouth, NS. A minimum 300 Red-necked Grebes wintered at G.M.I., NB (BD), but were unnoteworthy elsewhere. Single Sooty and Greater shearwaters were late off Grand Manan, NB Dec. 6–7 (BD). A small shearwater, dark-brownish above and white below, was seen Feb. 10–16 off Halifax, NS, by 3 independent observers. A recently dead N. Gannet Feb. 19 at Green Bay, NS, appeared after a winter gale (SC). As usual, a few Double-crested Cormorants wintered in Nova Scotia; the latest elsewhere were Dec. 1 at Renewes, NF (BM), and early January near Bathurst, NB. At least five Great Blue Herons survived winter in Nova Scotia, where lingering was fatal for a Great Egret at Barrington Dec. 22 (\*J. Nickerson) and another at Pubnico Dec. 23 (RD). A White-fronted Goose at Yarmouth mid-December–Jan. 1 appeared to be *gambelli*, lent credence by its association with two apparent *parvipes* Canada Geese from the same breeding range.

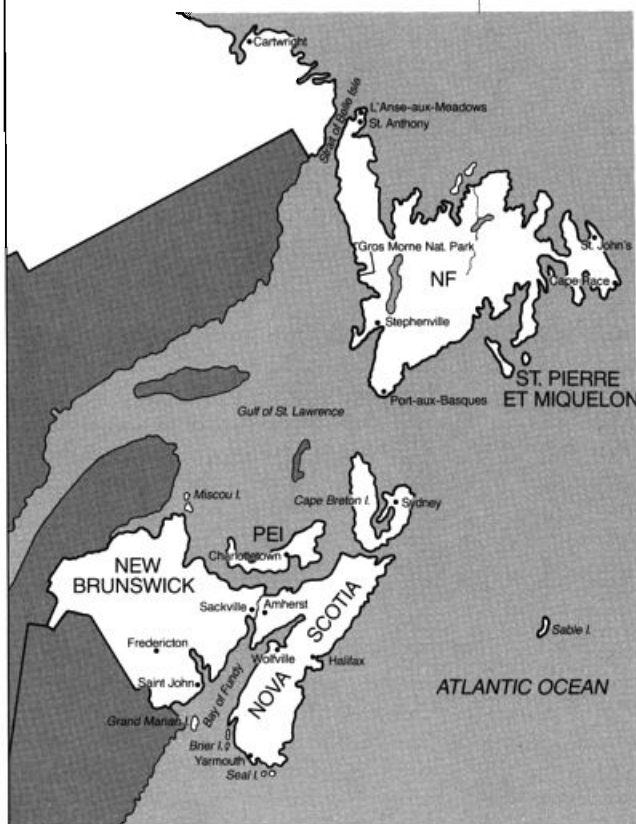
A Snow Goose was at St. John's, NF, until mid-January, and another wintered with especially numerous Canadas near Halifax, NS. By Feb. 1, the buildup of returning Brant was impressive on G.M.I., NB (1300), and on Cape Sable I., NS (2000).

Ten ♂ Eurasian Green-winged Teal and an undetermined number of females (some suggestively buffy, with weak eye-lines) wintered among some 40 Green-winged Teal in St. John's, NF; a North American record? Mere spillovers were two wintering at Cape Broyle, NF, and one to Jan. 7 at Saint John, NB. Record numbers of Am. Black Ducks wintered on S.P.M. Other less common dabblers lingered as usual in disorderly breadlines at city parks and waterfronts, among them 150–200 now-resident N. Pintail at St. John's, NF. Six Eur. Wigeons

wintered in s.e. Newfoundland, while five in Nova Scotia dwindled to a persistent pair in Dartmouth. A Canvasback was unusual in early December at New Minas, NS. A Lesser Scaup again wintered in St. John's, some 25 were discriminated in Nova Scotia, and nine were off G.M.I., NB, in early January. Few are now excited by Tufted Ducks. Two wintered in St. John's, NF, ≥four and three got through part or all of winter in Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick hosted a bird from Jan. 4 at Saint John, and another Jan. 3–11 on G.M.I. Gatherings of some Com. Eiders were noted around S.P.M. and approximately 1600 around Grand Manan, NB, but were largely unreported in between. Forty Harlequin Ducks at Cape St. Mary's, NF, represented a recent record-high count, but only 50% of 1980s' levels. Other good winter flocks were 28 at Prospect, NS, 14 in Shelburne, NS, and 62 at the Wolves, NB, in early December, becoming 22 in mid-February. Astonishingly, some 200 wintering Barrows Goldeneyes at Dalhousie, NB, were rated as fewer than usual because Chaleur Bay remained open (BD). Ten Ruddy Ducks began winter on Bissett L., NS, but only one stayed nearby.

## Raptors to Alcids

No details were received on individual Black Vultures Jan. 21 at Fairfield, NB, and Feb. 17 at Port l'Hebert, NS, although they are plausible given recent winter records. Nine wintering Turkey Vultures feasted through winter on a dead pilot whale on Brier I., and there were three wanderers elsewhere in Nova Scotia and one Jan. 3 at Inkerman, NB. An Osprey at North R., PEI, during December–January (D. Wadowska, *fide* DM) supplied one of few reliable winter records for the Region. A record 525 Bald Eagles (52% adult) were counted during the annual Kings, NS, census Jan. 26 (*fide* J. Wolford). A N. Harrier Jan. 18 at Brigus, was one of the latest recorded in Newfoundland (BM), and birds on S.P.M., Jan. 10 and Feb. 11 were almost unprecedented for the season (RE). Fifteen N. Goshawks, "about average" (BM) at the city dump, St. John's, NF, would be exciting elsewhere. Wintering Sharp-shinned Hawks were again scarce in Nova Scotia. A Cooper's Hawk at Chester Dec. 15–29 (C. Field) supplied the 2nd well-documented winter record for Nova Scotia. A Red-shouldered Hawk was at Shemogue, NB, Dec. 31+ (ST). An undetailed Broad-winged Hawk on the Cape Tormentine, NB CBC, a documented immature on the Kingston, NS CBC, and an adult Jan. 27



near Halifax, NS (J. Taylor *et al.*), were not surprising given the open winter. The usual buteos seemed unexceptional. In Nova Scotia, Am. Kestrels were more widely reported than in recent winters. Peregrine Falcons were at St. John's, NF (an imm. *tundrius* through winter, BM), and in Kings, NS Jan. 3 in Kings (*fide* BMA) and on Sable I. Feb. 28 ("... making such a racket that a group of horses bolted;" ZL). Two Gyrfalcons were noted in Nova Scotia and  $\leq$ seven in New Brunswick, but did not appear in s.e. Newfoundland until after the period.

Ruffed Grouse populations were low in Nova Scotia, but remained high in New Brunswick. Six Am. Coots began winter near Dartmouth, five elsewhere in Nova Scotia, and seven in St. John's, NF; one stayed through winter in Dartmouth. Two Killdeers Feb. 23 near Halifax, NS, were probably early migrants, but whence a Greater Yellowlegs that appeared Feb. 20–27 in Shelburne, NS (M. Newall *et al.*)? In Nova Scotia, especially in the southwest, the usual shorebirds had an easy winter: There were a few Black-bellied Plovers and Red Knots, numerous Sanderlings, a few White-rumped Sandpipers and Dunlins, >500 Purple Sandpipers, and a few Ruddy Turnstones. Less usual were a Black-bellied Plover and four Sanderlings during late January on S.P.M., and a White-rumped Dec. 21 near Cape St. Mary's, NF. Also unusual were a Com. Snipe on S.P.M., Jan. 2, three near Windsor, NS Feb. 2, and an Am. Woodcock on Cape Sable I., NS Jan. 24. A Great Skua feeding on the beach of Sable I., NS Jan. 19 was routine for recent winters (ZL). A Laughing Gull on Cape Sable I., NS Jan. 19 was not unprecedented. Black-headed Gulls seemed restored to past numbers in St. John's, NF (100 to late February), but following a record 127 on the Halifax-Dartmouth CBC, became scarce or un-concentrated, in Nova Scotia. The last Little Gull left G.M.I., NB Dec. 15 (BD). A few Bonaparte's Gulls stayed throughout winter in Nova Scotia. Four Mew (Common) Gulls wintered in St. John's, NF, and individuals appeared (both for the 3d winter) at Glace Bay, NS, and Saint John, NB. One at Whale Cove Jan. 3 provided a first for G.M.I., NB (pBD); another or the same bird had been unwittingly photographed Dec. 8 in nearby Black's Harbour (K. MacIntosh). Some 30,000 Herring and 8,000 Great Black-backed gulls (BLM) were deprived of the Halifax regional landfill when it closed in late December, but no hordes materialized elsewhere. A Yellow-legged Gull Oct. 24–Dec. 26 (pBM *et al.*) in St. John's, NF, was

thought to have been the same one that appeared in December 1995, the 3rd confirmed in Canada, all from that city. MacTavish and European experts identified it as *atlantis* or as *michahellis* of the Iberian population. Six Lesser Black-backed Gulls wintered in St. John's, NF, six were seen at scattered times and places in Nova Scotia, and one appeared for the 9th year in Moncton, NB. Noteworthy were some 25,000 Razorbills Feb. 7 off Grand Manan Is. (BD), and a phenomenal 37,000 Dovkies flying off s.e. Newfoundland during 2 hours after dawn Jan. 4 (BM *et al.*).

### Owls to Shrikes

Snowy Owls were moderately common in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, but apparently less so in New Brunswick and P.E.I. Worth mention in Nova Scotia was a roost of 12 Long-eared Owls in Kings, and some 18 wintering Short-eared Owls, also mostly in Kings. We are always on the fringes of northern owl flights. New Brunswick had two N. Hawk Owls, one persisting at Port Elgin. That province also had a Boreal Owl at Miscou I., Feb. 8 and a road-injured one on G.M.I., Feb. 5. There were also an ephemeral Boreal in Halifax, NS, and a corpse Feb. 28 at St. Felix, P.E.I.

Open waters sustained  $\leq$ nine Belted Kingfishers through winter in Nova Scotia. Have recent waves of Red-bellied Woodpeckers subsided? Of four initially in Nova Scotia and singles in Brunswick and P.E.I., only the last was evident through the period. A Red-headed Woodpecker paused in Halifax Dec. 17.

**SA** The bird of the year for many in Nova Scotia was a Dusky Flycatcher discovered Nov. 24 by Angus and Stella MacLean in an unkempt orchard near Williamsport, but not diagnosed until Dec. 11, partly because of the brightness (olive-green back, gray face and nape, yellowish underparts) of its freshly molted plumage, normally seen only on the winter range. A full account and photos are in *Birders Journal* (1997, 6:68–73). Salient field-marks included narrow bill; long, narrow, brownish, pale-margined tail; and "whit" calls, distinguished from Least's by sonogram. It was last seen Dec. 27 after a night of windchill at -30°F. There is only one other documented record for the east, although 2 other claims are being reassessed.

A late, but not Regionally unprecedented, E. Phoebe was at Montegue, P.E.I., Jan. 4

(R. Richman). A Brown Creeper Dec 13 was only the 5th for S.P.M. A House Wren and a Marsh Wren were December stragglers in Nova Scotia. A N. Wheatear Jan 4 at Donkin, Cape Breton I. (ph. J. Metcalfe), provided a winter first for Nova Scotia. Could an E. Bluebird at West Pubnico, NS Feb. 27 have been a spring arrival? More exciting was an imm. Mountain Bluebird, New Brunswick's first, near Bathurst, mid-November–Dec. 8 (P. Duguay *et al.*). Four Hermit Thrushes were noted in Nova Scotia; one in St. John's, NF, from mid-February was less commonplace. A Townsend's Solitaire, now annual in the Region, was at Blandford, NS Dec. 29–Jan. 5 (M. Brady *et al.*) New Brunswick's 2nd Fieldfare was avidly sought at Sussex beginning late February (D. & J. Hughes *et al.*). Mountain ash berries, and therefore Am. Robins, were initially abundant in n. New Brunswick (BD), but robins arrived in numbers farther south and east only later in winter. A Varied Thrush, recently annual, was at Woodstock, NB Jan. 6+ (v.o.). A Gray Catbird was found Dec. 24 on Sable I., NS. Of three Brown Thrashers in Nova Scotia, one died and another disappeared in mid-December, and one appeared mid-January.

There was only a modest incursion of Bohemian Waxwings, which, along with Cedar Waxwings, followed Am. Robins—first common in n. New Brunswick, later in s. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Numbers of N. Shrikes were well below last winter's. A Loggerhead Shrike mid-December in Parrsboro, NS, was convincingly described (ph. G. Bradshaw), but few details were available for one around Bathurst, NB, into early January. There is one previous December sight record for Nova Scotia.

### Warblers to Finches

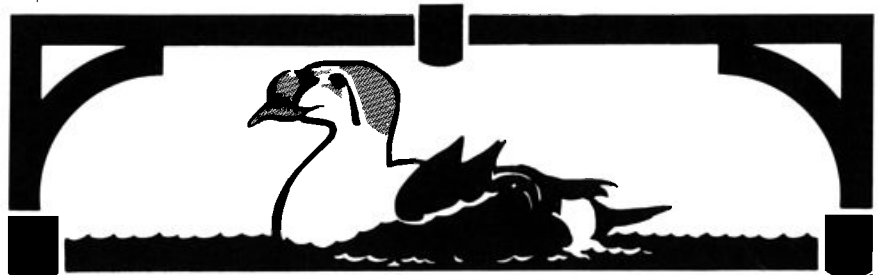
The usual mix of foolish warblers began wintering, mostly at feeders. Of about seven Orange-crowned Warblers in Nova Scotia, only one (in Dartmouth) apparently survived through the season. Two lingered in s.e. Newfoundland to Jan. 4, and one appeared on G.M.I., NB Jan. 2 (BD). A Nashville Warbler was in Halifax, NS, until Dec. 22. A N. Parula was last seen Dec. 8 in St. John's, NF. Of a surprising three Black-throated Blue Warblers in New Brunswick in late December, one in Moncton lasted to Jan. 12. A Black-throated Green was in Halifax, NS, in late December. A Yellow-throated Warbler survived to Dec. 26 in St. John's, NF (J. Wells *et al.*). Fewer Pine Warblers than usual began to winter; one survived into January in New Brunswick, another was found Jan. 4 at Montegue, P.E.I., and only

one reportedly survived through the season in Nova Scotia. A Prairie Warbler lasted to Dec. 11 in St. John's, NF, and another Dec. 23 on Sable I., NS (ZL), provided a provincial late record. A "western" Palm Warbler was in Yarmouth, NS Jan. 4. Two Black-and-white Warblers survived to Dec. 30 in St. John's, NF, and another to Dec. 22 in Dartmouth, NS. In Nova Scotia, single Ovenbirds were noted to mid-December in Dartmouth and to Dec. 28 in Glace Bay. The latest of two Com. Yellowthroats in Nova Scotia was found Jan. 15. The usual wrong-headed Yellow-breasted Chats began to winter. One was a hawk victim Jan. 18 in Moncton, NB. Of  $\geq$ eight in Nova Scotia, one persisted in Dartmouth, and two in St. John's, NF, lasted to early December.

Slightly fewer N. Cardinals were reported in New Brunswick, whereas a record 30 were noted in Nova Scotia. A late Indigo Bunting was at Barrington, NS, Dec. 21. A Painted Bunting Dec. 21–31 at a feeder at Louisbourg, NS (ph. S. Myers), outlasted a November 1988 bird in Halifax. Dickcissels turned up widely: two on S.P.M., three in s.e. Newfoundland, one each in P.E.I. and New Brunswick, and  $\geq$ six in Nova Scotia, of which  $\geq$ one survived the period. One of three E. Towhees at New Brunswick feeders, one in P.E.I., and one of two in Nova Scotia survived at feeders.

Although juncos were often the most conspicuous birds along roads and at feeders in Nova Scotia, compilers everywhere stressed the general scarcity of sparrows. However, there were treats among them. A Clay-colored Sparrow wintered at a St. John's, NF, feeder (J. Pratt *et al.*). In Nova Scotia, single Field Sparrows were in New Glasgow Jan. 1 and Shelburne Jan. 19. A Vesper Sparrow was at West Pubnico, NS, Jan. 19–16. Lark Sparrows were at feeders at Graham's Pond, P.E.I., Jan. 4 (V. McSwain) and, in Nova Scotia, at Port Hawkesbury to Jan. 4 and in Lower Argyle Dec. 22+. A Grasshopper Sparrow stayed through December at Grande Anse, NB (R. Landry *et al.*). Two White-crowned Sparrows were reported from Nova Scotia, but New Brunswick's *Zonotrichia* was a more exciting Harris' Sparrow at a feeder near Saint John Dec. 27+ (C. & M. Adams *et al.*). Four January Lincoln's Sparrows were normal for s.e. Newfoundland.

In addition to the usual *icterids*, there were undocumented reports of a Yellow-headed Blackbird Feb. 23 at Ft. Augustus, PEI, and, in Nova Scotia, two Brewer's Blackbirds in Glace Bay Jan. 2–8, and two more elusive ones in Pictou during January. Videos of one of the latter may be diagnostic. A Orchard Oriole Dec. 1 in Halifax,



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NS (IM), supplied the Region's latest record. At least four Baltimore Orioles were nurtured through winter around Halifax, NS. Although two possible Bullock's were reported, they were not critically assessed.

It was a "a very poor year for finches" in Newfoundland (BM), and they were also "in very low numbers" (DM) in P.E.I. Purple Finches were an exception in New Brunswick, where—like robins and waxwings—they were initially common in the north and later unusually so in the south (BD).

House Finches, more feeder-dependent, continued to consolidate their beachheads in Nova Scotia, with some 30 reported from both Yarmouth and Halifax. Am. Goldfinches, as usual, did not track winter finch fluctuations, but remained common throughout.

### Addendum

The "probable" Yellow-legged Gull in Halifax, Feb. 11, 1995 (*AFN* 50, p. 141), is thought by German expert D. Gruber from photos to have been a yellow-legged "*ommissus*" (N. Europe) Herring Gull. Given current fluidity of large gull systematics, it is best to reserve judgement.

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