

atlantic provinces



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Southern extremities of the Region continue to warm in winter, with heavy rain and even severe electrical storms now commonplace, even in February. Waterfowl and shorebirds are the main beneficiaries of global warming here. Among landbirds, such species as Belted Kingfisher, Northern Flicker, Winter Wren, American Pipit, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet seem poised to benefit. Except in Labrador, winter was a mild affair until early January, when snow and rain arrived to clean out half-hardy laggards. Many wayward warblers survived until early January in Nova Scotia, but a week of rain and sub-freezing temperatures did in most by 7 Jan, except for a few hardy Pine Warblers and Yellow-breasted Chats at feeders. Coverage was good from all provinces.

This marks my first regional report, having just taken over from irrepressible Ian McLaren, winter-season editor in good standing since 1988. Always the first to pounce upon new developments in the field, Ian still leads the pack of ever-increasing Maritime birders. His insight, wit, brevity, and wisdom will be missed in these pages, but he can still be read in *Nova Scotia Birds*. Thanks also to faithful Roger Etcheberry on St. Pierre et Miquelon for his timely and informative reports over many years from that fascinating little chunk of

France. For extensive use of New Brunswick CBC data, I am indebted to David Christie, and to the Nova Scotia Bird Society for data from that province. And lastly, to all who have ever taken the time to send in a report, a tip of the hat; you deserve it!

Abbreviations: A.P. (*Acadian Peninsula, NB*); A.V. (*Annapolis Valley, NS*); A.V.P. (*Avalon Peninsula, NF*); C.B.I. (*Cape Breton Island, NS*); C.C.E.R.C. (*Cyril Coldwell Eagle & Raptor Count*); C.S.I. (*Cape Sable Island, NS*); G.M.I. (*Grand Manan Island, NB*); H.R.M. (*Halifax Regional Municipality, NS*); S.B.I. (*Sable Island, NS*); S.P.M. (*St. Pierre et Miquelon, France*).

GREBES THROUGH HERONS

Red-necked Grebes increased at the Cape of Miquelon, S.P.M., from 40 on 9 Jan to 460 on 23 Feb. Lingering Pied-billed Grebes were at Hampton Marsh, NB, 26 Dec; at C.S.I. to 7 Jan; and late January at S.B.I. One in St. Pierre harbour 26 Dec–4 Feb was a first winter occurrence. Northern Fulmars stay offshore, except when blown in; most notably 1619 on 18 Dec from St. Brides, NF, exiting Placentia Bay the first two hours after dawn (PL). One at Point Prim, PEI, 27 Dec was exceptional for Northumberland Strait (E. Townsend). Northern Gannets tarried, with record highs on NS CBCs, the bulk from C.S.I., where 596 were counted 18 Dec. A few Double-crested Cormorants winter in the Maritimes, but two on the A.V.P. and at least four at S.P.M. were pushing the envelope. So was an imm. Little Blue Heron at Arcadia, NS, 19–20 Dec, and Cattle Egrets 15 Nov–20 Dec at G.M.I. and 7 Jan at Blanche, NS. An imm. Black-crowned Night-Heron at G.M.I. 28 Jan was the latest on record for New Brunswick, while a recently-dead adult was found near-by 4 Feb (BED).

VULTURES THROUGH WATERFOWL

Peak counts of Turkey Vultures were six near St. Stephen, NB, 6 Dec and 12 at Brier I., NS, 20 Jan (CAH). Three singles from PEI during the period may have involved some duplication, but they represented the first winter reports for the garden province. Two well-described "Greenland" **Greater White-fronted Geese** were found in NS, one around Lanark, *Antigonish*, from 8–28 Dec (RFL) and another on the Wolfville dykelands 28 Feb–1 Mar (RST). Brant began trickling in to their two main spring

staging areas in the region in late Jan, with 3000 estimated at both C.S.I. and G.M.I. by late Feb. PEI took the winter Gadwall sweepstakes with 18 at Cymbria 19 Feb (RCO). A hen Am. Wigeon at St. Pierre harbour from 22 Jan was a first winter occurrence. Eurasian Wigeon included five from NS, eight from NF (St. John's), and one 18–26 Feb at Murray Harbour, PEI (ERM). Am. Black Ducks had a good breeding season, reflected in high totals on CBCs in the region: 20,974 in NS; 9549 in NB; and 572 at S.P.M. 18 Dec. A total of 318 N. Pintail at St. John's 26 Dec eclipsed all other regional totals combined. Fifty Green-winged Teal throughout the period at St. John's contained at least eight of the Eurasian variety. Tufted Duck is becoming almost regular, with seven each from NS and NF and a single drake returning for its 5th winter at St. John, NB, 27 Dec. Fine concentrations of Greater Scaup were 1200 in Lingan Bay, C.B.I., 8 Jan (CAM) and 5000 at Pictou 23 Feb (KJM). Lesser Scaup numbers were above average, with 40 on the Fredericton, NB, CBC 19 Dec. and 101 on NS CBCs. Common Eider was indeed common, with 7362 on NS CBCs, 4787 in NB, and ± 6100 during a special aerial census around S.P.M. 26 Feb (L. Gaspard). Harlequin Duck is rebounding slowly but surely from pre-1990 lows, with flocks of 50+ birds reported from White Head I., G.M.I., Prospect, NS, and near Jones Harbour, NS. Many more wintering areas remain to be checked along Nova Scotia's e. shore. Chaleur Bay is Regional Barrow's Goldeneye headquarters, with 266 on the Dalhousie, NB, CBC 2 Jan. A record 238 Hooded Mergansers were found on NS CBCs. A female near Gander, NF, 13 Feb and a pair at Port Blandford 3–13 Feb were especially unusual (*vide* BMT). Ruddy Ducks persisted, with two at SBI 2–5 Dec; nine at C.S.I. 1 Dec; six at Moncton, NB, 18 Dec; nine on the Halifax-Dartmouth CBC 19 Dec; two to 19 Feb at Trenton, NS, and one at St. John's, NF, 11 Nov–2 Jan.

RAPTORS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

A special Bald Eagle survey in the A.V. tallied 580 birds 13 Feb, 59% adult, 43% imm., and 9% unknown (C.C.E.R.C.). Single Broad-winged Hawks were at South Bar, C.B.I., 21 Dec (CAM), Halifax-Dartmouth CBC 19 Dec (Chris Majka), and on the Broad Cove CBC (imm.) 29 Dec. (J.

Hirtle). An impressive 164 Red-tailed Hawks were counted around Wolfville, NS, 13 Feb (C.C.E.R.C.). Six reports of Golden Eagles in NS, from the H.R.M. eastward, likely represented at least three imms. 14 Dec–22 Feb (v.o.). Resident were two Gyrfalcons along Chaleur Bay between Campbellton and Dalhousie, NB. Reports of wintering Peregrine Falcons came from G.M.I., the A.V., and the A.V.P., with an outlier from S.B.I. 10 Jan (ZOL).

SA 2000, Year of the Ptarmigan:

a massive invasion of Willow Ptarmigan into central Québec and Labrador arrived in early December. Single flocks of 250–300 birds were reported around Wabush-Labrador City in Jan and Feb (CDA). Total numbers are impossible to come by, but in w. Labrador alone at least 250,000 were thought to be present (BED). In the east the invasion came later and was over by late Feb around Happy Valley-Goose Bay. A few Rock Ptarmigan were reported shot around Esker, about 100 km n. of Wabush. The last time similar numbers were noted in w. Labrador was 1990, which agrees well with the reported 10-year population cycle of the species. Many thousands ended up in stew pots, but many more did not, and ptarmigan-watchers in the Region have the year 2010 firmly in mind.

A Virginia Rail was found in a weakened state at Birchtown, NS, 16 Feb (JON). Two Am. Coots in St. John, NB, 24 Feb (K. MacIntosh) provided the first successful wintering records for the province. One was at St. Pierre through 6 Jan and another at S.B.I. 30 Jan. A Sandhill Crane was present around Antigonish Landing, NS, into early Dec (RFL). A **Northern Lapwing** was well seen and described during the S.P.M. CBC 18 Dec (M. Dérable). Black-bellied Plovers wintered mostly at C.S.I., with 25 on the CBC 18 Dec.

A Greater Yellowlegs was at Wolfville 19 Dec, whereas three were near Yarmouth, NS, 2–8 Jan (MUN). A Lesser Yellowlegs was also there 10 Jan, perhaps the individual present in Sackville, NB, until at least 6 Dec. A Willet at White Head, G.M.I., 22 Feb provided a first winter record for NB and may have arrived with the Killdeer flight. An imm. **Upland Sandpiper** near Sydney 2 Dec (JUM) was a good find. The largest flock of Ruddy Turnstones was 15 near Cape Race, NF, 30 Dec. Concentrations of Red Knots were 11 on the S.P.M. CBC 18 Dec;

SA An exceptional mid-winter flight of Killdeer was detected in late January from the A.V.P. to the mouth of the Bay of Fundy. First reports came from S.P.M., with three 23 Jan, and \leq six late in the month; followed by six on the A.V.P. 24–28 Jan, 35+ in NS, most along the coast from the H.R.M. e. to C.B.I., but with 10 at S.B.I. 29–30 Jan. Their arrival coincided with passage of a major storm throughout the region 20–21 Jan, the third savage nor'easter of the winter.

nine at usually ice-bound Montague, PEI, 7 Jan (ERM); 18 at Grand Barachois, S.P.M., 24 Jan; and 40 at C.S.I. 19 Feb. Sanderling headquarters in the Region is S.B.I., where Zoe Lucas found 260 on 9 Feb. Elsewhere, 13 were at Grand Barachois, S.P.M. and 116 at C.S.I., both 18 Dec, and 100 were at Port L'Hebert, NS, 5 Feb. At least five White-rumped Sandpipers were at C.S.I. throughout. Dunlins were spread thin, with 20 at C.S.I. 18 Dec; 20 at Port L'Hebert 5 Feb; one at SBI 9 Feb; 24 at Port Joli, NS, 28 Feb; and one throughout at Maces Bay, NB. Record-late for the province was a Long-billed Dowitcher at Marsh Creek, Saint John, NB, 9–21 Dec (M. Cormier). The last reported Am. Woodcock was a roadkill at C.S.I. 22 Jan. Three Red Phalaropes were off White Head, G.M.I., 14 Dec.

GULLS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

A first-winter **Great Skua** was the bird of the season 20 Jan–3 Feb at St. John's (M&C Schwitters), furnishing only the second winter record for Newfoundland. It was captured 3 Feb, having an injured wing, and hospitalized. During its stay at Quidi Vidi L. it scavenged dead gulls and even killed a Great Black-backed Gull. Single Common Gulls were at Halifax and Pictou, NS, St. Peters, PEI, and Rocky Harbour, NF. The three throughout at St. John's were an adult, a first-winter, and a second-winter. A critically-examined adult **Thayer's Gull** at Pier 9, Halifax Harbour 15 Jan+ (F. Lavender et. al.) provided a first confirmed record for the province, while a second ad. was found at Kentville, NS, 26 Jan (RST). An ad. **Yellow-legged Gull** (race *michahellis*) 24 Feb at St. John's (BMT) was confirmed by European expert Martin Garner (from photos). Close to annual in St. John's, it is still a major North American rarity. There were 7–8 Lesser Black-backed Gulls on NS CBCs in late Dec, with 12–15 identifiably different individuals at St. John's. The only Ivory Gull outside NF was an imm. at St.

Andrews, NB, 9 Feb (T. Dean, K. Neilsen). No large numbers of Dovekies were reported in the region, but in Newfoundland other alcid numbers were thought to be usual, with maybe a few more Atlantic Puffins than normal in Dec and early Jan, perhaps due to warm weather (BMT). The newly-divined winter feeding concentrations of Razorbills in the Bay of Fundy yielded land-based counts of 32,000 at G.M.I. 5 Dec and 10,000 from a boat 4 Feb (BED).

A Mourning Dove found dead at Wabush, Labrador 26 Jan (after surviving a month of -30° to -40°C) may have died due to lack of drinking water rather than hypothermia (CDA). Another was still alive at a feeder in nearby Labrador City 11 Feb. The only significant Snowy Owl presence in the region were 3–4 throughout at The Hawk, C.S.I., subsisting on a mini-plague of rats (MUN). Northern Hawk Owls were above average in Newfoundland following two summers of high vole numbers (BMT). An adequately-described (and sketched) Long-eared Owl persisted at frigid Labrador City from 29 Dec–4 Feb (N. Genge), well n. of the species' range in either summer or winter. At least 35 Belted Kingfishers were found on NS CBCs, with a high of 10 on the Montague, PEI, count 2 Jan and one e. to Langlade, S.P.M., 18 Dec. Fifteen Red-bellied Woodpeckers were found at NB feeders after a good fall flight, including three at North Head, G.M.I., and a male n. to the A.P.; there were but two in NS and one in PEI. There were a record 56 N. Flickers on the St. John's CBC 26 Dec, with 13 reported over the winter at S.P.M.

TTMICE THROUGH WAXWINGS

It took 17 years, but NB got its second through fifth confirmed Tufted Titmice, with singles at Chamcook, St. Stephen, St. George, Woodstock, and Hartland (*vide* DSC). White-breasted Nuthatch was widely-remarked upon at Maritime feeders, after a significant fall flight from New England and Québec. An undocumented N. Wheatear was at Fourchu, CBI, 11 Feb (J. MacInnis, *vide* CAM). Single **Townsend's Solitaires** came to earth at Halifax 10 Dec (*vide* AAM); Debert, NS, 29 Dec–20 Jan (FLS, EPS); and Riverside-Albert, NB, 13 Dec–16 Mar (DSC). Remarkably, the NB bird was likely back for a third winter, despite being missed in 1998–1999. Three **Varied Thrushes** included one in Lower Sackville, NS, 23 Jan–20 Feb (C. Stevens); one near Fredericton, NB, 7 Feb+ (N. Coy); and the third near St. John's, also 7 Feb+ (*vide* BMT). Northern Mockingbird had a

good Maritime breeding season, leading to CBC highs of 14 in NB and 43 in NS, including 17 at Wolfville, NS, 19 Dec and four at St. John's, NF, 29 Dec. Hardy flocks of Am. Pipits were 25 at Pubnico, NS, 6 Jan and 15 at St. Pierre 9 Jan. Bohemian Waxwings invaded in unprecedented thousands, with early winter flocks of up to 5000 in St. John's and 2000 in Halifax-Dartmouth, NS. They generally outnumbered Cedar Waxwings by about 10:1.

WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

An Orange-crowned Warbler to 31 Jan at St. Pierre (P. Boez) provided a first winter record for the islands. A Nashville Warbler at Halifax in Dec appeared to be of the western race *ridwayi* (IAM). Yellow-throated Warblers survived to 4 Dec at St. Pierre, 16 Dec at Kentville, NS, and 22 Dec at St. John's. Prairie Warblers were at St. John, NB, 13 Dec (K. Allard) and Schooner Pond, C.B.I., 8 Jan (JUM). Black-and-white Warblers lasted until 26 Dec at St. John's (PL) and, surprisingly, 2 Jan at Montague, PEI (CBC). An Ovenbird was on the Halifax-Dartmouth CBC 19 Dec. A Wilson's Warbler was at Wolfville, NS, to 12 Dec (BLF). A record 18 Yellow-breasted Chats were found on NS CBCs, with outliers at Shippagan, NB, to 7 Dec (*vide* MDA) and 11 Jan at St. John's (JW et al.). A male **Western Tanager** was at Barrington, NS, 5–10 Dec (*vide* MUN). A **Spotted Towhee** at Cornerbrook, NF, 15–18 Dec (L. Butler et al.) provided a provincial first. An E. Towhee survived the winter at a feeder in Millertown, cen. NF (D. Burton et al.), about as far east as it could go. An imm. **Golden-crowned Sparrow** at Halifax 19 Dec+ (P. Chalmers et al.) was about the fifth for NS.

A strong fall flight from the west allowed the N. Cardinal to consolidate its expanding permanent range in the Region, now extending n. and e. to Victoria and Kings counties in NB and e. to the H.R.M. in NS. Single E. Meadowlarks were at Kingsport, NS, and Castalia Marsh, G.M.I., both 22 Feb; a third was at St. John's to the end of Jan. Single Yellow-headed Blackbirds were at Murray River, PEI, 15 Feb (ERM), Donkin, CBI, in Dec (CAM), and a pair at Moncton, NB, 18 Dec+. Baltimore Orioles were in good supply at feeders throughout Nova Scotia into early winter, but despite TLC, most eventually died. Seven at a feeder in Howie Centre, C.B.I., in early Dec is indicative. A **Bullock's Oriole** at St. Peters, PEI, 6–10 Dec (ERM, RCO) was photographed for a first provincial record. Pine Grosbeaks

were reasonably common in the Region, where many took to sunflower at feeders, perhaps because of the dearth of Mountain Ash berries caused by last summer's drought. Red Crossbills were in short supply, but many remarked on their presence at feeders, such as 18 at Salisbury, NB, 9 Dec (C. Colpitts). White-winged Crossbill numbers were down 90% on regional CBCs after having depleting the enormous spruce cone crop of 1998–1999. Some came to feeders. Common Redpolls smothered the Region: up from 33 on NS CBCs last winter to 11,000+ this winter and 13,287 on NB CBCs. Judging from reports, at least 1:100 was a Hoary Redpoll in NB, 1:500 in Nova Scotia, and as high as 1:20 in w. Labrador. For the most part, Pine Siskins and Am. Goldfinches bailed out ahead of the engulfing redpoll horde, but numbers were up on the A.V.P., where rare a decade ago.

EXOTICS

A Long-tailed Rosefinch (*Uragus sibiricus*) discovered at a St. George, NB, feeder 2 Jan remained throughout the period. It is a southern Siberian species commonly kept as a cagebird, especially in Europe.

Observers (sub-regional editors in boldface):

Todd Boland, Calvin Brennan, **David Christie**, Ray Cooke, Brian Dalzell, **Marcel David**, Cheryl Davis, **Fred Dobson**, **Roger Etcheberry**, Bernard Forsyth, **Sylvia Fullerton**, Carl Haycock, **Andrew Horn**, **Richard Knapton**, **Randy Lauff**, Paul Linegar, Zoe Lucas, **Bruce Mactavish** (BMT), Eric Marcum, **Blake Maybank** (BMy), **Dan McAskill** (DJM), **Ian McLaren**, **David McCorquodale**, Kenneth McKenna, **Angus McLean**, Hugh Metcalfe (JUM), **Eric Mills**, Cathy Murrant, Murray Newall, Johnny Nickerson, Fran Spalding, Edgar Spalding, Richard Stern, John Wells.



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It was a short winter, with most of the Region experiencing very mild conditions until about mid-January, while the first signs of spring were already obvious as early as the third week of February. As expected in such circumstances, many species lingered at record-late dates and there were unusual concentrations of waterfowl well into December and even into January.

In reference to rarities, they had their origins from the four cardinal points. Three Varied Thrushes, a Black-throated Gray Warbler, and a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch came from the West, one or two Fieldfares from the East, as well as a Painted Bunting and a Purple Gallinule from the South. From the north, a major invasion of Willow Ptarmigans was experienced on the Lower



North Shore of the St. Lawrence and in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean regions.

LOONS THROUGH DUCKS

Although not unprecedented in the Region, it is worthy of mention that our only wintering Com. Loons were far from the southwest: two overwintered in Alma (S. Boivin), while four were still in Les Escoumins 9 Jan, with one remaining there until at least 26 Feb (CA, CG). A Pied-billed Grebe in Contrecoeur 21 Feb onward was probably an early migrant (Y. Tardif). Several records of Great Blue Heron also originated away from the sw., as shown by singles in Jonquière 1 Jan (C. Simard et al., J. Tanguay), Biencourt 8 Jan (C. Tardif, *vide* RP), Chandler 10 Jan (L.P. Luce), and Matapédia 2 Feb (C. Pitre). In the south-