

*Seminole, Orange, Polk, and Miami-Dade* (v.o.); the high report of nine, in *Polk* 30 Jan (CG et al.), does not compare to the flock of 46 birds last year at L.A.R.A., where this season's high count was three 28 Feb (HR). Vesper Sparrow reports included highs of 20 at T.B.S. 31 Jan (DSi et al.) and 15 at L.A.R.A. 29 Feb (HR). The only report of a Lark Sparrow came from *Polk* 2 Jan (*fide* TP). Grasshopper Sparrows were widely distributed and in normal numbers in the peninsula; one was reported in the Big Bend at Springhill Road S.T.F. 8 Feb (GM). The secretive Henslow's Sparrow, often overlooked, was reported from the Tallahassee area (several, 17 Jan; MG), Apalachicola N.F., *Liberty* (five, 10 Dec; DoW, LS), P.P.S.P. ( $\leq 12$ , 4 Dec-1 Jan; JHi et al.), and from Santa Fe Swamp W.M.A., *Bradford* (28 Dec; D. Cimbaro). In *Pasco*, single Henslow's were seen at Withlacoochee C.P. 28 Dec, e. of Dade City 5-21 Dec (RS, AuS), and at Crews Lake C.P. 27 Dec (DRo, T. Rogers et al.). Six Le Conte's Sparrows were carefully identified at T.B.S. 22 Dec+ (K. Allen, BHA, A.&T. Mason, ph. LSA, m.ob.). Although the total number of Le Conte's was probably greater than six, the size of the fields, abundance of grasses, and large numbers of other species, especially Grasshopper Sparrows, made an accurate census of the entire area impossible. Elsewhere, single birds were reported at S.M.N.W.R. 18 Dec (*fide* K. NeSmith); H.P.M. 21 Dec and Lake City, *Columbia*, 24 Dec (JK); and P.P.S.P. 18 Dec (DoW, LS) and 1 Jan (JHi, MMA et al.). A Fox Sparrow was seen in rural *Hamilton* 18 Dec (JK), while two remained at P.P.S.P. 4 Dec-1 Jan (JHi et al.). There were only four reports of single Song Sparrows s. to *Pinellas* (RS, AuS), whereas the usually rarer Lincoln's Sparrow was reported from *Leon, Hamilton, Alachua*, and *Orange* (v.o.), with a high of three in the Tallahassee area. White-throated Sparrows continue to be scarce in the peninsula, with reports coming from *Alachua* and *Polk* only (DoW, LS, VPL). Flocks of up to 12 White-crowned Sparrows were widespread and found in *Nassau, Hamilton, Alachua, Orange, Pinellas*, and *Polk* (v.o.). Single Dark-eyed Juncos wintered s. to *Alachua*, where three were found throughout that county; even in the Big Bend only single birds were noted (GM). Up to three Blue Grosbeaks wintered at L.A.R.A. (HR). Two Painted Buntings were found n. of the species usual winter range in *Alachua* 19 Feb+ (BR, MMA). Dickcissels are rare but regular in the winter; following last summer's breeding record at L.A.R.A., it is surprising that the only report was of a bird that visited a Valrico, *Hillsborough*, feeder 2-18 Dec (SB).

Lone Yellow-headed Blackbirds wintered in *Hernando, Pasco, Polk, Osceola, Charlotte*, and *Collier* (v.o.). A report of two from *Orange* and a total of 68 Rusty Blackbirds from two locations in *Alachua* were the extent of this species invasion into the peninsula (CP, Jhi, C. Lanciani, G. Kiltie et al.). Irregular in winter, one Brewer's Blackbird was discovered at Clearwater, *Pinellas*, 26 Dec (DG, E. Haney et al.). Rare inland, a Shiny Cowbird was found in a flock of Brown-headed at a pig farm in Zellwood 11-19 Feb (KR, CP). Elsewhere, at the feeders at Briggs Nature Center, *Collier*, the only sure place to find these invaders in winter, the high count was four on 21 and 25 Feb (HM). Bronzed Cowbirds were rather widely distributed in the w. peninsula (v.o.), where reports came from *Pasco* (one), *Polk* (21), *Charlotte* (two), and *Collier* (five). Rare in winter, a hatch-year male Orchard Oriole wintered at L.A.R.A. (JeB et al., HR). In the peninsula the House Finch is invading not only from the n. but from presumed escapes in s. Florida. From the north, a female found its way to e. of Dade City 21 Dec (AuS, RS, BAH et al.) for the 2nd county report; four at Haines City, *Polk*, 15 Feb were presumably from the south (A.&H. Wheaton). The only Pine Siskin reported was one at Cedar Key 1 Feb (DaH, B. Lever).

**Contributors:** We thank the F.O.S. Field Observations Committee for sharing many reports: Bill Pranty, chairman, Linda Cooper, Gail Menk, Peggy Powell, Rex Rowan and Ron Smith. We also thank those who submitted observations whether included or not. Observers cited by initials only are Brian Ahern (BAh), Larry Albright (LaA), Ken Allen (KeA), B. H. Anderson (BHA), Lyn Atherton (LSA), Steve Backes, Gian Basili, Brad Bergstrom (BBe), Wes Biggs, Bill Boeringer (BBo), Jeff Bouton (JeB), Dave Bowman, John H. Boyd, Pat Burns (PBu), Jim Cavanagh (JCa), Roger Clark (RoC), Lloyd Davis, Kathy & Terry Doyle, Jack Dozier, Susan Epps, Paul Fellers, Judy Fisher, Murray Gardler, Chuck Geanangel, Dave Goodwin, Al Hansen, Bev Hanson, Dale Henderson (DaH), John Hintermister (JHi), Harry Hooper (HaH), Judi and Larry Hopkins, Howard Horne (HoH), Vincent P. Lucas, Lorne Malo (LoM), Mike Manetz (MMA), Larry Manfredi (LaM), Dennis McCoy, Hugh McGuinness, Michael Meisenburg (MMe), Gail Menk, Barbara Muschlit, Carol Paine (CPa), Tom Palmer, Rich T. Paul (RTP), Cheri Pierce, Peggy Powell, Bill Pranty, Kurt Rademaker, Susan Rallo, Bryant Roberts, Don Robinson (DRo), Harry Robinson, Rex Rowan, Lillian Saul, Earl Scales, David Simpson (DSi), Austin Smith (AuS), Ron Smith, Ken Tracey, Juan Villamil, Noel Wamer (NOW), Doug Wassmer (DoW), Ray Webb (RaW).



# ontario



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**T**he weather this year was mild until mid-January, very cold until mid-February, and then moved into an unusually early spring. From 1997 through Feb 2000, precipitation was 10-15% less than usual in Ontario, resulting in record-low water levels in the Great Lakes. Late departures in December and early arrivals in February were once again the order of the day. Lester Pearson airport in Toronto and most other Ontario weather reporting stations recorded their 28th consecutive month with above-average temperatures. Winter finches and owls were scarce, but a few exceptional rarities in the Toronto-Hamilton region more than made up for it.

**Abbreviations:** Pelee (*Pt. Pelee N.P. and vicinity, Essex*); P.E.Pt. (*Prince Edward Point, Prince Edward*), Algonquin (*Nipissing*), Presqu'île (*Northumberland*), and Rondeau (*Kent*) are Provincial Parks. C.A. refers to a conservation area.

### LOONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

Red-throated Loon reports were plentiful: three in Hamilton Harbour 7 Dec (KAM), where one remained until 9 Jan (RZD, BNC); Kingston had three with one on 8 Jan at P.E.Pt. (JHE, RDW) being record-late. Even better was the Pacific Loon seen off Wolfe I. 19 Dec (GFV, RDW). There were 10 Horned Grebes at Fifty Point 9 Jan (KAM, WGL, GMN), and four more in Hamilton Harbour 24 Feb (RZD et al.). A Red-necked Grebe remained in Hamilton Harbour 16–24 Feb (BKW et al.); unusually far n. was the individual at Deer Bay on Buckhorn L. (PB) 10 Dec. An Eared Grebe (JF, HK) discovered 21 Dec was enjoyed by many as it remained at Humber Bay East in Toronto until 12 Jan. Singles were also at Chippewa on the Niagara River 31 Dec (SS, DD), at Marathon 21 Dec 21 (KW), and Erieau 8–11 Jan (JB, SC).

A female light-morph **Northern Fulmar** was found lying in the snow 5 Jan by a non-birder in Aurora and taken to a rehab center. It was found to have a broken clavicle and was therefore euthanized. This will provide a first record for the Toronto Region, if accepted. An adult Great Cormorant in Port Credit harbour 19 Feb (DEP) was joined next day by an immature. Both birds favored a prominent perch on the mast of a sunken ship, and remained to 29 Feb. Remarkable so far n. was the Great Blue Heron seen at Atikokan 7 Dec (DHE). The number of Black-crowned Night-Herons wintering in Toronto continues to increase with a maximum of 13 on 8 Jan (RS).

The Lake Ontario Mid-winter Waterfowl Inventory (Table 1) was conducted 9 Jan. The 457,813 waterfowl counted were a record by 180,571 in the 10 years that a census has been taken of the Canadian shoreline of Lake Ontario. The 64,763 waterfowl in the Toronto area was a record by 8186 in the 54-year history at that location. There were record numbers in the overall count for Canada Goose, Am. Black Duck, Mallard, Redhead, scaup, and Long-tailed Duck. Numbers were high for White-winged Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, and Bufflehead. The majority of Long-tailed Ducks and Com. Mergansers were at the e. end of the lake, but Hamilton at the w. end had the highest

numbers of scaup and Com. Goldeneyes. Tundra Swans are increasingly tending to overwinter in s. Ontario. An example would be the 6200 on the Blenheim CBC Also counted there were 4000 Am. Coots. A Richardson's (Canada) Goose at Hillman Marsh 5 Feb (AW) provided a first winter record for Pelee. Fifteen other Richardson's were seen on the Thames R. at London 23 Jan (P&DB). A Greater White-fronted Goose was on Wolfe I. 19 Dec–5 Jan (RKF et al.). The Ross's Goose at Toronto's Humber Bay Park remained until 3 Dec (GC). A flock of 134 N. Shovelers at Hamilton Harbour 26 Dec (AW) were exceptional for the date. A flock of 800 early migrant Canvasbacks was seen at Hamilton 27 Feb (RZD, BNC). A female Com. Eider was off Stoney Creek 24 Dec (RC, JO, m.ob.). King Eiders were also present there, but the female at Cobourg 1–10 Dec (m.ob.) was exceptional for that area. Harlequin Ducks were again thinly scattered around the s. Great Lakes, totaling more than a dozen. The 102 Surf Scoters at Rondeau 6 Jan (SC, JTB) were exceptional for that locality. Single Barrow's Goldeneyes turned up at P.E.Pt. (RW, JE), Ivy Lea Bridge, Ft. Erie, Barcovan, and Toronto, in addition to the two at Ottawa. A flock of 2100 Com. Mergansers (RT) remained until freeze-up 18 Dec at L. Nipissing.

### RAPTORS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

The Grimsby Raptor Watch got off to an exceptionally early start with 250 raptors, including 224 Red-tailed Hawks counted 29 Feb. At Atikokan, 19 Bald Eagles remained to 19 Dec (DHE), and in Fort Frances another 23 were counted the day before (DHE). The only Gyrfalcon in the s. was one at Richmond Hill 17 Dec (NM). Others were present farther n., with one at Sault Ste. Marie and two at Thunder Bay.

According to Ontario government biologist Ron Pittaway, the highest-ever count of 118 Ruffed Grouse on the Algonquin CBC was likely the result of the mild dry spring in 1999, which led to a high chick-survival rate. The highest numbers in winter are found in areas with large groves of aspen where they feed upon the buds in late afternoon. If there is a cyclical pattern in Ruffed Grouse populations, it has been too weak to be discerned. A few N. Bobwhite are being reported from the Curt Cousin C.A. in s. London, but they are likely escapees. A Virginia Rail at Aldershot (m.ob.) remained from 28 Jan+. A Sora at Port Hope (RF et al.) seen 5–19 Jan (MW) was equally unusual.

Killdeer lingered to 18 Dec at Adolphustown (JHE, RDW) and returned early, e.g., 24 Feb at Kingston. One remained 1 Jan–22 Feb in Wheatley Harbour, to furnish the second overwintering record for Pelee. A Sanderling on the Cedar Creek CBC was a good find. Only two Purple Sandpipers were above Niagara Falls (JI) 2 Dec, and these both soon disappeared. Another was at Cobourg Harbour 30 Dec–2 Jan (CEG, m.ob.). A pair at Erieau (JTB et al.) remained to 9 Jan. American Woodcocks were among the first spring migrants, one at P.E.Pt. was record-early. A Com. Snipe at Atikokan 26 Dec (DHE) was the first there in winter in almost 30 years.

A Pomarine Jaeger and three Parasitics were at Van Wagner's Beach 14 Dec (JO) in a powerful e. wind. Two others were blown off L. Ontario to nearby Burlington lakeshore (RC) the same day. There were two Parasitics at Kettle Pt. 10 Dec (A&MR) and another at Sarnia 26 Dec. A second-basic Laughing Gull was at Adam Beck, Niagara, 5 Jan (DD). An adult Black-headed Gull at Queenston 20 Feb (CE) was joined by another a few weeks later. A Bonaparte's Gull at Wolfe I. 25 Jan (RS, EC) was the latest ever for Kingston. At Colpo Bay there were still 20 on 25 Dec (JJ) Before 1995 this species was rarely seen in winter in the Bruce peninsula. An albino first-year Ring-billed Gull was at Sunnyside in Toronto 25 Feb (RY). California Gulls continued their late fall Niagara appearances in recent years, with an adult at Adam Beck (MK). One was as late as 6 Jan and there was another the same day above the falls (MK). A third-winter bird was at Adam Beck 1 Jan (WD, SS). One was at Port Weller on the CBC 19 Dec (RZD et al.) Gull peak numbers at Niagara are now 2–3 weeks later than a decade ago. Iceland Gulls reached a high of 12 on 8 Jan (DD) at Adam Beck and Lesser Black-backed totaled five the same day. At the foot of Polson St on the Toronto waterfront, the first-basic **Heermann's Gull** remained 14 Nov (BM) to 29 Feb, with two side trips to Hamilton (in March). Local birders fed it fish by hand to help it through the harsh winter. Despite its smaller size, this feisty gull defended its food items vigorously and successfully against all comers. At the same Polson St location, counts ran as high as 34 Glaucous Gulls 6 Feb (BY), 17 Iceland Gulls 23 Feb (JI et al.), one Thayer's Gull and one Lesser Black-backed Gull. An imm. **Ivory Gull** was seen by a lucky few in the Toronto area. It was first spotted at Toronto's Leslie Spit at 1330 EST on 23 Jan (JE *vide* JI), then Humber Bay Park (TH *vide* JI) at 1500, and

**Table 1. Mid-winter waterfowl count results, Lake Ontario Ontario 9 Jan 2000. A total of 40 species was recorded. There were also 37 Bald Eagles tallied.**

SPECIES	TOTAL
Red-throated Loon	2
Common Loon	7
Pied-billed Grebe	1
Horned Grebe	31
Red-necked Grebe	3
Eared Grebe	1
Double-crested Cormorant	29
Greater White-fronted Goose	1
Snow Goose	6
Canada Goose	34,907
Tundra Swan	156
Trumpeter Swan	40
Mute Swan	327
Wood Duck	6
Gadwall	1760
American Wigeon	102
American Black Duck	3355
Mallard	25,685
Am Black Duck x Mallard	19
Northern Shoveler	36
Northern Pintail	75
Green-winged Teal	34
Canvasback	74
Redhead	5944
Ring-necked Duck	46
Greater Scaup	37,417
Lesser Scaup	4730
scaup sp	22,550
King Eider	1
Harlequin Duck	3
Surf Scoter	171
White-winged Scoter	11,150
Black Scoter	5
Long-tailed Duck	228,725
Bufflehead	6569
Common Goldeneye	27,769
Barrow's Goldeneye	1
Hooded Merganser	102
Common Merganser	11,049
Red-breasted Merganser	1845
merganser sp.	2211
Ruddy Duck	62
duck sp	30,603
American Coot	203
TOTAL WATERFOWL	457,813

finally at Bronte Harbour at 1600 (GC) where it went to roost. Next morning the bird was gone.

The Niagara River has had more than its share of unusual hybrid gulls and Herring Gull subspecies of distant origin. To date, Yellow-legged Gull has escaped detection in Ontario and is considered a likely candidate to be added to our provincial list. A gull was observed 8 Jan that was slightly larger than the average Herring, with considerable head streaking, a slightly darker mantle, and a bright yellow bill with a rectangular red gonys spot. The bill was deeper and slightly shorter than those of

the nearby Herring Gulls. The irides were chrome yellow, the orbital ring was red, and the black on the primaries was extensive. There was one small mirror on p10 and three primary tips extended beyond the tail. From the resulting Internet discussion, it was learned that only Atlantic populations of Yellow-legged Gull would show head streaking at this date and that Baltic races of the Herring Gull or hybrid Lesser Black-backed x Herring were both possibilities given the description. The issue remains unresolved.

The same easterly gale 14 Dec that produced the jaegers was responsible for an all-too-brief sighting of an **Ancient Murrelet** 80 meters offshore by RC at Burlington, providing the fifth record for Ontario and the third in the past decade.

**OWLS THROUGH FINCHES**

Owls were scarce again this winter as meadow vole populations remained exceptionally low. Great Gray Owl sightings were few in the south. One bird returned to Mara Township of *Simcoe*, where it eluded most birders. Two were in the Bancroft area 28 Jan–12 Feb (m.ob.). Boreal Owls were seen no farther s. than Algonquin Park 26 Feb (RT) and sw. of Tobermory in early Jan.

Three-toed Woodpeckers were present in their usual small numbers. A female was at Spruce Bog Trail in Algonquin Park 20 Feb (PM) and it, or another, was there 26 Feb (PS, MA). Three were observed at various times in a grove of recently dead tamaracks n. of Apsley (BF). An oddity was the “pure white” Blue Jay at Downie (TF). Common Ravens are venturing farther s. each year. This year’s reports include two n. of Bowmanville 29 Jan (EA, m.ob.), two near Bewdley 16 Feb (FH), and another at Palgrave C.A. (PG) 15 Jan which was believed to have spent the winter there again. Boreal Chickadees occasionally wander south, so three at a feeder near Coldwater (CC) were not too surprising. Another was at Cold Springs, *Northumberland* (AG) to 9 Dec. A Marsh Wren spent the winter near the n. platform at Cranberry Marsh (m.ob.). The Long Point CBC turned up the only Blue-gray Gnatcatcher of the winter.

The male Mt. Bluebird first reported last fall continued to be seen in company with 2–3 E. Bluebirds near Fisher’s Glen throughout the winter. Its range extended several km along Front St., so it was often difficult to find. A female was at Warton 19 Dec (JJ, EM) and another with three Eastern Bluebirds was a few km from P.E.Pt. 22–9 Feb (JHE, BR etal.).

Townsend’s Solitaire sightings this winter each lasted only a few moments. One was seen briefly at the entrance to Kortright, York, 3 Dec (DS), seen very briefly, and another at Tilden Woods at Pelee (DM) in early Dec. Another was on the Long Pt. CBC 18 Dec (RR, EC) on concession 3, but like the others, it could not be refound. This bird was a first for the Long Point region. One s. of Thunder Bay was better behaved, remaining from 26 Dec–5 Jan (*vide* NE). Truly remarkable was the Wood Thrush at 12 Cluny Dr. in Toronto on 26 Dec (RT). The bird appeared to be injured and may have fallen prey to a fox. Varied Thrush is another western rarity that managed to avoid most birders’ lists. A male wintered in Sault Ste. Marie, another in Blind R., and yet another spent the winter at Thunder Bay, but these sites are far from the populous south.

Bohemian Waxwings were widespread and present in big numbers. They were seen as far s. as Rondeau P.P. 30 Jan (BM). Flocks as large as 700 were at Lakefield 9 Jan (FH, J&JT). At Kingston, a peak of 2000 was recorded 13 Feb. Except for Yellow-rumped, warbler reports were scarce. Noteworthy was the Pine Warbler 1 Dec (HK) at the Donwoods Institute in Toronto. A Black-and-white Warbler was found on the London CBC The Baltimore Oriole on the Ottawa CBC was the only representative of that species in Ontario this winter. A female W. Tanager was discovered on the South Peel CBC (GE) at the Shell Woods (soon to be a subdivision), and was subsequently seen by hundreds through to 12 Jan. Eastern Towhees included one at a feeder at Arkona (PC), another in North Bay late Dec and early Jan, and one near Wesleyville 17 Nov–3 Feb. Two others farther n. were at Sault Ste. Marie 18–20 Dec (MR) and Marathon 19–24 Dec (CV, PC). Spotted Towhees have been reported almost annually since they were taxonomically split from Easterns five years ago; one wonders how many passed unnoticed in the years before 1995. This year’s was a male at Lynde Shores C.A. in Whitby 1 Dec–10 Feb (BH), a first for the Durham region. Western Meadowlarks are becoming scarce at any season in s. Ontario, so one n. of Bowmanville 15–23 Feb (MB, m.ob.) was exceptional.

Savannah Sparrows included singles at Seacliff 30 Jan (AW), Brantford airport 16 Jan (WL), the U. of Guelph arboretum 28 Jan–6 Feb (CEa), Dundas 18–29 Feb (BW, m.ob.), Wolfe I. 19 Dec (DW, JR), Turkey Point 21 Jan (JMH, DG), and Bird Studies Canada in Port Rowan. The only Lincoln’s Sparrow was

at Ernest T. Seton Park in Toronto 14–15 Jan (JE, *fide* GC), to the delight of Toronto's avid winter listers. An imm. Harris's Sparrow was at a feeder near Elizabethville 31 Jan (AP). A female Rose-breasted Grosbeak was at Marathon in late Jan (CV, PC). A total of four reports of Brewer's Blackbirds was above average. One was at Branchton 19 Dec (WR), one was in company with Rusties was at Port Colborne 22 Jan (GL), and another was at Kleinburg 23 Jan (JL). Purple Finches, like most of the winter finches, were scarce. At Kingston they were regular until 19 Dec, then there were none until they began to return 23 Feb at P.E.Pt. (RSp). A special treat for s. Ontario birders was provided by the mixed flocks of the crossbills in the European larches near Cranberry Marsh: up to 10 Reds and 12 White-wingeds were approachable and there was a high proportion of males.

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