

# western great lakes



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For the third consecutive year the Region had mild conditions during the winter. It was particularly mild in the beginning of the season, the first two weeks of December, and the end of the season, the last two weeks of February. The only truly winter weather, with average amounts of snow and colder temperatures, occurred during the last two weeks of January through the first two weeks of February. Although most inland lakes froze during parts of the season, the Great Lakes remained virtually ice-free throughout.

The mild conditions resulted in a good number of species throughout the Region that lingered into January, while the early arrival of spring brought many migrants back early. Rarities, however, were "few and far between." Minnesota had the most notable reports, including Curve-billed and Sage Thrashers. In Michigan, a Black Vulture was an exceptional find, as was a Pomarine Jaeger. All three states had average numbers of irruptive species during the season.

**Abbreviations:** MBRC (*Michigan Bird Records Committee*).

## LOONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

In Michigan Red-throated Loons were reported from *Berrien*, *Muskegon*, and *Ottawa*, while in Wisconsin they were seen in *Manitowoc*, *Ozaukee*, and *Madison*. An

emaciated **Pacific Loon** in Minnesota was rehabilitated and released, but unfortunately later died (JC). It provided a first winter record for the state. Pied-billed Grebes returned early to Minnesota, with the first arriving 27 Feb in *Washington* (KB); there are only three Feb dates in the prior 20 years. Record-late in Wisconsin was an Eared Grebe 5–16 Dec in *Oconto* (AS et al.). Michigan had a rare winter report of Am. Bittern 11 Dec at Pt. Mouillee, *Monroe* (KO), but even more astounding was a **Least Bittern** 18 Dec in *Washtenaw* (RW), pending MBRC review. In Minnesota an imm. Black-crowned Night-Heron was reported through 19 Dec in Bloomington, *Hennepin* (SC, TT et al.). Michigan also reported this species 1 Jan in *Wayne* (*vide* JC). Perhaps the best bird of the season in Michigan was a **Black Vulture** seen 8 Dec in *Grand Traverse* (JW); the record was accepted by the MBRC. Turkey Vultures lingered well into the winter in Michigan and returned to all three states by late Feb. Late records were particularly noteworthy in Minnesota, which had its first-ever convincing February record 26 Feb in *Goodhue* (Abo).

A Greater White-fronted Goose that overwintered at Fergus Falls (SM, DM) provided the first such record in Minnesota in 20 years. Also exceptional in that state were 802 migrant Greater White-fronteds 25–29 Feb, with reports from 12 s. counties. Wisconsin had an exceptional migration as well, with 300+ found at Arlington ponds in *Columbia* and *Dane* 25 Feb into March. Michigan had a few reports, including two

at Willow SP, *Wayne*, 5 Dec (WP) and one at Sterling SP, *Monroe*, 1 Jan (AC) as well as CBC records. Snow Geese also made a good showing in Minnesota, with 3019 reported during 25–29 Feb from 12 counties, including an early n. report of 27 on 26 Feb at Sax-Zim bog, *St. Louis* (MA). A flock of 75 Ross's Geese 27 Feb in *Jackson* (PJ) was a record-early date for Minnesota as well as the largest flock ever recorded in that state. Also record-early were 25 on 27 Feb in *Nobles* (PJ); another was seen 26 Feb in *Lac Qui Parle* (RS) and one wintered 29 Dec–30 Jan+ in *Olmsted* (m.ob.). Wisconsin also eclipsed its earliest arrival for Ross's Goose, with five 26 Feb in *Columbia* and *Dane* (TW et al.); two were seen 27 Feb near Shiocton, *Outagamie* (MP et al.). A **Brant** 27 Feb in *Columbia* and *Dane* provided an unusual winter/early spring record in Wisconsin (CH et al.). Trumpeter Swan numbers continue to swell. Minnesota reported 400 at Monticello, *Sherborne*, and *Wright* (KB), and Wisconsin had 46 at Hudson. An impressive number of Tundra Swans remained late in Wisconsin, including 10,840 on 6 Dec in the Upper Mississippi River N.W.R. (EN). Both dabbling and diving ducks overwintered in good numbers throughout, and spring migrants arrived early and in force. Notable reports included 92 N. Pintails in *Otter Tail* 27 Feb (DM, SM), a large number that early at such a northern Minnesota site. Wisconsin highlighted a very early Blue-winged Teal 28 Feb in *Jefferson* (KH). Also noteworthy in that state was a report of 60,000 Canvasbacks 6 Dec at the Upper Mississippi N.W.R. (EN). Minnesota birders were disappointed to find that a potential first state record Tufted Duck at the Blue L. sewage plant in *Scott* was an escaped female from an aviculture collection. Minnesota birders should be complimented for their persistence in investigating the origin of the bird. The King Eider in Minnesota since fall lingered through 8 Dec near Grand Marais, *Cook* (KB, et al.). Michigan reported up to six Harlequin Ducks overwintering at *Muskegon* (CF, m.ob.). One was seen 2 Dec in Ludington, *Mason* (TG), and another 13 Dec near Lakeside, *Berrien* (KM). Wisconsin had a Harlequin Duck winter at Milwaukee (MK, TW, JF), while Minnesota reported one through 6 Dec at Mille Lacs L., *Aitkin* (KB, AH, PS) and three in Grand Marais through 18 Dec (*vide* DB, m.ob.). The male **Barrow's Goldeneye** present for about six winters returned to Virmond Park in Wisconsin, this year accompanied by a female, into mid-Dec.



**Rare in the East, this Townsend's Solitaire was photographed 31 Jan 2000 at Sand Dunes State Forest, Sherburne, MN. It was present 29 Jan–12 Feb. Photograph by Peder Svingen.**

#### **HAWKS THROUGH RAILS**

An extremely late Osprey was reported in Wisconsin 18 Dec at *Door* (CL, RL). Minnesota had unprecedented numbers of wintering N. Harriers, with 125 reports from 40 counties, far higher than the 20-year average of 7 individuals. A Broad-winged Hawk was record-early in Wisconsin 26 Feb in *Dane* (DT, MP). Rough-legged Hawks were reported from a record 56 counties in Minnesota, while Michigan also had an above-average number, including  $\leq 40$  on 15–16 Jan in *Chippewa* (KT), a large number that far n. in winter. Michigan had 1–2 Golden Eagles at the typical locations in *Allegan*, while Wisconsin had reports from five counties and Minnesota had a record 26 individuals from 15 counties. Merlins were reported in increased numbers in both Michigan and Wisconsin. In Michigan many of these reports were on CBCs and some may be incorrect, however, some were well-documented and suggest an increase in winter individuals. As is typical, the only Prairie Falcon reports came from Minnesota where individuals were seen 31 Dec in Otter Tail and 13 Feb in *Wilkin* (DM, SM), while another overwintered in Minneapolis for the third consecutive year. Peregrine Falcons were reported overwintering at various locations in both Michigan and Wisconsin. Gray Partridge numbers were up in Wisconsin, particularly in *Brown*. Also more numerous were Sharp-tailed Grouse in the Sault Ste. Marie area of

Michigan, where groups of up to 20 were observed. Northern Minnesota had its first winter record of Sora when one was found 18 Dec in Otter Tail (DM, SM). A Virginia Rail in Wisconsin was seen through 18 Dec in Madison (PA). Sandhill Cranes remained late in all three states and early arrivals appeared throughout the Region in Feb. Minnesota had a record-early arrival, with individuals 29 Feb at Carlos Avery W.M.A., *Anoka* (JD).

#### **SHOREBIRDS THROUGH GULLS**

Killdeer remained late in the Region and probably overwintered in all three states, while early migrants began returning by the end of Feb. Amazingly, both Michigan and Wisconsin had reports of **Lesser Yellow-legs**. In Michigan, two were seen 2 Dec in Washtenaw (MJ, DC, et al.), while another two were seen 18 Dec at the Erie Power Plant, *Monroe*; one was there 1 Jan (AC). In Wisconsin, an early migrant appeared 29 Feb and remained into March at Goose Pond, *Columbia* (WH). Sanderlings lingered into January in Michigan, the latest being one at Muskegon 9 Jan (DM, KOt, PD, CF). Unprecedented for Michigan were overwintering Purple Sandpipers at Muskegon, where a maximum total of 14 birds was seen 8 Jan (KM, JG, et al.). Also in that state were three Purple Sandpipers 7 Dec at Holland SP, *Ottawa* (FS), and one 6 Dec (DSt) and two 8 Dec (TWe, GB) at Point Mouillee, *Monroe*. Wisconsin had a Purple Sandpiper 5–6 Dec at Milwaukee

(MK) and one through 17 Dec at Sheboygan (DBr, MB). Dunlins were record-late in Michigan, the latest being two at Pt. Mouillee, *Monroe*, 24 Jan (WP). Common Snipe and Am. Woodcock returned to both Minnesota and Michigan by late February.

Exceptional for Michigan was a sub-adult **Pomarine Jaeger** 3 Jan at Port Huron, *St. Clair* (AB, ST); the record is pending review by the MBRC. Little Gulls lingered late in Michigan this season, with one to 18 Dec at Holland (LB), two to 9 Jan in Muskegon (CF), and one to 24 Dec at New Buffalo, *Berrien* (DVi). Bonaparte's Gulls also remained well into Jan in Michigan in above-average numbers. Unusual for Minnesota were overwintering Ring-billed Gulls in the ne. portion of the state adjacent to L. Superior. All three states reported average numbers of Thayer's and Iceland Gulls. Michigan had a maximum of nine Lesser Black-backed Gulls in *Monroe* (AB), with smaller numbers from seven other counties. Wisconsin had one in Madison through mid-Dec and another at Milwaukee 8 Jan (m.ob.). Minnesota had up to two ad. Lesser Black-backed Gulls at Black Dog Lake, *Dakota*, 19 Dec (AH). Minnesota reported a single first-winter Great Black-backed Gull 13 Dec at Knife River, *Lake* (PS). In Wisconsin, a first-winter Nelson's Gull (Herring  $\times$  Glaucous) was reported 7 Dec (KB) at the Superior landfill, while a second-winter was seen the same day in Minnesota at Duluth (KE, KB); the latter bird was seen again at the Superior Landfill and finally at Duluth 18 Dec (KB, PC, DB). **Black-legged Kittiwakes** were seen in Michigan 27 Dec at New Buffalo, *Berrien* (AB, PC); an adult was seen at close range 9 Jan at Muskegon (DMc, KOt, PDe).

#### **DOVES THROUGH THRUSHES**

**Eurasian Collared-Doves** overwintered in Minnesota in New Ulm, *Brown* (*vide* AH) and at Willmar, *Kandiyohi* (RF), while two remained to 18 Dec at Fairmont, *Martin* (BB, EB). Snowy Owls were scarce throughout the Region. Only Minnesota reported N. Hawk Owl this season, where an average number of 10 was seen in the traditional locations in *Aitkin*, *St. Louis*, and *Lake*. Also average were the 33 Great Gray Owl reports from eight Minnesota counties. Wisconsin had a single Great Gray reported from 2–3 Jan at Fort McCoy, *Monroe* (DK). Minnesota reported near-record numbers of Long-eared Owls: 40 individuals from eight counties. Michigan also had better numbers of this species with reports from

six counties. Minnesota had a record high for Short-eared Owls with 28 reports from 10 counties. In Michigan a Short-eared Owl nest was discovered with two warm eggs 15 Feb at Pt. Mouillee (KF). Not only was the early egg date unusual (perhaps a record), but Short-eareds are also extremely rare nesters in the state. Minnesota reported Boreal Owls calling in *Lake* as early as late Jan (FN). A nocturnal owl census 28 Feb along Stoney R. Forest Rd., *Lake*, Minnesota, recorded two Boreals, two Great Grays, two Long-eareds, and 13 N. Saw-whet Owls (AH, PS). Michigan had an above-average number of saw-whet reports in the south.

A Red-bellied Woodpecker 21 Feb in *Menominee* (JS) was n. of normal in Michigan. Six Three-toed Woodpeckers in their traditional n. locations in Minnesota were considered above-average, but even rarer was a female in Michigan 18–19 Feb in *Baraga* (JY, LM), where the species is casual at best. Black-backed Woodpeckers were seen in record numbers in Minnesota, with 30 found in 10 counties; both Michigan and Wisconsin reported average numbers. Michigan and Minnesota had above-average numbers of N. Shrikes. Wisconsin reported above-average numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches in the s. part of the state. Far s. of normal in Michigan was a report of a Boreal Chickadee 7 Jan in *Kent* (BM). Rare in Minnesota were reports of four Carolina Wrens: one wintered at Battle L., *Otter Tail* (EE, m.ob.), one in Fredenburg Township, *St. Louis* (*fide* KE) late Nov–15 Jan, and one each at St. Louis Park (AH) and Bloomington 18 Dec (both *Hennepin*). Wisconsin reported the species to be scarcer than normal this season. Exceptional in Minnesota were two Marsh Wrens 3 Dec at Frontenac, *Goodhue* (KB), and another 16 Jan at the Minnesota River Valley N.W.R., *Hennepin* (TT); there were only six previous winter records for the state. Minnesota reported the only Townsend's Solitaires, individuals 2 Dec at Sax-Zim bog, *St. Louis* (AH), 29 Jan–12 Feb at Sand Dunes SF, *Sherburne* (ABi, m.ob.), and two on the Grand Marais CBC 18 Dec (*fide* JK). Wisconsin had five reports of Varied Thrush and Minnesota had eight, including a first county record for *Blue Earth* 24 Jan in Mankato (MF).

#### MIMIDS THROUGH FINCHES

Unexpected in Wisconsin was a Gray Catbird feeding with robins and waxwings 21 Jan in *Kewaunee* (MP). In Michigan, a Brown Thrasher 20 Dec–13 Jan in *Grand Traverse* (LG) and another 9 Jan in *Marquette* (LT) were both n. of normal. A **Curve-billed**

**Thrasher** which wintered at a feeder in Breckenridge, *Wilkin*, (CB, m.ob.) provided Minnesota its 3rd state record, while a **Sage Thrasher** 20 Feb–4 Mar in Edina, *Hennepin* (RJ, et al.) was the state's 8th. Late in Michigan was an Am. Pipit 27 Dec in *Ottawa* (CP); Wisconsin had only its 2nd Jan record of this species with one 7 Jan in Milwaukee (JI). Both Wisconsin and Michigan reported good numbers of Bohemian Waxwings in the n. portions of the state, with a few making it to the s. portion of Michigan. Unexpected was a **Yellow Warbler** at Port Washington 4 Dec (BF), a record-late date for Wisconsin by one month. For the third straight year Wisconsin hosted a Yellow-throated Warbler, this year at a feeder in Onalaska to 30 Dec (LMA). A third winter record for Minnesota was the Cape May Warbler 18 Dec–18 Jan in Duluth, *St. Louis* (KE, m.ob.), while a first for that state was a **Wilson's Warbler** 3–4 Dec in St. Paul, *Ramsey* (SWa, TT). Also an excellent find was a Pine Warbler 23 Jan in *Ottawa* (CPo), Michigan.

In Wisconsin a Chipping Sparrow appeared at a feeder in *Waukhara* 15 Jan (DT, et al.). A Savannah Sparrow 18 Dec on the Cottonwood CBC (PE) provided only Minnesota's 3rd winter record. Rare in Michigan were Fox Sparrows that overwintered at several locations. Wisconsin's Fox Sparrows included one that overwintered in *Dane* (KB) and three 30 Dec–1 Jan in *Ozaukee* (JF). Michigan also had an above-average number of reports of Lincoln's Sparrow, including one photographed 1 Jan in downtown Detroit (KO, JFo). Blackbirds began arriving throughout the Region in good numbers by the end of the period. A male Baltimore Oriole in Wisconsin found 19 Dec during the Chippewa Falls CBC was captured and rehabilitated two days later. One was in *Roscommon*, Michigan, 10 Dec–4 Jan (JBo). Pine Grosbeak numbers were reported as good in the n. portions of the region, but few came south. Both crossbills were found in average to below-average numbers in the n. portion of the region, although a few White-winged Crossbills made it into s. Michigan. Common Redpolls were reported in modest numbers in Minnesota and Michigan and very good numbers in Wisconsin. All three states had good numbers of Hoary Redpoll reports, including 37 from 17 counties in Minnesota, and reports from seven counties in Michigan, with a maximum of five in *Marquette* 5 Feb (LT). Pine Siskins were reported in fair to modest numbers, while Evening Grosbeaks were scarce in Michigan and Minnesota but present in good numbers in n. Wisconsin.

**Errata:** In *North American Birds* 53:389, the observer for the Piping Plover in *Lake 3* Jun should read PS not JM.

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