

# Birding Inland in Winter

For birders in Ontario, it is just a fact of birding life that birding in winter presents a greater challenge than birding in summer – and I don't just mean trying to keep your toes from freezing while you're out hiking. Ontario's fields and forests, so rich with bird-song during the summer months, become nearly vacant during the cold, dark season. The focus of birding during the winter tends to shift to coastal areas, where the open water of the Great Lakes and joining rivers, relatively quiet during the breeding season, begin to fill up with arctic migrants, ducks and geese and gulls. In the pursuit of birding bounty, it's easy to forget the joy of birding one's "home turf". The numbers may be smaller, but the rewards are just as great.

Here Pete Read and Mike Burrell mention some great locations to see birds in the interior of southwestern Ontario. If you don't live in that vicinity, however, habitats and locations similar to those they mention can still be found in your area.

An excellent way to discover some of the best sites for local winter birding is to sign up for your region's Christmas Bird Count. Participation is free for Bird Studies Canada members, or \$5 for non-members, which helps to defray administrative costs associated with organizing the event and managing the data. Usually these counts are well-attended, and experienced birders are happy to have people new to the area or to birding join them as they visit local hotspots.

## To find a count near you, visit

Bird Studies Canada's list of Ontario CBCs at: <http://www.bsc-eoc.org/volunteer/cbc/index.jsp?targetpg=compilers&lang=EN&prov=ON>

# Finding Raptors in Waterloo

By Mike Burrell

**W**hen I think of winter birding in Ontario, I think of feeder birds, waterfowl, and raptors. Unfortunately for me, where I grew up just north of Waterloo we were just a little too far south for interesting winter finches, just a little too far north for interesting wintering sparrows, and just a little too far away from any open water for waterfowl. So, perhaps naturally, I became interested in the winter birds that were around: raptors.

The agricultural fields north of Waterloo are perhaps some of the best in the province for wintering raptors. Our outings (typically a couple of hours) usually net us about 50 raptors, generally about half each of Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks, with a sprinkling of American Kestrels and the odd *Accipiter* or Merlin thrown in. The area is also an excellent one for wintering Snowy Owls. Last winter we had close to 15 individuals in our "regular" area. The Linwood Christmas Bird Count, which began a few years ago

to document the great numbers of raptors, has recorded an average of near 100 Rough-legged Hawks each year; regularly one of the best in North America. The area is also great for big Snow Bunting flocks and smaller numbers of Horned Larks and the occasional Lapland Longspur; the best way to find them is to watch for fields that the local farmers have recently spread manure on.

Our regular route through the region is sure to turn up ample numbers of hawks. Typically, we leave from our town of Heidelberg, and head towards the town of Linwood, meander a few roads to the north near the Conestogo Reservoir and return south along the Conestogo River through the fittingly named town of Hawkesville to look for the Red-shouldered Hawk that has wintered on the flood plains for the past six winters. Give it a try — I'm sure you'll find some hawks.

*Mike Burrell lives in Waterloo County and coordinates the Linwood and Kitchener Christmas Bird Counts.*



Snowy Owl / Mike Burrell