Algonquin is a great place to see birds in winter – just not very many. Relatively few kinds are present in the Park then compared to the rural and urban areas of southern Ontario where most park visitors live. About 25 to 30 species occur here regularly in late December whereas 80 to 100 can be found along the north shores of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario at that time. Features of locations farther south in the province that benefit birds during winter include: frequent lack of snow; agricultural fields with grain, corn and weed seeds; open water; fruit-bearing trees and shrubs; abundant feeders; and regularly warmer temperatures. These things are almost totally absent here. Algonquin’s winter birds have special adaptations to cope with the cold temperatures and deep snow, and are able to exploit the limited feeding opportunities that exist. Of course, the commonest avian adaptation to an Algonquin winter is to leave, and most of our birds (and park visitors!) do so by migrating southward.

Checklist and Seasonal Status of the Birds of Algonquin Provincial Park
This publication features a list of all of the bird species that have been recorded within Algonquin Park, as well as their status (e.g. common, uncommon) and the time of year when they are normally found. There is also information on specific sites to go birding and to find some of Algonquin’s specialties.

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Algonquin Park Visitor Centre (km 43)
and food is held in the crop and gradually digested throughout the night to supplement the burning of fat to keep warm. Heavy feeding again in early morning is undertaken to refill fat reserves. Most of the energy consumed from fat is used to contract the massive breast (flight) muscles as birds “shiver” to generate heat. A bird may shiver constantly throughout a very cold night. Some birds are able to utilize less energy to cope with colder temperatures by undergoing “controlled hyperthermia.” A Black-capped Chickadee can lower its body temperature at night by as much as 12°C (22°F). When the temperature falls to 0°C (32°F) at night, almost 25% of the energy needed to maintain a chickadee’s normal physiological changes as they switch from a summer diet of moss capsules,berries,insects and herbaceous plants on the ground to a winter diet of conifer needles eaten up in the trees. Studies of these birds led on Turkamane needles over 75% of the time during fall as they make the transition to the winter diet. There is a gradual increase in the length and weight of the gastrointestinal tract in fall as Spruce Grouse to a pure diet of tougher needles on conifers such as Spruce, Balsam Fir and Jack Pine, and develop the capability to digest this coarse material. Research has also shown that Spruce Grouse selectively feed on conifer needles with higher protein and ash content. Common Ravens obtain food during an Algonquin winter by scavenging, especially at wolf kills. Vagrant ravens (non-breeding birds) may fly over a huge area of up to 1,800 square kilometres looking for carcasses. When one of these scarce food resources is found, there is competition among ravens for it. A resident pair of ravens “defend” a carcass located on their territory at first. But vultures gain access to the carcass by flying through “recruiting” other vultures. The first vultures at a defended carcass give “begging calls” similar to those given by young in the nest, which reduce aggression by the resident pair and also attract any nearby vultures. Later, vultures give loud “yell calls” to attract even larger carrion-eating birds. The number of vagrant ravens reaches eight to 10 birds, the territorial pair is “overwhelmed” and the vagrants get to feed. Some birds may utilize come to Algonquin Park during the winter. Large numbers of finches such as Red Crossbills, White-winged Crossbills and Pine Siskins may be present when bumper cone crops provide abundant seed for them to eat. The crossbills may even nest here in late winter when conifer seeds are still abundant. The Great Gray Owl, Boreal Owl and Northern Hawk Owl imper Fault improperly into southern Ontario and beyond small mammal populations crash in their Boreal Forest breeding range. Some of these owls pass through Algonquin Park in late fall and Sp. Owls were observed regularly along the Highway 60 Corridor throughout the winter. Large numbers of these owls made the transition to the winter diet. There is a gradual increase in the length and weight of the gastrointestinal tract in fall as Spruce Grouse to a pure diet of tougher needles on conifers such as Spruce, Balsam Fir and Jack Pine, and develop the capability to digest this coarse material. Research has also shown that Spruce Grouse selectively feed on conifer needles with higher protein and ash content. Common Ravens obtain food during an Algonquin winter by scavenging, especially at wolf kills. Vagrant ravens (non-breeding birds) may fly over a huge area of up to 1,800 square kilometres looking for carcasses. When one of these scarce food resources is found, there is competition among ravens for it. A resident pair of ravens “defend” a carcass located on their territory at first. But vultures gain access to the carcass by flying through “recruiting” other vultures. 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Owls were observed regularly along the Highway 60 Corridor throughout the winter of 2012-2013, for example. The bottom line for Algonquin’s winter birds is that they need to be able to adapt to the cold temperatures and deep snow as long as there is an adequate supply of accessible food. Perhaps surprisingly to us, there is a remarkable diversity in the things that birds find and decide to use here in winter. This is demonstrated by the following examples of food resources and species that feed on them: tree buds (Ruffed Grouse, Pine Grosbeak); carrion (Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Common Raven); conifer needles (Spruce Grouse), herbaceous plants, fern fronds and moss capsules exposed by digging in the snow (Wild Turkey); grous and snowshoe hares (Northern Goshawk); small mammals, invertebrates and their eggs on tree bark (Brown Creeper); wood-dwelling ants and beetles (Pileated Woodpecker); wood-boring beetle larvae under conifer burk (Black-backed Woodpecker), soft-bodied invertebrates on conifers, including geometrid moth caterpillars (Golden-crowned Kinglet), conifer seeds (Red Crossbill, White-winged Crossbill); seeds of birch, alder, and weeds (Common Redpoll); and conifer and deciduous tree seeds (Evening Grosbeak). Back-feeding is a common behavior; birds in winter all along the Highway 60 Corridor but there are some areas that are particularly good for seeing them. Feeders at the Visitor Centre often provide excellent opportunities for closely observing and photographing birds such as Common Redpoll and Evening Grosbeak. Come here in winter to look for Algonquin’s boreal specialties –Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker and Boreal Chickadee– along Spruce Bog Boardwalk and the Opeongo Road. Winter finches are frequently attracted to sand and salt on the highway, so be sure to slow down and blow your horn when you see birds on the road to avoid killing them with your vehicle. Enjoy Algonquin’s winter birds!