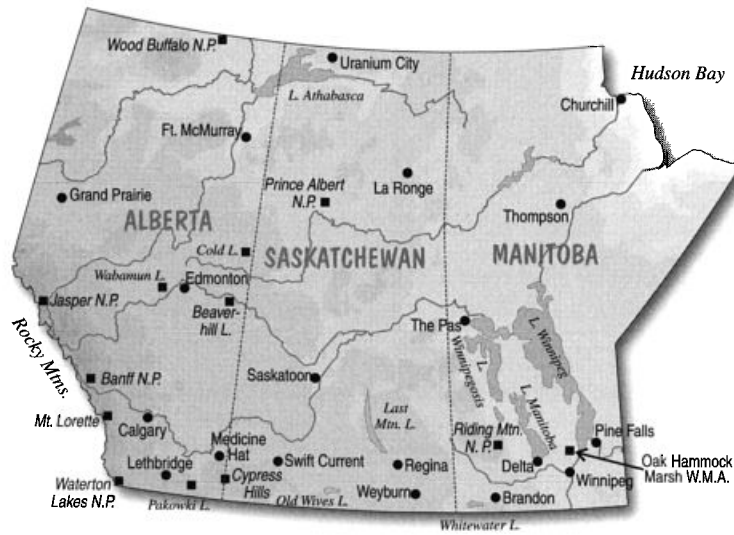


Prairie Provinces



Rudolf F. Koes

135 Rossmere Crescent

Winnipeg, Manitoba R2K 0G1

(rkoes@merlin.mb.ca)

Peter Taylor

P.O. Box 597

Pinawa, Manitoba R0E 1L0

(taylorp@granite.mb.ca)

Moderate temperatures in December and February contrasted with severe cold spells in early and late January. When long-time Saskatchewan residents use phrases like “absolutely bone-chilling” and “horrific bout of savage temperatures,” there is no doubt that there was a real cold snap! At the nadir, towards the end of January, daytime temperatures edged up toward -30° F, with overnight lows well below -40° F in many areas. Combined with substantial snow cover across much of the Region, this resulted in unexceptional birding apart from the high visibility of Gray Partridges and Sharp-tailed Grouse.

GREBES THROUGH WOODPECKERS

A Pied-billed Grebe remained at Henderson

L., Lethbridge, AB through 16 Jan, accompanied by an Eared Grebe until 27 Dec (D&TD, WG). There were at least 5 Great Blue Herons in Alberta in early winter, the latest being at Calgary 10 Jan (PS et al.) and High River 12 Jan (KWa).

Relatively few waterfowl were reported after the C.B.C. period. Highlights at Calgary included an overwintering Tundra Swan (m. ob.), an American Black Duck 9–12 Jan (B&TG), and a Long-tailed Duck for the 3rd consecutive winter (m. ob.). Mallard survived well at a few Manitoba locations, with 114 plus a Northern Pintail in Winnipeg 3 Mar (GH) and 10 throughout the season at Minnedosa (CC). Six Redheads were reported at Gardiner Dam, SK 20 Jan (AH). A Common Merganser somehow survived at a tiny patch of open water at St. Norbert, MB (AC).

The usual wintering Bald Eagles near Whitemouth, MB pulled out in Jan (m. ob.), while a pair was already on territory at Calgary 16 Feb (TK) and 2 early migrants passed Eden, MB 28 Feb (RD). A female or imm. male Northern Harrier was unusual just w. of Palo Siding, SK 29 Dec (GW). A Red-tailed Hawk in Regina in early Dec appeared to be preying on Rock Pigeons atop tall downtown buildings (*vide* TH). Rough-legged Hawks were scarce except in sw. Saskatchewan. It was a banner year for Gyrfalcons in s. Alberta, while one of 5 reported in Saskatchewan was an apparent window-kill in Regina. Prairie Falcon sightings included 2 near Gardiner Dam 8 & 22 Dec, and one seen frequently just n. of Winnipeg for

much of the season (D&JB, RK, m. ob.).

Many C.B.C.s reported Gray Partridges in the hundreds, while 126 were counted in three hours se. of Winnipeg 31 Jan (BN, FG), and 130+ were seen in the Craven-Lumsden, SK area 29 Feb (JC, BL). Greater Sage-Grouse are close to extirpation in Canada, so a rancher's report of 7 near Govenlock, SK in late Dec was heartening (*vide* GW). Sharp-tailed Grouse numbers were exceptional, with many three-figure totals in s. Saskatchewan and se. Alberta. In Medicine Hat, AB, they were reported “on city rooftops, in trees, on golf courses and even telephone wires” (DB). Most exciting was a report of two Greater Prairie-Chickens within a large gathering of Sharp-tailed Grouse s. of Weyburn, SK 22 Feb (CB, MB).

Exceptional in winter, a Sandhill Crane was observed at Yorkton, SK landfill 30 Dec (J&SJ, MW, BA). Even more unusual, though of uncertain origin, was a well-documented Common Crane near Leader, SK 29 Dec–8 Jan; on the last date, it was apparently killed by an imm. Bald Eagle (KW, m. ob.). Rare anywhere after early Dec, a Glaucous Gull was videotaped by a fisherman at La Ronge, SK 17–24 Jan (*vide* TH). Low Great Horned Owl numbers in s. Manitoba (CC, KG) and s. Saskatchewan (BL et al.) led to speculation about possible vulnerability to West Nile virus. Snowy Owls were also unusually scarce Regionwide, while Northern Hawk Owls and Great Gray Owls made only a modest showing. Given the snow cover and extreme cold, five Jan sightings of Short-eared Owls in s. Saskatchewan (AH, GW) were surprising. Boreal Owls staged a “mini-invasion,” with three Dec records in Calgary (*vide* MH).

Single Red-bellied Woodpeckers were present in Neu Bergthal, MB to 9 Feb or later (T&DK, *vide* AS) and just n. of Winnipeg in late Feb (RI, m. ob.). A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker found in Medicine Hat 12 Jan (BV) was unlikely to survive. Northern Flicker was one of several “half-hardy” species thought to have suffered much mortality in Jan. Pileated Woodpeckers are defi-



Rare anywhere in the Prairie Provinces in winter, this Great Blue Heron at High River on 10 January 2003 was one of five reported in Alberta during December and January. Photograph by Terry Karolyk.

nately increasing outside the boreal forest across s. Manitoba (m. ob.).

PASSERINES

Red-breasted Nuthatches thrived in the prairie city of Swift Current, SK, with 25+ in one city park 21 Feb (M&LD). Brown Creepers are making increasing use of feeders, where they glean peanut butter, suet crumbs, and sunflower seed fragments. A Winter Wren turned up at a Millarville, AB farm 31 Dec (TK). There were fewer reports than usual of both Townsend's Solitaire and Varied Thrush in Saskatchewan (*fide* BL). A Hermit Thrush survived in Brandon until at least 11 Jan (BR). Over 30 Cedar Waxwings were still in Regina 9–13 Feb (JN). Inevitably, 2 Yellow-rumped Warblers in Calgary succumbed to the late-Jan cold.

Wintering sparrows, other than Dark-eyed Juncos, were relatively scarce, with only one American Tree Sparrow reported in s. Saskatchewan. Unusually far n. were 5 Dark-eyed Juncos at Nelson House, MB 3 Feb (RB). Likewise, heavy snow cover apparently drove Lapland Longspurs s. of the border. Three Northern Cardinals were reported in Saskatchewan, with a male surviving to at



This Prairie Falcon spent most of the winter just north of Winnipeg, Manitoba (here 1 March 2004), where it fed on an abundant supply of Rock Pigeons. Rare in the province at any time of the year, it attracted numerous observers.

Photograph by Christian Artuso.

least 17 Feb at Theodore (D&CA) and a female to 22 Feb in Saskatoon (*fide* DW), and there were sightings at five s. Manitoba locations. A flock of 12 Rusty Blackbirds overwintered near Regina (JN, BL).

Over 1000 Gray-crowned Rosy Finches were reported at Exshaw, AB in early Feb (J&MM). Pine Grosbeaks irrupted farther s. than usual in Saskatchewan, while White-winged Crossbills made a good showing across most of the s. tier. Common Redpolls

were widespread in good numbers, while Pine Siskins were numerous only in Alberta. At least 16 American Goldfinches survived the Jan cold at Regina, SK (*fide* BL); flocks of 30 were noted at feeders at Gretna, Horn-dean, and Winkler throughout the winter in extreme s. Manitoba (*fide* AS). Evening Grosbeaks seem to be declining even in their main strongholds along the s. edge of the boreal forest.

Observers (provincial compilers in bold-face): Bill Anaka, Delores & Clark Anderson, Martin Bailey, Dennis Baresco, Rob Berger, Carol Bjorklund, David & James Bradley, Andy Courcelles, Jim Cummings, Calvin Cuthbert, Rick Demey, Mary Ann & Larry Dudragne, Doug & Teresa Dolman, Ken Gardner, Wietek Gierulski, Fran Giesbrecht, Bernard & Therese Goulet, Michael Harrison, Al Hartley, Trevor Herriot, George Holland, Ray Iverson, Jim & Shirley Jowsey, Ted & Darlene Klassen, Rudolf Koes, Terry Korolyk, Bob Luterbach, Joan & Malcolm McDonald, Bernie Neufeld, Jim Nordquist, Barbara Robinson, Al Schritt, Penny Smith, Ben Verner, Ken Wallace (KWa), Guy Wapple, Don Weidl, Marge Wilson, Kerry Wishko. ☺

A mild December was followed by six weeks of severe cold, when some areas of northern North Dakota and northeastern Montana saw temperatures drop to -40° F. In late January and early February, the temperature did not rise above zero for a twelve-day stretch at Minot, North Dakota. Milder temperatures returned by mid-February.

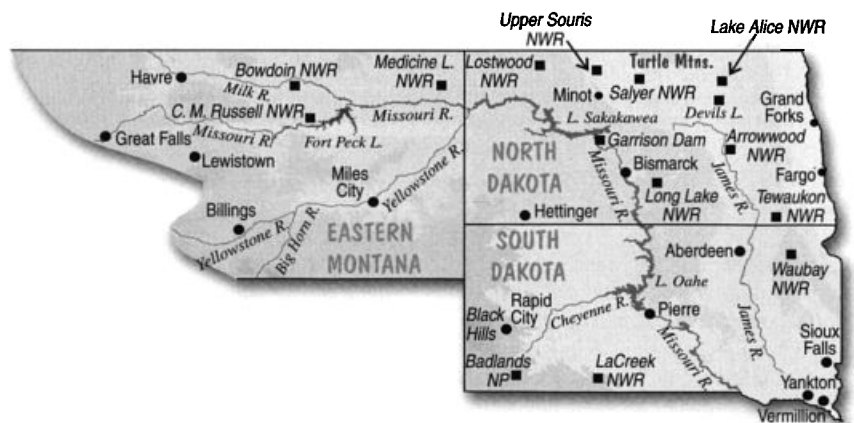
Along with the cold, some northern areas also saw record snowfall during the period, often accompanied by high winds. Two to three feet of snow cover was common in these areas. Glasgow, Montana saw a record snow season with over 150 cm. Much of the Region, however, saw snowfall closer to the long-term average.

GREBES THROUGH HAWKS

A Horned Grebe 20 Dec in Hughes, SD provided the 4th winter record for the state (KM). Also in Hughes, a Red-necked Grebe on Christmas Day furnished the 2nd winter season record for South Dakota (ph. DB). In Montana, a late Eared Grebe was noted on the Chester C.B.C. 14 Dec. The Great Blue Heron in Grand Forks, ND 12 Jan provided the latest record for the state (EEF).

Two Greater Scaup at Garrison Dam 10 Jan furnished the first Jan record for North Dakota (REM). Two Greater Scaup reports were also received for South Dakota: 2 at Yankton 6 Dec (JC) and occasionally through the period at Pierre (RDO). The 2nd

Northern Great Plains



state record Harlequin Duck first noted at Pierre, SD in the fall season remained through the winter and was enjoyed by many—"many" being a relative term in the Northern Great Plains. A Barrow's Goldeneye was in Perkins, SD 14 Dec, the 5th consecutive winter season this species has been reported in South Dakota away from the usual

Ron Martin

16900 125th Street SE

Sawyer, North Dakota 58781-9284

(jrmartin@ndak.net)