

# Idaho & Western Montana



## David Trochlell

The winter of 2005 featured unusually mild mid-season weather sandwiched between very cold periods in early December and mid-February. January 2006 was the fourth warmest January in 112 years of Idaho records and the warmest January ever recorded in Montana. Precipitation amounts varied widely across the Region, but most areas received normal or above-average precipitation for the period. Unfortunately, it was a season of few notable avian highlights, and the lack of migratory winter finches was a widespread lament. In general, Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks were few, Common Redpolls were unusually rare, and Cassin's Finches were absent. At least partly compensating for this shortfall was the Region's most significant Snowy Owl irruption in memory.

**Abbreviation:** Latilong (area encompassed by one degree latitude and one degree longitude used in mapping bird distribution in both Idaho and Montana).

## GEESE THROUGH OWLS

Unexpected in w. Montana was a Greater White-fronted Goose near Deer Lodge 15-18 Jan (NK, GSw). Very rare in winter was a Snow Goose in Flathead, MT 5 Feb (DC). A total of 5 Cackling Geese was reported in Idaho, representing only about a fourth of last winter's tally. Also weak for the Gem State was a total of only 2 Eurasian Wigeons. By contrast, Idaho's winter count of 10 Long-tailed Ducks may have set a new high record. Especially rare in winter was a Pacific Loon



A good-to-spectacular irruption of Snowy Owls was one of the many highlights of winter 2005–2006. This image of four sleepy Snowy Owls was captured on film near Pablo National Wildlife Refuge, Lake County, Montana by subregional editor Dan Casey on 7 February 2006. The roost at this site reached 29 birds in midwinter, a large concentration for any location in the United States. Photograph by Dan Casey.

near Harrison, ID 4 Feb (LH). An excellent total of 9 Gyrfalcons was recorded. Very surprising were 4 Greater Yellowlegs wintering in Gem, ID 8 Jan, but even more unusual was an unidentified dowitcher there 8 & 23 Jan (RM). Rare wintering larids were scarcer than usual, with reports of only one Mew, 3 Thayer's, 2 Glaucous-winged, and 3 Glaucous Gulls. Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to increase in their se. and s.-cen. Idaho strongholds, but new this season were 5 in Owyhee, ID 31 Dec (MC), 3 in Gem, ID 21 Feb (FZ), and 11 in Bozeman, MT 17 Dec (JP). Representing a winter latilong first was a Burrowing Owl in Cassia, ID 12 Jan (SB).

## HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH BLACKBIRDS

The only Anna's Hummingbird was one in Burley, ID that held over from last fall through 8 Dec (SP). A tardy Lewis's Woodpecker in Eureka, MT 10 Dec (LY) provided a first winter record in Latilong 1. Representing Idaho's 3rd winter record was a Williamson's Sapsucker in Valley 29 Jan (CS). Only 6 Idaho Blue Jays were reported throughout the period, providing a stark

contrast to last winter's record irruption. Single extralimital Western Scrub-Jays were noted in Lapwai (m.ob.) and Payette, ID (P&LC) during the period; and were apparently of the *californica* subspecies. Unexpected both geographically and temporally was a Northern Mockingbird in Blaine, ID 6 Dec (GS). A Swamp Sparrow was discovered near Hagerman, ID 22 Dec (*vide* BD), where they are now almost expected in winter. Rare *Zonotrichia* sparrows were scarce, with only 2 White-throated, one Golden-crowned, and 4 Harris's Sparrows noted. A record-early Western Kingbird showed up in Ada 25 Feb (MM), representing Idaho's first winter record. The only Rusty Blackbird found was near Kalispell, MT 1 Jan (LK, LW).

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**SA** The major story of the season was the unusually high, probably record-high numbers of Snowy Owls that visited the Region. At least 41 were recorded in western Montana and 9 in Idaho, whereas for the past 20 years the winter tally has averaged three reports. Most sightings occurred at a spectacular roost site near Pablo N.W.R., Lake, MT, where Snowy Owl numbers peaked at 29 in midwinter.