

# Northern Great Plains

## RON MARTIN

Fair weather characterized the first three months of the season. In response, migrants came and went quickly. Mirroring the spring, many species moved through a couple weeks later than usual. It all ended abruptly October 29 and 30 when a huge front blew unbelievable numbers of waterfowl, hawks, and cranes through the Region with mind-boggling speed. Winter descended with a vengeance, with record or near-record snow falls in November and temperatures generally 10°F below average. Readings of -20°F were recorded in several areas. The weather caught some birds by surprise, with late stragglers and lots of hurried movement in November.

Abbreviations: Observations marked with a # are subject to review by the appropriate state records committee.

## Loons to Shorebirds

Common Loons were notably scarce, but a **Red-throated Loon** Oct. 31 in *Dewey*, SD (BKH#), furnished the 4th record for that state. The *1200 W. Grebes* Aug. 23 at DeWald Slough/L. Etta in *Kidder*, ND (REM), was just one example of the successful breeding season enjoyed by most waterbirds. An Am. Bittern was late Nov. 16 at Bowdoin N.W.R., MT (DP). A

White-faced Ibis was late at McKenzie Slough, *Burleigh*, ND Oct. 17 (HCT), and a peak of >200 was noted in *Hand*, SD Sept. 8 (*vide* BKH). In Montana, two were at Medicine L., Aug. 12, where the species is rare (JW).

A "**Black**" **Brant** was found Nov. 7 at Sand Lake N.W.R., *Brown*, SD (DAT, DGP, AH#). There are about 10 previous South Dakota records. Two ad. and two imm. Brant at Big L. near Billings Oct. 24 (WR#) provided the 8th record for Montana. A flock of 60 Red-breasted Mergansers Nov. 10 at L. Audubon established a new peak for North Dakota (GBB).

Record early in North Dakota was a **Rough-legged Hawk** Aug. 2 in *Grand Forks* (EF). Merlins were noted in higher than usual numbers, with a peak of three recorded on several days in n.c. North Dakota and reports from 12 South Dakota counties. A Gyrfalcon was early in *Laurence*, SD Oct. 9 (BAS *et al.*).

Gray Partridge numbers are beginning to rebound but are still much reduced compared to the early 1990s. A Sora found dead Nov. 10 at Garrison Dam provided the first November record and the latest ever for North Dakota (REM).

Seldom seen in fall in North Dakota, a Black-necked Stilt was in *Nelson* Aug. 22 (DOL). One Short-billed Dowitcher was found at Medicine L., MT Aug. 19 (JLD, TN). There are about 20 Montana records.

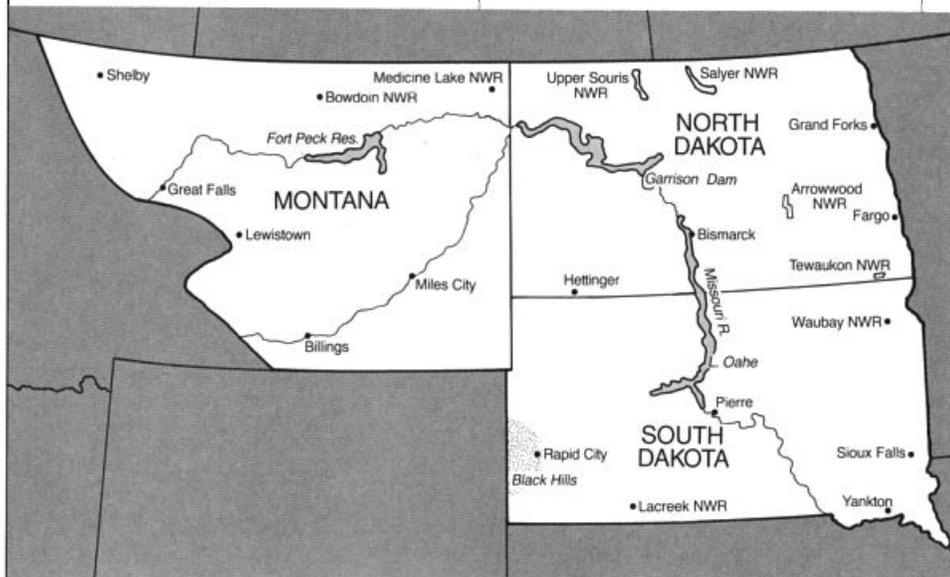
## Jaegers to Terns

By November birding activity moves toward the power plants and large lakes along the Missouri R. system. North Dakota and Montana observers have covered these larid havens for some time, and increased coverage by South Dakota observers in recent years is proving rewarding as well.

North Dakota's first and second **Pomarine Jaegers** were documented at Garrison Dam Nov. 11 & 23-24 (CDE, HCT, REM, ph. GBB#). South Dakota's 2nd record, and first since 1932, was furnished by an individual at Oahe Dam at Pierre Nov. 24-25 (DB, BKH#). A juv. **Long-tailed Jaeger** was at L. Etta in *Kidder* Aug. 24, providing North Dakota's 5th record (JLD, GBB ph.#). **Mew Gulls** were found in all 3 states. North Dakota's 6th was documented at Grand Forks Oct. 17 (EF#), Montana's 3rd at Ft. Peck Oct. 6 (CC#), and South Dakota's first at Ft. Randall Dam Nov. 30 (DS#). North Dakota's earliest-ever **Thayer's Gull** was at Garrison Dam Sept. 29, and the species peaked at *ten* there Nov. 10 (REM). The **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Garrison Dam Nov. 16-17 provided North Dakota's 3rd record (HCT, CDE#). A **Glaucous Gull** at Garrison Dam Nov. 2 was North Dakota's earliest ever (GBB). Also at Garrison Dam, North Dakota's first **Great Black-backed Gull** was documented Nov. 23 (RHO, GEN#). Single **Black-legged Kittiwakes** were at 3 South Dakota dams Nov. 14, 16, & 23 (DGP, DS, JSP, RFS, BKH#), and several were at Garrison Dam Nov. 10-29, with a peak of three Nov. 24 (REM, GBB). **Sabine's Gulls** were recorded in all 3 states. Singles were at Freeze-out L., MT Oct. 18 and Nov. 14 (MS), one was documented at Gavin's Point, SD Oct. 26-Nov. 2 (BH, DS#), and singles were at Minot, ND Sept. 27 (REM) and Garrison Dam Sept. 29 (GBB). The *400* **Forster's Terns** in *Kidder* Aug. 10 represented a new high count for North Dakota (GBB). Latest ever by 6 days were two **Forster's Terns** at Stump L., ND Oct. 28 (EF).

## Doves to Pipits

A **Eurasian Collared-Dove** was discovered Aug. 30 in *Edmunds*, SD, providing the first state record (MZ, AH, DAT, JDW, #ph.). **Snowy Owls** appeared in good numbers in early November. A N. Hawk Owl was early Nov. 10 in *Morton*, ND (BC). There are about 18 previous records. **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** were numerous in the Dakotas, and they should now probably be considered rare but regular in n.e. Montana. Singles were at Medicine L., Aug. 29 (BM), and at Ft. Peck Sept. 3 (CC). At Westby there were 20 observations of an unknown number of **Ruby-throateds** from Aug. 19-Sept. 7 (TN, JLD). A **Black-chinned Hummingbird** August-Nov. 2 in *Meade*, SD, would provide a first record for that state (EEM, BAS#). Also in South Dakota, **Calliope Hummingbirds** were reported in *Lawrence* Aug. 21 (DGP#) and in



*Edmunds* Aug. 24 (MZ, JDW#). There are <10 records for the state. Also casual in South Dakota, **Broad-tailed Hummingbirds** were in *Lawrence* Aug. 13 (DGP#) and *Butte* Aug. 13–Sept. 1 (BAS#). Completing the banner fall were Rufous Hummingbirds in *Butte*, with a single Aug. 13–Sept. 1 (BAS#) and two Sept. 6–9 (SW#). **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were at *Westby, MT* Sept. 20 and Oct. 4 (TN#). One of the birds was collected for the first verified record for the state.

One–two **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** were in *Westby* Aug. 18–27 (JLD, TN *et al.*#). A specimen was collected for the University of Montana. There was only one previous state record. Also at *Westby*, an Alder Flycatcher was seen Aug. 18; five were noted Aug. 19 in n.e. Montana (JLD). There are <20 records, but more observation may prove this to be a regular migrant in e. Montana. A bird thought to be an **Ash-throated Flycatcher** was found at *Ft. Smith, MT* Nov. 5 (WR#). There are 9 previous state records. A W. Kingbird was in *Mercer, ND* Oct. 19 (REM), the latest for the state by 25 days.

An incredible peak of 24,000 Tree Swallows was noted in n.e. North Dakota Aug. 28 (EF). Two Mt. Chickadees were far east at *Ft. Peck* Oct. 17–Nov. 30 (CC). North Dakota's 2nd **Pygmy Nuthatch** frequented a feeder in *Fargo* Oct. 15–30 (VFS *et al.*#). A **Carolina Wren** in *Mandan* Sept. 23 provided perhaps the 2nd record for North Dakota, and the first documented (CDE, HCT#). A **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** in *Oliver, ND* Oct. 6 furnished the 16th state and first October record (HCT). A peak of 310 Am. Pipits was found in n.c. North Dakota Oct. 13.

### Vireos to Goldfinches

**SA** The increased coverage of the *Westby, MT*, area this fall netted numerous notable vireo and warbler records, in addition to the various birds of eastern affinity mentioned previously. Nordhagen, who lives in *Westby* and regularly birds this area, was joined by various visitors, and a banding operation was manned by **Wright** of the University of Montana. Again, more observation may show some of these species to be of regular occurrence in n.e. Montana. Reported warbler species, all with <10 state records, included two **Chestnut-sideds**, one **Cape May**, two **Bay-breasted**, two **Mourning**, and six **Canadas**. In addition, three **Magnolias** were seen, a species with 16 previous records. Two **Philadelphia Vireos** were located for the 5th and 6th state records.

In e. North Dakota, a good movement of warblers and vireos was noted at *Fargo* Sept. 7. In c. North Dakota, the weekend of Sept. 20–22 brought a spectacular fall-out of warblers, especially considering the date. The 4 vireo and 21 warbler species observed was not only a good fall total for one weekend, but was 2–3 weeks after such numbers usually occur. Fair numbers of warblers also occurred in e. North Dakota the same weekend. Rare in fall, **Golden-winged Warblers** were in *Grand Forks* Sept. 6 (EF) and in *Morton, ND* Sept. 8 (CDE). A **Black-throated Blue Warbler** was late in *Nov. 1* (DAT).

South Dakota's second-latest **Scarlet Tanager** was in *Lincoln* Nov. 3 (RFS), and North Dakota's 15th—and first fall observation of—**Summer Tanager** was provided by a male Oct. 3 at *Minot* (REM, GBB). A **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** at *Grand Forks, ND* Nov. 3 furnished the second latest and 2nd November record for that state (EF).

The sparrow migration was late, and basically unspectacular. The only highlight was North Dakota's 4th **Golden-crowned Sparrow** at *Clark Salyer N.W.R.*, Nov. 9–30 (GAE#). Interestingly, the 3rd state record occurred at the same feeder in the spring of 1995.

**Red Crossbills** were fairly widespread, with a peak of 50 at *Denbigh Experimental Forest, McHenry, ND* Nov. 28. **White-winged Crossbills** were reported only from *Minot, ND*, and *Fort Peck, MT* (CC). Two Com. Redpolls at *Grand Forks* Sept. 25 furnished the second earliest ever observation for North Dakota (DOL). Otherwise, small

numbers of redpolls were widely reported in late October and early November in the Dakotas, but by the end of the period few could be found. **Lesser Goldfinches** made an unprecedented showing. Following the first record this spring at *Glasgow, Montana's* 2nd appeared at *Carlson's* feeder in *Ft. Peck* Oct. 16. This fall's bird was of the "green-backed" race, the spring bird a "black-backed" individual. Three reports came from South Dakota, where there were about 6 previous records: A single was noted Aug. 17 & 24 in *Butte* (BAS), two–three were in *Fall R.*, Aug. 21 (JSP), and eight–ten were in *Custer* Sept. 12 (DGP).

### Cited observers (area editors in boldface):

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Only months after the first state record, Montana's second **Lesser Goldfinch** (a male of the "green-backed" type) came to a feeder at *Fort Peck* on **October 16, 1996**. Photograph/Charles Carlson.