

# british columbia–yukon region



Remaining through the season (and photographed on December 9, 1997) was this Yellow-billed Loon in first-winter plumage at Crescent Beach, Surrey, British Columbia. Photograph/Jo Ann Mackenzie

## JACK BOWLING

All hail El Niño!! If not for a two-week cold spell which began around New Year's Eve, this would have been a record warm winter interval for almost the entire Region as the superheated ocean currents transferred their warmth to the prevailing westerlies. Even so, mild temperature records fell almost everywhere in December and February, especially inland. Precipitation was near to locally above normal on the coast, but meager inland, with the only widespread snows falling in January as the cold snap broke. The mild weather and low valley snowpacks allowed many species to linger north of their usual wintering grounds, a recurring theme in the following summary. And a couple of species from far afield showed up in unlikely places. As well, there was ample evidence that the first wave was eager to get the northbound migration underway early. And as is typical of mild

winters, Siberian rarities were few, with only a Brambling and a Great Knot.

**Abbreviations:** B.C. (*British Columbia*); Ok. (*Okanagan*); P.G. (*Prince George*); p.v. (*pending verification by responsible Bird Records Committee*); Reifel (*George C. Reifel Waterfowl Sanctuary, Ladner, s.w. B.C.*); STP (*Sewage Treatment Plant/Ponds*); Van. (*Vancouver*); Van. I. (*Vancouver I.*); Vic. (*Victoria*); Whse. (*Whitehorse*).

## LOONS TO CRANES

The young Yellow-billed Loon at Crescent Beach, Surrey, s.w. B.C., in November remained there through winter (ph. JAM, m.ob.). At least two other young Yellow-billeds frequented Van. Harbor through the period (MPR et al.). Christina L. in the W. Kootenay did not freeze over this winter, and there were 103 Horned Grebes tallied on the CBC there Dec. 28 (RW), a high total for the season. Usually about 1000 W.

Grebes winter in Nanaimo Harbor, but they were present in low numbers on the CBC Dec. 28. A Clark's Grebe frequented the side channels of the Fraser R. near Sea I., Richmond, Dec. 18–Feb. 27 (MKM, m.ob.), the 2nd consecutive winter this species has been in the area.

Two N. Fulmars and 25 Short-tailed Shearwaters were off Rose Spit, Q.C.I., Jan. 1 (MH, PH), driven closer to shore by a cold NE wind. The arrival of the New Year's cold snap pushed a Cattle Egret to desperate measures—it was apprehended Jan. 8 trying to follow passengers aboard a Vic. commuter bus (P&G Goodwill, m.ob.)! The bird was sent by aircraft to California.

While any swan would be unusual in the Yukon in winter and assumed to be a Trumpeter, such was not the case with a pair of Tundra Swans on L. Laberge Dec. 30 (†CE, †PS). A flock of seven unidentified swans was on the Yukon R., just s. of Whse., Dec. 17 (JS). Another ad. Tundra, rare at

any season on the Q.C.I., was in with a flock of Trumpeters near Tlell Feb. 7–27 (B&N Watton). In an unusual location, four Tundra Swans were at White L., S. Ok., Feb. 26 (ILR). An **Emperor Goose** was at the Chain Islets off Vic. Dec. 21 (RWC), the 2nd consecutive winter one has been seen on Van. I. Brant liked the waters around the Q C I., with two CBCs tallying new record-high numbers: 37 at Masset Dec. 20, and 483 at Sandspit Dec. 27.

The eight Am. Black Ducks on the Nanaimo CBC Dec. 28 suggest that the species is holding on in their introduced environment. Mallards are rare but now regular wintering birds in specific Yukon locations. A flock of 10 at McIntyre Wetlands on the Dec. 26 Whse. CBC (CE) increased to 19 Jan. 31 (HG); nine were there Feb. 28 (JMcC, PN). In with the mallards Dec. 26 was a female **Northern Pintail**, providing a first Yukon documented winter record (†CE). This bird lingered through Feb. 22, surviving the early January cold snap into the -40°s F. There were no winter records of Am. Wigeon for the Upper Arrow Lakes area of the W. Kootenay, until two were spotted on the Fauquier CBC Dec. 27 (GSD), and two more at Nakusp Jan. 10 (GSD). Tufted Ducks returned to Lost Lagoon in Van.'s Stanley Park with a female Dec. 3–Feb. 10 (MPr, m.ob.) and a male Feb. 16 through the period (MPr, m.ob.). This is likely the same male seen there the previous 3 winters.

An incredible sky-darkening flyby of 15,000–20,000 Lesser Scaup over Lost Lagoon in Van.'s Stanley Park occurred at 4 p.m. Jan. 31 (MPr); half settled onto the lagoon, while the other half continued onward. The young male **Common Eider** present in Van. nearshore waters area since fall 1996 remained in the area through the period (m.ob.). An ad. male **King Eider**, the Region's potential 14th and the first since 1986, spent Dec. 21–Jan. 1 off Gartley Rd. in Royston (p.v., BMS, m.ob.). Two female-plumaged Harlequin Ducks at Castlegar Jan. 18 (LM), and another on the Ok. R. at Ok Falls Feb. 26 (RJC), added to a handful of winter interior records. The 138 Barrow's Goldeneye on the Port Clements CBC Jan. 3 (C. French, MH, PH, SS) furnished a new high winter count for Graham I. Also on the Q.C.I., a female Ruddy Duck at Masset Nov. 17–Dec. 29 (MH, PH, SS) provided only the 4th record for the archipelago.

Several Turkey Vultures found easy pickings through the period on s. Van. I. On Feb. 3, three were eyeing a deer carcass near Ft. Rodd Hill, Vic. (R Shortinghouse) The

51 Bald Eagles at Veeken's Poultry Farm, s.e. of P.G., Feb. 28 (CA, JB) represented a record-high single-location winter tally for the local checklist area. Ten Bald Eagles were noted along the Kettle R. from Midway to Beaverdell Feb. 28 (GSD). New for winter in the Nakusp area were N. Harriers: a male Dec. 2 (GSD), an unaged bird on the Fauquier CBC Dec. 27 (JP), and a female type on the Nakusp CBC Jan. 3 (GSD). Three harriers on the P.G. CBC Dec. 21 furnished only the 2nd count occurrence.

Seldom seen in the Nanaimo area, two–three Rough-legged Hawks were there Dec. 27–28 (G. Monte et al.). Golden Eagles found the S. Ok. magnetic, with nine tallied on the Penticton CBC Dec. 20, nine adults and four immatures on the Vaseux L. CBC Dec. 28, and another nine on the Oliver-Osoyoos CBC Jan. 1. Even with inevitable duplication, these totals are impressive. They were also more common in the Yukon, with singles near the Donjek R. in January (DD), killing a fox at Houghton L. Jan. 28 (DD, PM), in the Ruby Range in early February (DD), in the Pelly Mts. near the Hoole R. in February (DD), and in the Hutshi L. area Feb. 25 (DD, PM). The Am. Kestrel on the P.G. CBC Dec. 21 was the first ever for the count. Rare inland sightings of Gyrfalcon included one on the Oliver-Osoyoos CBC Jan. 1, and another 15 km s.e. of P.G. Jan. 29 (LL). Out on the coast, a Gyr overflew the entrance to Van.'s Stanley Park Feb. 7 (MPr, M. Beck, B. Gordon), and another frequented the Martindale Flats n. of Vic. Dec. 31–Jan. 2 (DM). Rare for the season and area was a Peregrine Falcon at Christina L. Dec. 28 (RW). A Prairie Falcon was present at Brunswick Pt., Ladner, at the mouth of the Fraser R., through the period (m.ob.).

Just in case someone was wondering if there are any California Quail left in the Ok. Valley, 2460 were tallied on the Penticton CBC Dec. 20, and 1844 on the Oliver-Osoyoos CBC Jan. 1. The previous high count was 1339 on the 1981 Oliver-Osoyoos CBC. Virginia Rails were noted in relatively large numbers from a couple locations. Three were tallied on the Penticton CBC Dec. 20, 36 on the Nanaimo CBC Dec. 28, and seven on the Vaseux L. CBC the same day. Also heard on the Vaseux L. count was a **Sora**, only present during mild winters in the Ok. Valley. Enjoying the balmy winter were several Sandhill Cranes. On Van. I., a young bird spent the first half of December near the Jinglepot area of Nanaimo (*fide* SB), and two others associated with Trumpeter Swans s of Duncan

Jan. 3–8 (DM). Inland, a Sandhill was present at Trout Creek Pt., s. Ok. L., Dec. 1–19 (m.ob.), and may have been seen there again Jan. 31 (J. Kitson). Record early to the Ok. Valley were 50 Sandhills flying N over Naramata Feb. 13 (C. Munro); two touched down on a play field there a week later (T. Bomford).

#### SHOREBIRDS TO WOODPECKERS

Two Am. Golden-Plovers at Sandspit Airport Dec. 27 (MH, PH) furnished about the 4th winter record for the Q.C.I. Lingering from fall, four Am. Avocets remained at the mouth of the Serpentine R., Surrey, through the period (m.ob.). A Willet was at the n.e. end of the Tsawwassen Jetty, Delta, Dec. 1–Jan. 11 (m.ob.), and two Rock Sandpipers were at the same location Dec. 28–Jan. 31 (KMacP, m.ob.). Another Rock Sandpiper was at Crescent Beach, Surrey, Dec. 1–Jan. 19 (m.ob.). Providing a 2nd potential record for the Region was the basic-plumaged **Great Knot** present for only a few hours at Iona STP Jan. 12 (p.v., MTo, RTo, MWy). With a Greater Yellowlegs at Reifel Feb. 13 (RTk) was a **Pectoral Sandpiper**, one of 3 winter season sightings on record and no doubt a lingerer from the fall.

Now year-round residents of the Ok. Valley, two ad. and two imm. Glaucous-winged Gulls were at the Penticton end of Ok. L. Dec. 14 (RJC). The first-ever California Gulls recorded in winter in the c. interior of B.C. were five on the Fort St. James CBC Dec. 27. A first-winter **Iceland Gull**, rare to the Region, was s. of Duncan, s.e. Van. I., Feb. 21–22 (DM et al.). Also in the area was a 3rd-winter **Slaty-backed Gull** Feb. 15–28 (DM, m.ob.). Another Slaty-backed was near the Hwy 99 & Hwy 10 Interchange in Delta, B.C., Feb. 20 (*fide* DTy); this species has become a regular visitor to the n.e. Pacific coast over the past decade, mostly in the winter. A Rhinoceros Auklet, a rare visitor to inner waters, was off the Iona S. Jetty Dec. 18 (RTo); the day before 15 Ancient Murrelets visited there (DJ, RTo). The 18 Marbled Murrelets tallied on the Port Clements, Q.C.I., CBC Jan. 3 were the first for the count.

A Barn Owl was once again found in the old barn on Rd. 22, Oliver, S.Ok., Feb. 15 (P&B Morgenstern); more unusual were two 50 km farther north in a house under construction in Penticton (*fide* RJC). On Feb. 23 in Vancouver's Pacific Spirit Park, a University of B.C. class discovered a W. Screech-Owl flying around in broad daylight in apparent distress. Subsequent searching uncovered a predated nest with at



The remarkable Xantus's Hummingbird at Gibson's, coastal British Columbia, first discovered in November 1997, remained through the winter, and was photographed on January 14, 1998. An additional photo of this bird appeared in the preceding issue of *Field Notes*. Photograph/Ruth Sullivan

least 2 eggs, the earliest nesting attempt on record by about a month (J. Smith et al.). A solitary Snowy Owl was on the Delta, s.w. B.C., farmlands Dec. 28 (MKM). There was not even a shadow flight of Snowys after last winter's big invasion. Northern Hawk Owls stayed north—one first seen in the fall along McIntyre Cr. near Whse. lingered through January to provide one of few area winter records (CE, PS, LK, BrB). Other single Hawk Owls were reported from Fort St. James, c. B.C., Dec. 5 (WD), and Giscome, e. of P.G., Dec. 10 (CA, MA). The 19 Short-eared Owls seen on the P.G. CBC Dec. 21 was unprecedented. Two Boreal Owls were on Mt. Randolph, Pentiction, Dec. 20 (RJC). Daylight sightings of Boreal Owls were made at Horse Cr. Dec. 25 (BrB, RMu), and L. Laberge Feb. 18 (ph. KO, CE, LC).

The female **Xantus's Hummingbird** at Gibson's on B.C.'s Sunshine Coast, which first showed up in November, remained through the period, allowing over 1100 birders to flock to the Patterson's feeders for a view of this wayward midget. The bird's feeding frequency decreased gradually as the days warmed. Two "pairs" of Anna's Hummingbirds were seen at Queen Charlotte City, Q.C.I., feeders 3.2 km apart (B. Eccles, N&G Gordon, MH, PH, D. Younger). The first female arrived Sept. 27, a male and female were seen Dec. 27, and the female was last seen Feb. 27 during hurricane force winds. The 2nd duo appeared in early October and both birds were seen

Dec. 27; the female was irregular after that, but the male was seen through the period. Anna's have been fairly regular late summer-fall visitors to the Q.C.I. since their discovery there in 1989. This is undoubtedly part of the overall increase in the Anna's Hummingbird population in coastal B.C. since 1970. A new record high 88 was recorded on the Vic. CBC Dec. 20.

A female plumaged *Selasphorus* hummingbird, thought to be a Rufous, was in the company of Anna's at a W. Van. feeder Dec. 7–23 (v.t., S. Hosie, †MPr, m.ob.). It could furnish about the 3rd accepted winter record for the Region.

A Red-breasted Sapsucker at Kelowna Feb. 12 (Jbu et al.) provided one of fewer than 5 winter records for the interior. Elusive at the n. edge of its range, a Pileated Woodpecker was observed at Watson L., Yukon, Feb. 21 (†LE) for the first winter in at least 15 years.

#### FLYCATCHERS TO FRINGILLIDS

Definitely the most cold-tolerant of all N. American tyrannids, two Say's Phoebees were at Osoyoos, S. Ok., Jan. 3 (RJC) during the cold snap. Blue Jays were concentrated in the s.e. part of the Region, with most reports coming from the Kootenays; most were present through the entire period. Additional locations included P.G., with one Dec. 20 (NK, THe) and other birds irregularly through the period (DgW); another 35 km n.w. of P.G. Feb. 16 (R. Case); one

along the e. side of Skaha L., S. Ok., Dec. 1–Jan. 15 (S. Schmidden); and a bird coming to a McBride, c.e. B.C., feeder through the period (*vide* E. Stanley).

Uncommonly reported in the Yukon, Mt. Chickadees were scattered along the s. border of the Territory: one was on the Auriol Trail, Kluane N.P., Dec. 29 (RMa); a single was among Boreals and Black-capped at a Tagish feeder Jan. 17 (HG, YBC); and one was seen regularly through the period at a Teslin feeder (DD). White-breasted Nuthatches are very local winter visitors to c. interior B.C. Such was the case at Quesnel, with two–six birds frequenting a feeder in the Ten Mile L. area through the period (Bridget Kollner). A **Brown Creeper**, first reported from the Haines Jct. area in November, lingered through the period (†THe) for a first winter Yukon record. Four Rock Wrens were heard at McIntyre Bluff, Vaseux L., S. Ok., Dec. 27 (ILR), the first time more than single birds have been recorded in winter in the Region.

New for an E. Kootenay winter census were four W. Bluebirds on the Cranbrook CBC Dec. 28. Obviously lost was a **Brown Thrasher** at Terrace in the w. foothills of the Coast Range on B.C.'s inland N. Coast. The bird arrived at the end of November and remained through the period (p.v., D. Walker, †DVG, m.ob.). This is the 2nd Brown Thrasher to appear in Terrace, the first photographed on the local CBC Dec. 19, 1976! Bohemian Waxwings were found in normal numbers across the c. interior, but were down to only 10% of normal in the S. Ok. (*vide* RJC); in s.e. B.C., they were observed in flocks of up to 3000 in Cranbrook and Kimberley (*vide* MW), but were scarce in the Nakusp area. Thirteen Bohemians made it across Hecate Strait to Masset, Q.C.I., Jan. 7, where they ate the fruit of a hawthorn tree (PH, MH) with 10 cm of snow on the ground—a typical inland winter scene. Lingering late so far north, a N. Shrike was present at L. Laberge, Yukon, through November and December (KO), and another was in pursuit of redpolls and juncos at a Whse. feeder Dec. 13 (HG). Crested Mynas were reported from 6 Van. locations, including one potential new nesting site under the Granville St. Bridge (*vide* MPr).

In addition to several Orange-crowned Warblers scattered around the s. coast of B.C., a young Yellow Warbler managed to survive at Sooke at the s. end of Van. I. Jan. 13 onward, for one of very few winter records in the Region (N. Hughes, m.ob.). Two Yellow-rumped Warblers managed to

**SA** Looking at the vagrancy pattern of **Yellow-throated Warbler** in N. America, every state in the Pacific Northwest except Washington has the species on its checklist. It was thus only a mild surprise when the Region's first showed up at a Gabriola I., B.C., feeder Jan. 3 (p.v., v.t., ph. R. Mumford, m.ob.). As is often the case with a brightly plumaged vagrant in an alien landscape, the bird was ultimately picked off by an accipiter Jan. 25, a scattering of feathers all that remained. Available evidence seems to point to the bird being a young male of the *albilora* form (*fide* DGC).

survive the period at Christina L. in the W. Kootenay district of s. B.C. (RW), and a Com. Yellowthroat was observed at the Nakusp STP Dec. 25 (GSD). Another yellowthroat was at Addington Pt., Coquitlam, Dec. 21–24 (DSB). Palm Warblers were more numerous than usual on the s. coast. Sightings included two at Camel Pt., Vic., Nov. 30, and singles at Store St., Vic., Dec. 23 (DA), Cowichan Bay Dec. 19 (DM), and the Martindale Valley in Saanich Dec. 30 (Mr. Moore). Another single was at Iona Dec. 21–Jan. 27 (RT0, m.ob.).

A **Western Tanager**, casual in winter in the Region, was at a Burnaby, s.w. B.C., feeder Dec. 18–Jan. 13 (LCo, m.ob.). American Tree Sparrows are extremely rare in winter in the Yukon. Surprising, then, were several Whse. area sightings: two birds at a ground feeder at Hidden Valley mid-December to mid-January (LG, JHo), and again next door Jan. 31 (CaC); two in with a large flock of redpolls in Marwell Dec. 28 (CE, PS); and one on the Whse. CBC Dec. 26 (M. Beauregard). They also favored the Kootenays, with two at the Nakusp STP Dec. 25 and six more there Jan. 3 (GSD), and one at the n. end of Kootenay L., s.e. B.C., Jan. 18 (GS, JL). A **Sage Sparrow** of the *nevadensis* type, a first record for the local checklist and one of very few for the coast, was in the Dallas Rd., Vic., area Feb. 16–19 (R. Barnes, R. Prior, ph. LJS, ph. JAM, m.ob.). Harris's Sparrows were noted from several areas. In the Kootenays, one immature spent the winter in Nelson, s.e. B.C. (LM, BKo), and another was at a Nakusp feeder sporadically Jan. 24 through the period (GSD). Another young bird wintered at the w. end of Lost Lagoon in Van.'s Stanley Park (m.ob.), and one was seen on the Penticton CBC Dec. 20. Dark-eyed Juncos were well reported in the Yukon, with

the most noteworthy at a Dawson City feeder Dec. 14 (G. Bell, M. Yusch), likely the most northerly winter record for the Region. Five which lasted the season at a Whse. feeder included the Yukon's first well-documented "Oregon" type (ph. HG, †CE, PS, LC, YBC).

An influx of Red-winged Blackbirds into the Q.C.I. in mid-February had the locals shaking their heads; were they early migrants? The first sighting included two ad. males at Old Masset Feb. 13–14, followed by five ad. males and one female at Masset Mar. 7, and two the same day at Port Clements (D. Jones, PH, MH, G, Johnson, E&M Podd). Rarely lingering into winter, a pair of Rusty Blackbirds was at the Haines Jct. landfill until at least Dec. 3 (THE). The **Hooded Oriole** which first appeared in Terrace, B.C., Nov. 23 remained through the period (v.t., ph. G&C Thomas, m.ob.). A diet of mealworms and a hummingbird feeder full of warmed "oriole mix" saw it through the winter. Is the recent spate of Hooded Oriole sightings an anomaly or a trend?

A female **Brambling**, more of a cold winter visitor, was at Port Alberni, C. Van. I., Jan. 3–15 (DGC, V. Geist, v.o.). Pine Grosbeak numbers were down in the s. Yukon, with peak flocks in the 15–20 range (m.ob.). Perhaps some of the Yukon grosbeaks made it out to B.C.'s n. coast ahead of the impending cold snap, with 45 Pines on the Masset CBC Dec. 20 constituting a new high for the Q.C.I. Cassin's Finch from coastal areas are always noteworthy. A male discovered at the foot of Rogers St., Van., Dec. 21 (V. Omen) was joined later by a female type; both birds stayed in the area until Dec. 30 (†JAM). White-winged Crossbills invaded the S. Ok. spruce-larch forests: CBC totals included 112 Dec. 20 in Penticton, 590 at Vaseux L. Dec. 28, and 478 on the Oliver-Osoyoos count Jan. 3. Common Redpolls were scarce across s. B.C.; however, they staged their usual late winter invasion into the c. interior of B.C. beginning late February. Two adjacent flocks eating grass seed in a large stubble hay field near Vanderhoof Feb. 21 (CA, NK) totaled at least 1000 birds. The flock of 44 at Masset Jan. 22–Mar. 2 comprised the largest ever seen on the Queen Charlottes. Hoary Redpolls are regular winter visitors to the s. Yukon; this year only a few were noted. A very white Hoary was at a Whse. feeder Feb. 4–22, with a 2nd there Feb. 5–18 (CE, PS). A Pine Siskin spotted with redpolls on the Whse. CBC provided the first documented winter record for the Yukon (†CE, PS).

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Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *Field Notes* are keyed on page 160.