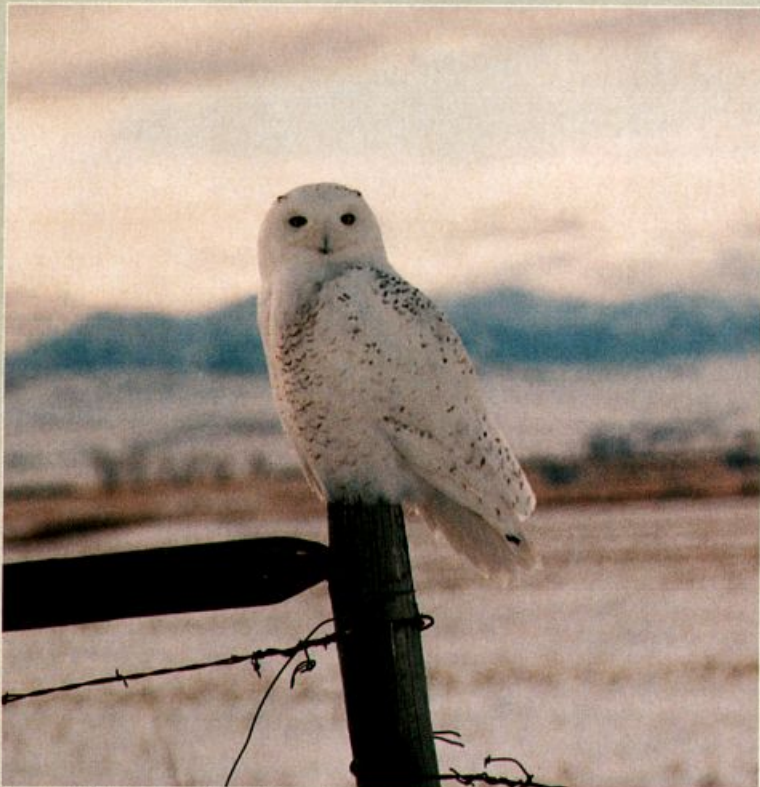


pictorial highlights

This selection of photographs represents some of the interesting phenomena of the winter 1997–1998 season. More photos can be found at the front of this issue, and scattered through the regional reports. Be sure to refer to the regional reports for more information and more details on any of the birds shown here.



In some winters, southward invasions by northern owls provide a seasonal highlight. This was not one of those winters: those owls generally stayed in the far north. Bucking the trend were fair numbers of Snowy Owls on the northern prairies, especially in Alberta, where this quintessential winter scene was taken on January 24, 1998. Photograph/Terry Korolyk



The mildness of the winter in eastern North America was reflected in numerous records of warblers and other insectivores lingering late, or even successfully overwintering, well north of their usual limits. This Yellow-breasted Chat, puffed up for warmth in the leafless thickets of New Year's Eve 1997, was in Cook County, Illinois. Photograph/ Joe B. Milosevich

Southern California still has no records of Eurasian Dotterel, although that elegant little plover has reached the northern part of the state five times in fall. However, this individual clearly passed through southern California: it was found wintering just south of the border, at La Mision, Baja California, from late January into March 1998, providing a first record for Mexico. Photograph/Larry Sansone



Back for its second consecutive winter at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, Virginia, was this adult Black-tailed Gull, present at least from December 1997 through March 1998. This photo shows its dark gray upperparts (darker than the adult Ring-billed Gull to its left, for example), its distinctive black-ringed, red-tipped bill, and the black tail-band that gives the species its name. Photograph/George L. Armistead

pictorial highlights

Townsend's Warblers, straying in from the west, have now been recorded quite a few times along the Atlantic Coast, but records in any one region there are still cause for excitement.

This bird visited a feeder in Carroll County, New Hampshire, during November and December 1997, providing a third state record.

Photograph/
Elizabeth Ellis



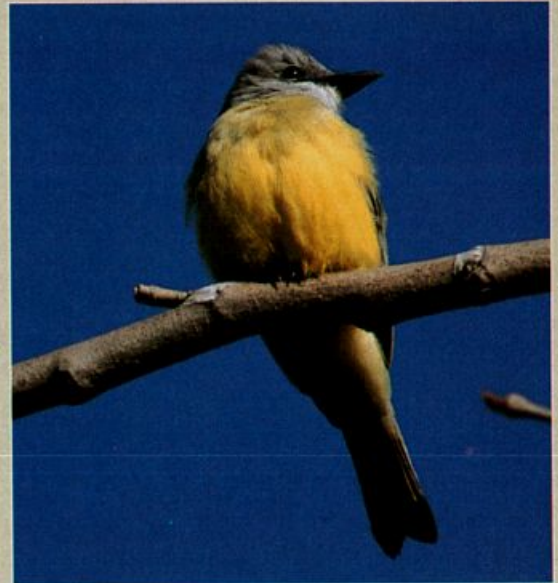
Even more of a rarity in the east than Townsend's Warbler is its close relative, Hermit Warbler, but New England had individuals of each during the winter. This Hermit Warbler was discovered associating with a flock of kinglets on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, in late December 1997, and remained there at least into March 1998.

Photograph/
P.A. Buckley



Birds named after William Swainson (like the hawk and the thrush) are hardly to be expected in North America in winter; his warbler would be even more of a surprise. This Swainson's Warbler at Des Allemands, St. Charles Parish, Louisiana, on the outlandish date of January 24, 1998, may have furnished a first mid-winter record for North America.

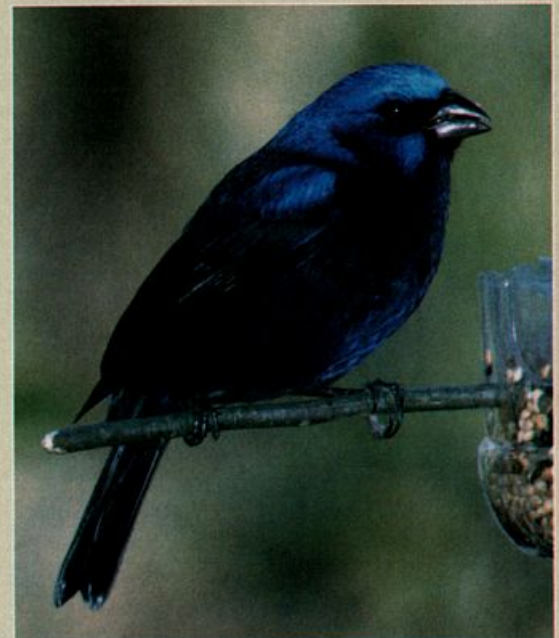
Photograph/Peter Yaukey



California's most surprising bird of the winter was this Couch's Kingbird, present from late December to late February in Fullerton, Orange County.

The look-alike Tropical Kingbird has been found many times on the Pacific Coast (as detailed in an article by Steven Mlodinow in the preceding issue of *Field Notes*), but Couch's had never been found there before; this record thus highlights the difficulty of identifying silent kingbirds of this type out of range.

Photograph/Brian E. Small



Blue Buntings are rare and irregular visitors to southern Texas, not found every winter, but they were present there all this season at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. By February 1998, when this photo was taken, at least four individuals were coming to feeders in the park. Notice the highlights of brighter blue on the forehead, malar region, and shoulder of this adult male. Photograph/Jim Culbertson



Allen's Hummingbird, a very rare visitor to eastern North America, presents some special problems in identification. Adult males—like this bird (above) visiting a feeder in Bristol, Virginia, on January 3, 1998—are fairly distinctive, but an occasional adult male Rufous Hummingbird can be essentially green-backed and can look almost identical. Photograph/Ron Carrico



Females and immatures of this complex, on the other hand, must be in the hand to be identified, since Rufous and Allen's hummingbirds look exactly alike in those plumages. This adult female Allen's Hummingbird (above) was present at least from November 1997 to February 1998 near Wilmington, Delaware, providing a first state record. This photo was taken when the bird was captured for banding in January, and it shows the essential characteristics: the shapes of certain tail feathers. Photograph/Frank Rohrbacher



Considering how mild the winter was in the upper Midwest, it was particularly surprising that Wisconsin had visits by two Ivory Gulls, representing only the seventh and eighth state records; we might have expected this high Arctic species to appear during a colder season. This immature, with distinctive black spotting on its wing coverts and primaries, was at Port Washington, Wisconsin, from December 31, 1997, to January 3, 1998. Photograph/Charles Sontag



There's nothing like a rare warbler to brighten up a winter's day. This Pine Warbler, photographed on January 11, 1998, was present for two months this winter at the-Valco Ponds at Pueblo, Colorado. Along with other warblers wintering in the same area, it was often seen feeding on midges emerging from the water. Photograph/Tony Leukering

pictorial highlights



Gulls provide a big part of winter's excitement for many birders, challenging observers to build up their identification skills, and then rewarding them with sightings of rare visitors. A surprising scatter of Mew Gulls reached the interior of the continent this season, including this adult at Tuttle Creek Reservoir, Manhattan, Kansas, on February 14, 1998. Photograph/Galen L. Pittman



Although it was a warmer winter than usual in Canada's Maritime Provinces, it was also stormy, and powerful northerlies in early January brought a major invasion of Ivory Gulls to Newfoundland. Numbers were estimated in the low thousands; at least 85% of the birds were adults, like the one shown here, photographed at L'Anse-aux-Meadows, Newfoundland, on January 17, 1998. Photograph/Bruce Mactavish



On Sand Island, Midway Atoll, Hawaii, a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*)—one of the most widespread and common raptors in the Old World—appeared in January 1998. By late February there were apparently two individuals present, and they remained well into the spring, alternately feeding on, and being mobbed by, White Terns (seen in the background here). Midway had one previous record of Black Kite, one present January to March 1995. Photograph/Peter Pyle (HRBP # 1153)



A rare visitor to southwestern British Columbia, this Sage Sparrow (representing one of the interior races) strayed to Victoria, Vancouver Island, in mid-February 1998. Photograph/Jo Ann Mackenzie



Baird's Sparrows are rare and little-known in New Mexico, especially in winter. This one appeared at a feeder at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge during a snowstorm in late December 1997. Photograph/Gordon Warrick