

prairie provinces region



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Rainfall was substantial in southeast Manitoba and Alberta during June and early July, but the remainder of the period was very dry and warm. Saskatchewan and southwest Manitoba were much drier, punctuated by occasional downpours. The Cypress Hills received 195 mm of rain in one day, Calgary had a record 43 mm July 4, and southwest Manitoba reported up to 200 mm in two days in mid-June. The effects on nesting birds were mixed: generally good success in Manitoba's South Interlake, contrasted with nest failure or destruction in regions farther west. Churchill hosted a fine array of "southern" rarities, but details were missing for most.

LOONS TO FALCONS

Seventy Pacific Loons, an unusually large number for the area, were seen migrating N at Lac La Biche, AB, May 31 (RT). Single Com. Loons were s. of their Saskatchewan breeding range at Willows Res. July 22, Eastend Res. July 23, and Reed L. July 25 (RKr). A well-described imm. **Yellow-billed Loon** at Delta June 10 provided a long-overdue first for s. Manitoba (DS). Nesting Pied-billed Grebes at Churchill, MB, a first since 1940, hatched three young (LdM, RKo et al.). Single Great Egrets were at Beaverhill L., AB, June 4 (DD) and Pakowki L., AB, June 22 (BP), while Calgary, AB, hosted two June 21 (CPe). Two Cattle Egrets were at Last Mountain L., SK, June 4 (DS).

Tundra Swans lingered until mid-June at 3 lakes near Biggar, SK, and at Irricana,

AB (WR, GW; TK), as did two Trumpeter Swans at Red Deer, AB (JRo, SB, BP). A strong molt-migration of Canada Geese was noted at Lac La Biche June 3 and across s. Manitoba June 6–8 (m.ob.). A male **Garganey**, Manitoba's 2nd, delighted observers at Oak Hammock Marsh June 4–6, whereafter it retreated into the marsh until last seen June 16 (KO, m.ob.). Blue-winged Teal were seen daily in Churchill in mid-June, with a peak count of eight (BM). A hybrid Blue-winged × Cinnamon teal was at Oak Hammock Marsh June 21 (LdM). Saskatchewan Cinnamon Teal sightings included three at Catherwood L. June 16, nine between Orkney and Eastend June 16, and 15 at Taits L. July 23 (WR; PJ; RKr). A concentration of 7000 Canvasbacks in mixed-sex pairs at Opuntia L., SK, June 10 likely indicated aborted breeding in the area (WR, GW). A "couple of pairs" of Harlequin Ducks were at Clearwater L., MB, June 5–6 (*vide* KO). A post-breeding flock of 800+ male Ruddy Ducks covered a small lake near Claydon, SK, July 24 (RKr).

Circling in the same thermal with six Am. White Pelicans were six Turkey Vultures 20 km n.w. of Craven, SK, July 1, while 17 Turkey Vultures were nearby July 23 (CPo). These are large numbers for the area. Swainson's Hawks had a disastrous season in the Brooks and Pollockville, AB, areas, with numerous abandoned nests (*vide* GB). Ferruginous Hawks also fared poorly there, but did better near Lethbridge, AB, and a nest near Biggar was the 2nd ever for the area (*vide* DC, LS; RWa). Eleven Prairie Falcon pairs in Saskatchewan raised 44 young (SH, *vide* PW) and a late migrant Gyrfalcon was in Churchill June 6 (*vide* BC).

GROUSE TO WOODPECKERS

Several searches in s.w. Saskatchewan produced only seven Sage Grouse, near Willow Cr. July 25 (RKr). A N. Bobwhite at Rosenort, MB, late July had likely escaped from a game farm (JKr). Dry conditions were thought to be responsible for the lack of Yellow Rail reports in Saskatchewan (RKr). A Black-necked Stilt at Lac La Biche May 31 was n. of its range (TM, PR, RT), as were Am. Avocets with five young there (KSa, JS, RT). Tour groups at Churchill found a Willet June 11–13 and an Upland Sandpiper June 6 (*vide* BC). Three Whimbrels at Catherwood L., SK, June 8 provided a first record for the area (WR). Breeding clusters of 22 and 29 Long-billed Curlews in the Biggar area were noteworthy (WR, GW), as were 25 at Taber, AB, June 27 (LB) and a vagrant at Marquette, MB, June 4 (BR). No details were received on two **Bar-tailed Godwits** seen in Churchill June 25–27 (VENT, JL).

Concentrations of shorebirds included 200 Red Knots at Brooks June 1 (JPi), 250 Sanderlings at Old Wives L., SK, June 12 (PJ), 500 Semipalmated and 350 Baird's sandpipers near Irricana July 31 (TK), and 500+ Stilt Sandpipers near Regina, SK, June 2 (RKr). Rarities of note were single W. Sandpipers at Reed L., SK, June 1 (MP) and near Irricana July 31 (TK), and an undocumented female Ruff at Oak Hammock Marsh June 9 (NB).

A ground-nesting pair of Bonaparte's Gulls at Richmond L., SK, June 12 was well s. of the normal breeding range (WR). Although rare, such nests have previously been found at Glaslyn and Maidstone in Saskatchewan. Garbage dump visits produced Glaucous Gulls at Swan R., MB, June 1 (CC, GH) and at Winnipeg, MB, June 24 (RS). Great Black-backed Gulls are almost annual visitors to Manitoba; one was at Churchill July 4 (RKo et al.). Up to two Ross's Gulls frequented this location, without evidence of nesting (BC et al.). A noteworthy movement of Sabine's Gulls in Alberta involved a single at Cochrane L. May 23 (DC, JPo), flocks of ten and three at Bonnyville June 6, and lone birds at Cardston and Chip L., both June 23 (all WS, RWe). At least one Caspian Tern visited Churchill June 10–July 15 (m.ob.).

A **White-winged Dove**, visiting a Lethbridge feeder July 14–18, represented a



The Eastern Bluebird is expanding westward across the Canadian Great Plains. This male on June 14, 1998 near Seebe, Alberta close to the eastern foot of the Rockies was a member of a successful pair pushing the envelope. Reports of this bluebird showed a sharp increase in the western Prairie Provinces this season. Photograph/Terry Korolyk

2nd provincial record, if accepted, hot on the heels of the first in 1997 (G&PG, BSh). A Black-billed Cuckoo at Lac La Biche June 23 was farther north than any previously reported in Alberta (RT). An E. Screech-Owl called nightly at Pine Cr. Regional Park, SK, July 20–28, at the w. edge of its range (JH). Great Horned, N. Hawk, Long-eared, and Boreal owls all nested at Churchill (*vide* BC). Although early season reports of Burrowing Owls were up slightly in all 3 provinces, nesting success was reportedly poor (KSc). Similarly, continued concern is expressed over low numbers of Com. Nighthawks throughout the Region (GB, LV, RKr).

Two Vaux's Swifts were at Beaver Mines, AB, July 2 (LV); others were at the traditional Waterton N.P. spot. A Rufous Hummingbird at Leask, SK, in late May was followed by one at Medicine Hat, AB, June 25 (*vide* TH; DB). For the 3rd consecutive year a Red-headed Woodpecker was in Medicine Hat (BP) and another was at Val Marie, SK, June 7 (*vide* PJ). Both Three-toed and Black-backed woodpeckers took advantage of a recent burn at Churchill, with up to seven adults of the latter noted (BM, m.ob.).

PASSERINES

Out-of-range flycatchers included a W. Wood-Pewee near Camper, MB, June 10

(KG); a Least Flycatcher at Churchill June 12–13 (m.ob.); nesting E. Phoebes near Turner Valley, AB, June 27 (GB); and an E. Kingbird at Churchill June 26 (*vide* BC). Manitoba's 5th **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**, a female, built a nest in Assiniboine Forest, Winnipeg, June 4–13, then disappeared (GC, m.ob.). Eastern Bluebirds, doing well in Manitoba, are pushing west, as witnessed by the following Alberta reports: 2 pairs in the Cypress Hills May 30 (PH), a male near Redwater early June (GA), a pair with 3 young at Millet (D&ID), a pair at Seebe that fledged 3 young July 7 (JRi, LV, ph. TK, JRo), and a male at Maycroft June 13 & 22 (CW). Likewise, 2 nests in the Biggar area were a first (RWa), while 4 nests were found in the Saskatoon area, vs. the occasional nest in earlier years (MH). Finally, one found its way n. to Churchill June 8 (Cygnus Tours). Mountain Bluebirds fared poorly in Saskatchewan due to drought (MH). A Wood Thrush at Tolstoi, MB, June 20 was rare (LK), as were N. Mockingbirds at Taber, AB and Herbert, SK; St. Norbert, MB; and Churchill (m.ob.). Sprague's Pipit numbers were way up in s. Saskatchewan and s.w. Manitoba (RKr, DF, RKo), and four sang at Duck Mountain P.P., MB, June 9 (PG, CC, GH).

A **Hutton's Vireo** in Waterton N.P. June 18 was the first ever reported in Alberta (CW). Pushing their ranges were N. Parulas near Minitonas, MB, June 2 (GH) and L. Kawinaw, MB, in early June (BSi et al.); a Magnolia Warbler in Jasper N.P., AB, June 16 (GB); and Yellow-breasted Chats near Harris and Herschel, SK, June 8 and June 10, respectively (WR, GW). Locally rare were a Scarlet Tanager at Bulyea, SK, July 22 and a N. Cardinal at Tobin L. near Nipawin, SK, in early July (TH). Lazuli/Indigo bunting hybrids intrigued observers in Winnipeg June 8–10 (WC, MW, RP et al.) and at Sheep R., Windy Pt., AB, June 14 (JRi, m.ob.), while at least two Indigo Buntings were at Waterton N.P. June 7–29 (BK et al.) and another at Medicine Hat July 3 (WS, RWe).

Observers tallied 23 Le Conte's Sparrows in less than one km of shoreline at Frank L., AB, July 17 (IH), and 16 Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows in 2 km of fen near Perdue and 21 in 8 km at Kimoff L., both in Saskatchewan, mid-June (WR, GW). Lingering at feeders were a White-crowned Sparrow in Winnipeg June 12 (TB, JKs) and a Harris's Sparrow near Ste. Anne, MB, into early June (VR). A juv. Dark-eyed Junco at Stonewall, MB, July 25 was an early fall migrant by over a month (KG). A Bobolink

at Churchill June 1 was about the 4th for the area (RR). Eleven of 12 Brewer's Blackbird nests found near Reston, MB, were parasitized by Brown-headed Cowbirds; one nest contained 8 cowbird eggs and no Brewer's (RD)! A Purple Finch at Churchill June 15 was a rarity (*vide* BC). A very late Com. Redpoll at Stonewall June 4 appeared to have conjunctivitis (KG).

CORRIGENDUM

A Black-throated Green Warbler reported at Beaverhill L. May 26 was in fact a Black-throated Blue Warbler (EJ).

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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 428.