

# The Changing Seasons

*Disappearing birds in the East . . .  
lingering birds in the West . . .  
a Northern Shrike invasion  
and much February activity.*

by Kimberly Smith<sup>1</sup>

**I**F ANYONE WONDERS what long term effects adverse weather conditions may have on bird populations, this winter report should provide the test. Not one of the reporting regions had a normal winter! Many eastern and Great Plains reports detailed the "coldest winter on record," while Alaska had its warmest winter and the West was suffering through a drought. The Northeast got more than its share of snow, while the southeastern seaboard had lower-than-normal precipitation as did the Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, and Great Basin. The Pacific Coast was mild and dry all winter, while southern Texas was exceptionally wet. The January cold spell in eastern North America broke in mid-February with some areas reporting record *warm* temperatures to bring February's average temperature to normal.

Recent ornithological literature indicates that birds can cope with daily weather changes behaviorally (Grubb, 1975, *Condor* 77:175-182). This must seem obvious to most birdwatchers, as birds tend to "sit tight" on windy days, forage higher in trees on sunny days, or lower on stormy days. Feederwatchers probably notice that birds tend to arrive later and leave earlier on adverse days (Kessel, 1976, *Wilson Bull.* 88:36-61). But what happens during prolonged periods of cold, stormy weather? Avian population levels and species diversity can be quite different in the same forest during different weather conditions on successive winters (Kricher, 1975, *Auk* 92:766-777). However, this winter began rather mildly and then turned bitterly cold. What options are available to birds?

Certainly some bizarre behavior changes can be found in these reports. Sharpshinned and Cooper's Hawks became much more common around backyard bird feeders.

American Kestrels were twice reported trying to kill pheasants and a Red-shouldered Hawk came to a suet feeder as did two kestrels. Screech and Barn Owls foraged from roadside snow banks, and Screech Owls were even coming down chimneys in western Pennsylvania, "perhaps chasing Starlings?!"

**A**BETTER STRATEGY would be to seek a more favorable climate. However, little evidence suggests a mass movement into the southern states from the north. For one thing, the South was not its usual warm haven. Secondly, recent research, mostly with raptors in wind tunnels (J. A. Gessaman, pers. comm.), suggests that many species may in fact try to literally sit out a cold spell, possibly becoming less conspicuous. If this were true, one would expect many dead birds reported, and indeed many are mentioned in these reports. Third, some species such as chickadees (Chapin, 1974, *J. Comp. Physiol.* 89:321-330) may have only enough fat reserves to last them through the night and part of the next day. These species do not have the option of leaving or sitting out adverse conditions; they must find food or perish. As with the above, mass die-offs would occur and several are reported or suspected, especially among southern species that have been extending their range northward over the last several mild winters. This coming breeding season should tell the tale.

The drought in western United States must also be having an effect on bird populations but it is much more subtle and harder to document. An example is that Nuttall's Woodpecker invaded the California coast,

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which was much drier than usual. With less snow in the northern Rocky Mountains, birds may have been more dispersed because food was easier to obtain, or their numbers could be decreased. A poor food crop in the Mountain West region compounded the problem. Many inland bodies of water were extremely low or dry in California, but nevertheless many interesting records were reported from these areas, such as Yellow-billed Loon on Grant Lake, Brandt's Cormorant at Fowler, and Pelagic Cormorant at Silver Lake, all first inland records. In Alaska the mild weather allowed an unusual number of birds to linger.

### Species affected by the adverse winter

**G**OOD ESTIMATES of avian winter densities before the January cold spell were obtained for most regions during the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) period. The results of January field trips in most cases documented the suspected mass die-offs or exoduses in the East when compared with the CBC results. Several regional editors suggest that comparisons should be made between these reports and the CBCs to see just how devastating the cold winter period was. The hardest hit seemed to be the water-dependent species, and no wonder! With Pamlico Sound, Lake Erie, Lake Champlain and the Ohio and Susquehanna Rivers all frozen, how much open water could possibly have been available?

**Loons, Grebes, Herons and Kingfishers**—Common Loons were extremely scarce in the Northeast and disappeared along the Middle Atlantic in January as did Horned Grebes. Many dead loons were reported on the East Coast of Florida. At least 762 Red-necked Grebes were reported along the Northeast coast, a regional high. They were also abundant in the Long Island area and 127 were counted at Saanich, British Columbia. Good numbers occurred in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Illinois. Single birds were reported in Québec, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Montana and southern California. A very impressive invasion for this Blue-Listed species! The Ontario report listed three dead Red-necked Grebes: one in a parking lot, one in a gas station,

and one in a woodlot! All eastern and mid-western regions reported herons "leaving" in January, but the southern Gulf regions did not experience an influx. Dead Great Blue Herons were reported from the Hudson-Delaware and Appalachian regions. Population levels for this species should be checked carefully this coming year. Wood Storks abandoned their nests after laying eggs in Florida, and few Belted Kingfishers were reported in Florida, with weak and starving kingfishers found in the Hudson-Delaware region.

### Waterfowl, Galliformes and Shorebirds—

As expected, waterfowl left the northern regions and moved south in large numbers during January. Starvation was blamed for the high mortality of ducks, especially diving ducks, on the East Coast, while diving ducks increased and dabblers decreased in the Southern Great Plains. Lead poisoning increased in the Middlewestern Prairie and Hudson-Delaware regions owing to ducks increasing their intake of dry grains (see Middlewestern Prairie report).

Large numbers of Brant made a mass exodus from Brigantine N.W.R., New Jersey, in January where numbers dwindled from 20,000 to 15 (!) in one month. This movement was beautifully documented along the coast with 10,000 seen passing Wallops Island, Virginia on January 17 and 1650 at Pea Island, North Carolina. Brant were reported feeding in front yards, roadsides, and median strips in Ocean City, Maryland. Canada Geese pushed southward with 406,000 reported from southern Illinois and western Kentucky, and high numbers in the southern regions. Numbers of White-fronted and Snow Geese were high, especially in Texas. For the second year in a row, Canvasbacks and Redheads were reported in large numbers, both on the coast and inland, possibly concentrated by frozen water. The 406,000 Canvasbacks at Hamilton, Illinois, was noteworthy, for this controversial Blue-Listed species. The 118,478 Mallards recorded on the South Washington Co., Mississippi, CBC and the 24,000 at Kootenai N.W.R., Idaho, were presumably a product of cold weather elsewhere. Harlequin Ducks may also have been more numerous along the coast owing to frozen water, with 91 re-

*Three birds of the season.  
Right, First year Thayer's  
Gull, Holland Tract, Calif.,  
Mar. 3, 1977. photo/ Rich  
Stallcup. Middle: McCown's  
Longspur, Bridgewater, Mass.,  
undated. photo/ Robert L.  
Norton. Below, Burrowing  
Owl, Cedar Beach, L.I., Dec.  
27, 1976, photo/ P.A. Buckley.*



ported along the Northeastern coast and 13 along the New Jersey coast. A record seven were counted along the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel with single sightings in North and South Carolina and Florida. Ruffed Grouse suffered upwards of 80% mortality in the Northeast and Bobwhites and Ring-necked Pheasants were hard hit in the Western Great Lakes area.

**Hawks and Owls**—Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks were widely reported, and much of this may be attributed to poor hunting conditions forcing birds to frequent bird feeders. Numbers of Cooper's Hawks were above recent norms in most of the Northeastern regions, while Sharp-shinned were more common along the Eastern Seaboard. Both Screech and Barn Owls were common roadkills in the Hudson-Delaware region, presumably hit while feeding along the roadsides. Short-eared Owls were scarce and scattered in the East with above average numbers only in the Western Great Lakes and Great Plains.

**Passerines**—Several species such as Eastern Phoebe were widely reported in northern areas during the CBC period, but did not survive through January. Carolina Wrens suffered heavy losses with up to 80% mortality estimated in the Middle Atlantic region. They literally disappeared from the Appalachian region, and were hard hit in Ontario, the Middlewestern Prairie and the Southern Great Plains. The Mockingbird and Tufted Titmouse expansion into the Western Great Lakes region suffered a serious setback. House Wrens and Tree Swallows were scarce in Florida, and cold weather took its toll on Blue-gray Gnatcatchers along the entire Gulf Coast.

Another species apparently virtually wiped out in the Southern Atlantic region was the Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Now known to prefer warm winter weather (Bock and Lepthien, 1976, *Wilson Bull.* 88:483-485), the species also disappeared from the Middle Atlantic and Florida areas, but seemed to be doing well in the Appalachians and along the Gulf Coast. Golden-crowned Kinglets fared slightly better in Ontario and the northern Appalachians.

Numbers of Black-and-white, Orange-crowned and Wilson's Warblers and Com-

mon Yellowthroats were low in Florida and yellowthroats disappeared in the Hudson-Delaware region. In the Appalachians Yellow-rumped Warblers declined as the winter season progressed.

### **Irruption species**

**I**F ANYONE THOUGHT that irruptions of boreal birds were weather-related this winter should put those theories to rest. A number of regional editors hint that the "expected" invasion did not occur, but just because there is cold weather is no reason to expect invading birds. Bock and Lepthien (1976, *Amer. Nat.* 110:559-571) theorize that a circumboreally synchronized coniferous seed crop fluctuation probably exists, and birds depending on these conifer seeds will be influenced. However, they offer no reasons for the synchronized seed crop, only correlations with the irruption of boreal birds. Thus, if a good seed crop existed this winter in the boreal forests, there would be no reason for the finches to wander south. But they point out that irruptions in the East do not always coincide with irruptions in the West.

The explanation becomes somewhat strained when only one seed-eating species invades, as happened this year with the Purple Finch. Most of eastern North America reported abundant Purple Finches with record numbers in Florida and flocks in the prairie and plains areas south to southern Texas. However, Purple Finches were scarce in the Pacific Northwest. Possibly DeSante's suggestion of a genetic component to these irruptions (1976, *AB* 30:678) may be responsible for the one-species invasion. However, I suspect that, as with bird navigation, several influences must be working concomitantly.

**Birds of Prey**—As mentioned earlier, Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks were reported in above-average numbers, but whether this represents an irruption *per se* is debatable. I prefer to think that these Blue-listed species were just more conspicuous than usual. In support of this, Goshawks were widely reported in small numbers. Almost all reports agree that Rough-legged Hawks were scarce this winter. Only 13 Gyrfalcons were reported in the eastern half of the continent, and only five

from the West. Snowy Owls were few and far between almost everywhere in the East with *none* reported in New Brunswick. More were reported from the Midwest where 191 (!) were reported in Iowa; newspaper ads were used to ask for sighting reports. Either more than 50% of all the Snowy Owls in the United States invaded Iowa or birds were repeatedly counted and/or misidentified, or no one else was looking. Notably, one wintered in Shreveport, Louisiana. The 175 Snowies in the Northern Great Plains were considered normal, with few reports from the western half of the continent. Four Great Gray Owls were reported in New England.

If a low-density species such as the Northern Shrike can stage an invasion, this was the year, especially around the Great Lakes. Individuals wandered as far south as Texas, and west to New Mexico, Arizona, and northern California.

**Woodpeckers, Jays, Chickadees and Nuthatches**—Northern Three-toed Woodpeckers were scarce everywhere but in Québec, and Black-backed Three-toeds were almost non-existent except in Minnesota. Gray Jays were also evident in Minnesota. Clark's Nutcrackers, like most Gray Jays, must have remained in the mountains.

Black-capped Chickadees remained in the Québec region, but they abandoned the Ontario and Niagara-Champlain regions. However, no great flight of chickadees was reported in any southern region, suggesting a bad winter for the Black-capped Chickadee. Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees invaded the Mountain West, but Mountain and Boreal Chickadees did not appear in numbers anywhere. Numbers of both nuthatches and Brown Creepers were reported in Ontario, and Red-breasted Nuthatches were in record numbers in the Niagara-Champlain region. However, populations were low in almost all other regions. After a large invasion last year, Bohemian Waxwings were relatively scarce, except in most of Canada, the Rocky Mountains, and northern New Mexico. Some did return to Arizona after a 10-year absence. Cedar Waxwings were virtually unreported across the continent except along the central and western Gulf Coast.

**Winter Finches**—With the exception of the Purple Finch, one has to look hard to find even a hint of an invasion of other species. Evening Grosbeak numbers appeared normal in Québec and increased on the eastern seaboard during the cold January weather, but were absent in the Pacific Northwest. Pine Grosbeaks were common only in the extreme eastern parts of Canada where there was an "enormous" cone crop, and the Northern Great Plains. Pine Siskins were below average on 14 of the 16 regions reporting them, with only Maine and the Mountain West recording average numbers. The distribution of American Goldfinches was patchy except in the Northeast, Appalachian, Middlewestern Prairie, and Southwestern regions. Over 20 wintered in Revelstoke, British Columbia, for the first time. The hoped-for invasion of Lawrence's Goldfinches into Arizona failed to materialize.

Common Redpolls all "stayed in Canada" according to Thomas Rogers. Not surprisingly, Hoarys were unreported. Similarly, Red Crossbills were reported as above normal only at Revelstoke, while 11 regions reported them as scarce or absent. White-winged Crossbills were abundant only in eastern Canada. Of note were individuals that appeared at Pocatello and Tulsa with a small flock at Cheyenne. Cassin's Finches and Rosy Finches were very scarce.

Lapland Longspurs were uncommon on the East Coast and in the Midwest but were unusually common in Ontario and the Southern Great Plains through southern Texas. Other longspurs were widely scattered in small numbers. Snow Buntings were abundant in the Ontario, Niagara-Champlain, and northern Appalachian regions, and in the prairie and Great Lakes areas, but were very scarce in the West.

### Winter population dynamics

**P**OPULATION BOUNDARIES are in a constant state of flux—some species expand and contract their range over large areas, while others appear to be occupying the same area year after year. But even in the latter group, changes are occurring in population size and distribution of individuals

and all of this comes under the heading of population dynamics. This section is perhaps the most important of all the sections since it directly reflects how bird populations are faring on a continent-wide basis, and keeps both professional ornithologists and amateur birdwatchers abreast of the changes that are occurring.

For the first time in 20 years, Brown Pelicans returned to Rockport, Texas; four were sighted by the end of February. A total of 19 Anhingas wintered in Montgomery County, Kansas, and Great Cormorants continued their movement south down the East Coast with five reported from Florida and above-average numbers reported from the Hudson-Delaware area. Although unusually low in Florida, Cattle Egrets were doing well in Georgia. Many wintered along the Northern Pacific Coast to northern Vancouver Island. Louisiana Herons were absent along the Gulf Coast, but White Ibis remained in normal numbers in North Carolina despite the cold weather.

Mute Swans continued to increase along the Middle Atlantic coast and on Lake Ontario and into Michigan. Whistling Swans were widely reported from Long Island to Alabama and Florida, although an epidemic killed hundreds of swans in northern California. All areas reporting Trumpeter Swans commented on the high numbers; nearly 1600 individuals were reported. New Mexico had its first confirmed record when an illegally shot swan east of Silver City was identified as a Trumpeter.

Most duck species were reported in good numbers, although reports of King Eider and Oldsquaw were scattered and numbers may be down. Large numbers of Fulvous Whistling Ducks were reported in eastern North Carolina as this species continues to move northward. The presence of nine Masked Ducks at Loxahatchee N.W.R., Florida, suggests that breeding may occur soon. Barrow's Goldeneyes again wintered in numbers on the Arizona-Nevada border, and were found in New Mexico.

It is difficult to assess the population dynamics of most raptors since numbers are usually low and reports scattered. Turkey Vultures wintered in record numbers in the Hudson-Delaware region with individuals in

Vermont and New York, as well as in Michigan, Ohio, Oregon and Washington, hopefully showing a population increase after declining for some time (Brown, 1976 *AB* 30:909-912). Ontario reported a great year for Red-tailed Hawks, as did the Appalachian and Western Great Lakes areas. Reports of Bald and Golden Eagles were mixed—generally they seem to be holding their own.

Ospreys wintered with interesting frequency in southern regions. A total of 52 Peregrines was reported continent-wide, mostly from coastal areas, half the number reported in the previous two years. Large numbers of American Kestrels appeared in the Western Great Lakes and Middle-western Prairie regions. A sad commentary on our times is the omission of dates, places, and numbers of falcons from the Northern Great Plains report, lest falconers use the information to secure birds.

Although Ruffed Grouse may have suffered high mortality in the Northeast, population levels were good throughout the range and at a peak in the central Canadian provinces. Willow Ptarmigans were unusually common in the Northeast and Rock Ptarmigan appeared for the first time in the region on the Gros Morne, Newfoundland, CBC. Turkeys were reported as thriving in all areas where they have been reintroduced and were extending their range in most cases.

A total of 69 Whooping Cranes spent the winter at Aransas N.W.R., a new high count, and six Whoopers from the Sandhill Crane Foster Parent Program at Gray's Lake, Idaho, wintered in central New Mexico. From nearly 40 eggs placed in Sandhill nests in Idaho, an estimated ten Whooping Cranes have fledged in the past two years, a respectable success rate. Since it takes several years for a Whooper to reach maturity, this satellite population will be non-breeding for 2-3 more years. Establishment of breeding colonies removed from the Wood Buffalo-Aransas population is a major step in the recovery program for the Whooping Crane. Ten Whoopers were spotted in Colorado during February migration.

High shorebird numbers were present on the West Coast, especially Willets and Marbled Godwits in the Northern Pacific region and Red Knots and Snowy Plovers on the

California coast. Again almost every region reported Glaucous Gulls, the most notable sightings being 40–50 in northeastern Colorado, 17 from the California coast, six in Alabama and one each in Kentucky, Louisiana, and Texas. Iceland Gulls were also widely reported, but one is directed to the pithy comments regarding “white-winged” gulls in the Southern Atlantic report. All too often, only size is taken into consideration when deciding on the identification. Note also that a “white-winged” gull collected in southern Texas was actually a Thayer’s Gull. Extreme caution must be used in identification of these gulls since they may be seen almost anywhere in North America. Reports of hybrids such as the Glaucous X Herring Gulls found in Massachusetts and Maine, certainly compound the problem, as does the albino Herring Gull in Texas.

Great Black-backed Gulls continued to spread with three showing up in Calumet, Illinois, and single birds on the Alabama and northern Florida Gulf Coasts. One wonders what the “strange black-winged gull” seen by many observers in Denver was! Thayer’s Gulls also turned up in various locations, possibly because more birders are becoming familiar with the proper field marks. A juvenile was seen off Ocean City, Maryland, and a possible Thayer’s Gull was seen near New Smyrna Beach, Florida. The interesting comments concerning Thayer’s and Herring Gulls around San Francisco Bay certainly show that the Bay birders have dump-watching “down to a science.” Ring-billed Gulls seemed very scarce in Ontario. Bonaparte’s Gulls were reported along the Middle Atlantic coast and several wintered at Cordova, Alaska.

Razorbills were found in record high numbers along the Northeastern coast as were Thick-billed Murres: totals of 2800 and 13,990 were counted respectively. This was thought to be owing to abundant squid, not the cold winter. Few reports were found south of Rhode Island, with Razorbills reported from New York, Maryland, North Carolina, and Florida. Many Common Murres fell victim to the *Argo Merchant* oil spill. Dovekies were reported on the Northeastern coast, with several reported from Cape May and one from Florida. Puffins also pushed southward with reports from Cape Cod and Cape May

Pacific alcids were also well represented in the Northern and Middle Pacific regions.

Surprisingly, Mourning Doves were extremely common in Québec and Ontario this winter. Large populations were also reported in the Middlewestern Prairie and Northern Rocky mountains. Inca Doves are rapidly moving towards Nevada through Arizona river bottoms, and an unprecedented 400 Band-tailed Pigeons invaded the Prescott, Arizona, region. An unbelievable 1140 White-winged Doves were counted near Davie, Florida.

Screech and Barn Owls seemed more conspicuous in the East, but Short-eareds were low in number. Great Horned Owls were increasing in Ontario, but few reports mentioned this species. Several Burrowing Owls were reported in the Northern Pacific and eastern Washington, but this Blue-Listed species was hard to find in the Middle Pacific and may be declining rapidly. Barred Owls continued their movement into the Northwest (Taylor and Forsman, 1976, *Condor* 78:560–561) with sightings in Glacier N.P., eastern Washington, and southern British Columbia.

The mild southern California winter had Poor-wills calling all winter, with three Lesser Nighthawks at Blythe in late January. Lesser Nighthawks and hummingbirds lingered in Arizona. Reports suggest Whip-poor-wills winter along the southern coast of North Carolina. As might be expected, the mild West Coast weather again permitted up to 15 Anna’s Hummingbirds to winter in western British Columbia. Other sightings occurred in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon.

The report of 23 Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in one colony at Wakefield, Virginia, is encouraging, but this was balanced by their absence on the Lake Georgia-Pacific CBC in Arkansas, where 13 were counted last year. Hairy Woodpeckers were at the lowest ebb in seven years in the Appalachian region. Red-bellied Woodpeckers had an exceptional year in the Ontario and Hudson-Delaware regions, Michigan, and southern Texas with individuals straying as far as central Colorado. Red-headed Woodpeckers were also unusually common in the Hudson-Delaware region, Michigan, Wiscon-

sin, and Iowa, but were low in number in Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma. They wandered into South Dakota, Idaho, and New Mexico. A flight of Lewis' Woodpeckers invaded New Mexico.

Over 50 Eastern Phoebes were reported from Montreal to southern California, suggesting an expanding winter range, although most Northeastern birds did not make it through January. Horned Larks fared well on the lower East Coast. Blue Jays continued to expand their wintering range westward with many reports in the northern Rockies, Mountain West, and Northwest. High numbers were reported in southern Texas, and in the Ontario and Québec regions where Blue Jays failed to move southward. Common Crows appeared in record numbers in Ontario, and Common Ravens continue to increase in Vermont. Common Crows invaded southwestern Arizona with counts of 500–600 where there were only a few previous records, and Yellow-billed Magpies continued to move northward. An exceptional number of wrens was reported this winter. Carolina Wrens appeared to be doing well in the East until the January freeze. Winter Wrens lived up to their name in the West, with several in the northern Rocky Mountains, Middle Pacific, and Arizona with at least 25 sightings.

Surprisingly, almost all eastern regions had record numbers of Hermit Thrushes, especially east of the Great Lakes. Varied Thrushes were absent from the Pacific Northwest. Boat-tailed Grackles in Delaware and New Jersey were exceptionally high in numbers. White-crowned Sparrows were common along the Eastern Seaboard as were White-throated Sparrows in the Northeast. Numbers of White-throated Sparrows were also high in the Southern Great Plains and they invaded New Mexico and Arizona with scattered reports in the Rockies. Tree Sparrows moved farther south than usual over most of the United States as did Field, Fox, and White-crowned Sparrows. House Finches extended into Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Wisconsin, and seven wintered at Bozeman, Montana. Despite the weather, record numbers of House Finches were reported in the Middle Atlantic and the Carolinas

## Pelagics

**O**BVIOUSLY WE KNOW LITTLE concerning the distribution of pelagic species during the winter. As winter pelagic trips become increasingly popular among the strong-stomached, especially on the East Coast, a surprising number of formerly "enigma" species such as the skua will be seen. The new sport of jetty-watching that has developed along the Texas coast is an encouraging sign.

Northern Fulmars were reported in large numbers throughout the season off the Northeast coast, with one found in a parking lot in Bennington, Vermont! Cory's Shearwater was reported in December, and a Greater Shearwater and two skuas later in the season. A total of 29 skuas was observed far off the coast of New Jersey. A pelagic trip from Ocean City, Maryland, was quite successful—two skuas, ten Pomarine Jaegers, and 110 Red Phalaropes. A skua and the only reported Long-tailed Jaegers occurred off the coast of Florida, along with three Audubon's Shearwaters and 900 phalaropes off Canaveral. A Manx Shearwater was reported off Cocoa Beach. The Blue-footed Booby 120 km south of the Sabine River provided the first (?) winter record for Louisiana.

Three Parasitic Jaegers were seen off High Island, Texas, and two were inland—at Denver and Coffey County, Kansas. A Pomarine at Prince Albert N.P. provided the second Saskatchewan record and an unidentified jaeger was seen on the Lake Milford, Arkansas, CBC.

As for most years, the West Coast stole the show, with an impressive six species of shearwaters around the Monterey area—Pink-footed, Flesh-footed, New Zealand, Short-tailed, Manx, and Sooty. Six Laysan and seven Black-footed Albatrosses were reported, plus excellent numbers of Pomarine Jaegers. One Parasitic was reported from Monterey and several from southern California. Northern Fulmars were also widely reported, with two reports each of Laysan and Short-tailed Albatrosses from the Northwest.

Few reports mentioned Black-legged Kittiwakes, although large numbers appeared off



the Middle Pacific coast. Four were seen off the coast of southern Texas. Only two Sabine's Gulls were reported—Fire Island, New York and Cameron, Louisiana.

### Lingerers

**I**N SPITE OF THE FRIGID WINTER in the eastern half of the continent, and perhaps because of the mild winter elsewhere, late-lingering or "short-stopped" birds were reported in considerable numbers and variety.

In Alaska, two Western Grebes wintered at Cordova for the first time. A White Pelican attempted to winter at Big Stone N.W.R., Minnesota, but died December 11. Single birds were also widely reported in the central United States. Great Egrets wintered at Lowden, Washington and in Logandale, Nevada, in the company of a Snowy Egret and White-faced Ibis. Two White-faced Ibises also wintered in Arizona.

More common in fall migration in California, a lingering immature Broad-winged Hawk was found in mid-December at San Diego and another was found in late December at Monterey. More surprising was one discovered at Indian Lake, New York, at the end of January.

An amazing number of shorebirds lingered at the beginning of the reporting period and into late December. From the Northeast region, three Semipalmated Plovers, two Greater Yellowlegs, two Lesser Yellowlegs, a Least Sandpiper, and a Red Phalarope were reported. A White-rumped Sandpiper on December 4 was very late. A Semipalmated Sandpiper on January 30 at Chatham, Massachusetts was unprecedented (see Phillips, 1975, *AB* 29:799–806). Whimbrels wintered north to Ocean City, Maryland, a first. A Pectoral Sandpiper wintered in northwest South Carolina and possibly another at Gamesville, Florida. Others were sighted at La Crosse, Wisconsin and Davis Dam, Nevada, in mid-December. American Avocets lingered into December at Farmington Bay N.W.R., Utah, where one was seen in January. For the first time Northern Phalaropes were recorded in Cordova, Alaska, during the winter. A Roseate Tern was found dead at Key West in early December for Florida's first winter specimen, and a sight record

was reported from the same place on January 5! The first mid-winter occurrence of Elegant Tern in North America occurred at Princeton Harbor, California, and a Heermann's Gull wandered into Arizona for the third winter record.

Three species of hummers were reported in Nevada; Black-chinned and Anna's were in Texas; Rufous and Black-chinned were in Louisiana; a Rufous was in Florida; and a Broad-billed was in San Diego.

A Poor-will observed at Pratt, Kansas, in mid-December was unexpected, as were the Common Nighthawks in southern Texas during such a cold winter. Say's Phoebe wintered for the first time at Penticton, British Columbia; Rock Wrens wintered in Pueblo, Colorado; and a Wood Thrush was found in Virginia, as well as a Veery in early December in Vermont. A Brown Thrasher tried to winter in Québec but died during the cold weather. A Townsend's Solitaire wintered in Fairbanks, for the first Alaskan winter record. A Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at Flaming Gorge, Utah, on January 27 was out-of-season. Loggerhead Shrikes lingered farther north than usual. A White-eyed Vireo was found north of its range at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, and Solitary Vireos continue to appear in Virginia and the Carolinas during winter.

It is astonishing how many warblers are being reported during winter in North America. Soon birders will be referring to those confusing winter warblers! Notable finds in the East include: Hooded Warbler on the Halifax (West) CBC, Blackburnian Warbler at Hunting Island, South Carolina, on January 29 (first winter record), and Bay-breasted at Suffolk, Virginia. The southern reports are spiced with lingering and wintering warblers, such as the first winter record for Cape May Warbler in Alabama.

Almost all eastern regions commented on the number of lingering sparrows, such as Grasshopper, Seaside, Swamp, and Field. A Henslow's Sparrow was found at a feeder in a boreal forest in Vermont at the beginning of December. A Savannah Sparrow was found at Brattleboro, Vermont, for the second winter record. Both Lark Bunting and Chipping Sparrow wintered in Minnesota for the first time, the former surviving  $-30^{\circ}\text{F}$  temperatures by roosting with 250 House

Sparrows. In Alaska, a Savannah Sparrow wintered in Fairbanks for the first time, and a Lincoln's Sparrow wintered at Kodiak for the second winter and state records. Clay-colored Sparrow occurred at Point Reyes. Twenty Harris' Sparrows were reported from the Southwestern region, and a Black-throated Sparrow wintered in northern California for the second time.

### East, West, North, and South Wanderers

**A**N UNBELIEVABLE COLLECTION of vagrant and wandering species was reported this winter, reinforcing my suspicion that probably nothing prevents a species from being found outside its normal range in North America. Certainly some species have strict physiological tolerances and others have specific habitat requirements, but even individuals of these species may be reported out of their usual range. Dispersal of young migratory birds is probably in various directions although the majority probably move in the same general direction. Birds surely must have to perfect the technique of migration through experience. This suggests an explanation for the large number of juvenile warblers that "bounce down" both coasts during fall migration while the majority of adult birds migrate slightly inland. A fantastic number of birds must end up in the oceans! Migratory birds are also frequently blown off course, or carried along by storms, probably resulting for most extralimital sightings. More exciting are the reports of supposedly non-migratory species far from their normal range. Certainly some individuals move short distances exploring possible new habitats, but long distance displacements are really astonishing.

This section of the Changing Seasons seems to grow longer with every issue. More and more extralimital records occur each season; there were at least 15 new state records this season. This must reflect in part the increased number of birdwatchers that go into the field. I would suspect a large number of birds wander beyond their range every year, and as bird watching becomes more popular these disoriented birds will be more frequently sighted. Also,

birders are now discovering "hot-spots"—bird traps that seem to attract displaced or out-of-season birds. These discoveries provide insights into the subtleties of population dynamics and are an important aspect of the study of avian distribution.

For the second straight year, a Yellow-billed Loon appeared at Calgary, Alberta, and six were reported along the Northern Pacific coast, with two in California. Only three Eared and two Western Grebes occurred on the East Coast, probably owing to the hard winter since grebes seem to be very sensitive to cold weather. A single Brown Pelican attempted to winter at Cape May, New Jersey, but was later found dead. An Anhinga appeared at Sweetwater Reservoir, providing the first California record. A Magnificent Frigatebird was also present at Primo Beach, California. Four Ross' Geese wandered into Nevada and a White-fronted Goose on Amchitka Island, Alaska, was certainly unexpected. The first Cinnamon Teal for Georgia appeared in January; another appeared in the Everglades. The Mississippi and Swallow-tailed Kites reported in North Carolina in February were both out of range and season. A White-tailed Kite was seen on the Texarkana, Arkansas, CBC. A Clapper Rail highlighted the Broad Cove, Nova Scotia, CBC.

Purple Sandpipers appeared in Texas and were also in Florida and Arkansas at the end of November (first state record). No invasion of Ivory Gulls occurred with only single birds seen in Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Québec, although 300–400 were seen, following a great storm in January, in Newfoundland. Both Laughing and Franklin's Gulls were reported from the southern California coast.

One of the most interesting reports concerns a Burrowing Owl found near Jones Beach, Long Island, New York. Being in a weakened condition, it was easily captured and determined to be the "supposedly" sedentary Florida race. It was then restored to health, flown back to Florida and released. Could the bird have been a stowaway on a Florida flight into J. F. Kennedy Airport, 30 miles east of Jones Beach?

Iowa was the ornithological hot-spot for more than Snowy Owls, with a Gray Jay

wintering at Decorah and a Pygmy Nuthatch at Des Moines, both first state records. Unidentified hummers were also reported in North and South Carolina, with the comment that winter birds on the East Coast can no longer be assumed to be Ruby-throated, with the occurrence of a *Selasphorus* (species?) in North Carolina last fall. A Piñon Jay appeared at a feeder at Pratt, Kansas and a Pygmy Nuthatch at Sheridan, Montana, January 4 was unprecedented.

A Boreal Chickadee also spent the winter in Des Moines, and a Tufted Titmouse wandered to Yankton, South Dakota.

Several western birds moved eastward in good numbers. A total of 26 Varied Thrushes was reported from the eastern half of North America, most notably from Nova Scotia, Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York. After the invasion last year, Townsend's Solitaires appeared only in Québec, Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, and Missouri. The Québec bird was reported as singing—this is not unusual since Townsend's Solitaires defend a winter feeding territory (Lederer, 1977, *Bird-Banding* 48:11–18).

A most exciting find was a Mountain Bluebird at Newark, New York, in January, possibly the second state record. A Wied's Crested Flycatcher and Vermilion Flycatcher both occurred in Florida. Other western species in the East include: "Bullock's Oriole in New Brunswick (first record); two Brewer's Blackbirds in New Brunswick; Black-headed Grosbeak in Connecticut, South Carolina, Vermont (second record), New Jersey, and Texas; Bohemian Waxwing in New Jersey (fourth record); and Western Tanager in San Antonio, Texas. One, possibly two, Green-tailed Towhees appeared for the first time in Mississippi and one was found on Long Island. Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Dickcissels were widely reported throughout the East

In the West, there were two Northern Waterthrushes at Pocatello, Idaho, a Nashville Warbler at Pullman, Washington, a Black-throated Blue at Las Vegas, a Chestnut-sided at Phoenix, and no less than eight species of eastern warblers in California, including an Ovenbird at Riverside. Five Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, two Baltimore Orioles, two Dickcissels and a Common

Grackle (fifth record) were reported in California. A Dickcissel also appeared in Arizona and a Bridled Titmouse was collected only 10 miles from the California border.

A few more western fringillids trickled into the East: A "White-winged" Junco was found in Virginia; Lark Sparrows were reported from Maryland, New York, and North and South Carolina; three Clay-colored Sparrows were seen in Florida; and a Harris' Sparrow showed up at Camillus, New York. A Golden-crowned Sparrow "returned" to Boonton, New Jersey, only to be repeatedly harassed by a Sharp-shinned Hawk and Loggerhead Shrike. A Painted Bunting at Lebanon, New Jersey, provided the second winter record, while a Blue Grosbeak at Freeport, Long Island, represented the first winter record. A McCown's Longspur was found at Bridgewater, Massachusetts; there appears to be no recent report of this species east of Illinois. Two Smith's Longspurs were found on Assateague Island, Maryland.

#### **Paleartic and neotropical outlanders**

**A**S MIGHT BE EXPECTED, few paleartic species appeared this winter, nor did many neotropical species venture far north.

One Whooper Swan appeared at Adak Island, Alaska. A female Smew was found at Côte Ste-Catherine, Québec, but the wild status of the bird has not been confirmed. Only eight European Wigeons were reported on the Northeast coast, and the only Tufted Ducks there were three around the New York City area. Four Tufted Ducks were seen in California with many reports of European Wigeons, a flock of over 20 being a new high count for Amchitka Island, Alaska. Only one Green-winged (Eurasian) Teal appeared on the East Coast at Warren, Virginia, but five were reported in the Pacific Northwest with two wandering to southern California. The only Ruff reported was in California, but a white-rumped curlew at Brookhaven, Long Island, caused much excitement and as yet is unidentified.

Lesser Black-backed Gulls were numerous with 18 reported. Notable sightings were at Cleveland, Padre Island, Texas, and three in Florida. A number of Black-headed Gulls

were reported from New England south to Long Island. Little Gulls were also seen in New England, with one wintering around Cleveland. The best bird of the season may have been the second Ross' Gull to appear in eastern North America; thanks to a hunter on Fogo Island, Newfoundland, it was also the first specimen.

Two Least Grebes were discovered in southern Arizona for most of the reporting period. Olivaceous Cormorants also were reported in record numbers with five in southeastern Arizona at Patagonia Lake where they may have been present for over a year. Three Olivaceous Cormorants also appeared in New Mexico. A probable female Hook-billed Kite was seen at the end of January at Santa Ana N.W.R., Texas, where breeding occurred last year. Green Kingfishers continued to slip into Texas with sightings along the Mission, San Marcos, and Nueces Rivers near Corpus Christi.

A possible second United States record of Nutting's Flycatcher occurred at Evans Lake in southwestern New Mexico on December 18. This myiarchid is extremely difficult to identify in the field, but the sighting is backed with notes on vocalizations, the key characteristic. Mexican Crows continue to increase in southern Texas with 500 reported from Brownsville. Four Rufous-backed Robins were seen in the Tucson, Arizona, region.

### Early spring activities

**A**S SOON AS THE COLD WEATHER ENDED in February, many birds started to move north in the eastern United States. In early February, Whistling Swans and Canvasbacks were in New Hampshire, Purple Martins had returned to South Carolina, Turkey Vultures were moving into the Hudson-Delaware region, and Mountain Bluebirds were back in the Northern Great Plains. Anhingas and Brown Pelicans started nesting in Florida and the White Pelicans started to leave the Southern Great Plains. By mid-February, an Osprey was back in Connecticut, a Common Gallinule was spotted on Nantucket Island, many waterfowl were moving up the coast, and some shorebirds were sighted in migration. By the end of the month, Red-

winged Blackbirds were on territories in Ontario, a Swallow-tailed Kite was at Flamingo, and a Chuck-will's-widow was at Lakeland. Purple Martins reached Knoxville, Tennessee, Marsh Hawks were back in Minnesota, and Sandhill Cranes were moving through the Middlewestern Prairie.

In the West, Violet-green Swallows reached Spokane earlier than ever before and thrushes were moving in February. Cinnamon Teal were also moving in early February, as were herons, swallows, and Turkey Vultures. An American Bittern returned to Toppenish N.W.R., Washington, in mid-February, and Orange-crowned Warblers were singing in northern California.

### Odds and ends

**S**OME REPORTS IN THESE SUMMARIES always fascinate me. The Chukar on the State House steps in Boston, Massachusetts, is unbelievable if you are familiar with the location of the State House. Had some hunting interest released it to persuade legislators to vote favorably on some bill? The House Wren in Québec on December 20 is interesting not only because of the late date, but because it was discovered in someone's house, supposedly having come down the chimney. The eight Fulvous Whistling Ducks seen riding in the surf of southern Texas would seem to be slightly out of their element, as were the two Purple Sandpipers in Ontario that disappeared down a hole in an ice sheet and did not reemerge.

Every winter there also seem to be large concentrations of species reported and I have gleaned just a few examples. The 727 Acorn Woodpeckers found within one CBC count area, Springville, California, must be destroying almost every telephone pole in that area. The 205,000 Eared Grebes on the Salton Sea was also very impressive, as were the "millions" of Common Redpolls "blackening the skies" in L'Anse-aux-Meadows, Newfoundland. I have calculated that if the 400 million blackbirds on the Delaware coast during February were evenly distributed across the state, you should see a blackbird every 11 feet! Think of the fun you could have with the 785 million blackbirds in 50 Louisiana roosts!