

The Changing Seasons

The winter of 1983-1984 — "The Siberian Express"

Paul Lehman

THE WINTER OF 1983-1984 IN MUCH OF North America will be remembered as one of contrasts and extremes. November and early December along both coasts were relatively mild, while the mid-continent was somewhat colder than normal. On December 15 the first of several blasts of frigid air moved southward into southern Canada and the United States, setting record lows for the dates. International Falls, Minnesota, hit -30°F on the 17th and -40°F on the 19th. By December 20, this initial area of intense cold in the mid-continent spread both westward to eastern Washington and Oregon, and eastward to the Atlantic Coast, and then southward to the Rio Grande Valley by December 21. Particularly severe cold hit the South on Christmas Day. This frigid air was brought well to the south by an intense ridge of high pressure which extended from the Canadian Arctic south to the Gulf Coast. On the morning of December 24, the barometer stood at 31.42 inches of mercury at Miles City, Montana, setting the *all-time* high-pressure record for the United States. Only the Southwest, south of a line from central California to southern New Mexico, escaped the arctic conditions.

During the two weeks of record cold, so many temperature records fell that it became the coldest December ever in many localities; in much of Texas it was the coldest *month* ever on record. Some of the highlights (or "lowlights" to most people concerned) included: -52°F in Montana and -50°F in North Dakota on the 22nd; wind chill factors of -100°F in the Northern Great Plains; -39°F at Casper, Wyoming, on the 23rd; -25°F in Chicago and -15°F in Toledo on the 24th; and 20°F at Brownsville, 2°F in Birmingham, 1°F in Atlanta, and 10°F at Jacksonville on the 25th. Upper Mobile Bay froze for the second time in history.



Brambling, La Grande, Union Co., Oreg., Dec. 23 & 24, 1983. Photo/O. Schmidt.

Omaha, Nebraska, spent 202 consecutive hours below zero, while Houston was below freezing for 91 continuous hours. Cold weather even affected Hawaii, setting the all-time low for the month at Maui of 52°F !

Temperatures moderated somewhat during the last week of December, but January was still very cold in many areas. Record low temperatures were set in some areas during that month, including -18°F in Columbus, Ohio, on the 21st and -20°F in New Jersey on January 22. In contrast, February was very mild in many regions and a number of record high temperatures were set.

The numbing cold in December and January, nicknamed "The Siberian Express" or "The Big Chill" by some, also prompted several regional editors to describe the season in such terms as "rugged" and "a long arduous ordeal." Several regional editors also commented on the dullness of the season following the

December cold. The combination of cold and relatively high amounts of precipitation early in the winter season, had significant effects on local bird populations in many areas.

THE MOST SEVERE IMPACT of the cold weather on birds may have been in the more southern regions not accustomed to prolonged sub-freezing temperatures. Particularly hard-hit this winter was South Texas. Many insectivorous birds were killed by the weather. Hummingbirds were particularly affected; some were found "frozen to perches and feeders." Virtually all the hummers were believed frozen in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. There was also large-scale ecological damage to the region from the killing of much vegetation, particularly exotic species.

At more northerly latitudes accustomed to cold winters, the effects were still noticeable. Many dead birds were found in Omaha, even under and around

feeders. There was an "incredible lack of birds" in Kansas, the cold "greatly reduced bird numbers" in the Northern Rocky Mountain/Intermountain Region, "most observers found the season quite boring" in the Western Great Lakes Region, and it was "unusually dull, especially after the December cold wave set in" in the Hudson-Delaware Region. On the other hand, in the Mountain West Region "record-keeping suggested that the winter did not impact that severely on birds as a whole," and in Florida "relatively few effects of this weather were detected in bird populations or survival." Most waterfowl were frozen out of northern localities and concentrated at the few remaining areas of open water (e.g., 10,000 Common Mergansers were attracted to a warm-water outflow from a power generating station in Ontario) or moved farther to the south (e.g., larger numbers of waterfowl than normal were present in the Southern Atlantic Coast Region). Gulls were forced to leave many areas of the Great Lakes after mid-December. Some freezes resulted in significant fish kills, attracting large concentrations of herons and, especially, gulls. Most significant were those occurring in the Middle Atlantic Coast, Southern Atlantic Coast, and South Texas regions. Particularly impressive was the concentration at Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina, in late December which involved $650,000 \pm$ gulls of 12 species, including over 15 Lesser Black-backed and single Mew and Thayer's gulls. Although not directly associated with a fish kill, an impressive number and variety of gulls were also found this winter along the Susquehanna River in Maryland. What makes this concentration even more unusual was its location inland on the Piedmont.

Landbirds were significantly impacted by the combination of cold and snow in many northern areas. Snow (especially crusty snow) hurt gallinaceous birds in the Southern Great Plains, Western Great Lakes, Middlewestern Prairie, and Niagara-Champlain regions. Half-hardy species such as Brown Creeper, Carolina and Winter wrens, both kinglets, Hermit Thrush, and mimids were significantly affected in a number of areas. The Northern Mockingbird may have been especially hard-hit in many northern regions. Ice storms are particularly devastating to passerines, and Doug Kibbe wrote that a coating of "an eighth-inch of ice is as effective as a glacier" in covering a king-

let's food resources.

Several species of ground feeders were particularly impacted by the extensive snow cover. Large numbers of Horned Larks were forced to move south or to congregate in limited open areas (e.g., plowed roads) in the Mountain West. Lapland Longspurs are notorious for suddenly appearing in immense flocks or in numbers farther south than usual immediately following major storms. Invasions of this species to the Gulf Coast states often closely follow severe winter storms farther to the north. Many times they disappear from there with the onset of improved weather as quickly as they appeared. This winter, large numbers were in the Southern Great Plains and Middlewestern Prairie regions, and the species was found all the way to the Gulf coasts of Florida and Alabama and was numerous on the Upper Texas coast. Snow Buntings also invaded southwards; large numbers spread farther south than usual in the Mountain West Region (and included Nevada's first), the species was fairly numerous in the Appalachians, and one made it to Tennessee. Deep snows were also likely responsible for the unusually large number of Rosy Finches seen in the Northern Rocky Mountain/Intermountain Region and in the lowlands of the Mountain West Region (including the eastern plains), and for moderate-sized flocks in eastern Montana and South Dakota. Probably associated with this movement were records of single "Gray-crowned" Rosy Finches far to the east: Michigan recorded its first ever, and Ohio had its second.

THE LATE FALL AND EARLY WINTER storms may have also been responsible for displacing numbers of late-migrating passerines east or southeastwards from the mainland to the West Indies Region. That Region recorded such strays as 3+ Western Kingbirds, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, three Eastern Wood-Pewees, and a Song Sparrow. The West Indies Region actually gathers in migrants not only from North and South America, but also those from Africa and Eurasia. The number of vagrants reported would certainly be much higher if there were more than just the few observers there presently.

The mild weather through early December in many areas of North America encouraged a good number of half-hardy species to linger up until the freeze. Lingerer rails, shorebirds, flycatchers, swallows, vireos, and warblers were

well-represented in many regions. A record sixteen species of warblers, including Townsend's and Yellow-throated, were recorded in the Northeastern Maritime Region during December. It is believed that many of these were reverse migrants that arrived in the Region very late in the fall. The importance of particular microhabitats to half-hardy species was very apparent this season. Sewage ponds regularly support late-lingering *landbirds*, and this December found two separate Barn Swallows at such sites in Michigan. Probably the most amazing such locality is the now-famous sewage canal in Chicago that annually attracts a marvelous assortment of December warblers.

Top honors to this season's collection of lingerers at one locale goes to the one-eighth acre patch of greenery on the Rutgers University campus in downtown Newark, New Jersey, which hosted two Wood Thrushes, Cape May Warbler, Ovenbird, and Yellow-breasted Chat in early December. During the same period, a single wet field in southern Ontario contained Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, and Pectoral Sandpiper. Needless to say, few of the early winter lingerers were seen after mid- or late December in the areas particularly affected by the arctic blasts. It is assumed that almost all of the less-hardy perished.

As an aside, it should be said here that many half-hardy species remain annually well into December and even January but do not actually winter locally. This is true even in such places as California and Arizona where the climate and food supply are conducive to remaining throughout the winter period. The regional editors in Arizona once used the appropriate term "late, low-density migrants" for these individuals and gave an excellent example of this phenomenon in 1975 when fourteen species of warblers were present near Phoenix into early January, but were followed by a drastic decline in both the number of species and individuals by mid-January. While such records occur during the winter reporting period of *American Birds*, they do not really constitute true winter records.

The unusually mild temperatures during February in many northern and eastern regions resulted in an influx of spring arrivals, most notably waterfowl, Killdeer, American Woodcock, and several passerines (especially blackbirds), some setting record-early arrival dates. At the end of the period the first of several sig-

nificant snowstorms hit a number of regions; their effect on these early arrivals is not well known at this time.

In the Southwest Region the weather was mild, with the contrasts and extremes being associated with precipitation. A relatively wet fall and early winter was followed by virtually no rain in Southern California and Arizona after Christmas. As usual, Southern California produced an amazing number and variety of wood warblers, with 30 species found during the period, as well as an excellent array of flycatchers, swallows, tanagers, and orioles. While many of these are vagrant species, a number of the individuals involved are returning year after year. In *AB* 37(3):337, Guy McCaskie wrote that "with the increased interest in searching for rarities we are learning that many of these 'lost vagrants' are at least living full lives, returning year after year to winter at the same locality. . . . With such birds as these returning for four or five years (normal life expectancy for small landbirds) we can be assured that they are also successfully summering at other localities, but we are a long way from knowing where those localities may be, and whether they are within the species' normal breeding range." Of course, examples of winter site fidelity in both vagrants and regularly occurring species are countless and come from every region of the continent. This season's longevity prizes go to the fifteen-year-old Barrow's Goldeneye at Shark River Inlet in New Jersey and to the nine-year-old American Tree Sparrow at a feeder in upstate New York.

While California certainly produces the largest volume of wintering vagrants each year, southern Louisiana has recently been found also to be a goldmine for such records. The isolated woods in Cameron Parish, in the extreme southwest, have been particularly productive. This winter produced 20 species of warblers on the state's CBCs and six species of "western" hummingbirds. Highlights included two Broad-tailed and single Calliope and Allen's hummingbirds, Brown-crested Flycatcher, Rock Wren, Tropical Parula (first state record), and Townsend's Warbler. Exceptionally late individuals included Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Veery, Yellow-throated and Red-eyed vireos, and Blackburnian Warbler. Since a significant number of these birds was collected it is unknown whether they represent late migrants or birds that were attempting to winter locally.

The appearance of several Mexican species (*e.g.*, Brown-crested Flycatcher and Tropical Parula) in Louisiana is additional evidence of the regular late fall/winter movement of individuals northeastward from Mexico into Texas, Louisiana, and, more rarely, farther east along the Gulf Coast. As usual, coastal and southern Texas and Florida continued to report a good number of unusual late-lingering/over-wintering species. Alabama also got into the act this year, with first winter records of Blue Grosbeak and Painted Bunting reported for that state.

RARITIES

WHILE THE TERM "THE SIBERIAN EXPRESS" was used by many people to describe the season's weather, many birders can also equate it with the unprecedented number of Siberian passerine vagrants which appeared in North America outside Alaska. On the heels of an autumn period which saw the appearance of a Rustic Bunting in British Columbia (which remained through the winter), Siberian Accentor in Washington, Stonechat of a Siberian race in New Brunswick (!), and single Bramblings in British Columbia, Alberta, Colorado, and Ontario, the winter season was no less exciting. Bramblings are almost becoming routine, with as many as seven in the Northern Pacific Coast Region and individuals in eastern British Columbia, eastern Oregon, Northern California, Utah, Colorado (two), and Minnesota; an additional bird was in New York after the close of the period. A White/Black-backed Wagtail wintered in Washington. Even more exciting was a Rustic Bunting in Northern California. Certainly the top prize must go to the male Siberian Rubythroat found dead in Ontario in late December. In addition to the above passerines, a Whooper Swan and the returning Smew were in Northern California and there was the much-studied and publicized Slaty-backed Gull in Saint Louis for over a month. Following the period in early spring there was a Ross' Gull in Connecticut.

A question that arises is why were there so many Asiatic landbirds this fall and winter in North America, with individuals occurring all the way to the East Coast? Certainly the number is so high that one cannot easily explain it as being due merely to chance. The origin of some of these birds, particularly in the East,

has been the subject of much debate. Do some cross the North Atlantic or do they all come eastward from Asia into Alaska and the Northwest, and then continue southeastwards varying distances, some even reaching the East Coast? In the preceding "Changing Seasons" (*AB* 38(2) 171-173) Paul DeBenedictis discusses this very topic. The accumulating records from this winter of these Asiatic species in the interior of North America suggests the North Pacific/Bering Sea route.

Owing to the large number of these records this year one is tempted to look at weather conditions over the Siberian and North Pacific regions during the *fall* months when these birds would be migrating south. Indeed, the weather may well have been a significant contributing factor as a strong ridge of high pressure set up over the eastern Pacific during September and October. The clockwise circulation associated with this ridge resulted in a flow of air from the direction of Siberia into Alaska and the Pacific Northwest and farther to the southeast (a factor responsible for the early rains last fall along the Pacific Coast). A number of these Siberian passerines are quite hardy (*e.g.*, Bramblings winter in northern Japan) and so can easily survive in northern North America well into the fall or early winter period before either being forced to move south into southern Canada and the United States or to appear at feeders, where they are more likely to be found.

While California and the Southwest were well endowed with eastern species this season, the number of western species found in the East seemed to be below average. Of particular interest in the West was the veritable invasion of Chestnut-sided Warblers, with seven in Arizona and four in Southern California during the period. Other highlights included a wintering Wood Thrush in Northern California and two Kentucky Warblers in Southern California. In the East, a total of 41 Varied Thrushes was found east of the Rockies, while there were only seven Western Tanagers east of Texas, and single Black-headed Grosbeaks were in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Texas. A small number of Black-billed Magpies and Townsend's Solitaires wandered east to the Western Great Lakes; a single magpie in Indiana was more unusual, as were individual solitaires in Quebec and Newfoundland. Some of the season's best highlights not previously mentioned would certainly include Short-tailed Albatross off Southern California, three

Garganeys and a Barn Swallow in Hawaii, a Sedge Wren in Sonora, Lesser Black-backed Gull in Oklahoma, two Harlequin Ducks in Tennessee, Northern Lapwing and Common Greenshank in Newfoundland, Great-tailed Grackle in Nova Scotia, and two Ferruginous Hawks in Florida. A Yellow-billed Loon in inland Southern California was out-classed by one in Arizona. Continued sightings of Zone-tailed Hawks in South Texas is evidence of a small but regular wintering population there. Also in the South Texas Region, Blue Bunting sightings accumulate at an increased rate. Continued reports of Green Parakeets and Red-crowned Parrots from that Region generate further debate on those birds' origins. The same questions regarding origin are germane to the sightings of Anhinga in Southern California, Barnacle Goose in Quebec and Virginia, and Jackdaw in Massachusetts. The geese are a particularly regularly occurring source of discussion in many regions. While birds along the Atlantic Coast are problematical, sightings well inland are very likely of escapees. The species is strictly coastal in distribution in Europe and is kept regularly in captivity. I believe the thoughts on the origin of the Barnacle Geese in the interior was well presented by Bruce Peterjohn in *AB* 37(3):309, as they related to regular sightings in the Middlewestern Prairie Region. Four Purple Gallinules in the Northeastern Maritime Region were unprecedented for the period; even more remarkable was that two of the individuals landed on boats well offshore. Perhaps the most intriguing records this season come from the West Indies Region where two Western Reef-Herons and a Great Egret of the African subspecies *melanorhynchos* were found. The regional editor speculates on the environmental effects associated with last year's *El Niño* as possible causal factors in these two west African species occurring there. Certainly the presence of the Western Reef-Herons adds additional spice to the discussion over the origin of the Nantucket, Massachusetts, bird (see: Roberson, Don. 1984. Ruminations on Reef-Herons and Ships. *Birding* 16(1):16-20).

IRRUPTIONS

BY FAR THE MOST NOTABLE IRRUPTION this year was the spectacular movement of Great Gray Owls into southern Canada and the northern United States

from Manitoba and Minnesota to Long Island. Record numbers of owls appeared in several regions, including a staggering 419 in Ontario and 250 in Quebec. Other impressive totals included 140 in the Western Great Lakes Region (primarily in northeast Minnesota), more than 59 in Manitoba, and 42 in the Niagara-Champlain Region. One or two on northern Long Island, New York, were the farthest south. The species first appeared in mid-October (in the Western Great Lakes Region), numbers built up in most areas during December, and declined somewhat in January and sharply during February. Most of these Great Grays appeared to be healthy, so they must have been able to find food. Likely associated with this flight were moderate numbers of Boreal Owls, found primarily in the Western Great Lakes, Ontario, and Quebec regions, and four Great Horned Owls of the race *subarcticus* in Ontario. Not normally thought of as an irruptive species, the Barred Owl also staged a noticeable movement this season and was recorded in large numbers in Minnesota and Ontario; many individuals frequented residential neighborhoods. On the other hand, Northern Goshawks were noted in appreciable numbers only in the Middlewestern Prairie Region, and three were found farther south than normal in Georgia. Rough-legged Hawks and Snowy Owls were in low numbers almost everywhere. Gyrfalcons were widely recorded southwards to the northern states, although not in high numbers; four in Nebraska and singles in Illinois, southern New Jersey, and Virginia were more unusual.

Winter finches put on another poor showing this year, with Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks being relatively numerous only in parts of widely scattered regions. Pine Siskins were notably abundant in eastern British Columbia, where a single truck killed 208! Numbers of Pine Grosbeaks, crossbills, and redpolls were low or nonexistent almost everywhere. Chickadees did move south, however, with a major flight of Black-capped into the Appalachians, southeastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. Boreals "invaded" North Dakota and small numbers were found southwards farther to the east. Bohemian Waxwings moved south in high numbers in the Mountain West Region, with a large flock reaching as far south as Flagstaff, Arizona. Good numbers were reported eastward locally to Ontario and Vermont. Another notable

flight this season involved Red-necked Grebes in the Northeast from the Niagara-Champlain south to Long Island, New York, beginning in February. Impressive totals of up to 100+ individuals were noted at Montauk Point, Long Island. Perhaps associated with this movement in the Northeast were encouragingly high numbers of Horned Grebes, a species experiencing significant declines in many areas in recent years.

MORE UNSEASONAL RECORDS AND SOME COMMENTS

IN A PREVIOUS CHANGING SEASONS (*AB* 37(2):150-154), I gave some of my prejudices related to the reporting of particular species during the late fall and winter in North America. A number of such hard-to-identify or "over-reported" species seen this winter season deserve special comment here.

Broad-winged Hawk: An unprecedented number of documented winter records of this species away from Florida, Louisiana, and California were reported this season. One was photographed and another captured in Nova Scotia during December. A bird present throughout January and photographed in upstate New York established the first documented winter record for the Niagara-Champlain Region. In February, an adult was in southern New Jersey and a pair was reported in North Carolina. In Florida, normally only a few individuals are found in winter, but this year many more were seen, including 21 in the Lower Keys.

Swainson's Hawk: For a species that regularly winters in North America only in southern Florida, an individual present (and photographed) near Anchorage, Alaska, for most of December was truly remarkable. An adult was photographed in Ohio in February; however the bird showed several broken primaries, casting doubt on its origin. Investigation by the regional editor revealed that a surprising number of hawks are kept not only by falconers but also as pets. It is almost impossible to keep track of birds involved in the pet trade, so that the origin of such individuals found in the wild is very difficult to establish.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: One was reported as wintering in Hawaii and would represent one of the *very few* winter records for the area covered by *American Birds* regional reports.

Baird's Sandpiper: This species normally departs the northern hemisphere in

winter. There is a small number of well-documented early winter records for North America which almost certainly pertain to very late transients. The same is true for White-rumped Sandpiper, which is reported almost annually along the Atlantic Coast in December, but not thereafter. This season's late migrant Baird's was found in December in Maryland

Pectoral Sandpiper: The winter status of this species is largely the same as that for the Baird's and White-rumped discussed above. There are also a handful of records in North America of birds which may have wintered locally. The two reports this season came from South Texas, one from mid-winter.

Wilson's Phalarope: Alabama established its first winter record.

Northern Phalarope: This species was previously thought not to winter in North America (except for a small flock found annually near San Diego). In winter, Red Phalarope is *far* more likely. However, this year significant numbers were reported off Georgia (along with the "expected" larger number of Reds) through most of the period. More fieldwork is needed to determine if this species occurs at all regularly off the Southeast coast in winter.

Black-chinned Hummingbird: This species is regular in winter in small numbers along the Gulf coasts of Texas and Louisiana; other winter records of *Archilochus* hummingbirds in the Southeast may also be of this species. There are only a handful of documented winter records for California (and the West); this season two were present near Los Angeles

Eastern Wood-Pewee: One collected in Louisiana on December 4 was exceptionally late. Are there *any* documented winter records for North America?

***Empidonax* flycatchers:** Three individual *Empidonax* were seen in December in the Hudson-Delaware Region, none identified to species. In Florida, 20 Least Flycatchers were found in Palm Beach County. Several Least were also found in Louisiana and Texas. While Least is almost certainly the most likely *Empidonax* in the East in late fall and winter, observers are urged not to automatically assume this is the case but to consider the possibility that western species may be involved, records of which do exist. In the West, Dusky and Gray flycatchers are the most regularly reported species in Arizona, with smaller numbers of Ham-

mond's and Westerns seen. Most of the records from New Mexico are of Dusks. In California, Western Flycatcher is the most-recorded winter *Empidonax* along the coast. Least Flycatcher is being reported more regularly now in California in winter, and a Willow Flycatcher there this year was the state's (and North America's?) second ever for the season.

Grosbeaks: Almost all the grosbeaks reported this year in the East were Rose-breasted. However, Black-headed Grosbeak is a very rare but regular winter visitor and observers should not automatically assume that *Ø Pheucticus* grosbeaks in winter are Rose-breasted. In California, Rose-breasted actually outnumber Black-headed most winters, showing the changes in relative status possible during unseasonal periods.

Chipping Sparrow: This species appears to be over-reported regularly during the winter period from the northern states and provinces, particularly on Christmas Bird Counts. While very small numbers certainly *do* occur, sightings of this species from these regions should be well-documented. Only single such reports were given by the editors of the Quebec and Middlewestern Prairie regions this year.

POTPOURRI

OBSERVER INTEREST IN IDENTIFYING and studying gulls continues to increase. In some regions their "importance" to birders cannot be underestimated, as evidenced by Doug Kibbe's comment that gulls are "the salvation from birding doldrums in recent winters." Bruce Peterjohn writes that "interest in gulls reached an all-time high this winter," partly due to the presence of the Slaty-backed in Saint Louis. As a result, this season brought yet another increase in the number of Lesser Black-backed and Thayer's gulls sightings in the East. More and more, first-winter Lesser Black-backed are being reported. Despite the increase in eastern sightings of Thayer's Gull, observers are urged to use extreme caution in identifying this species owing to the variability in the plumages of Herring and Iceland gulls. In spite of the increased interest in gulls, numbers of Little and Common Black-headed gulls reported continued to be lower in many areas than those of a decade ago. In the interior West, gull scrutinizers found a Mew and several Thayer's in Utah. Since the study of gulls cannot exist with-

out its lively debates, it is good to hear that the infamous dark-mantled gull "controversy still rages on" in Alabama/northwest Florida.

In Alaska, a very impressive concentration of 150,000 Crested Auklets was found, and yet another Black Guillemot was discovered far inland. An Anna's Hummingbird was rescued there in January and flown by an airline south to Seattle. Dan Gibson tells of other such life-saving gestures which have been made before, including the air-shipment of a Steller's Eider to Washington a few years ago. So, Seattle birders beware!

A Ruff that wintered in Newfoundland (!) was regularly seen feeding and roosting in a shopping mall with Rock Doves!

Continued pelagic trips off Georgia are producing much new valuable distributional information, and increased observations of the large reservoirs in the arid, interior Southwest continue to produce an interesting assortment of "coastal" waterbirds (*e.g.*, Red-throated Loon on Lake Powell, Red-necked Grebe on Lake Mohave, and two Surf Scoters at Davis Dam).

A Greater Prairie-Chicken in Iowa was believed to have wandered south from populations in Minnesota, evidence that this species may move greater distances seasonally than many observers would suspect.

A Lesser Golden-Plover in South Carolina in late January may have been a very late southbound migrant, a very early northbound migrant (the species has been recorded in Texas in mid-February) or, perhaps, was attempting to winter locally. The widespread, nominate race *dominica* normally winters only in South America. The Pacific race *fulva* winters both in the southern hemisphere and north of the equator on Pacific islands; a total of *c.* 50 individuals winters annually at several localities in coastal California. Observers in the East are therefore urged to closely study late fall and winter Lesser Golden-Plovers and attempt to determine the race of the bird(s) involved and to consider the possibility of the bird(s) being Greater Golden-Plovers (which winter north to Britain).

Disturbing news comes from Hawaii where packs of dogs killed significant numbers of nesting Laysan Albatrosses, and from Michigan, Ontario, and Quebec where a number of Great Gray Owls were found shot.

Cautionary comments on the identification of Red-bellied vs Golden-fronted

woodpeckers come from the regional editor in Florida.

Interesting behavioral attributes were seen in the Northern Saw-whet Owl responding to a beeping cordless telephone in Minnesota, and the Killdeer which, having to tolerate the crowded turf at a Bronco football game, had at least picked one of the few localities in Denver not covered by snow.

A report from the West Indies Region of American and Caribbean coots breeding in mixed pairs and of individuals ex-

hibiting intermediate color and shape of the frontal shield is additional evidence of the difficulty involved in identifying "Caribbean" Coots in North America.

Encouraging is the continued increase in reports of Black-shouldered Kites in Arizona and Louisiana and Mississippi. Black Vultures continue to spread north in New Jersey. Eastern Bluebirds continue to do well in the Hudson-Delaware and Middlewestern Prairie regions. On the other hand, some eastern regional editors are expressing concern over the

decline in numbers of Brown Thrashers.

Lastly, some sort of prize should be given to the people in two states who implemented original bird-feeding strategies. At Key West, two apparently wild Broad-winged Hawks were hand-fed cockroaches, and in Oklahoma a Barred Owl dined nightly on the offering of five or six trapped starlings.

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CONTINENTAL SURVEY

The Winter Season

December 1, 1983—February 29, 1984

Abbreviations frequently used in Regional Reports

ad.: adult, Am.: American, c.: central, C: Celsius, CBC: Christmas Bird Count, Cr.: Creek, Com.: Common, Co.: County, Cos.: Counties, *et al.*: and others, E.: Eastern (bird name), Eur.: European, Eurasian, F: Fahrenheit, *fide*: reported by, F.&W.S.: Fish & Wildlife Service, Ft.: Fort, imm.: immature, I.: Island, Is.: Islands, Isles, Jct.: Junction, juv.: juvenile, L.: Lake, m.ob.: many observers, Mt.: Mountain, Mts.: Mountains, N.F.: National Forest, N.M.: National Monument, N.P.: National Park, N.W.R.: Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, N.: Northern (bird name), Par.: Parish, Pen.: Peninsula, P.P.: Provincial Park, Pt.: Point, not Port, Ref.: Refuge, Res.:

Reservoir, not Reservation, R.: River, S.P.: State Park, sp. species, spp.: species plural, ssp.: subspecies, Twp.: Township, W.: Western (bird name), W.M.A.: Wildlife Management Area, v.o.: various observers, N,S,W,E,: direction of motion, n., s., w., e.: direction of location, >: more than, <: fewer than, ±: approximately, or estimated number, ♂: male, ♀: female, ø: imm. or female, *: specimen, ph.: photographed, †: documented, ft: feet, mi: miles, m: meters, km: kilometers, date with a + (e.g., Mar. 4+): recorded beyond that date. Editors may also abbreviate often-cited locations or organizations.

NORTHEASTERN MARITIME REGION

/Richard S. Heil

The climatological axiom that a mild November is usually followed by a mild winter was for the most part true this season. Overall the winter was very wet and slightly on the mild side, with the first part of December and most of February averaging exceptionally mild. February, in fact, was the second warmest in 114 years in Boston. However, frigid conditions did set in just prior to Christmas and lasted, with brief exceptions, throughout most of January. The first major snowfall for most of the Region occurred January 10-11, and was followed by similar storms January 18, and January 31-February 1. A heavy rainstorm on February 15 swelled lakes and rivers and contributed to one of the wettest winters in recent years.

A remarkable number of genuinely rare and unseasonable species was noted this winter, of a magnitude perhaps not achieved by any previous winter season in the Northeast. Illustrating this point were reports of no fewer than seven species of rails, twenty-two species of shorebirds, and sixteen species of warblers, some of which were noted well into or completely through the season.

The word "new-found-land" has acquired renewed meaning as observers in that province documented a mini-fallout of European shore-

