

The Changing Seasons

John Farrand, Jr.

THE WINTER OF 1987–1988 WAS NOT A SEVERE ONE IN most areas; the editors of 12 of the 22 regions reporting used the word “mild” for all or part of the season, three more included the word “average,” and in South Texas “weather patterns were not especially unusual.” All of this can be taken to indicate a relative lack of major cold fronts. In much of the eastern part of the continent, December was warm, and the first real winter weather didn’t arrive until the last week of the month, in early to mid-January, or, in the Western Great Lakes, until January and the first half of February. In the Western Great Lakes the thermometer dipped to –35 degrees (Fahrenheit, fortunately) at International Falls on February 10 and 11, and to –40 degrees at Isabella, Minnesota, on February 2. In the Northern Great Plains, where the lowest readings came in the middle of January, record low temperatures were reported in South Dakota, some of them providing nationwide daily lows. In most regions, the mercury rose again in February or at least in its latter half, and no further harsh weather occurred. Quebec and Ontario, however, reported their worst weather in the last month of the season.

Like the topography, weather patterns were more variable in the West. Many regions, especially those in the south but also Northwestern Canada and Alaska, reported no major cold spells, although a cold spell in northern Canada is obviously not the same thing as a cold spell in South Texas. The Mountain West Region experienced cold weather and heavy snows that lasted for much of the season, and the Southern Pacific Coast had a cold spell in December but milder weather after that. In Hawaii the winter was a rainy one, as a series of storms tracked across the Pacific to the north of the islands.

Reports of below-average precipitation came from many places, including the eastern interior of Alaska, the Middle Atlantic Coast, the Appalachian Region, much of southern Texas, and along the Southern Pacific Coast, where the weather was “exceptionally dry after the first of the year.” In parts of Ontario, snowfall amounts were “much less than normal,” and the middle of February saw no fewer than 20 forest fires burning in the district around Kenora, at the north end of Lake of the Woods. Quebec was dry during December and January but not February. A lack of precipitation in the Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain Region caused Thomas H. Rogers to predict another summer drought, while in most of the Northern Great Plains, according to David Lambeth, the accumulation of snow will not be sufficient to fill the region’s all-important pot-holes in the spring.

Editors in Quebec, Ontario, and the Northern Great Plains mentioned open water lasting far into the season, holding waterfowl and other water birds longer than usual. A similar but man-made situation occurred in Larimer County, Colorado, where open water produced by a power plant lasted through the winter.

Half hardies

In a sense, the mild weather during the first part of the period meant that winter itself was late in arriving, and as is often the case, events and conditions that influence the winter distribution of birds did not come into play until January. The above-average number of lingering birds reflected a lingering autumn, and so at least from a chronological point of view it is reasonable to discuss the half-hardy lingerers first, and then move on to the winter itself.

A few of these half hardies survived through the period, although others, seen on only a single date or during a short span of dates, were also accused of “wintering.” A Clapper Rail made it through the season at Greenwich, Connecticut, and the Northeastern Maritime Region’s first overwintering American Oystercatcher was confirmed at Old Lyme. Two Lincoln’s Sparrows—out of an original and unprecedented five—were still present at the end of the period at St. John’s, Newfoundland. In Quebec, a Mourning Dove made it through the winter at Baie-Comeau, “the first such occurrence on the North Shore.” A Belted Kingfisher overwintered at Sherbrooke, a vagrant Red-bellied Woodpecker at Bonaventure, and a Hermit Thrush at Shannon. The mild weather certainly helped Pennsylvania’s first Green-tailed Towhee, an immature, to survive the winter in Bucks County, and a male Cape May Warbler to persist in Philadelphia. In Ontario, larger than normal numbers of Mourning Doves, Hermit Thrushes, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Dark-eyed Juncos, and a single Fox Sparrow, overwintered; three Brown Thrashers were still at Sault Ste. Marie on February 29, and another was still at Kingston on the last day of the season. In the Appalachian Region, Golden-crowned Kinglets wintered in above-average numbers, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak made it into early February, and a Brown Thrasher was found at the McClintic Wildlife Station in West Virginia. Two more Brown Thrashers wintered at Grand Marais, Minnesota.

In North Dakota, a Red-headed Woodpecker seen up until February 20 in the Turtle Mountains probably overwintered, and yet another Brown Thrasher successfully win-

tered at Fargo. This species also wintered "in larger numbers than usual" in Washington County, Oklahoma, and Swamp Sparrows wintered in Nebraska and also in Washington County, Oklahoma. A MacGillivray's Warbler, found by a presumably more transient Paul Lehman, spent the winter at Clute, near Freeport in South Texas. In British Columbia, a Red-breasted Nuthatch "probably overwintered" at Fort St. John, north of its normal winter range, and three Mourning Doves at Windermere; a White-headed Woodpecker wintered at Summerland (I think I have that right). Among other water birds, all three scoters wintered at the power plant in Larimer County, Colorado, but this was likely due to open water from the plant, since this was among the few states that had a relatively severe winter; but Hooded Mergansers at St. George and Pueblo, and Sandhill Cranes at St. George, were on their own. Eastern Bluebirds wintered at Denver and Pueblo, and a Gray Catbird at Boulder. More Brown Thrashers wintered in the Mountain West Region, at Salida, Colorado, and Cheyenne, Wyoming, and there was one at Chico, California, through most of the period. All these Brown Thrashers are encouraging, in view of the decline in numbers of this species. Two Anna's Hummingbirds wintered at Las Vegas, Nevada, the second year this species has overwintered here. As Hugh Kingery writes, this species is "close to resident status" in southern Nevada. Four Great Blue Herons spent the season at Seldovia, Alaska, and one of three Long-billed Dowitchers that stayed on at Juneau was still present in late February. A few American Robins wintered as far north as Fairbanks. Many sparrows that usually leave Alaska spent the winter; for details on these see Dan Gibson's account.

The number and variety of lingering birds can be seen by considering the warblers. In eastern Canada and the states east of the Mississippi, the most frequently mentioned species were the Cape May and Orange-crowned, reported in eight out of the ten regions, and the Ovenbird, reported in seven of the ten. Of course many had Yellow-rumped, sometimes in greater than normal numbers, but in low numbers in southern Florida, and not mentioned at all in many cases. The Northeastern Maritime Region had Nashville, Cape May, Bay-breasted, Black-and-white, and Wilson's warblers, Ovenbird, and several Yellow-breasted Chats, not to mention some western species that will be considered below. The Hudson-Delaware Region turned in reports of Orange-crowned, Nashville, Yellow, Cape May, Prairie, and Wilson's warblers, not to mention western species. The Middle Atlantic Coast Region didn't do so well, and Henry Armistead commented that this was a poor season for "outré warblers," but there were lingering Orange-crowned, Yellow-throated, and Prairie warblers, Ovenbird, and Common Yellowthroat, and a record number of Pine Warblers. The Southern Atlantic Coast had Orange-crowned, Yellow, Black-throated Blue, Wilson's, and Yellow-throated warblers, Northern Parula, Ovenbird, and Northern Waterthrush. In Florida, species mentioned as occurring farther north than usual were Blue-winged, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Wilson's, and Worm-eating warblers, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Yellow-breasted Chat. Ontario tallied Orange-crowned, Nashville, Cape May, northerly Yellow-rumped, two bold-faced Yellow-throated, Pine, and Palm warblers, American Redstart, and Ovenbird. The Appalachian Region had Orange-crowned, Cape May, Pine, and Palm warblers, Ovenbird, and Common Yellowthroat. The Western Great Lakes reported Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Cape May, Yellow-throated, and Worm-eating warblers, and Common Yellowthroat. The Middlewestern Prairie Region had Orange-crowned, Cape May, Pine, and

Palm warblers, and Common Yellowthroat. Central Southern reported Orange-crowned, Cape May, Yellow, Black-throated Blue, Prairie, and Palm warblers, plus rare but regular Yellow-throated, American Redstart, Black-and-white, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, and Yellow-breasted Chat, and a western species considered below.

West of the Mississippi, the Northern Great Plains reported an Ovenbird. The Southern Great Plains had Orange-crowned, Northern Parula, Pine, and Wilson's. South Texas reported Yellow, Black-throated Blue, Palm, Cerulean, and Prothonotary warblers, and Yellow-breasted Chat, plus regular species in larger than normal numbers, and some most interesting extralimital species, among them the above-mentioned overwintering MacGillivray's. The Northern Rocky Mountains reported Yellow-rumped (including a "Myrtle") Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, and a MacGillivray's Warbler. Mountain West had Townsend's, Palm, and Wilson's warblers. The Southwest reported a number of eastern species, as well as late-lingering Yellow Warbler and Painted Redstart. Alaska had a late Orange-crowned Warbler at Petersburg. Besides species rare at any season in the places where they were found, the Middle Pacific Coast had lingering Yellow, MacGillivray's, Common Yellowthroat, and Wilson's. Guy McCaskie reported right up front that the Southern Pacific Coast Region had an astonishing 24 species of warblers, many of them eastern species but lingering nonetheless.

If warblers can account for all this verbiage, you can imagine what other late lingerers you will find in the reports. A few of the other birds that interested this writer were the two Sandhill Cranes at Mitkof Island, Alaska, on December 6, and the one at the Gustavus Marsh that stayed until late December; the Black-bellied Plover that was at Seward, Alaska, until at least January 17; the Lesser Golden-Plover at Hancock, Mississippi, until December 29; the Hammond's Flycatcher that stayed at Inverness, at Point Reyes north of San Francisco, until February 7, longer than most late-lingerers; Arizona's first winter Cave Swallow, east of Phoenix between December 21 and 31; the Bell's Vireo that remained at New Orleans until January 10; the Warbling Vireo that stayed at Corral de Tierra, California, until December 28, and a Fox Sparrow that was at a feeder in Fort St. John, British Columbia, until January 3. There were numerous other half hardies this year, for which see the regional reports. Most of them had faded away by the end of December or early in January, and the winter itself got underway.

Irruptions

This year's invasion of boreal and arctic species received mixed reviews, with most irruptive species absent or present in only low numbers. Gyrfalcons were in evidence in the northern regions—Northeastern Maritime, Quebec (where 16 birds were the best showing in a half a dozen years), Hudson-Delaware, Ontario, Western Great Lakes, Northern Great Plains, and Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain. Most remarkable of all was an immature bird in Shasta County, California. But aside from Gyrfalcons, irruptive diurnal raptors were not numerous; David Lambeth suggested that Northern Goshawks may be near a low in their cycle of abundance. In a run-of-the-mill season for Rough-legged Hawks, one did turn up at Savannah, Georgia, on January 17.

In the southern Canadian provinces and the northern tier of states there was a flight of Snowy Owls—an echo, perhaps, of last winter's invasion. In general, numbers peaked in November and December, and then fell off in

January and February. Elsewhere they were few and far between or absent altogether. There was also a movement of Northern Hawk-Owls, with birds reaching southern Quebec, Ontario, and the Western Great Lakes; two appeared in Maine, and one was seen in Vernon, British Columbia. In Ontario the influx was termed the largest invasion in 25 years, and numbers were described as "impressive" in Minnesota. Great Gray Owls staged a "widespread invasion" in Quebec, where they reached the North Shore, but elsewhere they were not mentioned as boreal irruptives. Ontario reported a modest invasion of Boreal Owls, and in Quebec the total was "slightly more than usual."

Red-breasted Nuthatches were in short supply except in the Northern Great Plains, where numbers were "exceptional." Bohemian Waxwings moved into Ontario, the Canadian Maritimes, Maine (a few reached Massachusetts), eastern New York (a single bird), the northern part of the Western Great Lakes Region, the Northern Great Plains, the Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain Region, and northern California. They staged a "giant incursion" in Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada. But the best Bohemian was clearly one that turned up at Falfurrias, Texas, on Christmas Eve. Northern Shrikes were in above-normal numbers in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and as far south as Massachusetts, but were not notable in other parts of the Northeast or anywhere else.

The major boreal invader this year was the Pine Siskin, and it is a species such as this that provides the main satisfaction in writing the "Changing Seasons" or in carefully reading the Regional Reports. What is suggested by one's own birding experiences or by the report from a single region is confirmed by reports from many. A pattern emerges that permits you to reach a definite conclusion about an ornithological event involving an entire continent. The Regional Reports in *American Birds*, with their firmly established system of cooperation among thousands of dependable birders, provide our only means of doing this. In these pages a few seasons ago, Paul DeBenedictis called them "perhaps the largest cooperative ornithological research project," and one assumes he meant "in the world." But I am preaching to the converted—back to Pine Siskins. The species was noted and commented upon in every region where boreal birds can be distinguished from montane birds, except that no mention of them is made in the report from Northwestern Canada, much of which is outside the species' winter range, anyway. Their abundance prompted an S.A. from George Hall in the Appalachian Region, where the invasion lasted from mid-December to the end of the season and beyond; Hall concluded by saying that "if nearby Regions experienced anything similar it boggles the mind to think about the total numbers." Siskins penetrated all the way to Florida, where this was a "major invasion year throughout the peninsula," and to South Texas, where the species was "widespread but patchy." In the Western Great Lakes Region it was declared "clearly the winter finch of the winter." On the Northern Great Plains, the birds became territorial and began pairing in mid-February.

Other winter finches were more spotty and uneven. Red Crossbills made their "best showing of the decade" in the Hudson-Delaware Region, and there was a modest influx into southern Ontario, the Appalachian Region, the Western Great Lakes, and the Northern Great Plains. Six or seven birds did put in an appearance at Fayetteville, Arkansas, between December 19 and 21. In the Middlewestern Prairie Region, there was a minor movement of the species, and on the Southern Great Plains the invasion, which had started in the fall, continued into winter. In the Rocky Mountains the species was unmentioned (Northern Rocky

Mountain-Intermountain), or "only a few" were reported (Mountain West); the birds that were not there could have been montane populations. West of southeast Alaska the species is usually unreported, but Red Crossbills were at least as numerous as White-wingeds. This year the White-winged was not well-represented except in interior and southeast Alaska, the Western Great Lakes, and the Northern Great Plains. Numbers were noted as low in North-western Canada, and only one individual was found in the Mountain West Region—a bird in Salt Lake City on January 29.

There was a "modest incursion" of Common Redpolls late in the season in the Northeastern Maritimes, and good numbers were found in Quebec and Ontario. The species arrived on the Northern Great Plains with the cold weather in mid-January, and there were "scattered records" on the Southern Great Plains. Other regions that mentioned them at all noted their scarcity, but a female from Acadia Parish, Louisiana, on January 20 will, if accepted by the Louisiana Ornithological Society bird records committee, be that state's first. Needless to say, there were few reports of Hoary Redpolls. Pine Grosbeaks were in evidence in the northernmost areas, where one would expect them, but this was not a flight year for this species, and Evening Grosbeaks were reported in below-average numbers except in the Mountain West.

The Mexican invasion

If we knew what had induced it, we might be able to call this season's spectacular influx of Mexican species—which was largely what caused Greg Lasley and Chuck Sexton to declare this "the most phenomenal winter birding season ever seen in Texas"—an irruption. But in the absence of any clue to what produced it, we will be ahead and use the less analytical but more dramatic "invasion." This invasion was not merely a South Texas affair, if we are to judge from a bold-faced female Xantus' Hummingbird that spent the period from January 30 to March 27 at Ventura, California. The bird built a nest and laid two eggs in February, deserted that nest, and then built another in March. This is the first thoroughly documented Xantus' in the United States, although a male was well described by a single observer last winter in eastern San Diego County. There was also a Ruddy Ground-Dove at Furnace Creek Ranch in Death Valley between October 17 and January 4, another in Big Bend from December 12 to the end of the period, and two more at Green Valley, Arizona, from November 22 to January 3. Also at Green Valley was an immature Streak-backed Oriole on February 26. One wonders if some of the birds that merited bold-facing in New Mexico were not Mexican individuals rather than birds that had shifted position or elevation within the two southwestern states. There was also a Common Black-Hawk on February 16 at Kimble, Texas, north of South Texas as here defined, and the first Texas Violet-crowned Hummingbird at El Paso in December.

But South Texas was the place to be for this winter's invasion of Mexican birds. Of course, there is nothing new about Mexican birds in Texas. What was impressive was their number and variety. If we could tag Mexican individuals of species that also occur regularly in Texas, we would probably find that a large number of birds—unidentifiable as Mexican birds because they are the same species as our own—spread into the United States each year from south of the border. Rather than list all the invaders, since they are printed in full in the Regional Reports, I will only mention the Crane Hawk at Santa Ana

on December 20, the first record of this long-legged raptor for the United States, the White-collared (that's "-collared," not "-throated") Swift at Freeport on December 20 and perhaps in the vicinity on nearby dates, the male Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, an "elusive" Golden-crowned Warbler, the six Crimson-collared Grosbeaks, and the greater than normal number of Blue Buntings.

What prompted this movement? Some of the birds were immatures, an age class we expect to turn up in odd places, but many were adults. Could these birds have been refugees from ongoing (gone?) habitat destruction along the rivers of Tamaulipas? Perhaps, but why this particular winter? Or was the drought that afflicted South Texas also felt in northeastern Mexico, causing birds to disperse? Lasley and Sexton lament the lack of information about what is happening south of the border: "The real gap in our knowledge is of weather patterns or ecological events in northeastern Mexico, perhaps in the summer and fall of 1987, which prompted such a pervasive movement of lowland and foothill species northward into Texas. We have virtually no clues." This is rather like a northern birder wondering about conifer-seed crops in the boreal forest, or our unrequited curiosity about events in regions whose reports have not arrived in time to go to press. It might help sort all this out if the South Texas Region were expanded to include more of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon, just as the Southwest Region now takes in Sonora, Chihuahua, and part of Baja California Norte. But I see that "South Texas" is about to become "Texas." That's plenty for any editors to handle.

The hummingbird invasion

Hummingbirds put on a major show this winter, although the cause is as elusive as that of the Mexican invasion. Central Southern reported its "most astounding hummingbird invasion ever," and South Texas logged no fewer than ten species. There were many amazingly out-of-range records, but on a broad scale, the Rufous Hummingbird seems to have been the chief actor. Everyone knows that Rufous Hummingbirds turn up in fall and winter in the Gulf States, but records this year prompted Harry LeGrand to write of the species in the Southern Atlantic Coast Region: "The Rufous Hummingbird, considered almost accidental five years ago, is becoming routine now." There were also Rufous Hummingbirds in Florida, and a male at Kingston, Ontario, lasted in the wild into December, when it was taken into custody for its own protection, and succumbed under protection on January 21. Still another Rufous was found on a front door, and also at death's door, in Dalton, Georgia, while a young male survived the winter in Alabama. One bird was found dead in El Dorado, Arkansas, on February 19, and this species, "arguably the most common wintering hummingbird" in Louisiana, was termed "very widespread" in the Pelican State. There were Rufous Hummingbirds "in excellent numbers" on the Upper Texas Coast, and elsewhere in the state there were small numbers. In the Far West, a *Selasphorus* on February 10 at Rio Dell in Humboldt County, California, was called a Rufous, but given the early date, the regional editors repeated a call for careful documentation of early arriving Rufous and Allen's.

Other hummingbirds identified only as *Selasphorus*, most or all of them doubtless Rufous, were in the Southern Atlantic Coast Region, Florida, at Jeffersonville, Kentucky, at Mobile, Alabama, and at Hancock, Mississippi, the last bird present through the period. While on the subject of *Selasphorus*, there were three Allen's in Louisiana, one of them a hold-over from August that lasted through the winter.

Texas had its first two confirmed Allen's, both adult males, at Helotes, Bexar County, in November and December, and at Freeport through the period. A possible male Allen's was at Cedar Key, Florida. A very early Allen's was at Bend, Oregon, on February 21, a date that explains the caution the regional editors in the Middle Pacific Coast Region showed about the *Selasphorus* in Humboldt County. A male Allen's was at San Diego between December 21 and January 3, but the earliest migrants arrived on January 16, after which date it is impossible to tell whether a bird was a returned migrant or one that had been wintering. Still speaking of *Selasphorus*, there was a Broad-tailed in New Orleans from February 23 onward, and the species was described as being "in excellent numbers" on the Upper Texas Coast, as well as fairly widespread in small numbers elsewhere in South Texas.

Broad-billed Hummingbirds appeared in Texas, at Falfurrias on January 15 and at Lake Jackson on February 7. Two male Broad-billed Hummingbirds were seen near Phoenix, Arizona, where the species is casual in winter. The same yard in Ventura, California, that hosted the above-mentioned female Xantus' Hummingbird had a male Broad-billed through the period. This bird was joined by a female on January 31. Another male was at Mission Viejo, California, in early December.

In the genus *Amazilia*, Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, no doubt part of the Mexican Invasion, appeared at numerous locations. There was one in the Florida Panhandle in December, and more than 30 birds were recorded in Louisiana. The species wintered at numerous locations in South Texas. There were one or two Violet-crowned at Bisbee, Arizona, where there have been about six previous records, and we have already noted the Mexican invader at Big Bend.

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were at the same backyard in Hancock, Mississippi, that had one of the *Selasphorus* hummingbirds, there were three Ruby-throateds in or near New Orleans, Louisiana, and the species was recorded at Kingsville, Houston, and Lake Jackson, Texas. The Southern Atlantic Coast had a number of immature or female *Archilochus*, one of which had a red gorget feather. A possible Black-chinned was at Tallahassee, and more positively identified birds were in Walton County, Florida, at that same Hancock, Mississippi, backyard, at El Dorado, Arkansas, for a state first, and at Little Rock for a state second. In southern Louisiana, Black-chinned Hummingbirds and unidentified *Archilochus* were "everywhere," while on the Upper Texas Coast the species was "in excellent numbers." A bird identified as a female Black-chinned in San Diego on February 10 and another at Point Loma almost throughout the winter were the only ones reported in southern California.

Another western species that moved east this year was the Calliope Hummingbird. There was a possible Calliope at Tallahassee, Florida, Louisiana had two, and there was a male at Freeport, Texas, through January and February.

Arkansas had its first Anna's Hummingbird in Arkansas County between January 27 and 30. There were three Anna's in Cameron Parish, Louisiana, two of them last seen as late as February 21. The feeder in El Paso that had the above-mentioned Violet-crowned Hummingbird, also hosted up to three Anna's Hummingbirds. There were "excellent numbers" of Anna's on the Upper Texas Coast, and birds were at Kingsville, Sinton, and around Falfurrias. We have already mentioned the Anna's Hummingbirds that wintered at Las Vegas.

A male Costa's Hummingbird was at a Kingsville, Texas, feeder in late January, and there were Costa's in Tulare County, at Redding, and in Fresno County, California, while

along the southern California coast there were up to two wintering at Ventura and another at Santa Barbara for much of the season.

A male Blue-throated appeared at Portal in late February. If I mention a “hummingbird (sp?)”—and this year that could mean almost anything—that lingered at Lubbock, Texas, until January 2, I will have covered all the hummingbirds.

The montane invasion

Greater than normal numbers of montane birds appeared in the lowlands in the Mountain West, Southwest, Northern Rocky Mountain-Intermountain, and Southern Pacific Coast regions. To take one intriguing example: two Bridled Titmice were seen in southwestern Phoenix on December 4. A Steller's Jay arrived with the New Year in Cedar City, Utah, Scrub Jays wintered in the Las Vegas valley in Nevada, and jays were also involved in the movement down the slopes in New Mexico, where there was a Gray-breasted Jay at the Percha Dam in the Rio Grande Valley, and in Arizona. Perhaps inevitably, the movement of western birds eastward had a decidedly montane flavor, what with a seemingly larger than usual number of Varied Thrushes and Townsend's Solitaires, several Townsend's Warblers, and “one of the western races” of Fox Sparrow (we would like to have been a little more subspecific on that one) in the Northeastern Maritime Region, a Black-throated Gray Warbler in New Jersey, the above-mentioned Green-tailed Towhee in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, as well as Green-tailed Towhees in Mississippi and Louisiana, a Lewis' Woodpecker at Lucketts, Virginia, and others in Oklahoma and Texas, a Cassin's Finch at Duluth, a Mountain Bluebird in Illinois, and another Townsend's Warbler in Louisiana. And then there was the blaze of western hummingbirds across the Southeast. The presence of jays in the southwestern lowlands suggests a food-crop failure for these eaters of seeds and nuts, and we know there were heavy snows in the Mountain West Region, but how to explain the rest of it?

Other noteworthy records

This year's eastward movement of western species also brought a Hammond's Flycatcher to Wellesley, Massachusetts, where it was captured in a butterfly net and then weighed, measured, banded, photographed, and videotaped. After that, we are told, its fate was debated. Result: it was released. It will be interesting to see if the bird returns next year. Other noteworthy westerners included a White-winged Dove at Wachapreague, Virginia, a Cave/Cliff (rather than Cliff/Cave!) Swallow in North Carolina, and Cave Swallows at Loxahatchee and St. Marks Light, Florida (see also the reports from South Texas and the Southwest), a Smith's Longspur in North Carolina, Inca Doves in Missouri, Arkansas, Nebraska, and Kansas (these birds could have been Mexican).

Noteworthy eastern birds in the West included a Carolina Wren in New Mexico (probably a holdover for the fall), an immature Pine Warbler in Arizona, two Worm-eating Warblers in Arizona, a Chestnut-sided Warbler at Livermore, California, and a Cape May Warbler at Inverness.

Other interesting records were a female Eurasian Kestrel that moved from New Brunswick to Nova Scotia, a more mobile bird than the last one in the Northeastern Maritime Region (on Nantucket) almost exactly a century ago. New

Haven, Connecticut, had a Jackdaw during the last part of the season. A feeder at Pointe-Claire, Quebec, had a European Greenfinch. This could conceivably have been an escapee, and so could an equally interesting first-year Gray Gull (*Larus modestus*) at the Sabine National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana. Somewhat less problematical, perhaps, was a winter-plumaged adult Band-tailed Gull (*L. belcheri*) seen on San Nicholas Island, California, in November and again in January. A Northern Wheatear spent most of January at Ottawa, Ohio. A Rufous-backed Robin, no doubt late-lingering, was at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum in Arizona until at least December 21, and another was found at Patagonia on February 26. Many regions reported unusual numbers of shorebirds, which may have been late lingerers but which are mentioned here to draw attention to them. Likewise with an ever-increasing number of reports of Lesser Black-backed Gulls. On January 10, there were two Oldsquaws in Lincoln County, Nebraska, and four in neighboring Keith County. Lincoln County also had a Great Black-backed Gull in February, and there were first-year Great Black-backed Gulls at the Sabine National Wildlife in Louisiana and at Wilson Dam in Alabama. There was a notable movement of ptarmigans—species undetermined—in the region around Fort Nelson, British Columbia (for details see the report from Northwestern Canada). Willow Ptarmigans were in high numbers in western Alaska. An adult White Wagtail spent the winter at Oxnard, California. A La Sagra's Flycatcher was at Elliott Key in Biscayne National Park, Florida, and another was at Key Largo, the dates are close, but not overlapping. Another West Indian bird in Florida was a Black-faced Grassquit at Dania, in Broward County. Finally, the State of Hawaii had its first Red-necked Grebe, its second Tundra Swan, two Killdeers, and the state's first Gull-billed Tern, and a big influx of gulls after a series of January storms had passed the islands.

Comments

And now for a few thoughts that occurred to me as I read this season's Regional Reports, and a few items that are interesting but that I have not mentioned before now.

I couldn't help agreeing with Henry Armistead's remarks about the merit of written descriptions—as opposed to photographs—of rare birds. While divulging the particulars about the Lewis' Woodpecker in Virginia, he wrote: “Sure the photos are fine, but 300 years from now that [single submitted] description will still serve as close to proof as any image, recalling subtleties of appearance and context no photograph will.” To this I would add that writing a description makes one think about important field characteristics now, rather than later, and inevitably builds a clearer mental image than focusing a lens does. Of course, there are many cases where one doesn't know what the bird is for sure, and here a photograph is necessary. But for me, the clincher in this age of visual stimuli and rapid information retrieval is that you cannot quote a photograph or, for that matter, a drawing. Whoever took the trouble to write that one description of the Lucketts bird probably knows the species better for writing it than do those who recorded it on film. There has been, as everyone knows, a discussion about the relative merits of photographs versus art in communicating what birds look like. Regardless of where you come out on this subject, it's hard to deny that in many situations a carefully considered written description has them both beat.

Ted Below, cited by John Ogden in the report from the Florida Region, fears that while the human population in

his area is rising, the number of serious birders (also human, of course) is not. A disturbing thought, if it is more than just a thought. For many years, we have been watching the number of birders, and particularly of skilled birders, grow at a most satisfying pace. While there are times when one longs for what might be termed the ornithological privacy of the "old days," when encountering a stranger with binoculars on or near your own turf was a major event, the idea of going back to that more sparsely populated time, with uncrowded and therefore potentially undefended refuges and sanctuaries, is not a happy one. Birding is much less of a solitary pursuit than it once was, and this is a good thing.

Also from the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, it is interesting to learn that the introduced *Hydrilla*, an Old-World aquatic plant in the same family as *Vallisneria* and frog's-bit, is helping waterfowl and coots on the lower Potomac. Let's hope this potentially dangerous introduction (Armistead uses the word "infested") continues to make itself useful.

There was avian cholera around again this winter, with a serious outbreak at Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge in Colorado; cold temperatures and a grain shortage stressed the 17,000 birds in residence, and 17 Sandhill Cranes were among the infected birds. Fortunately, none of the three Whooping Cranes was infected. Another notable outbreak, a repeat from last year, occurred at the Modesto, California, sewage ponds, where the species hardest hit was the Ruddy Duck. Avian cholera is a regular occurrence on the West Coast, and Harold Reeve pointed to limited habitat and hunting pressure as factors causing concentrations of birds, and therefore increasing the risk of epidemics.

This same reduction of habitat in California may be causing a decline in numbers of Tricolored Blackbirds. There is evidence that flocks are not as large as they used to be, and the editors of the Middle Pacific Coast Region call for close monitoring of this specialized icterid.

Lucinda Haggas of Salmon, Idaho, reported a wing-tagged Bald Eagle up the Salmon River near Challis; the bird was from a nesting site near Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and is at least 13 years old (going on 14 by now).

This issue, unless something dramatic happens in the next few days, will contain no information about the winter season in (in alphabetical order): Alberta, coastal British Columbia, Iowa, Manitoba, New Hampshire, most of New York, coastal Oregon, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, Vermont, Washington, and the West Indies. That is a lot of holes in the map, and a lot of good birds and comments that will have to wait to appear in a future issue rather than in their proper context.

In closing, I am going to depart from custom in these pages to note with sadness the passing of Robert J. Newman of Baton Rouge on January 28. Bob Newman and I birded together regularly in Louisiana back in the 1960s, and I have never known a more delightful, polymathic, or ornithologically rigorous field companion. He also had that rare quality of being completely impervious to mosquitoes, and it was a true marvel to watch him plunge into the thick vegetation of one of Louisiana's coastal cheniers, surrounded by a shimmering cloud of culicids, without interrupting an erudite sentence or abandoning a flow of puns or anagrams. I learned a great deal from him, and he quickly broke me of my untutored Yankee habit of calling immature Acadian Flycatchers Yellow-bellieds. He also taught me the value, or rather the lack of value, of the negative field mark; not seeing rufous in the wings of a cuckoo is no grounds for identifying the bird as a Black-billed: maybe you just didn't see it. His practice of taking a second look at everything produced many a good bird we would otherwise have passed by.

Bob's ability in the field was unexcelled, but he was as willing as anyone I've ever met to acknowledge that he didn't know what something was. Despite his own expertise he could enter into a serious discussion about the identity of any bird with anyone, and was always willing to give a full hearing to a view opposed to his own. But he was rarely wrong.

I last saw Bob and Marcie in 1983, at the Centennial Meeting of the American Ornithologist's Union in New York. After the meeting, a group of us went out to Montauk Point at the eastern tip of Long Island. He enjoyed himself hugely, something he was neither disposed nor able to conceal, but even then it was clear that as David Muth points out, what was keeping him going was his love of birds and the undisguised delight he took in his numerous birding friends. He was an Editorial Advisor and longtime champion of *American Birds*, where I know proper notice is to be made of his passing, but like David Muth and the birders of Louisiana and the rest of the Central Southern Region, I could not write about this winter season without paying a personal tribute to a first-rate ornithologist and splendid friend, and extending my sympathy to Marcie Newman. As David says, we all have memories of Bob to cherish.

—506 East 82nd Street, New York,
New York 10028

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, \pm : approximately, or estimated number, δ male, ♀ : female, ♂ : 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.