

Prairie Provinces Region

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December was fairly mild, by prairie standards, but severe cold enveloped most of the Region around Christmas, and rarely eased its grip before March. Conditions in southern Alberta were less harsh than elsewhere in January, with short-lived chinooks providing respite from the cold. Snowfall was heavy in northern Alberta (e.g., 76 cm in Edmonton in January) and southern Saskatchewan, but generally light elsewhere. A surprising number of waterbirds and "half-hardy" passerines managed to survive most or all of this trying season; Snowy Owls, Snow Buntings, and Common Redpolls were the only northern birds that were widespread in above-average numbers.

Loons to Falcons

A Pacific Loon was late at Cold Lake, AB Dec. 4 (RT), and another lingered at Calgary Dec. 6–Jan. 14+ (LM *et al.*), while a Com. Loon was reported at Saskatoon in mid-February (CB, *fide* SS). Fewer than 300 Canada Geese overwintered at Regina (DH); a similar number was reported at Medicine Hat, AB (DBo).

Wood Ducks lingered at Regina to mid-

December (RE, FB), Calgary Dec. 13 (WW), West St. Paul, MB Dec. 5 (RKO), and two were at Winnipeg Dec. 19–21 (m.ob.). Also found in all 3 provinces were Am. Black Ducks: Two overwintered at Regina (FL, RKR), one was in Calgary to at least late January (m.ob.), and one hung in at West St. Paul to Jan. 22 (RKO *et al.*). Late, lone Oldsquaws were noted at Wabamun L., AB Dec. 8 (RKL, PM) and near Seven Sisters Falls, MB Dec. 4 (MIW *et al.*). As usual, the Calgary CBC dominated the waterfowl scene; it included records of 2542 Common and 17 Barrow's goldeneyes Dec. 19 (*fide* PS).

SA Wabamun L., w. of Edmonton, hosted a remarkable assortment of waterbirds this season: a **Horned Grebe Jan. 2 (EP); four W. Grebes Jan. 30 (DN, RD); a Double-crested Cormorant Jan. 2 & 30 (WK, DN, RD); seven Canvasbacks and 15 Redheads Jan. 30 (DN, RD); two Ring-necked Ducks Jan. 2 (GL); 50 Greater and 15 Lesser scaups, and eight Hooded Mergansers Jan. 30 (DN, RD).**

At least 12 N. Harriers were found in s. Alberta between Dec. 12–Jan. 29 (PS, TK *et al.*): the most winter records ever in the province. Lone Sharp-shinned Hawks appeared at Winnipeg Dec. 20 (DBY), Calgary Jan. 5 (RL), Lethbridge, AB in January and February (*fide* LS), and Swift Current, SK in December (*fide* RKR). Also rare in winter was a Cooper's Hawk near Lethbridge Dec. 27 and Jan. 13 (LB), while N. Goshawks were scattered across the Region in normal low numbers.

Rough-legged Hawks were widely reported in Alberta, from Edmonton s., includ-

ing 29 in 20 mi between Kipps and Standoff Jan. 29 (LS). Few were found in the heavy snowcover in s. Saskatchewan, but 13 were at Oak Hammock Marsh, MB Jan. 3, with at least four remaining to mid-February (RKO). Fewer Merlins than usual wintered in Saskatchewan; no more than two in Regina and three in Saskatoon. Twenty-six Gyrfalcon sightings in s. Alberta were linked to high waterfowl numbers (PS), and low numbers of Prairie Falcons to the dearth of Horned Larks. Six Gyrfalcon reports in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan were about normal.

Partridges to Woodpeckers

Gray Partridge, Ruffed Grouse, and Sharp-tailed Grouse were all widely reported as scarce or absent. A *glaucoides* Iceland Gull was reported at Cold Lake Dec. 3 (RKL), and one adult and three first-year Glaucous Gulls were counted there the following day (RT).

Good numbers of Snowy Owls wintered in parts of all 3 provinces. There were 22 N. Hawk Owl reports in Alberta (*fide* PS, PM), including eight banded in the Athabasca-Cross Lake region (RC *et al.*); only two were found in Saskatchewan, and four in Manitoba. The best Great Gray Owl reports also came from Alberta: 48 were banded near Athabasca, Cross Lake, and Mackay (RC), and 26 other sightings included 12 at McRae Jan. 22 (JM). Elsewhere the only concentration was about eight Great Grays near Turtle Lake, SK around Christmas (*fide* MC). Four scattered Long-eared Owls on Alberta CBCs was an exceptional total, and there were several reports of \leq seven Short-eared Owls in s. Alberta (*fide* PS). More N. Saw-whet Owls than usual were found: a remarkable 25 on the Edmonton CBC and over a dozen scattered individuals across the 3 provinces.

Seven Belted Kingfishers were reported in Alberta Dec. 18–Jan. 30, all but one in the mountains, while one at Pinawa Dec. 4 (PT, RZ *et al.*) furnished Manitoba's 2nd winter-season record. Both Three-toed and Black-backed woodpeckers were scarce; did last summer's major forest fire sites in n. Saskatchewan and n.w. Manitoba concentrate them north? Calgary edged out Edmonton 38–35 for the Com. Flicker title in CBCs; at least eight were reported in Saskatchewan, many overwintering, but only three were found in Manitoba.

Larks to Warblers

Horned Larks apparently avoided the heavy snowcover in parts of s. Saskatchewan, but were more common than usual (flocks of 10–30 birds) in s.w. Manitoba (KDS, RW). They were notably scarce in s. Alberta until late January; Alberta's highest CBC total of 35 Horned Larks was surprisingly far n. at Wembley



Dec. 18. Expanding corvid reports included nine Blue Jays at the Canmore, AB CBC (*vide PS*), Black-billed Magpies in cleared forest in central Saskatchewan (TT, BL), and Com. Ravens already nesting on a communications tower at Brandon, MB Feb. 28 (TW, RW). An unusual corvid was the Am. Crow that disrupted an Edmonton Symphony Orchestra rehearsal, trying to break through a window to reach a black violin case Jan. 20 (SJ)!

Following last fall's irruption, Red-breasted Nuthatches remained common outside the mountains, foothills, and boreal forest. A Townsend's Solitaire in Winnipeg was last seen in late January (TS *et al.*), and another overwintered in Saskatoon (FR). Small flocks of Am. Robins were scattered across s. Saskatchewan and s. Alberta into January, and some overwintered. A CBC total of 94 Am. Robins at Pike Lake, SK Jan. 2 (FR) was exceptional. One Am. Robin struck a window near Brandon Dec. 31; the pursuing N. Goshawk swerved in the nick of time (RW, TW). A Varied Thrush at Grand Beach, MB died in late January (JW), while one at Grosse Isle, MB found its way into a greenhouse and was still alive in mid-February (BJ). Single Varied Thrushes were also seen at Edmonton Jan. 8 (AH) and Pike Lake, SK in February (*vide SS*).

Bohemian Waxwings were scarcer than usual in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and most of s. Alberta, but above average in n. Alberta and the mountains. Cedar Waxwing numbers were above average, with records on several Alberta CBCs. Extraordinary survivors were an overwintering Yellow-rumped Warbler at Claresholm, AB (J&RA, JS, m.ob.) and a Pine Warbler in Calgary Dec. 19–Feb. 10 (NT, m.ob.).

Cardinals to Grosbeaks

Well documented were ♀ N. Cardinals at Calgary Oct. 21–Feb. 6 (WD, JD, m.ob.), Cochrane, AB Dec. 29 (MgW) and Edmonton Nov. 21–Jan. 9 (L&OB). A Rufous-sided Towhee perished in a January cold snap at Saskatoon (FR), and another was seen into January near Fort Qu'Appelle, SK (RH). The most unusual sparrows were single Vespers on Brandon and Melita, MB CBCs, a Swamp Sparrow also on Melita CBC, and an imm. Golden-crowned at Saskatoon in February (*vide SS*). Eleven White-throated Sparrows was a record winter total for Alberta (*vide PS*).

Five-hundred Lapland Longspurs feasted on unharvested wheat between Morris and St. Agathe, MB Jan. 16 (RKO), and three were locally rare at Lac du Bonnet, MB Jan. 22 (PT, RP *et al.*). Snow Buntings thronged much of Alberta in the thousands, but were somewhat less common and more localized

in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. About 12 Rusty Blackbirds and 12 Com. Grackles lingered well n. at Lac La Biche, AB Dec. 23 (EC, RT). Otherwise, there was little unusual in the blackbird line. Bramblings brightened winter for many birders: Alberta's second stayed at Claresholm Dec. 17–early March (J&RA, m.ob.), another was at Portage la Prairie, MB Dec. 15–mid-January at least (RKO, RP *et al.*), while two appeared at Bethany, MB Jan. 8–14, one of them remaining until Feb. 21+ (G&PW, CC). Few Pine Grosbeaks moved out of the boreal forest. Most of the 50 House Finches found on 3 Manitoba CBCs disappeared in January; in Saskatchewan, at least five overwintered in Regina (TH) and three at Weyburn (NP), while Calgary's lone male frequented a feeder from mid-October–Jan. 14+ (J&RD).

There were few Red Crossbills anywhere, while White-winged Crossbills graded from near-absence in s. Manitoba to relative abundance in c. Alberta. Common Redpolls appeared in excellent numbers—from hundreds to low thousands—across the Region, with Hoaries generally making up 1–2% of the hordes.

Pine Siskins occurred in fair numbers in Manitoba, more than usual reports in Saskatchewan, but few were found in Alberta outside the Edmonton area. There was little movement of Evening Grosbeaks outside the boreal forest, apart from their usual stronghold around Carberry and Glenboro, MB.

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Northern Great Plains

GORDON BERKEY

Deep snow blanketed the Dakotas and extreme northeast Montana all winter after the Thanksgiving storm. North Dakota had the most snow and coldest temperatures since 1978–1979, and many areas received twice the normal snowfall. By contrast the remainder of eastern Montana was mild and dry. The contrasting conditions led to predictable patterns, as evidenced by the distribution of wintering Canada Geese and Bald Eagles.

Loons to Raptors

A Com. Loon at Garrison Dam, ND Dec. 18 was the 2nd latest for the state, while the Horned Grebe there the same day was the latest ever (GB). Another Horned Grebe was unusual at Ft. Peck, MT until late December (CC). A Double-crested Cormorant was at L. Elwell near Chester, MT Dec. 1 (HM). Deep snow, which made feeding difficult, drove Canada Geese from the Missouri R. in North Dakota by year's end but 500 wintered near Chester, where grain fields were accessible. They had not returned by late February to either Bowdoin N.W.R. or the Amoco refinery at Mandan. The most notable late ducks were Green-winged Teal at Bismarck Dec. 20 and Garrison Dam Jan. 2, and Ring-necked Duck at Ft. Peck until late December. Record early "spring" migrants for South Dakota were Wood Duck Feb. 28, Green-winged Teal Feb. 15 in Yankton (SVS), and N. Pintail Feb. 5 in McPherson (JS). Seven Oldsquaw were at Gavins Pt. Dam, SD Dec. 7. The Canyon L. Barrow's Goldeneye spent yet another winter at Rapid City, SD (NW), while one was in Hughes, SD Feb. 27 (DT); Barrow's were numerous at Great Falls, MT throughout (MS) and a pair was at Yellowtail Dam Afterbay Jan. 10 (WR).

Most Bald Eagles left North Dakota after late December; only three were spotted on a flight along the Missouri from Garrison Dam to Bismarck Jan. 7 (RK). In contrast, the number at Ft. Peck built to a maximum of 35–40 in mid-January. Northern Goshawk reports totaled at least seven in Montana, 11 in North Dakota, and seven in n.e. South Dakota. Merlin dates in North Dakota point to a movement around the first of the year. The only Gyrfalcon reports