

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

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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

were from Montana: Medicine L., Dec. 20 (DN), n. of Choteau Jan. 7, and near L. Elwell Feb. 5. One Peregrine was seen near Bowdoin Dec. 6 (TF).

Gallinids to Woodpeckers

Winter mortality of Ring-necked Pheasants was reported from North Dakota, but the species was numerous at Medicine L. and Choteau, MT. Partridge and Sharp-tailed Grouse were apparently low in both states. Five Am. Coots wintered at Ft. Peck (CC), but the most surprisingly hardy bird was the Killdeer at Billings, MT Feb. 4, when the temperature was -35° F (JP)! A Franklin's Gull was in *Hughes*, SD Feb. 5. Four Glaucous Gulls at Gavins Pt., Dec. 12 (BFH) and 13 at Ft. Peck were good numbers for the Region; three were at Ft. Peck until Feb. 1.

It was an exceptional winter for Snowy Owls in the Dakotas. The peak count was eight Jan. 23 in *Grand Forks*, ND (EF). Numbers in milder e. Montana were unexceptional. Long-eared Owls were in *Fall River* (R&JP) and *Hanson*, SD (DGP, PB) Jan. 23. There were widespread reports of Short-eared Owls, with peak counts of five at Benton L., MT Feb. 8 (EB), four near Arrowwood N.W.R., ND Dec. 15 (RM), and three in *Clay*, SD. Perhaps CRP fields and a burgeoning vole population will finally benefit this species. The 5 North Dakota reports of N. Saw-whet Owl were an exceptional total. One at Grassy Butte took refuge in a barn Jan. 29 (JH), and one was seen sporadically in Grand Forks from mid-February–Mar. 29 (DL). Other February sightings were at Bismarck (CT, RR), Arrowwood (MV), and near Manvel (JS). A Red-headed Woodpecker coming to a feeder near Minot in January was unusual for mid-winter (REM).

Passerines

An estimated 10,000 Horned Larks and Snow Buntings were seen in the 26 mi between Ellendale and Edgely, ND Feb. 24 (GP). Red-breasted Nuthatches wintered widely in North Dakota in exceptional numbers. Others wintered at Ft. Peck and Malta, MT and there were reports from 4 counties in extreme e. South Dakota. Several E. Bluebirds were found by the Sioux Falls Bird Club in *Gregory*, SD Jan. 28. Mountain Bluebirds in *Jackson* Jan. 20 may have wintered (KG), but those in *Custer* Feb. 18 (MP) could have been early migrants. American Robins were seen in unusual numbers in e. Montana. A Hermit Thrush banded in *Clay*, SD Feb. 8 (EL) furnished a first state winter record. A Varied Thrush was noted in Brookings, SD Dec. 22 (BKH). Northern Shrike numbers held up throughout the period, but Bohemian Waxwings were very scarce. Deep snow kept most Lapland Longspurs from North Dakota, but Snow Buntings were in good numbers; the 3 December records in North Dakota of W. Meadowlark were surprising given the snow depth (HK,EF). A W. Meadowlark returned early to Freezeout L., MT Feb. 26.

Winter finch numbers improved somewhat from the past several years, but there were no real invasions. Purple Finches were widespread in the Dakotas, with ≤ 60 at a Jamestown feeder (JTP). Red Crossbills were noted at Billings, MT, Denbigh and Arrowwood N.W.R., ND, and in *Brown*, SD. White-winged Crossbills were noted from 7 locations in the Dakotas, with peaks of 15 at Minot Dec. 19 (REM) and 12 in *Codington* Dec. 4 (BKH). Common Redpoll numbers were consistently good, and a few Hoaries were reported from 8 sites across the region; most unusual were the two in Custer, SD Jan.

22 (MP, R&JP). Pine Siskins were common at feeders and appeared territorial in Minot by the end of February. On the downside, rosy-finches did not appear at Choteau, MT (perhaps because of the mild weather) and no mention was made of either Pine or Evening grosbeak. House Finches left little doubt that they are here to stay as they made it through the severe North Dakota winter with no apparent mortality.

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