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Idaho/ Western Montana Region

DAN SVINGEN AND THOMAS H. ROGERS

Bitter cold marked the end of the fall period, supposedly forecasting a harsh winter. Instead, the season was very mild. Many lakes and rivers thawed by mid-December, increasing sightings of semi-hardy species. Snowy Owls were the only winter visitor that made a significant showing. Several observers noted the lack of Pine Grosbeaks and "feeder finches." The pleasant weather and plentiful cone crop apparently encouraged these species to remain in the mountains. As usual, Regional Christmas Bird Counts were responsible for many interesting records, only a portion of which will be repeated below.

Abbreviations: A.F.R. (*American Falls Reservoir by American Falls, Idaho*); F.C.L. (*Fighting Creek Landfill by Coeur d'Alene, Idaho*)



Loons to Waterfowl

Coeur d'Alene L., *Kootenai*, ID had a Red-throated Loon Feb. 5 (WHA, JA) and a Pacific Loon Jan. 1 (JG, DSv, †). Both were very late dates for these rare species. An ad. **Yellow-billed Loon** was on Pend Oreille L., *Bonner*, ID Dec. 18 during the local CBC (EC, †), providing Idaho's 9th record. Idaho's 10th record was obtained a month later when two imm. Yellow-billed Loons were at Harrison, ID Jan. 29+ (KD, DH, DSv, m.ob., †). This is the same spot where two immatures wintered in 1991.

A Ross' Goose wintered by Pocatello, ID for a latilong first (CT, BH). Birders from 2 states were thrilled as a "black" **Brant** moved back and forth between Lewiston, ID and Clarkston, WA. Present from Jan. 26+, it provided Idaho's 7th record (JA, WHa, CV, m.ob., †).

Two ♂ Wood Ducks wintered in Coeur d'Alene, ID (SS, DSv), where one wintered last year. A single Greater Scaup was in Idaho Falls, ID Dec. 18–Jan. 5 (*fide* CT, BH) and 10–20 were on Coeur d'Alene L. throughout January (JH, MH, DSv). Four Barrow's Goldeneye were in Boise, ID during mid-January (DTr). The Clearwater R. by Lewiston had 1000 Barrow's Feb. 26 (JG), 20 times the previous high count. Red-breasted Merganser sightings in Idaho included a CBC pair on Hayden L., *Kootenai* Dec. 18 (SS, †), a male near Idaho Falls Jan. 6 (BH), and a lone female at Harrison Jan. 29–Feb. 4 (KD, DH, DSv).

Eagles to Gulls

Idaho's mid-winter eagle census tallied over 1000 Baldies, an all-time high. A "Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawk was photographed while at Harrison Feb. 5–21 (KD, DSv, ph.). Several Ferruginous Hawks wintered in *Butte* and *Bonneville*, ID (CT) for a latilong first. Single Golden Eagles were at Harrison Jan. 26–29 (JN, m.ob., ph.) and near Potlatch, ID Feb. 6 (KM). Non-kestrel falcons were more numerous than in recent years. Regional observers found four Merlins (including at least one *suckleyi*), two Peregrines, ten, Gyrfal-

cons, and five Prairie Falcons. Two very unseasonal **Sandhill Cranes** (a "lesser" and a "greater") were found on the Bigfork, MT CBC Dec. 18 (DC). Only one other winter record exists for w. Montana.

An ad. Mew Gull was at Coeur d'Alene Jan. 31–Feb. 21 (KD, DSv, ph.), where a first-year bird wintered last year. Small numbers of Thayer's Gulls wintered in the Coeur d'Alene area, as has become the normal pattern (JH, SS, DSv, ph.). A first-winter Thayer's at Harrison, ID Jan. 1 (JG, DSv) and an ad. bird in the same locale Jan. 31 (AF) were two of few non-landfill sightings. An ad. Thayer's was on the Snake R. by Idaho Falls Jan. 13 (BH). The true status of Iceland Gull in the Region remains as clouded as it does elsewhere in the west. A second-winter bird believed to be an **Ice-land Gull** was seen briefly Dec. 24 on Cascade Res., Valley, ID (JH, MH, †). One first-winter and two second-winter Glaucous-winged Gulls were at F.C.L. throughout the period (JH, SS, DSv, †, ph.). Up to five Glaucous Gulls of varying ages wintered at F.C.L. (JH, SS, DSv, ph.). Some of these same birds may have been involved in the December sightings at the *Kootenai* landfill in Coeur d'Alene 20 mi away (SS, DSv) and at Chatcolet L., *Benewah*, ID Jan. 31 (AF). A first-winter Glaucous Gull was in Idaho Falls Dec. 4 (BH, m.ob.), and an ad. and first-winter bird were at the Polson, MT dump Feb. 1 (DHo, m.ob.). The *Bonner*, ID landfill has traditionally been ignored by wintering gulls, so the 250 birds there Jan. 25 indicated a change in behavior. Among the birds present were four Glaucous and two Glaucous-winged gulls (EC).

Owls to Warblers

A Snowy Owl wintering at the Coeur d'Alene, ID airport was the darling of the local media (SS, m.ob.). Another Snowy was in Moscow, ID Dec. 18–29 (KD, m.ob.), and separate singles were in the Idaho Falls region Dec. 4 & 19 (CT). This was also a good year for Snowies in Montana's Flat-head Valley, where six–eight were seen (DHo). The N. Hawk Owl noted in November near Missoula, MT was still being seen through January (PW, m.ob.). Another was reported near Polebridge, MT Jan. 2 (BL). Great Gray Owls were not reported from Red Rock Lake N.W.R. Lima, MT this year (KN), but one was at Creston, MT in early December, as expected (DC). An imm. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** Dec. 28 in St. Maries is believed to be Idaho's first (CP, ICS, DSv, †), though it is still unclear to which species many past sapsucker records belong. The 50 Horned Larks by Somers, MT Feb. 12 were of interest (DC). Single Blue Jays in Salmon, ID (HR, m.ob.) and

Moscow, ID (KD, m.ob.) were seen throughout the period.

Single Bewick's Wren were near Lapwai, ID Feb. 11 (WH) and along Cottonwood Creek in *Nez Perce*, ID Feb. 26 (C.Bi.). Two Bewick's were in Lewiston Feb. 12 (C.Bi.). Late Mt. Bluebirds were in *Owyhee*, ID Dec. 19 (CS) and by Nampa, ID in mid-December (AS). Boise's N. Mockingbird was last seen Dec. 18 (WB). Waxwings were irregularly distributed throughout the Region and season. Bohemians were much less common, and Cedars more common, than usual.

Single Orange-crowned Warblers overwintered in Marsing, ID (JG), and Idaho Falls (BH), for latilong firsts. Yellow-rumped Warblers were fairly common in s. Idaho (MC, FK, DTr). Five–six others were seen in the Coeur d'Alene L. vicinity until Jan. 1 (JG, DSv, PJW), while one was in Missoula Feb. 23–24 (MB).

Sparrows to Finches

Single Am. Tree Sparrows were at Harrison Jan. 15 & 17, where rare (JH, MH, DSv, †, ph.). White-throated Sparrows were prominent in the fall, and a few apparently attempted to winter. Birds lingered to late December or early January near Benewah L., *Benewah*, ID (DSv), in Somers, MT (DC), near A.F.R. (FR), and at Deer Flat N.W.R. near Nampa, ID (JG).

Wright had both a White-throated and a Harris' sparrow successfully overwinter at his Missoula area feeder. Other Harris' wintered in Kalispell, MT (JeR), near Pocatello (BH), in Culdesac, ID (WH), and at Red Rock Lakes N.W.R. (KN). Single Lapland Longspurs were noted on the A.F.R. CBC Dec. 19 (CT) and by Idaho Falls, Feb. 16 (BH).

A lone Yellow-headed Blackbird was at Deer Flat N.W.R., Jan. 2, while three were at nearby Marsing, ID Feb. 5 (JG). An occasional Rusty Blackbird is expected around Helena, MT but the seven–eight birds which wintered there were unprecedented (CJ, GH). The **Rusty Blackbirds** present in St. Maries since November were still associating with a small Brewer's Blackbird flock until at least Jan. 1 (JG, DSv). A late Com. Grackle visited a Hamilton, MT feeder in early December (JO).

Montana's fourth **Brambling** was at a Kalispell area feeder Dec. 19+ (JeR, m.ob., †, ph.). Interestingly all of the state's previous records have come from this same general area. The only reports of Com. Redpolls were from the Lapwai area Dec. 3 (WH) and the Julieta, ID area Jan. 29 (AF). Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches are only erratically present in n. Idaho, so the small flock along the Idaho/Washington state line near Moscow Dec. 16–early February was welcome (JRo, m.ob.).



Two views of the Brambling that spent the 1993–1994 winter at a feeder near Kalispell, Montana. Photographs/Jan L. Wassink.

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