

Mountain West Region

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This quiet winter featured few birds at feeders, few rarities, little snow, and mild temperatures. Robins cruised all winter in such disparate locations as Denver, Eagle, Indian Peaks, Casper, and Sheridan. Most northern visitants that sometimes range into the Region did not come, such as Rough-legged Hawks, Bohemian Waxwings, and Common Redpolls. Similarly, most of the Region's mountain breeders which often winter on the plains or in the valleys winter did not materialize, including Mountain Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskins, and rosy-finches.

The Indian Peaks Winter Count had its second-lowest numbers in 13 years—12 birds per count-hour (range: 11.9–27.4). It recorded average numbers of tree-cone seedeaters, including only 400 of the most numerous species, Mountain Chickadee—a total that was below average. The next most numerous count was 99 Steller's Jays (DH).

Beyond Rare Birds

This column typically recounts rare birds seen by our observers—indeed that's what attracts many readers to *Field Notes*. I've put in 22 years writing this column, and mostly I've talked about rare stuff.

Yet probably most stray birds, lost in inhospitable climates or habitats which can't produce their preferred foods, are doomed to die. Exceptions exist, of course, like the few which return a second or third year (in this report, Yellow-footed Gull at Las Vegas, Golden-crowned Sparrow at Denver). But most rarities disappear and, in the big picture, lack significance.

Sometimes the rare stuff portends important ornithological patterns, like dispersal of Trumpeter Swans, the spread of Blue Jays, or displacement of species by grackles. The array of maritime birds which annually drop onto Colorado reservoirs reveal a widespread, regular dispersal which probably has occurred for centuries. No doubt these vagrant birds were irrevocably doomed even before we built dams and canals to irrigate wheat fields and lawns. Perhaps when we host five Pacific Loons, a dozen scoters of three species, and 25 Bonaparte's Gulls—we are a significant host.

My instinct, however, suggests that we should pay as much attention to the birds which normally inhabit our expanses of conifer forests, prairie grasslands, and sagebrush deserts (and, as well, our islands of wetlands and riparian corridors).

Ongoing studies such as the Indian Peaks seasonal censuses and rough analyses like Phil Hayes' compilation of birds seen on Denver Field Ornithologists trips and Ann Means' compilation of Longmont/Lyons/Berthoud/Loveland area birds add more to our understanding of birds and their health than does the recitation of the rarities. Collecting information on breeding ranges—through Atlases, Breeding Bird Surveys, Breeding Bird Censuses, and the develop-

ing Point Counts and MAP stations—provides, we hope, significant data. Continuously manned hawk watches, migrant study stations, and the massive Christmas Bird Count data reveal trends which we couldn't find otherwise.

By publishing the Christmas Bird Counts, *American Birds* performs an important service to birds. It distributes the results widely and publicizes counts. This, in turn, generates more counts and more participants. As a teenager I started a Breeding Bird Census because *Audubon Field Notes* published them. Too bad we have relegated the Breeding Bird and Winter Bird Censuses to another magazine and a university file cabinet.

It takes more effort and a different commitment—in the field and at home—to evaluate population trends for wintering Red-tailed Hawks, Horned Larks, and Mountain Chickadees, than it does to write up the rare thrasher.

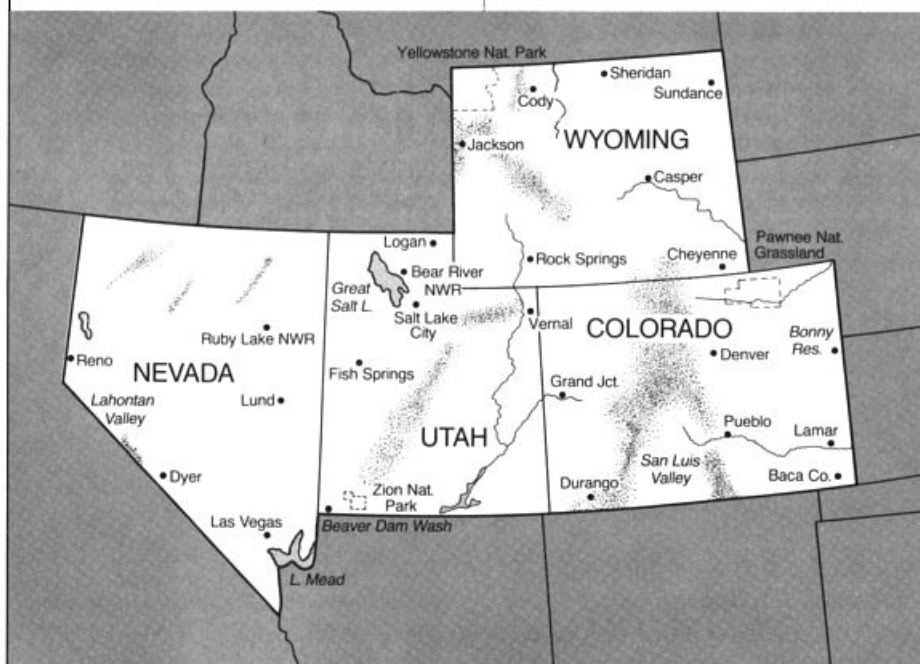
The National Audubon Society has access to a huge talent pool. And their *Birds in the Balance* program is aimed at the common birds. We can not only report on such efforts in this magazine, we can initiate them. Reporting them will publicize the projects, keep our readers better informed, and maybe motivate some to undertake similar studies. Can we redirect some of our energy toward studying the more common birds, mundane as they seem? It doesn't take all the fun out of birding, at least for me.

Rare birds are fun, but the natives are crucial.

Abbreviations: D.F.O. (*Denver Field Ornithologists field trips, compiled by Phil Hayes*); G.S.L. (*Great Salt Lake*); L.L.B.L. (*Longmont/Lyons/Berthoud/Loveland area, CO, using Foothills Audubon Club records*); R.E. (*Regional Editor*); 1st Lat (*first latilong record [a latilong is outlined by one degree each of latitude and longitude, and measures about 50 by 70 mi]*); p.a. (*written description on file with, and subject to approval of, state or local records committee*); # (*no written description submitted or photograph not seen by R.E.*).

Loons to Herons

Lake Powell, UT held 3 species of loons Feb. 10: Pacific and Com. loons, and the state's second **Yellow-billed Loon**. Compared with a Common, which trailed it across the water, the Yellow-billed exhibited the classic bill color, shape, and posture, but had only a faint spot on the side of the head (†JS, †CL). At Rawhide Res., n. of Ft. Collins, CO, 13–15 Horned Grebes wintered, as did two Westerns (RAR). A Red-necked Grebe almost wintered at Rawhide; it stayed Dec. 1–Jan. 16 (m.ob.). At Boulder and Denver one–three Double-crested



Cormorants appeared in January. Great Blue Herons appeared in January at Gold-eneye Res. near Casper, WY, Eagle, CO, Rifle, CO, Denver and L.L.B.L. January saw 2 remarkable heron records: a Green-backed at Grand Jct. (#MW) and an amazing **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** which stood on a sandbar in the Arkansas R. at Canon City Jan. 13 (†SW, 1st Lat).

Waterfowl

The Utah waterfowl count tallied 70,171 ducks Dec. 1–15 (21,330 Green-winged Teal, 14,257 N. Shovelers, 12,839 Mallards). The total dropped to 29,547 Dec. 16–31 (U.D.W.R.). Utah had 381 Tundra Swans in early December, 273 Dec. 16–31. Single Tundras visited in December at Las Vegas, Buffalo, WY, and Fruita and Berthoud, CO. At Ruby Lake N.W.R., NV, 22–37 Trumpeter Swans wintered. Yellow-stone had 161 on its midwinter survey Feb. 2 (TM). Coyotes exacted a toll on Yellow-stone's Trumpeters, killing at least nine in February, included two caught after diving into the Firehole R. In addition, an imm. Bald Eagle killed one on the ice; within 5 minutes Com. Ravens showed up, and then an ad. Bald Eagle chased the immature from its quarry (TM).

Snow Geese arrived early: one in February at Ruby L., 70 at Crook, CO Feb. 7 (DL), and 50 Feb. 20 at Delta with 1000s there by Feb. 28. Moab had four Feb. 25, and 3000 had arrived at John Martin Res. near Las Animas, CO Feb. 21 (DL). Canada Geese overwhelmed observers: 16,804 at L.L.B.L., cf. 9330 last year; 300 at Cortez (LB); 100–200 wintering at Gray Reef Res. near Casper. Mallards took advantage of the mild winter—300 spent the week of Feb. 16 in corn fields near Cody, WY and L.L.B.L. reported 1338, cf. 299 last year. Denver had a large population of wintering N. Shovelers along the S. Platte R.: 1762 recorded by D.F.O., including 750 Feb. 13. A Eur. Wigeon wintered at Denver and one stayed at Pueblo Feb. 27–Mar. 3. Rawhide had 49 Canvasbacks Feb. 19 (some had wintered) and 25 arrived at Ruby L. by Feb. 28. Utah's second Harlequin Duck, reported from G.S.L. during the fall season, stayed through the winter (ES, ph. VAS). The Antelope I. causeway, where observers saw the Harlequin, also harbored ≤10 Oldsquaws and a Black Scoter Dec. 14–Feb. 15 (TS, ph. VAS), and a White-winged Scoter Jan. 22 (TS). Two Oldsquaws wintered at Rawhide, one was reported at Las Vegas Dec. 4–Jan. 16 (MC), and singles appeared at Rifle, CO Dec. 4–9 (KP), at Fallon, NV Jan. 9 & 10 (†DT), and at Ft. Collins Jan. 8 (BL). Rawhide also had a Black Scoter Jan. 4–19 (RAR, DL). A Surf

visited Pueblo Dec. 4 (BP, V<). A White-winged was at Quail Creek Res. in s.w. Utah Jan. 28 (CK). Potter found 54 Barrow's Goldeneyes wintering at 4 sites on the Colorado R. near Rifle. At Casper 400–800 Com. Goldeneyes wintered in at least 2 reservoirs. Fewer than usual spent the winter at Denver and L.L.B.L.



Utah's second Harlequin Duck (center, with Common Goldeneye and Northern Shoveler), present since fall, stayed through the winter along the Antelope Island Causeway on the Great Salt Lake. Photograph/V. A. Smith.

Raptors

Mild weather led elk to stay in Yellowstone Park; that left few outside the park for hunters, so there were no discarded innards to attract scavenging birds. Observers reported low numbers of Bald Eagles outside Yellowstone. However, after 50 elk were killed Feb. 14, 40 Bald Eagles and a similar number of ravens materialized for the feast. Potter reported 31 observations of N. Harriers over the winter—D.F.O. had only 5 and L.L.B.L. 10 (cf. 20). A neighbor told Gifford about "a hawk that was hanging around her place. She and her husband differed over whether it was a Cooper's or Sharp-shinned. They took pictures on 2 different days, and when (Gifford) saw the pictures Feb. 10, three were of a Sharp-shinned, three of a Cooper's."

An ad. Red-shouldered Hawk wintered in the same spot near Pueblo where an immature wintered last year (DR, †MJ). Wintering Ferruginous Hawks increased somewhat in L.L.B.L. (79, cf. 30) and Denver (20, cf. 6–29). Most observers reported fewer Rough-legged Hawks, from Las Vegas and Cedar City to Logan and Denver, but Eagle and L.L.B.L. reported more. A Gyrfalcon, found Dec. 8 (‡KS), spent a month at Greeley (m.ob.).

Rails to Gulls

More Virginia Rails wintered at Grand Jct., Rifle, and Denver; Logan (KA) and Grand Jct. (CD) had Soras Dec. 18 and Feb. 14. At Grand Jct., five Sandhill and one Whooping Crane wintered. A gallimaufry of shorebirds surprised Regional observers. Decem-

ber reports included five–six Semipalmated Plovers at Cortez Dec. 11 (†LB), Least Sandpiper at Kanab, UT Dec. 21 (SH), and a dowitcher, probably Long-billed, at Greeley, CO Dec. 18. A Lesser Yellowlegs was reported Jan. 2 at Fish Springs N.W.R. A flock of Greater Yellowlegs wintered at Fish Springs: 13–19 in January. Up to 12 spent the winter at Provo, UT.

Single Dunlins appeared at Denver Feb. 20 (D.F.O.) and at Grand Jct., CO Feb. 26 (CD). A good description supports the Mew Gull at L. Mead, NV Jan. 13 (†RS). A Lesser Black-backed Gull found on the Denver Urban CBC stayed through January along the S. Platte R. (‡DN, m.ob.). The L. Mead one-legged Yellow-footed Gull returned for a third winter (MC). Videotapes of two probable Glaucous-winged Gulls found at the Salt Lake City dump have gone to experts for confirmation (CK, ES). The Great Black-backed Gull which arrived in September spent the winter at Pueblo (MJ, BP).

Doves to Woodpeckers

Nephi, UT sported a Mourning Dove Jan. 27 (RF), unusual in winter in most of the Region. An imm. Snowy Owl perched on the ice pack at Riverside Res. near Masters, CO Dec. 6–Jan. 31 (‡DL, m.ob.). Observers reported N. Pygmy-Owls from 11 sites in Wyoming and Colorado, including one which called all February at McCoy, CO (ME). Observers saw only three Short-eared Owls: in Cedar City, Casper, and



The Yellow-shafted form of Northern Flicker is rare as far west as Nevada. This typical male frequented a feeder at Fernley, Nevada, beginning in late January 1994. Photograph/Dennis Trousdale.

Alamosa N.W.R., CO. Three Anna's Hummingbirds wintered at feeders in Las Vegas (JC) and one at Davis Dam, NV (MC). Las Vegas also had a Broad-tailed Hummingbird Dec. 11–17 (VM). Northern Colorado had three Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers in January at Lyons, Loveland, and Ft. Collins. L.L.B.L. reported more Downy (111, cf. 57) and Hairy (25, cf. 9) woodpeckers than last year. At Fernley, NV a flicker with yellow-shafted plumage came to a feeder Jan. 25+ (†DT, ph).

Phoebe to Crows

An early Say's Phoebe arrived at Ruby L., Feb. 1 (JMa). Horned Lark counts peaked at Cody Feb. 24 with 400–500 during a blizzard; Casper had 1100 Jan. 29, and Last Chance, CO >5000 Feb. 9.

SA While neotropical migrants suffer from man's alterations to their habitat, corvids may actually thrive on those changes. In the past few decades Blue Jays have invaded e. Colorado and e. Wyoming, becoming commonplace residents in cities and stream bottoms. Crows have burgeoned in urban settings and in rural s. Utah, where magpies have also expanded their range. Another facet of adaptive behavior: Common Ravens at Yellowstone "continue to get into mischief. They have learned that a reward results from getting into the back of snowmobile seat compartments" (TM). A University of Colorado graduate student studying corvids in 2 landscapes—one natural and one man-impacted—reports (using only first-year results) that corvids thrive in humanized landscapes, along with raccoons (DC, *vide* DH).

The Indian Peaks Winter Bird count shows increases for all corvids, as the area has attracted more people seeking refuge from Front Range cities (DH):

Seen Pinyon Jays, seen 37 of 60 days in flocks of ≤20, stayed the winter at Devils Tower, WY (G&MS). Rifle had a flock of 300 Clark's Nutcrackers Jan. 29 (KP). After 1000s of crows thronged Cedar City in November, they disappeared. Farther south, groups of 100–200 flocked around Beaver and Kanab (SH).

Species per count hour, Indian Peaks Winter Bird Count

Species	1982–1985	1987–1991
Gray Jay	0.13	0.15
Steller's Jay	0.89	1.06
Clark's Nutcracker	0.23	0.23
Black-billed Magpie	0.18	0.21
American Crow	0.49	1.39
Common Raven	0.33	0.40
Total	2.25	3.44

Nuthatches to Waxwings

Two Carolina Wrens spent the winter 30 mi apart in Beulah (PF, m.ob.) and Pueblo (BD). Ruby-crowned Kinglets wintered at Rifle (KP) and Loveland (where one ate from

a suet ball, BW). Hermit Thrushes were reported in December at Ironton and Springville, UT (RF), Grand Jct. (CD), and Rifle (KP). Midwinter strays stopped at Grand Jct., Jan. 30 and at Colorado Springs and Glenwood Springs in February (CD, KP, AV). American Robins flocked throughout Wyoming and Colorado. During January Sheridan, WY had 25–50; Casper, WY, and Rifle, Gypsum, and Eagle, CO each had flocks of 50–200, L.L.B.L. counted 1191 (*cf* 295 last year), and flocks of 20–200 roamed Denver. Six Varied Thrushes visited the Region: one Nov. 26–Mar. 7 at Story, WY (HD), and others at Golden, CO Dec. 23–30 (GD), Canon City, CO Dec. 18 (DE, PM, LD), Heber, UT Jan. 11 (RF), and Fallon, NV Feb 9 (†DT).

SA The Varied Thrush found at Longmont's Golden Ponds Park Nov. 17 stayed into mid-January. Three other rarities found within 100 yards of the thrush in November also stayed: a Gray Catbird into January and a N. Waterthrush and two–six Rusty Blackbirds to Dec. 6.

Northern Mockingbirds wintered in Grand Jct. and Evergreen, and a Brown Thrasher wintered in Denver (GE). Brown Thrashers also appeared in February in Big Horn, WY (CO) and Wheat Ridge, CO (BS). A few Am. Pipits wintered along the Colorado R.: 10–15 at Grand Jct., and 36 at Rifle Dec. 28 (decreasing to one Jan. 28). Bohemian Waxwings stayed n. for the most part—in n. Wyoming there were 2000 Dec. 20 from Devils Tower to Sheridan (HD), but there were few in Cody and Yellowstone. Utah had 2 reports of three Bohemian Waxwings in Cedar City and Heber.

Warblers to Grosbeaks

An Orange-crowned Warbler lasted until Dec. 13 at Rifle (KP) and from Dec. 30–Jan. 7 at a Las Vegas hummingbird feeder (MC). A few Yellow-rumped Warblers wintered in the Region: eight–ten at Cedar City, 30–40 at Grand Jct., two–four at Ogden, UT (two banded), a few at Logan, UT, and one at Pueblo to Jan. 11. A Scarlet Tanager spent the winter in a Boulder yard Dec. 29+ (CC, m.ob., ph.#). At Reno, a Dickcissel joined a flock of House Finches, House Sparrows, and Red-winged Blackbirds at a feeder (†SK). At least one Sage Sparrow returned early to Eagle Feb. 26 (JM), and downstream at Rifle a Lincoln's Sparrow attended a feeder Feb. 20+ (KP). A Golden-crowned Sparrow (presumably the same bird) returned for the 3rd consecutive year to a feeder in Denver's Red Rocks Park Dec. 31+ (WWB *et al*). The

Golden-crowned at Grand Jct., Jan. 29 was a 2nd Latilong (CD). Few reported Lapland Longspurs, although 50–100 wintered n. of Masters, CO, and 250 were at Last Chance Feb. 9; Wyoming's peak report was 12 at Medicine Lodge Feb. 12. The only 2 Snow Bunting reports involved two–three birds seen Dec. 1–15 at G.S.L., and two Feb. 26 at Yellowstone.

Rusty Blackbirds visited Pueblo, Longmont, Ft. Collins, and Barr Lake S.P. near Denver; 12 were at Lamar, CO Feb. 21 (DL). Common Grackles wintered in Wyoming: 12 at Buffalo (RR) and six at Casper (F&LL). A N. (Bullock's) Oriole stopped in Denver Dec. 22 (DG). Mountain areas saw more Pine Grosbeaks than usual, especially in Jackson, WY and Yellowstone. Although the usual mountain feeders attracted rosy-finches, they did so infrequently, probably due to low snow cover at high altitudes. At Yellowstone Red Crossbills were hard to find, while L.L.B.L. had 150 (*cf* 50 last year) and 5–40 wintered at Ft. Collins. Several good-sized flocks roamed over Grand Mesa e. of Grand Jct., joined by 12 White-winged Crossbills (RL, CD, m.ob.). Wyoming observers found several flocks of Com. Redpolls, from Yellowstone e. to Devils Tower and s. to Torrington. In February some strayed S to n. Colorado—three at Loveland Feb. 14 (BW) and two at Pawnee Nat'l Grassland Feb. 26–28 (BL). Many observers complained about the scarcity of Pine Siskins and Am. Goldfinches. Only Eagle, CO reported wintering flocks, and those were small at 10–20 of each species. Observers did find fair numbers of Evening Grosbeaks in some places; a peak flock of 300 at Rifle Jan. 29 mixed with 300 Clark's Nutcrackers.

Undocumented rarities

This report omits the following rarities because the observers did not provide details Red-necked Grebe and Laughing Gull in Colorado and Mew Gull in Utah.

Corrigenda

For the 3rd time, the Editors failed to bold-face and italicize the appropriate names of Compilers and Contributors, this time in the Summer report (AB 47:1133). In order to avoid another typographical glitch, I've adopted a new format to acknowledge contributions of substance in this column.

Compilers (with number of observers who contributed to their compilation): Keith Archibald (10), W. W. Brockner (13), Alex & Gillian Brown (28), Marian Cressman (8), Coen Dexter (5), Phil Hayes (11), Ursula Kepler (23), Jim & Gloria Lawrence (16), Bill Lisowsky (16), Terry McEneaney

(9), Ann Means (35), Jack Merchant (5), Brandon Percival (23), Bert Raynes (35), Robert Rothe (10), Terry Sadler (15), Ella Sorensen (Utah Editor, 3868 Marsha Drive, West Valley City UT 84120).

Contributors: Lu Bainbridge, Jay Banta, Helen Downing, Margaret Ewing, Rob Fergus, Jewel Gifford, Dave Hallock, Steve Hedges, Craig Kneedy, Jeff Mackay (JMa), Kim Potter, J. C. Rigli, George and Melodie San Miguel, Alan Schmierer, V. A. Smith, John Spence, Janeal Thompson, Dennis Trousdale, Alan Versaw.

Cited Observers: J. Caler, D. Craig, C. Cushman, L. Danielson, B. Dickson, G. Dunphy, D. Ely, D. Engard, G. Evans, P. Flynn, D. George, S. Knowles, C. LaRue, F. & L. Layton, D. Leatherman, P. Monaco, V. Mowbray, D. Nelson, C. Orr, D. Roth, R. Schageter, B. Spencer, V. & L. Truan, Utah Div. of Wildlife Resources (U.D.W.R.), B. Washnock, M. Wright.
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Southwest Region-Arizona

**DAVID STEJSKAL, CHRIS D. BENESH,
AND GARY H. ROSENBERG**

In contrast to most of the country, the southern half of Arizona generally experienced a very mild winter. This was exemplified by the presence of several species normally absent during this season (*e.g.* Bell's Vireo), and others that lingered farther north than usual (*e.g.* Turkey Vulture). In addition, several species appeared in the state weeks ahead of their expected spring arrival dates, including four species of warblers that all appeared in the third week of February. Regional highlights included Arizona's third Glaucous Gull, as well as several persisting rarities (*e.g.* Eared Trogon, Crescent-chested Warbler, and Tufted Duck), which were all relocated during the period.

Abbreviations: A.B.C. (*Arizona Bird Committee*); B.A.N.W.R. (*Buenos Aires N.W.R.*); B.T.A. (*Boyce Thompson Arboretum*); L.C.R.V. (*Lower Colorado R. Valley*); G.F.P. (*Gila Farms Pond*); M.F.L. (*Many Farms Lake*); N.I.R. (*Navajo Indian Reservation*); P.A.P. (*Pinal Air Park*); P.R.D. (*Painted Rock Dam*); S.P.R. (*San Pedro R.*); S.T.P. (*Sewage Treatment Plant*)

Loons to Waterfowl

A Pacific Loon at P.R.D., possibly one of the individuals reported there during the fall, was present Jan. 23 (DE). Another imm. bird was found at Lee's Ferry near Page Jan. 16+ (†CL). This may represent the first winter record for n. Arizona east of L. Mead. A Horned Grebe at Picacho Res.,

Dec. 12 (PM) was the only one reported. One hundred W. Grebes on San Carlos Res., Jan. 16 was an unusually high concentration away from the L.C.R.V. (MS). More impressive were as many as 1000 Am. White Pelicans at P.R.D. through the period (m.ob.). This is the highest winter concentration ever recorded in Arizona, and numbers this year rivaled those of established wintering areas in the West. Following recent large summer influxes of Brown Pelicans, a few imm. birds have been found during winter. This year was no exception with one–two birds at P.R.D. throughout the period (m.ob.), another at Arizona City Dec. 26–Feb. 21 (MS), and yet another in s.w. Phoenix Jan. 16 (*fide* SGa). Numbers of Neotropic Cormorants at Patagonia L. (where they are now regular) built up from a single bird Jan. 3 to a high of eight by the end of the period (MS *et al.*). More unusual was a single bird at P.R.D., Dec. 24–Jan. 16 (TC *et al.*). There are still only a handful of records for this species in s.w. Arizona.

Once again large numbers of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were found in the Chandler area. One hundred thirty-five Black-bellieds were present through the period at Ocotillo (RJ *et al.*). The only report of Tundra Swan came from Imperial N.W.R., Jan. 9–21 (D. Todd *et al.*). An ad. Trumpeter Swan present through January at Howard L., 30 mi s. of the Grand Can-yon, was fitted with a collar that read "Green River, Utah" (R. Birkeland, *fide* TC). This represents only the 2nd report of this species in Arizona and will be evaluated by the A.B.C. Other than birds recorded on CBCs, the only Greater White-fronted Geese reported were singles at Willow L. near Prescott Dec. 18–21 (BT, CT) and in Chandler Dec. 24–Jan. 9 (RJ, MC *et al.*). There are very few winter records of Snow Goose from n. Arizona, so a single bird at Page

