

# British Columbia/ Yukon Region

## CHRIS SIDDLÉ

British Columbia, west of the Rockies, enjoyed an exceptionally mild winter. Prince George, for example, had little snow until the New Year. Flocks of Purple Finches and several Cedar Waxwings stayed north to Prince George, providing new winter records. Eurasian Skylarks were singing around Victoria by the middle of January. American Dippers enjoyed ice-free streams in the highlands and generally avoided valleys. Very few Red-breasted Sapsuckers were forced out of the coastal woods. Unusual numbers of shorebirds that normally migrate south from the province wintered along the Fraser fore-shore and in Boundary Bay.

The Queen Charlotte Islands reported excellent wild food crops, the result of the warmest, driest summer in 20 years. The very few winter storms in the Queen Charlotte Islands accounted for the successful wintering of many passerines, including tiny numbers of Cedar Waxwings, Hermit Thrushes, five warbler species, and Lincoln's, White-crowned, and Golden-crowned sparrows. Wild food crops were also excellent in the Kamloops and Okanagan areas, with many forest birds—such as Pine Grosbeaks and Northern Pygmy-Owls—staying in mountain forests rather than descending to valley bottoms.

Special thanks to all subregional editors for their extra efforts this season.

Abbreviations: P.G. (*Prince George*); PP (*provincial park*); Q.C.Is. (*Queen Charlotte Islands*); Van. (*Vancouver*); Van. I. (*Vancouver Island*); Vic. (*Victoria*); YT (*Yukon Territory*)

## Loons to Ducks

The 446 Pacific Loons on the Vic. CBC provided an all-time high count. A scattering of individual Yellow-billed Loon reports was received: Masset Dec. 18 (MH, GD, PH) and possibly the same bird Feb. 10 (JT); Vernon Jan. 16 (MC); Ten Mile Pt., Saanich Jan. 18–23 (GAN, J&GA) Cates Park, N.Van., Dec. 19 (PY); and Blackie Spit Jan. 1–9 (B&PSp). An imm. Black-crowned Night-Heron at Cowichan R. estuary Jan. 1 provided one of very few

chorage all season (TGT, RLS). These are about double the expected numbers. A Northwestern Crow, first located in Anchorage Oct. 4 (LJO), was seen sporadically to Feb. 21 (TGT, RLS, GJT). There are now 11 Upper Cook Inlet records for this Sitka Spruce-W. Hemlock forest species; this was the first overwintering bird.

Casual in fall in Southeast, **Mountain Bluebirds** were noted into December: Three at Juneau to Dec. 17+ (RLS) and one near Petersburg Dec. 18–21 (WHP, PJW) was a first Mitkof I. winter report. The Region's 2nd-latest **Hermit Thrush** skulked about Ketchikan berry thickets to Dec. 18 (SCH). Although Hermit Thrushes regularly linger to early November, we have only one previous December record. Up to two Townsend's Solitaires took advantage of the exotic berry trees around Anchorage, at least through the first half of the season, when one each was found Dec. 19 (*fide* RLS) and Jan. 14 (LS). Totally unexpected were two Cedar Waxwings flycatching in mild conditions in downtown Seward Dec. 26 (TGT, RLS, DWS). These were certainly Seward's first ever and Southcoastal's first winter records. Essentially all of Southcoastal's handful of previous records had been in mid-autumn. Other noteworthy Cedar Waxwing sightings included a group of ten around Ketchikan Dec. 18–Feb. 14 (SCH) and up to two in Petersburg Dec.30–Jan. 2 (WHP, PJW).

## Warblers to Fringillids

Kodiak weather was apparently mild enough to harbor two warblers well into mid-season. The Region's 3rd winter **Orange-crowned Warbler** appeared in a chickadee flock near Narrow Cape Jan. 23 (†RAM); two previous reports were also near Kodiak. A ♂ **Wilson's Warbler**, the Region's first in winter, survived at a suet feeder in town Jan. 22+ (CH vid., †RAM). Only slightly more expected were single late Yellow-rumped Warblers around Ketchikan Dec. 5 (DB) & 18 (TG).

The only Am. Tree Sparrows noted were from Southcoastal in December and included near-average numbers: 12 at Seward Dec. 26 (*fide* WS), one at Kodiak Jan. 1 (RAM), and up to six at Homer all season (EPB). One of the Region's very few **Savannah Sparrow** winter reports was a single at a Ketchikan feeder mid-December+ (JK, SCH). This abundant Alaska breeder typically departs by late-November. About the average number of Lincoln's Sparrows attempted to overwinter, with a single at Ketchikan to at least Dec. 31 (SCH), two around Kodiak to Jan. 30 (RAM), and another at a Homer feeder Jan. 12 (GCW). The Ketchikan **Swamp Sparrow**, originally

located in early November (q.v.), remained in the area to Feb. 12+ (SCH). Another appeared at Blind Slough on Mitkof I., Jan. 15 for a 2nd local winter record (PJW). There are now about 8 Alaska Swamp Sparrow records, all but 2 from Southeast from late-fall into mid-winter. Three White-throated Sparrows was average for winter, with singles noted at Seward Dec. 26+ (RLS, DWS, TGT), at Homer all season (BM, PM), and at Ketchikan late-December+ (TG, SCH). It was noteworthy that *Zonotrichia* reports were below-average or missing from traditional overwintering coastal sites; maximum was seven at Anchorage Dec. 18 (DFD). The season's only McKay's Buntings were reported from Cold Bay, where annual in winter, with at least five scattered around the area Dec. 26–Feb. 27 (CFZ, MGZ, RPS, SDS).

Although Rusty Blackbird numbers were below average, other icterids made news. At Homer, the ♀ Red-winged Blackbird that appeared at a feeder Jan. 1–mid-month+ (ph. EE, GCW) provided a first local winter report, and at Ketchikan, Heinl caught up with a shy **Western Meadowlark**, which was present Jan. 26–Feb. 18+ (ph. †SCH). There are now about 3 true winter W. Meadowlark records, all from Southeast. Two **Brewer's Blackbirds** remained from Dec. 1 to at least Feb. 2 (SCH, \*) in a Ketchikan parking lot for the season's only report of this casual winter visitor to Southeast. The Region's lone Brambling was a female around Petersburg Jan. 1+ (PJW). Of the irruptive winter finches, none was widespread, and only Pine Siskin was locally common in the s. half of Southeast and in central Southcoastal. Only scattered pairs or small groups of White-winged Crossbills were encountered in the e. Interior and from Anchorage s. to the Kenai Pen.

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records for Van I. (JG, CSa). A high count of 250 Brant wintered on Boundary Bay (DJ). A flock of 20 ♂ Eur. Wigeons was noted at Robert's Bank Jan. 3 (MP-L). Kelowna's ♂ Tufted Duck showed up Dec. 18 for the 3rd consecutive winter, staying until mid-March (CC, m.ob.). Vancouver had three Tufted Ducks: a female on Lost Lagoon Dec. 28–Jan. 28 (RO, m.ob.), a male on Lost Lagoon Jan. 15–February (DMP, m.ob.), and an immature on Boundary Bay Feb. 1 (GAP). In a late report, Hamel told of large concentrations of Surf Scoters and Barrow's Goldeneyes on Hastings and Alice arms in the fall. He counted 5760 Surf Scoters on Alice Arm Sept. 16 and 8258 Barrow's Goldeneyes on Alice and Hastings arms and upper Observatory Inlet Oct. 23 & 24. Up to three Com. Goldeneyes and two Com. Mergansers stayed on open stretches of s. Yukon rivers throughout the winter (HG, m.ob.). Two ♀ King Eiders were reported without supporting descriptions from Tofino in January. Red-breasted Mergansers were at an all-time high with 752 reported on the Vic. CBC. This species continues to increase in Okanagan in winter, with up to a dozen seen near Vernon during the season (CS).

### Hawks to Shorebirds

An ad. Turkey Vulture wintered along Boundary Bay Dec. 6–Feb. 4 (KR, m.ob.). In a late dispatch, an Osprey, rare to the Q.C.Is., was mentioned at Tlell River Oct. 15–27 (HK, FC, CB, MH *et al.*). Great ex-

citement was stirred in the Van. birding community when an imm. White-tailed Eagle was tentatively reported from Tsawwassen Jan. 22–28. The media got involved and for 2 weeks confusion reigned as the public reported imm. Bald Eagles as White-tailed. The few carefully written field notes will be sent to an outside expert for evaluation. A huge concentration of >100 Rough-legged Hawks was reported from fields near Nelson all season (LVD). This is the highest interior count ever. A gray-morph Gyrfalcon patrolled P.G.'s rail yards in search of pigeons Feb. 5 (MPh). Hamel watched flights of Sandhill Cranes going SE over Alice Arm Sept. 17. He counted 1220. A Least Sandpiper appeared at Masset Feb. 6 (DB), one of very few winter records for the Q.C.Is. Three Leasts were unusual at Alaksen N.W.R. and Reifel Dec. 23 (JI). A Red Knot lingered until Dec. 6 at Oak Bay (J. Defaye). Up to 29 Greater Yellowlegs wintered at Reifel I., Dec. 3–February (JI), and six were at Blackie Spit Jan. 1–Feb. 2 (*vide DJ*). These are unusually high numbers for winter. Seven reports of ≤38 Western Sandpipers from Blackie Spit, Iona I., Surrey, Reifel I., and Robert's Bank were received (DJ), an unusually high number for a species normally rare in winter.

### Gulls to Sapsuckers

It is thought that up to three Slaty-backed Gulls wintered in the Van. area. However, details of only one—an adult at Burns Bog Dec. 27—reached the Regional Editor (†AJ, RT). It was a Snowy Owl winter around Van., with a high count of 22 at 72nd St., Delta Jan. 16 (PWJ, RT, JTo). Seven occurred at Westham/Reifel Is. (JI) and single Snowies were present at Iona I. and Brunswick Pt. (*vide DJ*). Only one, an immature, was reported for Van I. at Comox Airbase Jan. 11 (PSm). Single N. Hawk Owls were scattered across s. and c. British Columbia, with individuals at McCulloch ski trails, near Kelowna Feb. 3 (JL), Nakusp Dec. 17–late February (GSD), near Celista Dec. 6 and Feb. 26 (JBr), Revelstoke (DP), Tabor L., P.G., Feb. 17 (CA, JB), and McBride all winter (ES). Revelstoke's first Great Gray Owl appeared Jan. 5 (KS) and was relocated Jan. 7 (DP). Great Gray

Owls, casual in extreme s.w. British Columbia, were reported from 3 widely separated locations: Kanaka Creek Park, Maple Ridge Jan. 9–15 (RL, †JD, m.ob.); Stanley Park Jan. 21–23 (*vide DJ*), and Campbell R. from about the 2nd week of January to at least Jan. 21 (BH, DWI, MAI, BMS). The only Okanagan Great Gray was at the McCulloch ski trails Feb. 5 (C.O.N.C.). The only interior Short-eared Owls reported were one at P.G. Feb. 5 (MP) and three on Vernon's CBC Dec. 19. Very small numbers of Short-eareds were also reported from Cowichan Bay and Central Saanich. Sixteen at Iona I. in January were cause for celebration, since Short-eareds have been rare there in recent years (*vide DJ*). Up to 15 wintered along Boundary Bay (*vide DJ*).

### Flycatchers to Finches

A Barn Swallow at Reifel Jan. 3–Feb. 5 (JI) provided a very rare recent winter record. British Columbia's second-ever Scrub Jay continued to reside at Museum Nature Park, Van. through the season. Victoria reported few Steller's Jays in contrast to last winter's abundance. One Blue Jay, a vagrant to Van I., was at Qualicum Beach Jan. 4–Feb. 7 (TM, DM, CSD). Two–three Blue Jays reported from Kimberley were the only interior birds noted (ER, NF). A Black-billed Magpie in S. Burnaby Jan. 14 (†JD) and one on Bowen I., Dec. 31 (BGS) provided two of very few records for this species, which rarely straggles to the coast. Individual Red-breasted Nuthatches overwintered at 3 Yukon feeders. One was at Marsh L., Dec. 19 (HG, CBC) and Jan. 30 (HG, Y.B.C.). One each were at C. Grant's feeder at Schwatka L. and at W. Nixon's feeder in Whitehorse-Wolf Cr. throughout the season. A Hermit Thrush on the Masset CBC Dec. 18 was very rare for the Q.C.Is. (GD). Several Am. Robins were noted in P.G. during the season (JB, m.ob.). At least two attempted to winter in the Yukon, with one along the Yukon R. in Whitehorse Dec. 4 (CE, PS) and a second in Whitehorse-Valleyview Jan. 8 (MW).

A Siberian Accentor was seen by a single observer at Van., Dec. 15 and could not be relocated in spite of extensive searches. If accepted, this would provide the first record for Canada and the 2nd for North America s. of Alaska. Fortunately Jaramillo took excellent notes. (Incidentally, two Siberian Accentors were videotaped at Salmon Arm in early March just after the season closed.) Larger than usual numbers of Bohemian Waxwings were at P.G. through December and January, while the Okanagan reported average to smaller-than-average totals (JB, CS). One Cedar Waxwing at Masset Jan. 26 and four in the same bush Feb. 5 were very rare for the



Q.C.Is. in winter (PH, MH). A Eur. Starling, rare in the Yukon, wintered at the Whitehorse dump Dec. 26+ (GK, LK, CE, PS).

The Queen Charlottes was the place to be for winter warblers. The prize was British Columbia's first **Prairie Warbler**, probably an adult, seen Dec. 18 (MH) and Jan. 25 (†PH, †MH). Other Misty Isles' warblers included a few Yellow-rumpeds (Myrtles), Townsend's, two Orange-crowneds, and two Palm Warblers in Delkatla Sanctuary. The Palms successfully overwintered (PH, MH, DB). In the West Kootenays at Nakusp the prize warbler was a ♂ **Black-throated Blue Warbler**, providing a 2nd record for the province (ph. GD, LW, m.ob.) It visited town feeders from the first week of December–Jan. 16 when it died, colliding with a window. Late single Yellow-rumpeds were at Kelowna Dec. 26 (CC), Nelson Dec. 22 (LVD), Nakusp early December–early February (GSD), and Vernon Feb. 6 (JDe). In Victoria's mild climate 4 reports of Townsend's Warblers were received, as well as one on Saltspring I., Dec. 1 (DR). A very late Com. Yellowthroat at Iona I., Dec. 19 (RT) brought British Columbia's winter warbler count to an all-time high 7 species. The Q.C.Is.' first Swamp Sparrow was described in detail Jan. 24 near Juskatla (†PH). Victoria's ≥three Swamps weren't described at all! Nor were Reifel I.'s two. Two–five White-crowneds and two–five Golden-crowned sparrows wintered at Masset (MH). Such records attest to the season's mildness. With last winter's *American Birds'* reports of two N. Cardinals overwintering in Alberta, a male appearing for a few minutes at a feeder near P.G., Feb. 15 doesn't seem so far-fetched (AA). How long will it be before British Columbia has its first confirmed sighting?

British Columbia's second-ever **Great-tailed Grackle**, a female, appeared at Vernon Dec. 5+ (CG, ph. PG, MC). This species' occurrence is not unexpected considering its continued expansion northward along the United States Pacific coast. Masset, Q.C.Is., was host to *three Bramblings*



In this mild season, it was perhaps not surprising that this female **Great-tailed Grackle**, British Columbia's second, managed to survive the 1993-1994 winter inland at Vernon. Photograph/Phil Gehlen.

this winter, an unprecedented number anywhere outside Alaska. All were at feeders. The first appeared Nov. 3 (P&PP, GD, MH, PH). A Com. Redpoll, a rare winter visitor, appeared at Masset Dec. 16 & 18 and Feb. 4–6 (MH, PH), providing the 2nd to 4th Q.C.Is. records. Elsewhere in s. British Columbia, Com. Redpolls were mostly absent, staying in the north where seed crops were heavy. Prince George reported 3762 on their CBC Dec. 19 (P.G.N.C.). In s. British Columbia, Pine Grosbeaks and White-winged Crossbills stayed in the mountains, where they were at times abundant, and avoided the valley floors. Flocks of 50, 30, and 25 White-winged Crossbills were observed at 1400 m near Summit L. (Nakusp) Feb. 16 (GSD). Pine Siskins and Red Crossbills both appeared in interior lowland locations in large numbers through the last half of the season, though Red Crossbills were in low numbers near Van. (DJ). Pine Grosbeaks also stayed north. Good numbers were reported around P.G. all season with an unusually huge flock of 200 at Giscome Feb. 1 (MA). Purple Finches visited P.G. feeders, wintering for the first time in years. The high count was 20 at Giscombe Jan. 13 (MA).

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