

# Middle-western Prairie Region

## KENNETH J. BROCK

Though arguments about global warming remain unresolved, there is no debate that residents of the Middlewestern Prairie Region luxuriated in another balmy winter season. December and January were unusually mild. Indeed, the National Climatic Data Center deemed 1994–1995 the second warmest winter in the past 100 years, according to Bob Danley. The minuscule cold spells that did appear were primarily in February. Under these circumstances many lakes and ponds remained ice free, at least through early February.

Effects of the mild winter on birdlife were predictable. From the birder's perspective the good news was that many species that normally winter farther south lingered in the region. This was especially evident among passerines and shorebirds. The availability of open water allowed waterfowl to tarry, creating uncommonly high counts in the northern states. The bad news was that

most irruptive species (*e.g.*, Snowy Owls, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and winter finches) remained north of the Region. The season's rarities were highlighted by two Regional first records: Harris' Hawk and Northern Lapwing.

Unfortunately, the Iowa report was apparently lost in the mail and failed to arrive in time to be included in this summary. Additionally, it was necessary to exclude several important records owing to lack of documentation; I entreat all correspondents to forward documentations of all extraordinary sightings.

Abbreviations: L. Cal. (*Lake Calumet, Chicago*); R.E.D.A (*Riverlands Environmental Demonstration Area, MO*), Spfld. (*Springfield, IL*).

## Loons to Ibises

The Region's only Red-throated Loon was on L. Vermilion, IL Jan. 1 (†RCh *et al.*). Following a 2-year hiatus, Missouri's Yellow-billed Loon returned to Table Rock L., where it was seen Dec. 22 (†PMc, TB, CL). Grebes were both widespread and plentiful; impressive counts were made at Crab Orchard N.W.R., IL, where 99 Pied-billed Grebes were found Jan. 8 (TF), and in *Gibson*, IN, where 500 Horned Grebes were counted Feb. 18 (GB). Following last winter's invasion, Red-necked Grebe numbers returned to normal with singletons reported on L. Jacomo, MO Dec. 9 (CHb) and Avon L., OH Jan. 11 (TL). East of the Mississippi R. single Eared Grebes were seen at L. Springfield, IL Dec. 11 (DPo) and at Lorain, OH Dec. 17 (JDu, ST, m.ob.). Western

Grebes were reported at 3 separate Illinois locations. Farther east singletons appeared in *Gibson*, IN Dec. 28 (†JCb) and on the *Maumee R.*, OH Jan. 25 (†MA).

A first-year N. Gannet gave Ohio birders a treat at Lorain for several days Dec. 11–12 (BC, †RHa, m.ob.). American White Pelicans ranged a bit farther east than normal with two in *Tazwell*, IL Dec. 8–29 (KR, LA) and singles at 3 Indiana locations. As might be anticipated in a mild winter, Double-crested Cormorants and Great Blue Herons wintered across the Region. Less expected were Great Egrets in *Madison*, IL Dec. 11 (KMc), and three in northerly *Will*, IL Dec. 26–27 (JS, JM). Up to nine Black-crowned Night-Herons wintered at Whistler Wood Forest Preserve, *Cook*, IL (WM, MB) and two were in *Cleveland*, OH Feb. 25 (D&JH).

## Waterfowl

Missouri Department of Conservation waterfowl biologists estimated that the Missouri waterfowl population was virtually double the mean count over the past 5 years. This increase is apparently the result of an excellent nesting season in combination with the mild winter. Tundra Swans were widely reported, with counts exceeding 15 in every state except Kentucky; the peak count was 40 at L. Rockwell, OH Jan. 3 (CHt, LRo). In conjunction with reintroduction programs in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, Trumpeter Swans are becoming regular visitors to the Region. This winter ≤34 individuals were seen in Illinois and 20 in Missouri. It was an excellent winter for Greater White-fronted Geese, with 3 separate Illinois reports that exceeded 100 birds; the maximum was 180 at the Union County W.M.A., Jan. 9 (TF). Additionally, two White-fronteds (adult and immature) wandered E to *Adams*, OH, where they were seen Feb. 18 (†DD, CG). A Feb. 17 airplane census in s. Illinois yielded 148,000 Snow Geese (RW). Accompanying this plethora were 16 Ross' Goose reports. Notable duck tallies, all in Illinois, included: 204,000 Mallards at Chautauqua N.W.R., Dec. 8, 6500 N. Pintail in *Calhoun* Dec. 8, 6500 N. Shovelers at Chautauqua N.W.R., Dec. 8, and 10,800 Canvasbacks in *Hancock* Dec. 13 (MG). Well n. of its normal winter range was an apparently uninjured ♀ Blue-winged Teal at Pigeon River W.M.A., IN Dec. 13 (†Haw). Missouri's first winter Cinnamon Teal record, a male, was at L. Springfield, MO Jan. 7 (†LRi). The only Eur. Wigeon reports consisted of single males seen in Ohio; the first was at Conneaut Harbor Dec. 21 (†JP) and the 2nd was in *Castalia Pond*, *Erie* Jan. 28 (VF, †RHa).





**Male King Eider (In adult or near-adult plumage) at Heidecke Lake, Grundy County, Illinois, January 27, 1995. Probably the first time that the species has been found in such a bright plumage in Illinois. Photograph/Joe B. Milosevich.**

Unusual for an inland site was 13 Greater Scaup at L. Jacomo, MO Dec. 11 (CD, MR). A highlight amidst the winter waterfowl profusion was an adult, or near adult, King Eider at the Commonwealth Edison power station on Heidecke Lake, Grundy, IL Jan. 28 (JO, TA, †DJh, †JM, ph., m.ob.). The bird was actually detected before Jan. 28, but on that date Com. Ed. officials arranged a special tour to allow birders an opportunity to view this rarity. Two Harlequin Ducks were reported along the Illinois L. Michigan shoreline and three were found on L. Erie in Ohio. Inland Oldsquaw reports included two at Smithville, MO Dec. 30+ (CHb, m.ob.) and one at Buck Creek S.P., OH Jan. 5–8 (DO). Following the pattern of recent years scoters appeared at many sites away from the Great Lakes; however, the species mix appears to be changing. In central Illinois Bohlen noted that Surf Scoters are replacing White-wingeds as the “winter” scoter. This pattern may well apply to the entire Region as White-wingeds were the least reported scoter this winter. Among the higher Black Scoter counts were seven at Illinois Beach S.P., Jan. 2 (ASt) and two at Rocky River, OH Dec. 21 (RH). An impressive 53 Surf Scoters were logged at Winthrop Harbor, IL (L. Michigan) Dec. 27 (TF *et al.*), and 11 were at downstate Clinton L., IL Dec. 10 (MD). In contrast, the Region’s peak White-winged Scoter tally was only 10 at Illinois Beach S.P., Dec. 31 (ASt). Single White-winged Scoters wandered inland to R.E.D.A., Dec. 3 (DBe *et al.*) and Jefferson, KY Dec. 17 (JB, PB). An ad. ♂ Barrow’s Goldeneye was at Winthrop Harbor, IL Dec. 31–Feb. 6 (†PSw, †DJh *et al.*) and another was at Muskrat L., MO Feb. 25 (†LL, DE, KG, m.ob.). The Region’s largest Com. Merganser count consisted of 5000 birds in LaSalle, IL Dec. 31 (C&JMc).

### Vultures to Shorebirds

Noteworthy among several sizable Black Vulture reports was 35 in Grayson, KY Dec. 9 (KC). Turkey Vulture numbers were well below normal. Most correspondents either failed to comment on this species or reported small numbers; the only exception occurred at the roost at L. Taneycomo, MO, where 800 birds, including Blacks, were observed in early February. An Osprey lingered at Miami R. Oxbow L., IN through Dec. 17 (JR), providing one of few winter records for that state. Winter Bald Eagle surveys yielded 2398 birds in Missouri (JW) and 132 in Indiana (JCs). It was not a banner year for N. Goshawks; only seven were reported in the Region. In concert with last autumn’s northward dispersal of Harris’ Hawks, one was discovered at Cosmos Park, Columbia Feb. 22 (†PMc, BJ, JW) to provide Missouri’s first record. Observers found no bands or jesses and believe the bird was wild. The season’s unusual Red-tailed Hawk list, all from Illinois, included an albino at Carlyle L., Feb. 1 (DK), a rufous morph in DuPage Dec. 18 (AW), a rufous/dark morph at L. Cal., Feb. 25 (WM), and a Harlan’s that wintered at the Union County W.M.A. (RD). A well documented ad. Ferruginous Hawk was found at Prairie S.P., MO Dec. 16 (†MR). The Region’s Merlin population remained hearty, with a total of 15 reported, including two–three wintering birds at Bath, OH (LRo) and two that wintered at Kingsbury W.M.A., IN (JMc). A dark Gyrfalcon was seen at L. Clinton, IL Feb. 25 (†RCh) and Mar. 4 (†MD). Half a dozen Prairie Falcons were reported in w. reaches of the Region.

Greater Prairie-Chickens numbered 122 at 3 w.c. Missouri locations (LRi, MR). Winter rail reports included a Sora in Henry, MO Dec. 15 (MR), a window kill Virginia Rail in Urbana, IL Dec. 9 (*fade* RCh), and a Virginia Rail in Joliet, IL Dec. 25 (JM). The availability of open water enticed an impressive number of Am. Coots to winter in the Region; at

least 3 states had peak counts in the hundreds. Sandhill Cranes were reported from every state; the 250–300 seen over Big Pond Sanctuary, Grayson, KY Dec. 30 (KC) were likely late migrants, but extralimital reports came from Columbia, MO, where one was seen Dec. 31 (†PMc) and Lucas, OH, where 28 appeared Dec. 11 (TK).

Taking full advantage of the mild winter numerous shorebirds lingered in the Region, resulting in an unprecedented tally of 15 shorebird species for the season.

**SA** By far the season’s most exciting bird was a Northern Lapwing discovered Dec. 29 in Adams, OH, and seen again, by 19 observers, the following morning (†BW). The bird was in a winter wheat field 0.3 mi w. of the intersection of state roads 125 and 136, near the small settlement of Panhandle. Though no photographs were obtained, this individual was seen quite well (both perched and in flight) in good light, from as close as 25 feet. The bird reportedly departed on a S-SW heading at 10:15 a.m. and was never relocated. This constituted the Region’s first N. Lapwing record and is one of very few records for the continental interior.

Other shorebird highlights included an Am. Golden-Plover at Maumee, OH Jan. 3 (†MA), four Greater Yellowlegs at Rend L., IL Dec. 29 (LS), three Lesser Yellowlegs at Ottawa N.W.R., OH Jan. 6 (EP, †RH), a Sanderling (with injured foot) at Evanston, IL Dec. 21 (LB), early December W. Sandpipers in Illinois and Ohio, nine Least Sandpipers in Gibson, IN Jan. 1 (GB), a Pectoral Sandpiper at Ottawa N.W.R., OH Jan. 6 (†RH), ten Purple Sandpipers on L. Erie, 60 Dunlin at Metzger Marsh, OH Dec. 3 (RH), and two Long-billed Dowitchers (identified by call) in Sullivan, IN Dec. 31 (†MB, †SJ *et al.*).



**Adult Common Black-headed Gull [right—with flying Bonaparte's Gull] at Eastlake, Ohio, December 17, 1994. Photograph/Larry Rosche.**

## Jaegers to Owls

Juvenile Pomarine Jaegers appeared at Michigan City Harbor, IN Dec. 10 (†JCD, JMc, †KB) and Lorain, OH Dec. 17 (†JP, EP, RHa). Although many Chicago area birders lamented the scarcity of gulls this winter, from a Region-wide perspective larids were well represented in both numbers and diversity. Single Little Gulls were observed at one downstate Illinois location and at 3 sites along Ohio's L. Erie's lakefront. An ad. Com. Black-headed Gull was photographed at Eastlake, OH Dec. 17 (LRO, JDu *et al.*, ph.). Adult **Mew Gulls** appeared at Michigan City Harbor, IN Jan. 14 (2nd state record, †JCD, †SB, JMc, †KB) and at Jerome Rd. Rapids on the Maumee R., Lucas, OH Dec. 31 (4th state record), and Jan. 2–3 (†TK, MA, m.ob.). An impressive 50,000 Ring-billed Gulls were at Lorain, OH Dec. 21 (RHa). The Region's laridists ferreted out ad. California Gulls as follows: at L. Cal., Dec. 31 (†WM), in *Ashtabula*, OH Jan. 13 (†JP), and at Clinton L., IL Feb. 25 (†RCh). Thayer's Gulls were unusually plentiful with season totals of 42 on L. Michigan, including seven in *Lake*, IL Jan. 1 (LB), and four on L. Erie. Iceland Gull counts were fairly typical, with three in Illinois, four in Indiana, and five in Ohio. Lesser Black-backed Gulls continue to expand across the Region. This winter a total of 38 Lessers were reported in 4 states; the peak count was three at Eastlake, OH Dec. 1–21 (RHn, LRO, m.ob.). Despite the mild winter it was a fine year for Glaucous Gulls with 71 individuals in reports from every state except Kentucky. Great Black-backed Gulls have become abundant on L. Erie, where 500 were counted in Cleveland Feb. 12 (CH), and are expanding rapidly on L. Michigan, where 39 were recorded. An ad. Black-legged Kittiwake was at Powerton L., IL Dec. 7 (KR) and a first-year bird was seen on L. Jacomo Jan. 20–21 (MB *et al.*).

This was not a Snowy Owl winter. Only five birds were reported in the entire Region: three on L. Erie and singletons at inland sites in Illinois and Indiana. It was, however, an excellent season for Long-eared Owls, with totals of 51 in Illinois and 20 in Missouri. The maximum count was 23 in La Salle, IL Feb. 19 (MD). Short-eared Owls were also plentiful with 52 reported in Illinois, 20 in Missouri, and six in Ohio. Single N. Saw-whet Owls were seen at 4 Illinois locations and in Missouri and Ohio.

## Hummingbirds To Shrikes

Once again Missouri had a splendid winter at hummingbird feeders. An imm. ♀ *Archilochus* hummingbird that lingered at a St. Louis feeder until Dec. 28 (DJs, PSn) raised unconfirmed suspicions of a possible Black-chinned. A young ♂ *Anna's Hummingbird* arrived in Ozark, MO in late No-

vember, where it molted into ad. plumage during the first 2 weeks of December; it remained until Feb. 2 (LRI, †PMc, TB, m.ob.). Elsewhere in Missouri, ad. ♂ Rufous Hummingbirds were banded in Springfield between Dec. 2–9 (LRI) and near Nixa Nov. 30. The latter bird remained until Jan. 22 (LRI). As is typical in mild winters, small numbers of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and N. Flickers wintered in the n. states.

Birders at Mingo N.W.R., MO Jan. 2 counted an impressive seven E. Phoebes (BR, m.ob.). A Tree Swallow at Table Rock Dam, MO Feb. 28 (GS) was almost certainly an early migrant; however, the direction a Barn Swallow, in *Gibson*, IN Jan. 15 (†GB) was heading is anyone's guess. This was an off winter for Red-breasted Nuthatches, with only small numbers reported in each state. Brown Creeper numbers were up in many areas; the peak single count was 10 at East Harbor S.P., OH Jan. 14 (RHa). Carolina and Winter wren reports were near normal. Unexpected wren sightings included a Sedge Wren at Prairie S.P., MO Dec. 29 (MR) and a Marsh Wren at Kent, OH Dec. 18 (LRO). Hermit Thrushes were numerous; noteworthy reports included nine in *Barton*, MO Dec. 16 (MR) and one in *Tuscarawas*, OH Jan. 28 (ES). A ♂ Varied Thrush spent a week at a Michigan City, IN feeding station Jan. 4–11 (†JCD, †JMc, ph.). Four Gray Catbirds were reported in Illinois and one, found near Maryville, MO Dec. 16–18 (KG, †DE), provided one of the state's northernmost winter records. Excellent winter Am. Pipit counts were made Dec. 17 when 210 were discovered in *Holt*, MO (DE) and Dec. 4 when 37 were found at Ottawa N.W.R., OH (EP, RHa). Cedar Waxwings were scarce in most areas; the only accumulation consisted of >500 in Rockford, IL Feb. 12 (DW). Northern Shrikes staged a major invasion in Illinois with 29 birds reported. Elsewhere, nine N. Shrikes were found in Ohio, four in Missouri, and two in Indiana.

## Vireos to Buntings

Most surprising was Missouri's first winter White-eyed Vireo, which was recorded at Mingo N.W.R., MO Jan. 2 (SH, KP, BP). Encouraged by warm early winter temperatures, a bevy of warblers lingered in the Region. Orange-crowned Warblers appeared near L. Springfield, IL Dec. 15 (DBo), in *Barton*, MO Dec. 16 (MR), and in *Johnson*, IL Dec. 21 (†TF *et al.*). A Nashville Warbler was at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, IL Jan. 1 (LB, RB). The discovery of a dead, but still warm, N. Parula in a *Johnson*, IL pine plantation (TF) was unanticipated. A Cape May Warbler decorated the feeding station of J. and C. Weir in Kansas City, MO Dec. 7+ (ph., m.ob.). Yellow-rumped Warblers wintered considerably farther north than normal.

Noteworthy among numerous Yellow-rumped reports was an "Audubon's" in *Platte*, MO Jan. 1–5 (SA, m.ob.), which established a first winter record for the state. Pine Warblers were widespread, with an impressive eight in *Mublenberg*, KY Jan. 21 (JB, PB), a total of four in Missouri, and a male in Wilmington, OH Jan. 23–Feb. 14 (†LG). Palm Warblers were located at Bradford Farms, Boone, MO Dec. 16 (Western form) (†PMc) and at a feeder in *Holmes*, OH Jan. 7–Feb. 6 (ES, m.ob.). Two December Com. Yellowthroats appeared in Ohio, three in Illinois, and one in Kentucky.

Two tardy Indigo Buntings were still at Horseshoe L., IL Dec. 20 (†DBo).

Accidental anywhere in the Region, a **Green-tailed Towhee** seen at Fleming Park, Jackson, MO Dec. 9–Jan. 2 (†PMc, BJ, m.ob.) was noteworthy. Lingering Chipping Sparrows were found at Union County W.M.A., IL Dec. 22 (†DBo), in *Mason*, IL Dec. 23 (DBo), *Lagrange*, IN Jan. 7 (Haw *et al.*), and one was banded in Richmond, IN Jan. 22 (WB). A Vesper Sparrow was detected at Horseshoe L., IL Dec. 20 (†DJh). Savannah Sparrows wintered at expected locations in Illinois and Missouri, but a straggler was seen on the Indiana lakefront Jan. 25 (JMc). Fox Sparrows were widely distributed, with reports from all the n. states. It was a banner winter for Lincoln's Sparrows, with nine in Illinois (three of these were in n. Illinois) and a remarkable eight on the Squaw Creek N.W.R. CBC (MR *et al.*). The only Harris' Sparrow e. of the Mississippi R. was an adult that wintered at Horseshoe L., IL (JZ, DK). Lapland Longspur concentrations were observed only in c. Illinois, where 6000 were found at Clinton L., Jan. 1 (MD), 5000 were at the same location Feb. 4 (RCh), 5000 were in *Jackson* Jan. 8 (RD), and 200 were seen at Carlyle L., Jan. 29 (DK, ASE). As expected, small to modest numbers of Snow Buntings were reported in the n. states.

A ♂ Yellow-headed Blackbird brightened the dreary winter days when it appeared at



In Kansas City, Missouri, this Cape May Warbler frequented a feeder from December 7, 1994, through the end of February 1995. Photograph/Jim Rathert.

Rend L., IL Feb. 2 (RD). In addition, a ♀ Yellow-headed visited an Ottawa, IL feeder Feb. 4 (†C&JMc). The peak Rusty Blackbird count was 50 seen Feb. 17 at Sangchris, IL (DBo) and the maximum Brewer's Blackbird tally consisted of 29 at Taberville, MO Mar. 5 (RF). About 75 Great-tailed Grackles were seen in w. Missouri near Nevada Feb. 10 (MR).

All winter finches were exceedingly scarce throughout the Region as illustrated by the following peak counts: Purple Finch 20, Red Crossbill 13, Com. Redpoll one, Pine Siskin 15, and Evening Grosbeak three.

### Corrigendum

Three singing Grasshopper Sparrows reported near Monticello, KY Jun. 4, 1994 (AFN 48:950) were observed by Stephen Stedman, not Herbert & Kathryn Clay.

**Contributors cited (Subregional editors in boldface):** Steve Addinall, Tom Allison, Matt Anderson, Louise Augustine, Susan Bagby, Margaret Baker, Tim Barksdale, Dave Becher (DBe), Mike Beck, Jane Bell, Pat Bell, Laurence Binford, Rich Biss, David Bohlen (DBo), Gary Bowman, Ken Brock, Michael Brown, **Alan Bruner** (AB) (Indiana), William Buskirk, **Fred Busroe** (Kentucky), Jim Campbell (JCb), John Cassady (JCd), John Castrale (JCs), Robert Chapel (RCh), Kathryn Clay, Bob Conlon, **Robert Danley** (Illinois), Myrna Deaton, David Dister, Jon Dunn (JDu), Betty Dyer, David Easterla, Vic Fazio, Todd Fink, Robert Fisher, Larry Gara, Chuck Gardner, Michelle Georgi, Kirby Gosley, Ray Hannikman (RHn), Rob Harlan (RHa), Jim Haw (Haw), Susan Hazelwood, Chris Hobbs (CHb), Dick & Jean Hoffman (D&JH), Craig Holt (CHt), Scott Jackson, **Brad Jacobs** (Missouri), David Johnson (DJh), Evelyn Johnson, Dave Jones (DJs), Dan Kassebaum, Tom Kemp, Larry Lade, Tom LePage, Chris Lundberg, Walter Marcisz, Cindy & John McKee (C&JMc), Paul McKenzie (PMc), Jeff McCoy (JMc), Keith McMullen (KMc), Joe Milosevich (JM), Jerry Olson, D. Overacker, Bill Palmer, Kay Palmer, Ed Pierce, John Pogacnik, Bill Reeves, Kevin Richmond, Larry Rizzo (LRi), Mark Robbins, **Larry Rosche** (LRo)(Ohio), Ed Schlabach, Al Seppi (ASe), Phoebe Snetsinger (PSn), Leonard Stanley, John Stofan, Al Stokie (ASt), Paul Sweet (PSw), Greg Swick, Sue Tackett, Alan Welby, Bill Whan, Richard Whitton, Dan Williams, James Wilson, and Jim Ziebol. Many other individuals who could not be personally acknowledged also submitted notes to the various state reports.

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# Central Southern Region

## STEPHEN J. STEDMAN

Warm temperatures again prevailed throughout the Region, and again produced a winter with a wonderful array of unexpected sightings. Unfortunately, this also meant that many species that would normally be reported in detail were encountered so often as to necessitate severe truncation of data, if the word limit of this report was to be met. Many coastal species wintered inland in substantial numbers. Nowhere was this more true than in *Pointe Coupee*, Louisiana, where a drawdown of the impoundment behind the Morganza Spillway resulted in some spectacular counts of species that normally do not winter away from the coast.

Many thanks again to all those noted below for providing clear, often detailed, records of their bird sightings.

Abbreviations: A.B.R.C. (*Alabama Bird Records Committee*); L.B.R.C. (*Louisiana Bird Records Committee*); p.a. (*pending action*); T.B.R.C. (*Tennessee Bird Records Committee*).



**Adding to the growing tally of far inland records, this Yellow-billed Loon was a first for Tennessee at Dale Hollow Lake, Clay County, in February 1995.**  
Photograph/Stephen R. Satterfield.

### Loons to Herons

Rare inland, a Red-throated Loon tarried in *Marshall*, AL Nov. 29–Dec. 27 (WS, ES, SWM†, DJS); another lingered in *Yalobusha*, AR Jan. 24+ (GK†, SK, ph. JRW, m.ob.). Equally rare Pacific Loons were at widely separated sites in *Baldwin*, AL Dec. 31 (RRR†) and Jan. 2 (CK†). Tennessee's first **Yellow-billed Loon** visited *Clay* Feb. 18–22 (SJS†, BHS, ph. SRS†, ReS, ph. LM *et al.*). Concentrations of Horned Grebes continued to be reported from large impoundments in the far n. sectors of the Region, especially in Arkansas and Tennessee. Eared Grebes in *Okaloosa*, FL Dec. 7 (DMW), in *Mobile*, AL Dec. 17 (JoP, JP†), and in *Orleans*, LA Dec. 26 (DPM, JB) were somewhat out of the ordinary; similarly unusual Red-necked and Western grebes lingered in *Yalobusha*, MS Jan. 7+ (GK†, SK,

