

Idaho-Western Montana Region

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Bitter cold and balmy warm, bone dry and sopping wet, predicted drought and actual flood—winter 1994–1995 had something for everyone. Overall it was mild, and many local records for northerly wintering or early “spring” arrivals were established. Most birding action was away from area feeders, as observers lamented the absence of finches, crossbills, waxwings, and redpolls.

Abbreviations: A.F.R. (*American Falls Reservoir, by American Falls, ID*); F.C.L. (*Fighting Creek Landfill, Kootenai, ID*).

Loons to Shorebirds

The Bigfork CBC turned up Montana's 4th **Pacific Loon** Dec. 17 (†JRg). A Com. Loon on the Salmon R., *Lemhi, ID*, Dec. 10 (LH) provided a latilong winter first. In early December, Idaho's 11th Yellow-billed Loon was at Harrison (SK, CV), where the species wintered 1991 and 1993. A seasonally rare Horned Grebe was near Idaho Falls, ID Dec. 13 (BH). An Eared Grebe found during the Missoula, MT CBC Dec. 17 provided a latilong winter first (†HA, †PW). Two locally rare and record-late Eared Grebes were on the Sandpoint, ID CBC Dec. 17 (EC).

Although Am. White Pelicans sightings are increasing in n. Idaho, the very late Lewiston bird Dec. 2 (ET) was quite unexpected. Three record-late Double-crested Cormorants were found on the Bigfork CBC Dec. 17 (DC). This species was formally rare in n.w. Montana, but has been increasing there since the 1980's.

Trumpeter Swans are rare in most of Idaho, making three at Thompson L., *Kootenai, ID* Feb. 19–20 (JH, KD) of interest. The single Snow Goose on the Rathdrum Prairie, *Kootenai, ID* during late January (RJ) provided the latilong's first winter record. Wood Ducks have been increasing

in the Salmon, ID area since the mid-1980's, but the single seen there Dec. 19 and Feb. 3 was one of the few ever recorded during winter (HR). The most dependable Idaho areas for Eur. Wigeon have been St. Maries, Lewiston, and Boise/Nampa. These again produced this winter, with single males found by Nampa Dec. 24–Jan. 31 (DL, JG) and at Lewiston Dec. 28–mid-February (KD, DHk, m.ob.). A 3rd male at St. Maries Feb. 26 was paired with Idaho's first ♀ Eur. Wigeon, a rufous morph (DNS, C&JM). A ♂ Oldsquaw on Flathead L., *Flathead, MT* Jan. 16 was the first winter bird seen there in 11 years (DC). Another Oldsquaw was on the Yellowstone R., *Park, MT* Feb. 10 (JB, DW), where rare.

Mild weather may have encouraged the Ferruginous Hawk seen all season near Howe, ID (BH) and the one near Council, ID Feb. 25 (JH) to linger n. of their normal seasonal range. The latter bird furnished a latilong winter first.

The small flock of eight Least and two W. sandpipers at Dry Lakes W.M.A., *Canyon, ID* Feb. 10 (JG) likely spent the entire winter there, a very rare feat for Idaho. The Dunlin seen at Frenchtown, MT in late November stayed to Dec. 4 (DH), providing a record-late date for this uncommon and irregular migrant.

Ptarmigans to Jays

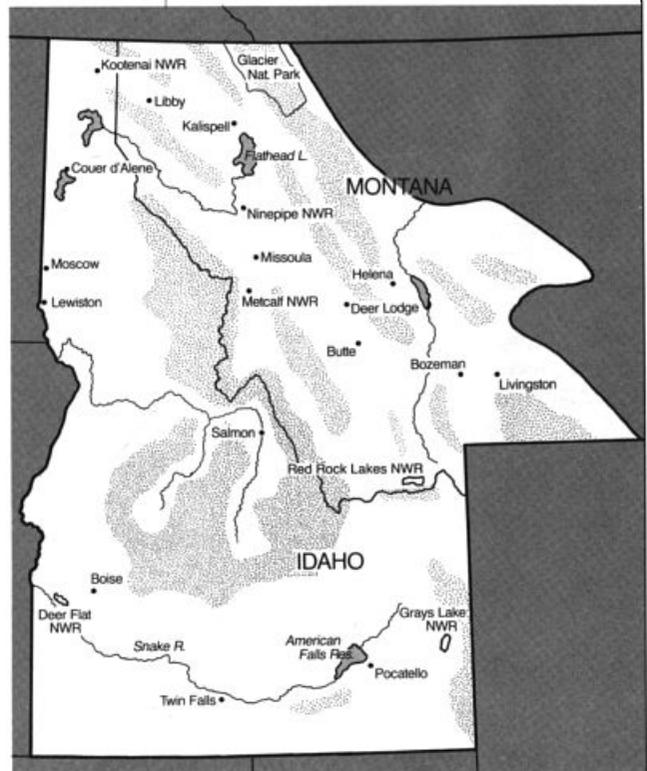
Idaho White-tailed Ptarmigan are rarely seen, but one was photographed on Trapper Peak, *Boundary* in winter 1992 (*vide* EC, ph.). All recent Idaho ptarmigan reports are from w. *Boundary* and *Bonner*.

A Mew Gull was at F.C.L., Dec. 17 (DNS), in the general area where other single Mew Gulls have been recorded for the last 3 years. There are less than 15 Idaho records. The species again wintered at the Polson, MT landfill (CB), where it is now annual. A bird identified as a first-winter **Ice-land Gull** was seen periodically between Spalding, ID and Clarkston, WA from Dec. 18–early February (†KD, †JH ph., †DNS, m.ob.). Western reports of this species always generate instant debate. One specimen and 7 sight records have been documented from Idaho. After reviewing documentation and photos for this

year's entry, 2 expert opinions support the identification, with a 3rd opinion still pending. An ad. Glaucous-winged Gull at F.C.L., Dec. 27 (JH) and Feb. 27 (DNS) was further evidence of this species' recent surge into the interior. The F.C.L. held a record eight Glaucous Gulls Dec. 17 (DNS), with lesser numbers present all season (KD, DNS). The species was again present at the Polson Landfill (DH) and at A.F.R. (CT).

Recent evidence has established Idaho's new northern-most breeding Barn Owl location as the Rathdrum Prairie, *Kootenai, ID*, where a pair nested in 1992. Another pair was found in the same location this winter (*vide* SHS). A large gathering of Great Gray Owls occurred during December and January near Teton, ID. Although the total number of birds involved is unknown, up to 15 were along just one mi of S. Leigh Creek, *Teton, ID* (BH, CT). Snowy Owls are rare and irregular winterers throughout Idaho, so the two seen intermittently in the Moscow area December–February (KD, DHk), and the single winterers in *Teton* and *Butte, ID* (m.ob.), were noteworthy. A N. Hawk Owl was seen throughout the winter near Pole-bridge, MT, where the species nested last year (DC).

The ten Am. Crows that overwintered in Helena, MT (GH) were among the many local firsts associated with the mild winter. Last fall's phenomenal Blue Jay invasion fizzled out by mid-December, with only scattered birds persisting after that (m.ob.).



Flycatchers to Finches

It isn't often that the subheading "Flycatchers" is used in this Region's winter report, but a Say's Phoebe Dec. 10 (JR) and Jan. 8 (KD) at Lewiston made it possible. There are less than 5 winter records for Idaho.

Although Bewick's Wrens are now well established in e. Washington, they have not yet colonized w. Idaho. Sightings typically increase in this area during and after mild winters as pioneering birds move up the Columbia R. drainages. This winter was no exception; Bewick's were near Moscow in mid-December (JH, KD) and in *Nez Perce* Dec. 28 (C.B.). Single, seasonally rare Winter Wrens persisted throughout n. Idaho and n.w. Montana (m.ob.). Ruby-crowned Kinglets showed a similar, but less widespread pattern, with birds in Missoula January–February (PW), on the Bigfork CBC Dec. 17 (†JRg), and in Helena Jan. 24 (GH). A flock of unseasonal W. Bluebirds was near Kalispell, MT Jan. 12 (JP), while a pair was seen investigating nest boxes near Moscow Feb. 9 (JM). A Hermit Thrush was in Missoula in mid-December, where it is a rare winterer (PM). Like Winter Wrens and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Varied Thrushes typically vacate the n. half of the Region November–March. This winter, however, hardy singles were found throughout the Region (m.ob.).

The N. Mockingbird found last fall in Idaho Falls persisted through January (BH), while another was near Aberdeen, ID Feb. 11 (MR). One of many surprisingly late fall migrants was a Palm Warbler at Frenchtown, MT Dec. 22 (†SG).

The four Am. Tree Sparrows near Potlatch, ID Dec. 3 were unusual for n. Idaho (ZP). Four Savannah Sparrows near Council, ID Feb. 25 were 2 months early (JH). Lincoln's Sparrows are rare and irregular winterers in Idaho. One Lincoln's was found on the Pocatello CBC Dec. 17 (CT) and two were seen on the Nampa CBC Dec. 24 (JG). Single White-throated Sparrows successfully overwintered in Missoula (DH) and in Sheridan, MT (TB). A White-crowned Sparrow on the Coeur d'Alene CBC Dec. 17 furnished a winter latilong first (SHS). A Harris' Sparrow was at Culesac Dec. 18, n. Idaho's most dependable spot for the species (H&WH). Small flocks of Snow Bunting, irregular throughout n. Idaho, were on the Rathdrum Prairie Dec. 1 (RJ) and in *Nez Perce*, ID Dec. 15 (KD).

Two seasonally rare Yellow-headed Blackbirds were found on the Bigfork CBC Dec. 17 (†DC). Two Rusty Blackbirds, Idaho's 9th record, were by St. Maries Dec. 17 (DNS) and Feb. 19 (JH), in the same tiny stockyard that has hosted the species the last 3 winters. The Burley, ID Great-tailed

Grackle flock successfully overwintered (JL, WS), becoming Idaho's most recent permanent residents. A Com. Grackle at A.F.R., Jan. 25 (TG) provided a latilong winter first. Two wintering Brown-headed Cowbirds in Kalispell, MT (JRb), provided a latilong winter first and one of the very few Montana winter records. Thirteen White-winged Crossbills were in McCall, ID Jan. 19, where irregular (JG).

Observers cited (Subregional editors in boldface): IDAHO: Canyon Birders (C.B.), Earl Chapin, Mark Collie, Tim Craig, **Kas Dumroese**, Todd Garlie, John Gachet, Lucinda Haggas, Brad Hammond, Hank and Winnie Hepburn (H&WH), John Hirth (JH), David Holick (DHk), **Dean Jones**, Ron Jurcevich, Florence Knoll, **Merlene Koliner**, Stan Kvern, Dave Lawrence, Jason Lynch, John Mill (JM), Cody & John Montgomery (C&JM), Zoltan Porga, Leon Powers, Matt Redford, John Roberson (JR), **Hadley Roberts**, W. Shillington, **Shirley Sturts** (SHS), Dan Svingen (DNS), Elaine Thalnick, **Charles Trost**, Carol Vande Vorde. MONTANA: Howard Andrews, Rod Ash, Tim Burns, Clif Barry, Jack Brandis, **Dan Casey**, Steve Gniadek, Denver Holt (DH), **George Holton**, **Terry McEneaney**, Poody McLaughlin, Justin Paugh, J. Robococker (JRb), Jim Roger (JRg), Dennis Wollerton, **Philip Wright**.

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Mountain West Region

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Excellent cone crops in the sub-alpine forests attracted record numbers of seed-eaters to the Colorado high country. The Indian Peaks Winter Bird Count, centered at Ward, Colorado, January 14, tallied more seed-eaters than on any of its 14 previous counts, and more birds than any but one count. There were 3132 birds of 41 species (27 per hour), compared with an average of 36 species and a per hour average of 18. Observers found record counts of 330 Pine Siskins, 166 Pine Grosbeaks, 139 Red-breasted Nuthatches, and 70 Clark's Nutcrackers. They also counted 707 Mountain Chickadees, 476 rosy-finches, and 255 Red and 26 White-winged Crossbills (DH).

In Estes Park, 20 miles north, a pair of Red Crossbills began an unsuccessful nest attempt January 8; by January 22, after the nest apparently had hatched young, the birds abandoned it (SW). At Cortez, Colorado, a pair exchanged twigs February 6, perhaps preparatory to nesting (LB).

In the Indian Peaks February 4 Figs found a female White-winged Crossbill building a nest in an Engelmann Spruce—the first *nest* ever found in Colorado. He re-

