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Idaho-Western Montana Region

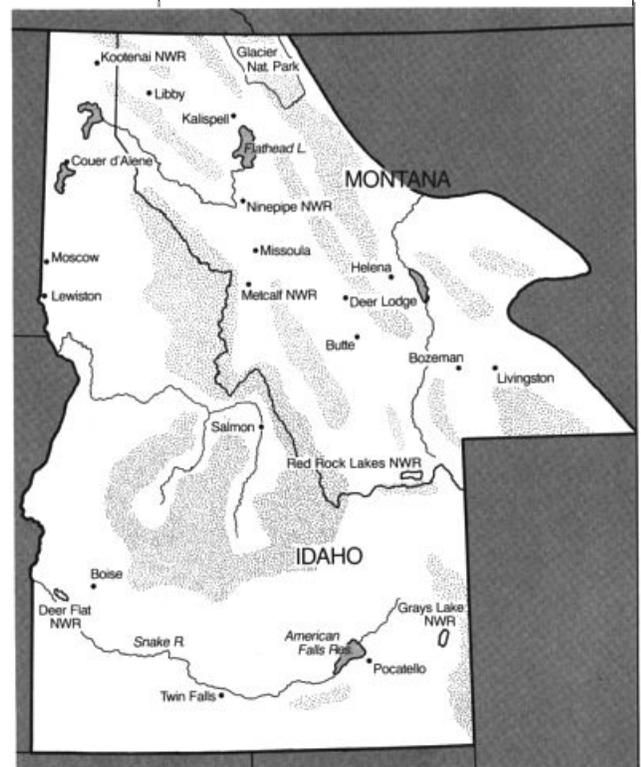
DAN SVINGEN

Fall 1995 was unseasonably mild Region-wide, with above-average temperature and precipitation. Observers noted three trends: low gamebird populations (a result of last summer's cool, wet weather), high Northern Shrike numbers, and many lingering migrants.

Abbreviations: A.F.R. (*American Falls Res., by American Falls, ID*).

Loons to Hawks

An early Pacific Loon was on Pend O'reille L., Bonner, ID Sept. 1 & 8 (JW). A car-killed Pacific Loon near Wolf Creek, Lewis and Clark, Nov. 2, provided Montana's first specimen (PW, *University of Montana). Last fall, Cascade Res., Valley, ID attracted about 30 Pacific Loons, doubling



the number of Idaho sightings. This year, 23 were present Oct. 21 (JG). Single Pacifics were in Post Falls, ID Oct. 21 (PAC, GC, SHS), and at Bruneau Dunes S.P., *Owyhee*, ID Nov. 20 (DNS, IS), while \leq three were at A.F.R. throughout November (CT, m.ob.). One—two locally rare Eared Grebes were on Coeur d'Alene L., ID Oct. 25—Nov. 30 (DJ).

A locally rare Am. White Pelican flew over Lewiston Orchards, ID Sept. 10 (LC). An Am. Bittern, once common in n. Idaho but now rarely reported, was at Cataldo Slough, *Kootenai*, Sept. 14 (RY). Great Egrets wander to n. Idaho every few years, but six at Kellogg Oct. 26 (SW) were unprecedented. Three White-faced Ibis at Mann L., Aug. 10 (WH, MS) provided a 3rd latilong record. A rare Green Heron was near Blackfoot, ID Sept. 9—17 (LB).

An imm. Trumpeter Swan at Little Camas Res., *Elmore*, ID Nov. 24 (DNS, IS), was a first for latilong 18. About 340 Snow Geese died in a mine pit near Butte, MT in late November (*vide* PW); the cause of death is still under investigation, but waterborne toxins are suspected.

Although no Eur. Wigeons were reported from perennial Idaho hot spots (St. Maries, Lewiston, and Boise), two were at Cascade Res., Oct. 21 (JG), while singles were near Haggerman, ID Nov. 14 (GS), and Marsing, ID Nov. 25 (JG). Single Harlequin Ducks were on A.F.R., Oct. 6 (CT, MR) & 28 (CT), where accidental. Four very late Harlequin Ducks were near Hauser Dam, *Lewis and Clark*, MT Nov. 24 and Dec. 2 (JV, MV). Two Oldsquaw at Lee Metcalf N.W.R., *Ravalli*, MT Nov. 13 (DG) represented a latilong first. Idaho Oldsquaws included *six* on Cascade Res., Nov. 19 (DNS, IS) and two near Preston Nov. 11 (JB, MeS). Four Surf Scoters were at American Falls, ID Oct. 28 (CT), while three were there Nov. 25 (CT, m.ob.). East-central Idaho's first White-winged Scoter was on the Salmon R. approximately 20 mi upstream from Salmon Nov. 19 (LH). An imm. White-winged was on Helena L., *Lewis and Clark*, MT Oct. 22 (GHo), and a male was at Middle Thompson L., *Lincoln*, Nov. 19 (D&LH). A Hooded Merganser pair was on the Salmon R. about 10 mi downstream of Salmon Nov. 19, where a rare migrant (LH), while 20 Hoodeds were at Deer Flat N.W.R., *Canyon*, ID Nov. 19 (JG).

A kettle of 412 Swainson's Hawks was in a recently burned field near Eden, ID Aug. 17 (JG). An early Rough-legged Hawk was at Kootenai N.W.R., *Boundary*, ID Sept. 19 (JRe). Falcon sightings were numerous this year, with most data com-

ing from falconers. Unusual sightings included single Peregrines at Mann L., Aug. 13 (m.ob.), on the Rathdrum Prairie, *Kootenai*, ID Aug. 15 & 21 (RJ), and near Bonners Ferry, ID Aug. 21 (RJ).

Grouse to Woodpeckers

A Blue Grouse on Blacktail Butte near Grangeville Aug. 14 (DNS) provided one of very few recent local records of this declining species. A Virginia Rail along Warm Springs Cr., 10 mi s.e. of Challis, ID Oct. 16—Nov. 30 (ML) provided a latilong 13 first. A Sora lingered in w. *Payette*, ID Nov. 24 (JG, DNS, IS), where the species is uncommon and local. Sandhill Crane are rare in n. Idaho, making the 40 Oct. 1 (KD, DNS, IS) and two Oct. 8 at Mann L. noteworthy (JH, MH).

An Am. Golden-Plover was at Mann L., Oct. 8—27, (JH, MH, m.ob.), n. Idaho's most dependable location for rare shorebirds. Solitary Sandpiper sightings included singles near Grangeville Aug. 14 & 24 (DNS), near Cottonwood, ID Aug. 30 (WH), and at Mann L., Sept. 2 (JH, MH). The Upland Sandpiper at the Silver Cr. Preserve, *Blaine*, ID Sept. 1 (*vide* CT) was likely a migrant attracted to the newly protected habitat. A Marbled Godwit was at Mann L., Aug. 6—7 (DS) where the species is almost annual, while another tarried at Helena L., Oct. 23 (DSk). High water levels in s.w. Idaho greatly reduced mudflat habitat. As a result, the only shorebird report was five Sanderlings at Indian Creek Res., *Ada* in September (BC). Dunlin are rare n. Idaho migrants, usually present only a day or two. This year, however, \leq six birds were at Mann L., Oct. 8—Nov. 30 (JH, MH, DNS, m.ob.). The only Stilt Sandpiper report was one—two birds at Mann L., Aug. 3—7 (DS). Four Short-billed Dowitchers were at Mann L., Oct. 8 (†JH, MH) for about Idaho's 20th record. Idaho's 4th Red Phalarope was at Mann L., Oct. 1—3 (KD, †DNS, IS, m.ob.).

On Nov. 2—3, two ad. Mew Gulls and a first-winter Thayer's Gull were at the Polson, MT sewer ponds (DC, JRo, m.ob.). By Nov. 7, gull numbers at nearby Polson dump had surpassed the 1000 mark. Besides expected Ring-billed and California gulls, several Herrings, two Bonaparte's, a first-winter Thayer's and a first-winter Mew were present (DH). Southern Idaho's first, and the state's 7th, Mew Gull was at A.F.R., Nov. 22 (†DNS, IS). On Nov. 27, a 3rd-winter Glaucous-winged Gull at the Polson dump became Montana's first specimen (*University of Montana). There were several w. Montana reports of single imm. Sabine's Gull,

including birds at Helena L., Sept. 9 (LM, GHa), Freezeout L., *Teton*, Sept. 11 (MSc) and in Helena Sept. 22 (HZ). Idaho's 8th Sabine's Gull was near Haggerman Sept. 30 (†RC, KR).

Idaho's 8th Anna's Hummingbird, an imm. male, was at a Viola feeder Sept. 2—10 (†JH, MH, †DNS, m.ob.). A late Broad-tailed Hummingbird was in Salmon Oct. 26—31 (HU). A "Yellow-shafted" N. Flicker, very rare and irregular in n. Idaho, expired in a Kamiah woodstove (DD).

Jays to Finches

Compared to last fall's mighty invasion, this year's Blue Jay news was pretty tame. Single birds were in Lewiston Orchards, ID Oct. 9 (FC), Coeur d'Alene Oct. 16 (JM), Boise, ID Oct. 28 (AL), and Moscow, ID Nov. 22 (DGB).

Bewick's Wren began expanding its inland Northwest range in the 1950s. The species was first recorded in Idaho in 1982 near Kamiah. Only two more Idaho Bewick's were reported over the next 9 years. Since 1991, however, the species has been seen about 25 times. Almost all of these records are from the St. Joe, Palouse, or Clearwater R. drainages. A recently discovered photograph shows that the species' nested near Kamiah in 1986 (DD) for an Idaho first. This fall, family groups (numbering \leq five birds) were also seen in Coyote Gulch, *Nez Perce* (KD, JH, MH, DNS), and at the Heart of the Monster Historical Site near Kamiah Oct. 8 (DNS), while a single Bewick's was near Moscow Nov. 10 (IS).

A late Winter Wren was near Condon, MT Nov. 21 (JE), and a late Swainson's Thrush was in McCall, ID Oct. 20 (JG). Varied Thrushes lingered near Condon, where six were heard calling Nov. 22 (JE).

A N. Mockingbird was reported from Bonners Ferry, ID Oct. 11 (RDC). Idaho's 6th Brown Thrasher was in e. *Butte*, ID Oct. 3 (DM, *vide* CT). Good numbers of Bohemian Waxwings arrived in c. Idaho by mid-November, with 300 in Cascade Nov. 19 (DNS, IS). The species was prominent in n.w. Montana, with thousands present in Kalispell by the end of the period (DC).

An ad. ♂ Hooded Warbler was videotaped in a Boise backyard Nov. 11 (ph. GH, AL, HL). If accepted by the Rare Bird Committee, this will provide Idaho's 2nd record; Idaho's first Hooded was photographed nearby in 1983, on almost the same day of the year. A late Wilson's Warbler was in Somers, MT Nov. 12 (DC).

Western Montana's first Field Sparrow in >50 years was on Stark Mt., *Mineral*,

Mountain West Region

HUGH E. KINGERY

I approach this, my last column for the Mountain West Region, with nostalgia, relief, and concern — the latter for the inclination of *National Audubon Society Field Notes* observers to seek rare birds but to ignore common ones. It's hard to get excited over common species, and we all thrill when we find a rarity. On our family picture wall hangs a portrait of Colorado's second Long-billed Thrasher, which thrilled us when we found it on a January ski tour near Denver. But we also feature portraits of an American Dipper and a clutch of four baby Hammond's Flycatchers — more relevant to my theme.

My first Regional column covered Spring 1971. In the ensuing 25 years birders have multiplied. But our greater numbers don't direct great enough enthusiasm so that 25 years from now people may share the birdlife we value today.

One contributor's comment — he doesn't think that common birds are important, at least to readers of *Audubon Field Notes* — probably represents a lot of *Audubon Field Notes* readers. I disagree. Those common birds *are* vital. They constitute essential components of our environment.

In my two-and-a-half decades (wow!), Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons recovered from their nadirs; but many neotropical migrants, Lark Buntings and Mountain Plovers, and even magpies, have declined — some drastically. *Half* the species endemic to short-grass prairies show significant declines.

It's hard to divine how today's numbers compare with historic populations. In fact, it's hard even to figure out *how* to derive any meaningful comparisons.

Year-round counts, like those spearheaded in the Indian Peaks west of Boulder, Colorado by Dave Hallock, help us to monitor common birds. So do Breeding Bird Surveys, Breeding and Winter Bird Censuses, Breeding Bird Atlases, banding, and point counts.

Some Mountain West contributors report on the frequency and numbers of the birds they see. These furnish rough comparisons of year-to-year trends. The best practitioners are Phil Hayes who, for



Taken a decade ago but just recently brought to light, this photo documents the first known nesting of Bewick's Wren in Idaho. The site was Lawyer's Canyon near Kamiah, and the date was June 5, 1986. Photograph/Dan Davis.

Aug. 26 (VV). As usual, White-throated Sparrows were scattered throughout the Region. Sightings included an early bird Sept. 11 at Mann L. (DNS) and four at Kootenai N.W.R., Sept. 15 (RDC). Single Harris' Sparrows were in Bozeman, MT Oct. 13–15 (EL), Kalispell Nov. 14 (JRo), and at Bruneau Dunes S.P., Nov. 20 (DNS, IS).

A single Lapland Longspur near Kalispell in late October (*fide* DC) provided the only report. A flock of 14 Snow Buntings was along Cascade Res., Nov. 19 (DNS, IS), while 11 were near Cataldo Nov. 9 (SW). Single Snow Buntings were at Minidoka N.W.R., Blaine, ID Nov. 21 (DNS, IS) and at Bonners Ferry Oct. 26 (RDC). About 1000 Snow Buntings were near Pablo, MT Nov. 11 (DH), one of the few places in the Region where the species can be expected in good numbers.

Great-tailed Grackles continue to explore s. Idaho. Three females and a male were by Marsing Nov. 12–19 (CS, AS), and the Burley, ID flock returned there Sept. 12 (R&JL). A Pine Grosbeak at Thompson L., Aug. 15 (JWN) was unusual for early fall. A ♂ White-winged Crossbill was at Winchester S.P., Lewis Oct. 4 (WH), and several small flocks were seen in the Lemhi Mts. of Butte and Custer, ID from *mid-August* to the end of November (m.ob). The species was particularly abundant this fall near Sandpoint (EC), and in Glacier N.P. (JE). Common Redpolls were

abundant in n.w. Montana, with flocks numbering 120 near Condon Nov. 22 (JE) and 130 in Glacier N.P. Nov. 26 (JE).

Observers cited (subregional editors in boldface): IDAHO: Linda Beitleman, Joan Bergstrom, Francis Cassirer, Earl Chapin, Raymond Clark, Bert Cleaveland, Gordon Comrie, Pam Comrie (PAC), Laurie Crenshaw, Dan Davis, Rich Del Carla, **Kas Dumroese**, John Gatcher (JG), Dale Goble (DGB), Lucinda Haggas, Gail Hast, Winnie Hepburn, John Hirth, Marty Hirth, Don Johnson, **Dean Jones** (DJe), Ron Jurcevich, **Merlene Koliner**, Al Larson, Hilda Larson, Mark Luper, Ron and Jason Lynch (R&JL), Jack McNeel, Dale Miller, John Nigh, Tom Radandt, Matt Radford, Jimmy Reynolds (JRe), Sharon Ritter, **Hadley Roberts**, Ken Rodenick, Alan Sanford, Dan Simpkins (DS), Marie Smith (MeS), Marilyn Smith (MS), **Shirley Sturts** (SHS), DeeAnn Spencer (DSp), Dan Svingen (DNS), Ila Svingen, Colleen Sweeney, **Charles Trost**, Helen Ulmschneider, Carol Vande Voorde, Jennifer Welch, Susan Weller, Jeff Wisman (JWi), Steve Woltmann (SWo), Roger Young. MONTANA: **Dan Casey**, Joseph Engler, Deb Goslin (DG), George Halaby (GHa), Dev and Liz Hill (D&LH), Denver Holt, George Holton, Elly Jones, Eric Lichtwardt, Lawrence McEvoy, Karen Nichols, Jean Robocker (JRo), **Don Skaar** (DSk), Mike Schwitters (MSc), Jeff Van Tine, Madeleine Von Laue, Virginia Vincent, **Philip Wright**, Hugh Zackheim.

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