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# Southern Great Plains Region

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Was this a "normal" winter? For the most part—probably so, but perhaps on the cold side of the median. Several serious winter storms with very cold temperatures erupted in late January, and open water may have become scarce for periods of time in Oklahoma and Kansas, except on the larger reservoirs. The cold weather was probably a culling factor for some resident species or others wintering too far north. Most of Oklahoma had little to no (western sections) precipitation through the period, and observers in Nebraska reported a drier than normal season.

Some notes on die-offs in waterfowl from aspergillosis and cholera came in from Larry Malone for the Nebraska Panhandle. While we all hope for the good news of good numbers of birds, such events are inevitable outcomes from high densities, or concentrating factors where more birds are in contact with each other, and transmissions of diseases between individuals is made easier. In this case, the drier weather both limits wetland habitat



and concentrates the birds that are left.

Rarities seemed hard to come by this season, except for the gulls at McConaughy. There was a modest invasion of redpolls in Nebraska, which overflowed into Kansas, but Pine Siskins were still present only in low densities. Cedar Waxwings made an apparent surge in numbers in central Oklahoma late in the period, but were barely noticeable through January, and present only in mediocre numbers in Nebraska.

Finally welcome data compy, both this author and other local compilers are left in the lurch over records of both geographic and seasonal rarities with no or limited documentation. Ross Silcock comments that seasonal rarities so reported are not infrequently "typos." In other cases, one is left wondering whether that wintering Chipping Sparrow was actually a American Tree Sparrow; a lingering Lincoln's Sparrow or that gray-faced western race of the Song Sparrow. In generating this account, I am left depending on the local compilers or left to make some arbitrary decisions on inclusiveness based on my own subjective instincts for the probabilities or possibilities of misidentification.

Abbreviations: McConaughy (*L. McConaughy, Keith Co., NE*); Quivira (*Quivira N.W.R., Stafford Co., KS*).

## Loons to Ducks

The only Red-throated Loon reported for the Region was one Dec. 2 in Trego, KS (SS). A Yellow-billed Loon Dec. 10–15 (MR, SS, m.ob) in Russell, KS provided the first record for that state. A Red-necked Grebe Dec. 21 McConaughy (SJD), if accepted by the N.O.U.R.C. will provide only the fifth documented record for Nebraska. A count of 133 W. Grebes at McConaughy Dec. 21 was remarkably high for the season (*fide* WRS). One W. Grebe was located at Lincoln, NE also Dec. 21 (SJD, WRS).

American White Pelicans lingering farther and farther north into the winter have become the norm. Some are birds trapped by injury. This year, at least two injured birds were reported in Nebraska, with another known to have died by Dec. 30, and other counts of birds dwindling through the period (*fide* WRS). At least six were noted in Kansas.

Tundra Swans were observed Dec. 17 (MC, ML) and Jan. 1 (AS) in Miami, KS, and Dec. 23–Jan. 6 in Saunders, NE (THo). Up to nine Trumpeter Swans were located at McConaughy through the winter, with seven in Hayes, NE during February (RH). Singles were noted in Miami, KS Dec. 12–17 (AS, DA), Johnson, KS

Jan. 10 (MC) and *Noble*, OK Feb. 5 (JWA, JT). Numbers of migrant Snow Geese began building up at Nebraska locations by mid-February, with 20,000 in *Phelps* Feb. 25 (LR, RH). Ross' Geese lingered in *Kearney*, NE Dec. 16 (LR, RH), with first spring arrivals Feb. 19 (BP, LP).

Wood Ducks lingered in *Scotts Bluff*, NE Dec. 16 (LKM). American Black Ducks were reported from only one Nebraska locality—three in *Lancaster*, NE Feb. 18 (JMo). At least eight were observed at 5 localities in e. Kansas (*vide* LM). The 35,000 Mallards in *Scotts Bluff*, NE Dec. 1 (LKM) provided the season's high count. Four Blue-winged Teal pushed N to *Dixon*, NE Feb. 20 (JJo). Northern Shovelers overwintering in Nebraska included one in *Jackson*, NE (BFH), and four observed Jan. 15 in *Douglas* (JoJ).

Reports of Greater Scaup have been more frequent and of higher numbers in recent years. Fourteen counted at McConaughy Dec. 23 dwindled to three–five Jan. 20 (JoJ, LKM); three were noted Jan. 1 in *Miami*, KS (LM), one Jan. 2 in *Sarpy*, NE (BP, LP), and apparent migrants appeared by Feb. 17 in *Lincoln*, NE (WRS). One–eleven were noted in *Tulsa*, OK Dec. 8–Jan. 13 (JWA); 28 were counted in *Oklahoma*, OK Feb. 17 (JWA).

Oldsquaw were reported in *Tulsa*, OK through Dec. 9 (JWA), in *Keith*, NE Dec. 21 (SJD) through Feb. 17 (WRS), and two in *Scotts Bluff*, NE Dec. 9 (LKM, AK), at *Cedar*, NE Dec. 3 (BFH), and at *Russell*, KS Dec. 3 (MR). The only Surf Scoter to report was in *Tulsa*, OK Dec. 8–13 (JWA). A female White-winged Scoter Dec. 2–4 in *Jefferson*, KS (DB, LM, GP) was the only reported.

Common Goldeneye numbers had built up to 750 at McConaughy by Feb. 17 (WRS). About 10,000 Com. Mergansers were present at McConaughy Dec. 23 (*vide* WRS), with the same number in *Osage*, KS Feb. 18 (LM, GP). Among few January records of Red-breasted Mergansers for Nebraska was one in *Lincoln* Jan. 13 (LKM).

### Raptors to Doves

Silcock and Rosche listed counts totaling 397 Bald Eagles for the period in Nebraska. In *Scotts Bluff*, NE, a female was sitting on a nest Feb. 23, and a 2nd pair was a 2nd nest site in late February (LKM). An Osprey lingered in *Tulsa*, OK through at least Jan. 13 (JWA). Another was observed in *Oklahoma* Feb. 17. Few N. Goshawks were reported, almost none documented. One, possibly three, Red-shouldered Hawks wintered in Fontenelle Forest (BP, LP). Golden Eagles were noted e. to Ewing, NE Dec. 26 (JJo), *Russell*, KS Dec. 15 (LM, MM, GP), and *Lin-*

*coln*, NE Feb. 4–5 (NR *et al.*).

Three Merlins were reported from Nebraska (*vide* WRS), and three from Kansas (*vide* LM). Becoming increasingly expected are wintering Peregrine Falcons; singles were reported from *Harlan*, NE Jan. 6 (LR, RH) and *Wehrspann* Feb. 9 (BP, LP). Interestingly, a Prairie Falcoln wintering e. to *Lancaster*, NE entered the Capitol Building and was captured Jan. 23 (*vide* WRS). Others were observed e. to *Douglas*, KS Dec. 15 (LM), *Linn*, KS Jan. 6 (LM, GP), and *Osage*, KS Jan. 14–Feb. 17 (BF).

Five wintering Virginia Rails were detected at *Lewellen* Dec. 22 (SJD, WRS), and another Dec. 23 in *Keith*, NE (*vide* WRS). A surprising winter find was three Whooping Cranes in *Kearney*, KS Dec. 16.

A larger-than-average number of shorebirds wintered in the Region. Up to 13 Killdeer were noted Dec. 23 in *Keith*, NE (LKM *et al.*). Greater Yellowlegs probably overwintered in *Cleveland*, OK (VB); up to 22 were counted Jan. 14 (JAG). Others may have made it in *Noble*, OK (JWA). Dunlin lingered until Dec. 16 in *Tulsa*, OK (JWA). Common Snipe were noted in *Scotts Bluff*, NE Jan. 26 (LK) and Feb. 2 (LKM); another was found in *Lincoln*, NE Feb. 4 (BP, LP). Three Long-billed Dowitchers lingered to Dec. 1 in *Stafford*, KS (JR).

The 23 Bonaparte's Gulls Dec. 23 in *Lincoln*, NE (SJD, WRS) are the latest fall migrants ever reported for Nebraska. A Mew Gull in 2nd-winter plumage at McConaughy Feb. 17 (WRS, JSu) will undergo review by the N.O.U.R.C.; it may represent the first for Nebraska. California Gulls appear to linger well into the winter at McConaughy with 67 Dec. 21 (SJD), down to 12 Feb. 16 (LKM) and one–two Feb. 19 (BP, LP).

Thayer's Gulls were reported from a number of locations. An adult was documented Dec. 5 in *Douglas*, NE (JoJ); a first-winter bird was seen Dec. 21 in *Lincoln* (SJD, WRS). Possibly seven different birds were reported from McConaughy Jan. 20–Feb. 24, including two adults, a 2nd-winter and  $\leq$ four first-winter birds (*vide* WRS); three were reported from Kansas (*Miami*, *Osage*, and *Douglas*), and one in *Tulsa* Feb. 5 (JWA). This author is still skeptical of all of these records, as many documented individuals are proven to be Herring Gulls or of uncertain identification; however, there is also reasonable certainty that some of these are correct identifications. A first-winter Iceland Gull was apparently identified at McConaughy Feb. 18 (BP, LP, RBa), the 7th Nebraska record if accepted by the N.O.U.R.C.

Three Lesser Black-backed Gulls were reported from Nebraska—an adult at

McConaughy Feb. 17 (WRS)–24 (BFH, RBa) was accompanied by a first-winter bird Feb. 18–19 (BP, LP). Another adult appeared in *Lancaster*, NE Feb. 23–25 (m.ob.). An ad. Lesser Black-backed Gull Feb. 8 in *Cowley*, KS (MT) was the first documented for Kansas. A careful count of Glaucous Gulls Feb. 24 yielded 16 birds (JoJ), the highest count ever reported for the Region. Up to five were reported in *Lincoln*, NE Dec. 22–Jan. 21 (LKM *et al.*). One other was reported in Nebraska (*vide* WRS); four were reported from Kansas (*vide* LM), with the southernmost in *Tulsa*, OK Feb. 5 (JWA) and *Oklahoma* Feb. 17 (JWA). Another unexpected find at McConaughy (or are all these gulls now to be expected?) was a first-winter Great Black-backed Gull Jan. 20 (JoJ)–Feb. 24 (m.ob.), among <five reported for Nebraska. Another, also in first-winter plumage, was reported from *Sedgwick*, KS Jan. 14–15 (JN, PJ).

More gulls?!! Our "Where's Waldo?" Black-legged Kittiwake was documented in *Lancaster*, NE Dec. 3 (JoJ).

Inca Doves were noted in *Finney*, KS Dec. 1 (T&SS) and *Sedgwick*, KS Dec. 8–16 (VH).

### Magpies to Shrikes

Black-billed Magpies were noted e. to *Lancaster*, NE (RBa), *Saunders*, NE (THo), and *Dixon*, NE (JJo).

Red-breasted Nuthatches made a perhaps unimpressive, but notable, showing throughout the Region. Rosche commented on a mini invasion of Pygmy Nuthatches in the Nebraska Pine Ridge. Bewick's Wrens wandered N to *Douglas*, KS Dec. 16 (GP) and *Riley*, KS Dec. 27 (LM, GP).

Half-hardies and foothardies included four Marsh Wrens, noted to Dec. 23 in *Keith*, NE (SJD). Some hardy E. Bluebirds (11–15) were noted at *Lancaster*, NE Jan. 29 (RBa) and Feb. 4 (LEi). Also hardy was a Hermit Thrush Dec. 31 in *Fremont-Dodge*, NE (JoJ). A Brown Thrasher was present on U.N.L. campus Jan. 8. At least 25 Mt. Bluebirds wandered E to *Russell*, KS Dec. 15 (LM, GP, MM), and 20 were in *Geary*, KS Jan. 15 (MS, CO). A Townsend's Solitaire Jan. 3 in *Wyandotte*, KS (MC) was e. of most occurrences.

This was good year for N. Shrikes in Nebraska with 7 reports; five were reported from Kansas (*vide* LM). Far afield for the winter was a Loggerhead Shrike Jan. 1 in *Hazard* (RH, LR).

### Warblers to Finches

"Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warblers wandered E to *Wyandotte*, KS Dec. 31 (LM, RR) and Jan. 4 (CH). An Ovenbird

was noted in *Oklahoma* Dec. 16; another lingered in *Tulsa*, OK Dec. 8 and survived until at least Jan. 30 after several cold fronts had passed through the area (JWA).

A Savannah Sparrow Feb. 3 in *Jefferson*, KS (MM, GP) was testing fate.

A Swamp Sparrow Jan. 25 in *Scotts Bluff*, w. NE (LKM) was almost unprecedented for both date and location; there is only one other winter record for w. Nebraska (*vide* WRS). White-throated Sparrows wintered n. to Gibbon, NE (LR, RH). Snow Buntings were reported s. to *Lancaster*, NE, where one–two were noted from Jan. 20 (RBa)–Feb. 18 (JMo).

Yellow-headed Blackbirds lingered far afield in Grand I., Dec. 16 (*vide* WRS), while one observed Feb. 23 in Kiowa W.M.A. (LKM) may have overwintered.

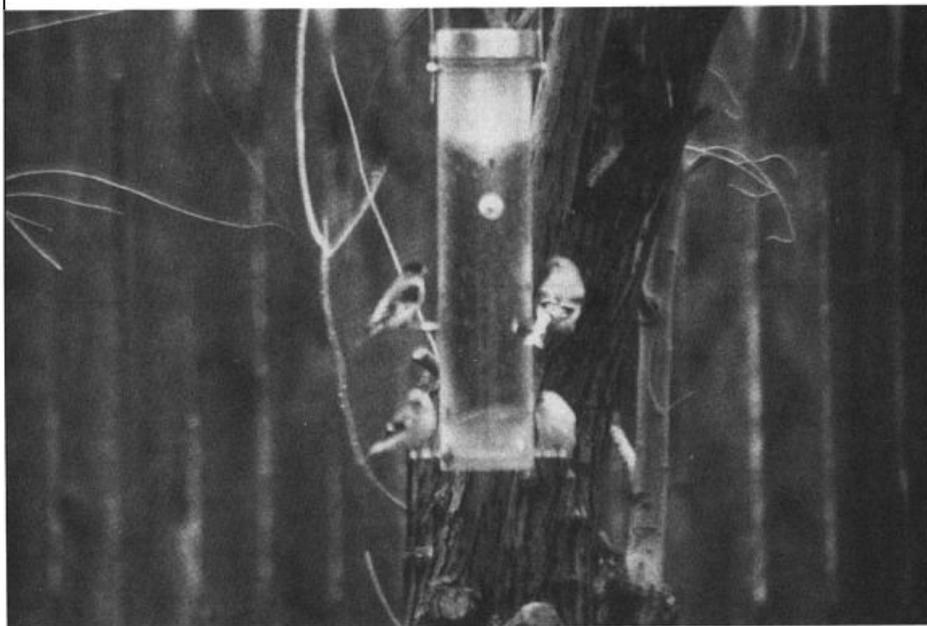
documented in *Dawes*, NE Jan. 17 (RCR), and another was apparently observed in Wakefield, NE Jan. 29–Feb. 29 (JoJ). Pine Siskins and Am. Goldfinches made only modest showings in the Region this period.

**Cited observers (area editors boldfaced):** Kansas: Don Arney, David Bryan, Mark Corder, Joyce Davis, Bob Dester, Bob Fisher, Vern Heinsohn, Chris Hobbs, Pete Janzen, Mark Land, Mike Lesan (MLe), Mick McHugh, Lloyd Moore, Galen Pittman, Mike Rader, John Rakestraw, Dale Roark, Richard Rucker, Max Thompson, Margaret Wedge. NEBRASKA: Gordon Brown, Kevin DeGamino (KDG), Stephen J. Dinsmore, Larry Einemann, Laurence Falk, Joe Gubanyi, Robin Harding, Joel Jorgensen, Lucy Koenig, Larry K.

# Texas Region

**GREG W. LASLEY, CHUCK SEXTON, WILLIE SEKULA, AND MARK LOCKWOOD**

This was a wild bucking-bronco of a winter for weather. While we recognize that other parts of the country, such as the Northeast, suffered much worse than we did, we had our own problems. Forget precipitation; for the most part, nobody got anything useful, perhaps only a little snow or rain in late December or early January. The drought in west Texas went from "worse to worser" (K. Bryan). Around the town of Balmorhea in December, irrigated farmlands became magnets (*i.e.*, the only hospitable habitat) for vast numbers of open field birds such as pipits, sparrows, longspurs, and meadowlarks. South and central Texas got little or no measurable rain for most of January and February. Even east Texas dried out. There was plenty of wind and *dust*, however. An early strong cold front brought freezing temperatures deep into south Texas December 9–10. Through January we virtually got whiplash as successive blustery fronts with north winds alternated, sometimes on a 48-hour rotation, with gusty south breezes. In west Texas again, measurable amounts of dust from several dust storms exceeded rainfall totals. In February we went through a roller coaster of temperature extremes. Many areas of central and east Texas had all-time record lows for February in a cold snap during the first few days of the month. Just over two weeks later, February 21–23, all-time record highs for the month were being set in the same areas. Austin's range of 19°F–99°F broke an old record for the *range* of temperatures for February. Well into the spring we would continue to recognize curious effects on many habitats from both ends of these fluctuations. One of the most disturbing effects immediately apparent was the increase in grass and brush fires. Massive blazes roared across several counties in north and central Texas. On the Fort Hood Military Reservation, a 30,000-acre fire destroyed thousands of acres of habitat for two endangered birds: Five-hundred acres of Black-capped Vireo habitat were destroyed (Their habitat is fire successional and it will come back in several years.). More distressing was the loss of an estimated 150,000 acres of prime



**Male Lesser Goldfinch [the upper, black-capped bird] with American Goldfinches at Tulsa, Oklahoma, in March 1996. The bird had been present since January 31. Photograph/Vera Hughes.**

Between 6–32 Great-tailed Grackles wintered in Lincoln, NE, only the 2nd group to be recorded through the winter period. One Brown-headed Cowbird in *Buffalo*, NE Jan 19 (JoJ) was also noteworthy.

A Purple Finch in *Keith*, NE Dec. 21 (*vide* WRS) was w. of most sightings. Only modest numbers were reported from e. Nebraska, and one must wonder how this species is faring against the recent invasion of House Finches. Among the rarer finches were two White-winged Crossbills in Norfolk Cemetery Jan. 29 (MB, EB), and two at North Platte Feb. 23 (WWy).

Common Redpolls staged a showing in Nebraska, with small numbers along its s. boundary. A tally of 27 redpolls were counted at 6 localities in Kansas between Dec. 31–Feb. 18 (*vide* LM). A Hoary Redpoll was

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