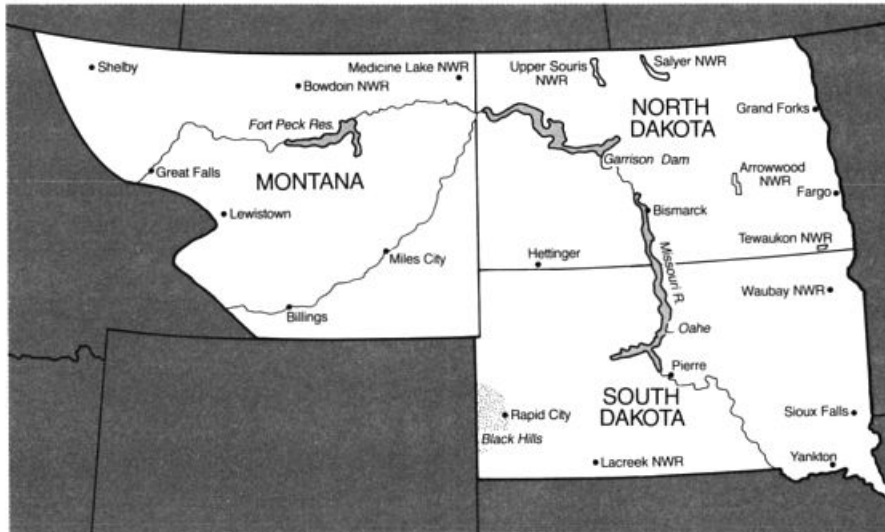


# northern great plains region



## RON E. MARTIN

**W**eatherwise the season was rather uneventful, with temperatures a little above average and precipitation somewhat below. Very little snow fell in November, and there was more open water at the end of the period than has been the norm in the last few years. Late waterfowl were everywhere, and late stragglers were the rule for many other species, as well. Most migrants, however, overflowed the Region, taking advantage of the mild weather. Some species groups, e.g. thrushes, were the lowest in recent memory.

## LOONS TO DUCKS

It was a notable fall for Pacific Loons in Montana, with 3 reports. The first was at Ft. Peck Oct. 26–Nov. 2 (SG, CC), the 2nd was noted Nov. 4 near Great Falls (CC et al.), and the 3rd was found at Ft. Peck Nov. 28 and remained into December (CC). There are about 14 previous records in Montana. Three Com. Loons at Ft. Peck Aug. 19 were quite early (CC), and one at Garrison Dam Nov. 28 was late (REM). A new fall peak was established for North Dakota when 14 Com. Loons were counted Oct. 25 in *McLean* and *Burleigh* (HCT, CDE).

Numerous reports of late grebes were received, with some remaining into the winter season. In North Dakota, two Horned

Grebes in *Mercer* Nov. 28 were the 2nd latest on record, and a Clark's Grebe in *McLean* Nov. 22 was the latest ever by 18 days (REM). Twenty Double-crested Cormorants on L. Sakakawea, ND, Nov. 28 was a large number for such a late date (RHO, GEN).

Rare in South Dakota, two Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were in *Brown* in August (*vide* DAT). A late Black-crowned Night-Heron was at Devil's L., ND, Nov. 6 (EEF). The 13th record of Trumpeter Swan for North Dakota was furnished by a single Oct. 6 at J. Clark Salyer N.W.R. (GBB). At least 38 Trumpeters migrated through Freezeout L., MT, during the season (MS). A report of a Brant shot near Bisbee this fall would constitute about the 12th record for North Dakota (TH, *vide* EEF).

Following reports of **Ruddy Shelducks** from w. Montana in the fall of 1996 comes a report of a pair seen this spring s.w. of Benton Lake. In August, a pair returned to the same area with eight young. On Aug. 24, three non-banded birds appeared at Benton L. and remained to Sept. 12 (SM). A single was noted with several thousand Ross's Geese at Freezeout L. Oct. 17 (MS). The Benton L. staff checked with a local aviculturist and found that an individual had sold 30–40 birds from a captive flock in Great Falls an undetermined time ago. Apparently now breeding in the wild, "these

sightings warrant closer review to ensure feral populations do not become established in the state" (SM).

Mallards peaked at 300,000 Nov. 7 at Sand Lake N.W.R., SD (SLS). Blue-winged Teal stayed later than usual, with 800 still at Medicine L., MT, Oct. 10 (LK, RS). An individual at Garrison Dam Nov. 29 was the 2nd latest for North Dakota (GEN, RHO). Canvasbacks peaked at 10,000 at Medicine L., MT, Oct. 22 (LK, RS). Ring-necked Ducks made a good showing, with 650 at Upper Souris N.W.R., ND, Oct. 12 (REM, GBB), and 610 at Bowdoin Oct. 23 (DP). North Dakota's 14th Harlequin Duck was documented at Fargo Nov. 1–9 (GEN, RMK). Rare in South Dakota, a Surf Scoter was noted in *Deuel* Oct. 29 (BKH), and a single at Benton L., MT, Oct. 30 furnished only the 3rd record for the refuge (RJ). A Barrow's Goldeneye at Garrison Dam Nov. 15 provided the 11th North Dakota record (REM, GBB, HCT).

## OSPREY TO TERNS

Several late Ospreys were noted, with one Nov. 14 at Minot, ND (REM); one in Grand Forks, ND, in mid-November (DOL); and the latest Nov. 27 in *Charles Mix*, SD (RM). Swainson's Hawks peaked Aug. 9, with 112 birds moving over Benton L., MT (MM). Gyrfalcons were seen at 3 locations, one in each state, all in mid-November.

A Sora was very late Nov. 1 in *Bennett*, SD (LCS), and the species' peak in North Dakota was Aug. 31 with 70 at the Minot Sewage Lagoons (REM). An Am. Golden-Plover was late Nov. 11 in *Charles Mix*, SD (DS). Black-necked Stilts peaked at 234 Aug. 12 at Benton L., which probably hosts the largest breeding colony in Montana (SM). Benton L. also hosted the Regional peak of Long-billed Curlews, with 243 Aug. 4 (SM). A late Least Sandpiper was found Nov. 1 in *Kingsbury*, SD (JSP). North Dakota's 2nd **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** was documented Sept. 28 at West Fargo (RMK). The 28 Short-billed Dowitchers at Bowdoin Aug. 19 provided a high number for Montana (LH). North Dakota's 10th Red Phalarope was documented at Grand Forks Oct. 21–25 (EEF).

South Dakota's first **Parasitic Jaeger** was documented Oct. 12 at Oahe Dam (BKH, BJR, DR, NH). The same day at Oahe, two **Long-tailed Jaegers** were documented, only the 2nd and 3rd for South Dakota (JDW, BJR, DR). Also at Oahe, an unidentified jaeger was reported Oct. 18 (DB).

An ad. Franklin's Gull in alternate plumage at Garrison Dam Nov. 29–30 furnished the 2nd-latest observation for North Dakota (GEN, RHO et al.). South Dakota's 2nd **Little Gull** was documented Sept. 27 in *Stanley* (RFS, JSP). North Dakota's 11th Iceland Gull was at Garrison Dam Nov. 15 (REM, GBB), and a first-winter bird at Ft. Peck from Nov. 7 through the period was suspected of being this species (CC, ph.). **Iceland Gull** is hypothetical in Montana (CC). An ad. **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Garrison Dam Nov. 15–28 provided the 4th record for North Dakota (REM, GBB, HCT, CDE). The species has been seen for 3 consecutive years at Garrison Dam.

Two Black-legged Kittiwake reports were received, both from South Dakota. An adult was in *Stanley* Nov. 15–16 (JSP, RFS), and a first year was at Oahe Nov. 29 (REM et al.). A strong showing of Sabine's Gulls included three in North Dakota Sept. 27–Oct. 21 (DOL, JSM, HCT), and four in South Dakota Sept. 16–Oct. 10 (MF, RFS, JSP). In Montana, three imm. birds were at Ft. Peck Sept. 17, providing the first record for that area (CC). Montana has about 14 previous records.

Some very late terns noted were Commons Oct. 13 in *Hughes*, SD (JSP), and North Dakota's latest ever in *Burleigh* Oct. 25 (HCT). A Forster's Tern Nov. 8 in *Kingsbury* (JSP), and a Black Tern Oct. 26 in *Butte* (RAS) furnished the latest ever dates for South Dakota.

#### DOVES TO SHRIKES

A **Eurasian Collared-Dove** in *Yankton*, SD, Aug. 24–Sept. 14 provided that state's 3rd record (SVS). A good peak of 1000 Com. Nighthawks was noted at Fargo, ND, Sept. 10 (DPW). Very late in South Dakota were White-throated Swifts in *Fall River* Oct. 12 (JSP). Ruby-throated Hummingbirds peaked at *nine* in Grand Forks, ND, Aug. 22 (EEF, JJ), and up to *four* were in Carlson's backyard at Ft. Peck Aug. 14–22 (CC).

An E. Wood-Pewee and an E. Kingbird were late Sept. 24 in *Clay*, SD (SVS). Four Yellow-bellied Flycatcher reports from the Dakotas spanned Aug. 30–Sept. 13.

A single Gray Jay was in Grand Forks, ND, in mid-November (*vide* DOL). South Dakota's 2nd **Steller's Jay** was documented

Sept. 19 in *Pennington* (TBW). A flock of 86 Black-billed Magpies in *Grand Forks*, ND, Aug. 26 provided the highest count ever recorded at the e. edge of the state (EEF). With very few recent records in South Dakota, a **Common Raven** was unusual in Roberts Oct. 22 (BKH). In North Dakota, single Com. Ravens were in *Walsh* Nov. 1 (EEF) and *Ward* Nov. 14 (REM).

Red-breasted Nuthatches made a very strong showing in North Dakota, with a peak of around 100 in *Wahpeton* Sept. 2 (RMK). A Brown Creeper Aug. 12 in *Turner*, SD, was very early, or could possibly indicate some breeding in e. South Dakota, where their status is uncertain (LRL). North Dakota's 19th Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was noted in *Adams* Oct. 18 (HCT). Three November reports of Hermit Thrushes in North Dakota was unusual. Both late and far west were Wood Thrushes Sept. 20 at *Mandan*, ND (CDE, HCT), and in *Pennington*, SD, Oct. 13 (TBW).

Only about a half-dozen Bohemian Waxwing reports were recorded for the entire Region. A late Loggerhead Shrike was at *Charles Mix*, SD, Nov. 28 (RM).

#### VIREOS TO FINCHES

Vireo migration was notably unspectacular, as was the warbler movement in general, but a few notable warblers were tallied. Accidental in fall, a Blue-winged Warbler was found Aug. 21 in *Yankton*, SD (SVS). Following the discovery of a population of **Virginia's Warblers** in the Black Hills of South Dakota this summer comes the first confirmation of nesting, with two ad. and two juv. birds in *Custer* Aug. 2–3 (DS). A late N. Parula was banded in *Brown*, SD, Nov. 1 (DAT). Two **Townsend's Warblers** at *Minot* Sept. 5 provided the 5th record for North Dakota (REM). In Montana, a single at *Benton* L. Aug. 17 furnished only the 2nd refuge record (MP). South Dakota's latest ever Pine Warbler was banded Nov. 14 in *Brown* (DAT). With under 10 South Dakota records, a **Prairie Warbler** Sept. 24–25 in *Clay* was a great find (DS, RFS).

Providing the 9th record for Montana, a female **Scarlet Tanager** was documented at Ft. Peck Oct. 9–10 (CC). A N. Cardinal Nov. 30 in *Tripp*, SD, was w. of the species range (RAP, JLP).

Sparrow migration was not memorable; however, a few late stragglers were noted. Chipping Sparrows were at Fargo Nov. 9 (GEN), and in *Yankton*, SD, Nov. 28 (SVS). South Dakota's latest ever, a Grasshopper Sparrow was in *Butte* Oct. 26 (RAS). Montana's 10th **Golden-crowned Sparrow** was

documented at Ft. Peck Oct. 9 (CC) A Dark-eyed Junco Aug. 26 in *Day*, SD, was quite early (DRS). With very few recent fall records, a McCown's Longspur in w. South Dakota Oct. 12 was notable (BJR).

**Great-tailed Grackle** was recorded in yet another South Dakota county this fall, with four in *Kingsbury* Oct. 25 (JSP). North Dakota's latest ever Orchard Oriole was studied in *Steele* Sept. 14 (DLK). Seven Pine Grosbeak reports came from North Dakota, with the earliest Nov. 5 at Fargo (RHO). Red Crossbills were very scarce, but White-winged Crossbills made a fair showing. Ten White-winged Crossbills at Ft. Peck for a week beginning Oct. 30 were very unusual there (CC). Four reports were received for e. South Dakota, and North Dakota listed at least 7 observations. Common Redpolls were early Oct. 8 in *Meade*, SD (EEM) A few Evening Grosbeaks were reported across the Region, with most observations of single birds. The earliest were in *Roberts*, SD, Oct. 20 (BKH).

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