

prairie provinces region



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The winter was exceptionally mild Regionwide, with much less sunshine than normal. Precipitation was generally light until late February, when an intense storm brought up to two feet of snow to southwest Manitoba and southeast Saskatchewan, and record rainfall farther east. In Winnipeg, it was the mildest winter since 1877, and the mildest February ever, averaging 14°F above normal. Only the first half of January was more seasonable, i.e., cold and snowy.

Not surprisingly, there were more lingering water birds and half-hardy passerines than usual, and there were a few stirrings of spring migration before the end of February. The winter was more disappointing for winter specialties, especially northern forest owls.

As usual, this report largely excludes Christmas Bird Count records.

LOONS TO FALCONS

A Com. Loon survived at Pine Falls, MB, until Mar. 3 (PT et al.); another was well n. at Squaw Rapids, SK, Jan. 2 (WH, SL, GWp, RWa). A Pied-billed Grebe in Calgary Dec. 22–Jan. 1 onward was the city's 2nd in winter (JC, LB et al.). Four Am. White Pelicans

and a Double-crested Cormorant were at Squaw Rapids Jan. 2 (WH, SL). Other single Double-crested Cormorants lingered at Wabamun L., AB, to Jan. 26 (JA, CF), Pine Falls to Jan. 1 (RKO et al.), and Lockport, MB, to Mar. 6 (RKO, PT, m.ob.).

Several Tundra Swan reports in Alberta included six at Medicine Hat Dec. 14 (RG). Also late at Medicine Hat were nine Greater White-fronted Geese Dec. 7 (B&MV) and four Snow Geese Dec. 21 (*vide* DB). At least two other Snow Geese were in the Taber, AB, area to Dec. 10 (LB), and single "Blue" Geese lingered at Echo L., SK, Nov. 29–Dec. 20 onward (RKR, RM, RH) and Gardiner Dam, SK, Dec. 22 (WH). Three Wood Ducks were in Medicine Hat in mid-December (*vide* DB), and one was at Calgary Jan. 29 (JRL, LV). A Green-winged Teal survived in Saskatoon to Jan. 20 (GWp), and two were still at Oak Hammock Marsh, MB, Jan. 11 (RKO). Spectacular numbers of Mallards in s. Alberta included 10,000 near Taber Dec. 12 (LB), and good winter counts in s. Manitoba included 198 in Winnipeg Jan. 10 (CC, GH). Northern Pintails were well represented in Alberta, including seven at Calgary Feb. 1 (KA), and single N. Shovelers were at Wabamun L. Jan. 18 (PM) and St. Norbert, MB, Jan. 30 (LP). Over 30 Gadwalls were counted at Wabamun L. Jan. 25 (PM).

Diving-duck highlights included a

Canvasback at Pine Falls to Dec. 30 (PT et al.), three Redheads in Calgary to Feb. 1 (JRo, KA), three Ring-necked Ducks at Silver Falls, MB, Dec. 23 (RKO), and 49 Buffleheads at Calgary Jan. 22 (WS, RWe, JRI). More good finds at Wabamun L. Jan. 25 were 12 Buffleheads and 10 Hooded Mergansers (PM). Unusually late were a Hooded Merganser at Silver Falls Jan. 1 (RKO) and a Red-breasted Merganser at Pine Falls Dec. 14 (RKO, PT, GWz, RZ).

Bald Eagle migration continued well into December Regionwide. Single N. Harriers were noted at St. Albert, AB, Dec. 13 & 16 (BP, FW, DN) and near Edmonton Dec. 14 (BP). At least seven Sharp-shinned Hawk sightings were reported in Calgary and two at Lethbridge, AB; a Cooper's Hawk was near Stonewall, MB, Dec. 3 (KG), and three were reported on Alberta CBCs. Good numbers of N. Goshawks were found in the Alberta foothills, but relatively few elsewhere. An exceptional winter sighting of an ad. Swainson's Hawk near Robsart, SK, Dec. 31 was well described (HS, JH). Lingered Red-tailed Hawks were reported in all 3 provinces, the latest at Winnipeg Jan. 21 (WC). Rough-legged Hawks were concentrated in the Alberta foothills and the Peace R. region, with few in Saskatchewan or Manitoba. Twenty-five Golden Eagles were in the McGrath–Del Bonito–Cardston, AB, area Feb. 19 (D&TD), and seven were near Tyvan, SK, Jan. 26 (B&SL). Six migrating Golden Eagles passed Windy Pt., AB, Dec. 9 (WS), and one was heading N again at Mt. Lorette Feb. 20 (PS, JS). More Am. Kestrels than usual wintered in Alberta, n. to Strathmore and Sundre. Five Prairie Falcons was an excellent count in the Lethbridge area Dec. 27 (v.o.).

PARTRIDGES TO WOODPECKERS

Gray Partridge and Sharp-tailed Grouse numbers were low in Alberta, but starting to increase again in Manitoba; Ring-necked Pheasants were also scarce in Alberta. Several Am. Coots lingered into December in s. Alberta, including six at the Medicine Hat sewage lagoons Dec. 21 (B&MV). Killdeers were widely reported in w. Alberta, mainly in December. Five gull species were recorded in Alberta in December, including a Mew Gull at Fincastle L. Dec. 1–2 (LB),



Two views (taken on December 28, 1997) of the Northern Mockingbird that attempted to live up to its name by wintering in Calgary, Alberta, the third such record there. Photographs/ Terry Korolyk

Reflecting the mild season (and some human help) were these American Goldfinches as far north as High River, Alberta, on February 28, 1998. Photograph/ Terry Korolyk

and California Gulls at Grand Centre and Cold L. (three birds) Dec. 11 (SB). Glaucous Gulls were found in all 3 provinces in early December, and an unidentified gull was in Calgary Feb. 3 (LS).

Fifteen Mourning Doves was a high count in the Lethbridge area Dec. 1 (LB). The highest Snowy Owl numbers were in Alberta, with up to 23 per day in the St. Albert area (DN), and many other counts of 6–14 birds. Northern Hawk Owl and Great Gray Owl numbers were extremely low, whereas fair concentrations of Short-eared Owls occurred in the Edmonton and Peace R. regions. Increased owling effort on Alberta CBCs turned up unprecedented numbers of Boreal Owls; also, seven were found at Windy Pt. Jan. 16 (WS), and 12 were singing along with 22 N. Saw-whet Owls in Sheep Valley Feb. 23–26 (WS).

One Red-headed Woodpecker was near the n. limit of the breeding range at Vogar, MB, Jan. 16 and perhaps longer (G&RL), and another was near Steinbach on at least Feb. 23 (*vide* DF). At least one Three-toed Woodpecker wintered in an “island” of boreal forest at Birds Hill P.P., MB, together with two Black-backed Woodpeckers (WC, MW). Two Black-backed Woodpeckers also overwintered in Regina (ABk et al.), and the species was more numerous than usual in s.e. Manitoba. Northern Flickers were widely reported in Alberta, and above-average numbers in Regina included two+ “Red-shafted” birds. In Manitoba, up to eight N. Flickers was a normal number in Winnipeg,

but overwintering birds at rural locations were more unusual: two at Stonewall (IG) and one at Grand Beach (RKO).

PASSERINES

A roost flight of 461 Com. Ravens at Windy Pt., AB, Jan. 16 (WS) was a high count for the mountains, and the species continued to increase across the prairies. An unconfirmed **Tufted Titmouse** visiting a feeder at Carnduff Jan. 12–13 was the first ever reported in Saskatchewan (DW, *vide* TH). More Brown Creepers than usual were reported in Alberta, and at least 11 were found in the Winnipeg area. American Dippers returned to normal winter numbers in Alberta, after 2 low years. A Ruby-crowned Kinglet was very late at Cold L., AB, Dec. 19 (FK). An ad. male **Eastern Bluebird** near Stonewall Dec. 5 (KG) furnished Manitoba’s 3rd winter record. Several Townsend’s Solitaires were found in each province, the most easterly being on the Ontario border at Mantario, MB, Dec. 29 (LK, DK).

A well-described **Swainson’s Thrush** at Medicine Hat Dec. 21 (PH, MH) was probably a winter first for the Region; almost as rare (although not so far from its normal winter range) was a **Hermit Thrush** at Horseshoe Canyon, AB, Dec. 20 (JT). Exceptional numbers of Am. Robins remained in Calgary well after Christmas, e.g., 40 Jan. 10 (JR). A Varied Thrush overwintered in Calgary (m.ob.), one was killed at a window in Prince Albert, SK, Jan. 28

(*vide* HG), and two separate birds were found near Steinbach, MB, in December (T&EW; P&JD et al.). Calgary’s 3rd wintering N. Mockingbird stayed from Dec. 13 to Jan. 6 (DQ, TK, m.ob.). A Brown Thrasher was a good find at Elma, MB, Jan. 3–30 (JW, MM), and an **American Pipit** in Calgary Dec. 26 (JS, m.ob.) provided Alberta’s first winter record. Never common, N. Shrikes were especially scarce Regionwide. Relative scarcity of Eur. Starlings in Manitoba was attributed to the 2 preceding cold winters.

Single male Cape May Warblers survived in Edmonton to Dec. 28 (TT, BD) and Selkirk, MB, to Dec. 24 (J&AM). A Yellow-rumped Warbler lingered in Biggar Dec. 6–26 (GWp, RWa), and another in Regina to Jan. 2 (FL et al.). An **Oporornis warbler** was extraordinarily late in Edmonton Dec. 4 (ABz), as was a **Common Yellowthroat** at Hinton, AB, Dec. 26 (*vide* PS). American Tree Sparrows were unusually scarce in Alberta. A **Chipping Sparrow** found at Strathcona, AB, Dec. 28 was captured Dec. 31 (*vide* PS), and another was reported at Calgary Feb. 20 (BW). Two **Savannah Sparrows** were exceptional at Gardiner Dam Dec. 22 (WH). A Fox Sparrow in Edmonton Dec. 21–Jan. 25 (PM) was Alberta’s 4th winter bird. A Song Sparrow overwintered in Winnipeg (CM), and a **Lincoln’s Sparrow** at BowKan Jan. 3 was Alberta’s 2nd in winter (*vide* JRd).

A Red-winged Blackbird wintered “north of 55” at La Ronge, SK (*vide* TH). Three Yellow-headed Blackbirds remained

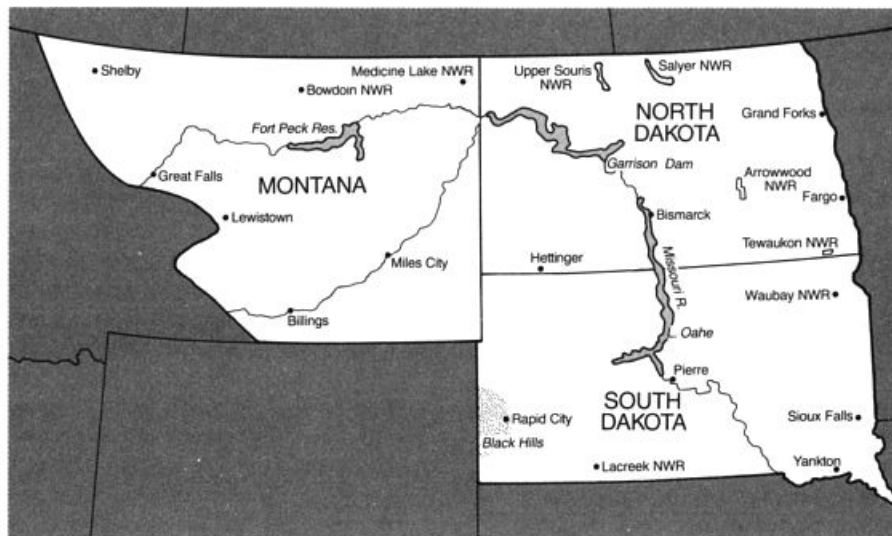
near Taber to Jan. 8 (LB), and a Com. Grackle was also far north at The Pas, MB, Dec. 17 to mid-January (JD). A Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch remained in Saskatoon from early December into February (PT et al.). Pine Grosbeaks were widely reported in Alberta and Manitoba, but were scarce for most of the period in Saskatchewan. Red Crossbills were scarce everywhere, while White-winged Crossbills were common only in Alberta. Common Redpolls were widespread in low numbers, and perhaps most numerous in w. Manitoba. American Goldfinches were more widespread than ever (albeit in small numbers) in Alberta. In Manitoba and Alberta alike, Evening Grosbeaks were widespread in good numbers, but tended to avoid the larger cities.

Observers (subregional compilers in bold-face): John Acorn, Keith Allsebrook, Dennis Baresco, A. Belyk (ABk), Lloyd Bennett, Suzanne Benoit, Andy Bezner (ABz), Ward Christianson, Andy Courcelles, Joe Crichton, Carolyn Curtis, Jackie Dixon, Peter & Janet Doerksen, Doug & Teresa Dolman, Bruce Dunlop, Dennis Fast, Chris Fisher, Irv Gardner, Ken Gardner, Rob Gardner, H. Greenwood, Wayne Harris, Trevor Herriot, Joan Hodgins, George Holland, Ron Hooper, Phil Horch, Mike Houtman, Lorne Klassen, Rudolf Koes (RKO), Fred Korbut, Terry Korolyk, **Robert Kreba** (RKR), Donna Kurt, Fred Lahrman, Sheila Lamont, Georgina & Raymond Larsen, Bob & S. Luterbach, Pat Marklevitz, Chris Meiklejohn, June & Arnold Minish, Max Misurka, Ron Myers, Dave Nadeau, Bob Parsons (Alberta), Robert Parsons (Manitoba), Louis Plett, Dan Quinn, John Riddell (JRI), Janet Rodgers (Jrd), Jason Rogers (JRo), **Peter Sherrington**, Heidi Scott, Linda Slater, Wayne Smith, John Steeves, P. Taylor (Saskatchewan), Peter Taylor (Manitoba), John Thompson, Terry Thormin, Ben & Michael Velner, Lynn Vogt, Tony & Eleanor Wagenhofer, Marlene Waldron, Gene Walz (GWz), Guy Wapple (GWp), Rodney Wapple (RWa), John Weier, Ray Wershler (RWe), Fred Whaley, Doreen Wilmot, Bill Wilson, Reto Zach.

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northern great plains region



RON E. MARTIN

It was an El Niño winter in the Northern Great Plains, with the third warmest winter on record in North Dakota, and comparable readings elsewhere. The average temperature in Fargo, North Dakota, was 21°F, 11 degrees above average. Most of the season featured no snow cover, and cold snaps were few. Along with the warm temperatures, the season was drier than average in most areas. Golfers were out January 1 at Minot, North Dakota, when the temperature hit 50 degrees. Lake Sakakawea froze over January 11, only four days from the latest recorded date. Nelson Reservoir in Montana did not freeze over until late January.

Seventeen species of waterfowl were recorded at Garrison Dam, North Dakota, in December. North Dakota recorded its first Mountain Chickadee, and South Dakota had its third record for Little Gull.

LOONS TO DUCKS

The Pacific Loon reported at Ft. Peck, MT, at the end of the fall period remained to Dec. 3 (CC). A Com. Loon in Lawrence until Jan. 3 provided a rare winter record for South Dakota (RAS, EEM, TJ). Furnishing North Dakota's latest ever and first December record was a Pied-billed

Grebe in McLean Dec. 14 (REM). The species also made a late showing in Montana, with singles Dec. 20 at Billings and Great Falls (AN, RE, CM, DD). Horned Grebes joined the late parade with one in Yankton, SD, Dec. 5 (SVS), one at Ft. Peck for several days beginning Dec. 18 (CC), and two on the Chester, MT, CBC Dec. 20 (HM). Tying North Dakota's 2nd latest date was a W. Grebe on L. Sakakawea Dec. 20 (REM).

American White Pelicans remained for the CBCs at Great Falls Dec. 20 (AN, RE), and Jamestown, ND, Dec. 19, where two were tallied. A Double-crested Cormorant on the Billings CBC Dec. 20 was only the 2nd recorded in 54 years, and a single remained until Jan. 18 at Ft. Peck (CC). Two individuals on L. Sakakawea Dec. 14 furnished the latest ever record for North Dakota by 11 days (REM). A Tundra Swan was late at Chester, MT, Dec. 20, and North Dakota's latest and first January record was provided by a single at Clark Salyer N.W.R. Jan. 6 (RLH). In South Dakota, Greater White-fronted Geese were still in Perkins Dec. 20 (DCG). Small numbers of lingering Snow Geese were noted across the Region, and Canada Geese were unusually widespread. Providing only the 2nd mid-winter record for North Dakota was a Wood Duck Jan. 2–Feb. 1 at Grand Forks (EEF, DOL).