

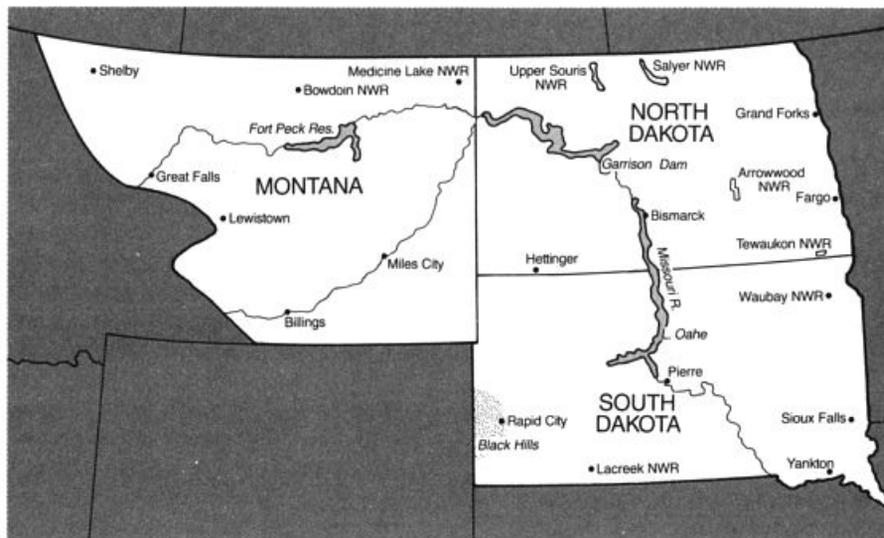
near Taber to Jan. 8 (LB), and a Com. Grackle was also far north at The Pas, MB, Dec. 17 to mid-January (JD). A Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch remained in Saskatoon from early December into February (PT et al.). Pine Grosbeaks were widely reported in Alberta and Manitoba, but were scarce for most of the period 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.

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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).

Three Gadwall were still at Garrison Dam Feb. 16 (CDE, HCT), and North Dakota's latest ever and 2nd January record for Canvasback was furnished by a single at Clark Salyer N.W.R. Jan. 6 (RLH). Providing North Dakota's 2nd winter record were four Redheads at Garrison Dam through the period, and 25 spent the season at Ft. Peck (CC). A Ring-necked Duck in *Renville*, ND, Dec. 19 was that state's latest by 17 days (REM). Oldsquaw wintered again at Garrison Dam, with two through the period (HCT, CDE). A Com. Goldeneye at Long Lake N.W.R., ND, Jan. 29 was likely a very early spring migrant (PTF). Four Buffleheads wintered at Garrison Dam, and a returning single at Long Lake N.W.R. Feb. 25 provided the first February record for North Dakota away from Garrison Dam (PTF). Two Red-breasted Mergansers at Upper Souris N.W.R., ND, Dec. 19, provided the 6th CBC record in that state, and two females wintered at Ft. Peck (CC). Ruddy Ducks were notably late in *Renville*, ND, Dec. 19 (REM), and on the Chester and Ft. Peck CBCs Dec. 20.

HAWKS TO KILLDEER

Northern Goshawks were scarce, with only seven individuals reported. Four Red-tailed Hawks were still migrating Jan. 10 in *McLean*, ND (HCT, CDE). Six Rough-legged Hawks were in the Bowdoin/Malta area during the period (DP, KE), and eight were tallied Feb. 24 in s.w. North Dakota (D&CG). Five Merlins wintered at Hettlinger, ND (D&CG), and two Peregrine Falcons flew past the Bowdoin N.W.R., MT, headquarters Dec. 23 (PG, KE). Four Gyrfalcon reports covered all 3 states.

North Dakota CBC totals for Gray Partridge, Ring-necked Pheasant, and Sharp-tailed Grouse were only 30% of 1996 numbers, no doubt a reflection of the severe winter of 1996–1997. Sharp-tailed Grouse numbers in e. Montana were also quite low. Ten Greater Prairie-Chickens in *Cass*, ND, Dec. 19 provided the first record for that county in many years (JSM). They were almost certainly from the population in neighboring *Clay*, Minnesota. The reintroduced population in *Grand Forks*, ND, appears to be doing well.

Three Virginia Rails provided a new high on the Billings CBC Dec. 20, and documentation has been requested for a report of three birds that frequented a feeder in rural *Ward*, ND, through the period (DG). Only one winter record exists for North Dakota. North Dakota's latest ever Am.

Coot was noted in *Mercer* Dec. 16 (REM), and the 718 recorded on the Ft. Peck CBC Dec. 20 furnished a new high there (CC).

A Sandhill Crane at Tewaukon N.W.R. Dec. 19 provided the 2nd CBC record for North Dakota, and a flock of 300 in *Butte*, SD, Feb. 14 provided the earliest spring date in that state (RAS). A Killdeer at Regent Feb. 19 furnished the 2nd winter and first February record for North Dakota (GCL).

GULLS TO OWLS

Very rare in winter, a Franklin's Gull was tallied Feb. 21 in *Stanley*, SD (RFS). South Dakota's 3rd **Little Gull** was noted at Ft. Randall Dam Dec. 10–Jan. 6 (RM, DS). Two Ring-billed Gulls at Garrison Dam Jan. 3 were the latest recorded for North Dakota (HCT), and the species wintered in *Butte*, SD, providing a rare record away from the Missouri R. (RAS). In Montana, the 44 noted on the Great Falls CBC was unusually high. A California Gull remained at Garrison Dam until Jan. 3 (HCT), and the 246 counted on the Ft. Peck CBC Dec. 20 provided a record high there (CC). Also record high at Ft. Peck were the 14 Thayer's Gulls noted on the CBC. In North Dakota, Thayer's Gulls stayed at Garrison Dam to Jan. 3, providing the 2nd latest date for that state (HCT). A Thayer's Gull was in *Stanley*, SD, Jan. 31 (FRS, JSP). The Iceland Gull reported in the fall season at Garrison Dam remained to Jan. 1, the latest recorded date for North Dakota (REM).

A **Eurasian Collared-Dove** was noted in *Yankton*, SD, Jan. 31, the same county where the state's 3rd record was tallied last fall (SVS). Only four E. Screech-Owls were recorded on North Dakota CBCs, with recent harsh winters at least partially responsible. Snowy Owl numbers were good in the Dakotas, and exceptional in s.e. North Dakota and n.e. South Dakota, where numbers were unusually high. The *seven* tallied in *Day*, SD, Dec. 23 represented a good number for that state (LH). In North Dakota, Fargo recorded a record *nine* on their CBC. Only 2 reports were recorded from Montana.

WOODPECKERS TO WAXWINGS

Northern Flickers were reported in above-average numbers. One example was the Bismarck, ND, CBC, which tallied 26 for a new high there. Horned Larks were quite scarce in North Dakota and Montana until the arrival of spring birds in February. The 46 Blue Jays on the Bowdoin CBC surely represents one of the highest ever counts in Montana for that species (DP). Eight Com.

Ravens were in the Turtle Mts. of North Dakota Jan. 24, where they now regularly winter (CDE). Documentation was received for two **Mountain Chickadees** seen on the Hazen, ND, CBC Dec. 29. Apparently the birds had been present since fall; if accepted, this would furnish the first record for North Dakota (LM, BM). Unprecedented numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches were noted in North Dakota, with a new record total of 250 on the CBCs. A new high for the state was recorded at Minot, with 65 individuals The **House Wren** at Great Falls, MT, Dec 20 may furnish the first winter record for the Region (GH, CM, GE, VG).

Kinglets made an impressive showing this winter, with a North Dakota CBC record 36 at Minot Dec. 21 (REM). Wintering was noted at several locations in the state. Very rare in the winter season, two Ruby-crowned Kinglets provided the first CBC record for Billings, MT, in 54 years Eastern Bluebirds were n. of usual winter range in *Faulk*, SD, Jan. 4 (MMM), and a Mt. Bluebird wintered at Ft. Peck, MT (CC). A Hermit Thrush at Fargo Dec 20, provided only the 4th CBC record for North Dakota (GN, BN). A N. Mockingbird spent most of the season in *Brookings*, SD (KIE). Bohemian Waxwing numbers were very low in North Dakota, but about average in Montana. Cedar Waxwings were numerous and widespread in North Dakota. Northern Shrikes were low in North Dakota, with only 11 recorded on CBCs

WARBLERS TO EVENING GROSBEAK

It was an unprecedented season for Yellow-rumped Warblers, with North Dakota's first CBC and 2nd winter record noted on the Icelandic CBC Dec. 23 (DOL). Two birds were found in Montana, with one at Great Falls Dec. 20 (GS, LW, LB, BC), and a single in Billings Dec. 23 (JC). Despite the mild weather, sparrow numbers were about average. At Ft. Peck, a Song Sparrow on the Dec. 20 CBC provided a first, and a White-crowned Sparrow was present for a couple of weeks in mid-December (CC). Snow Buntings were low on North Dakota and Montana CBCs. Only 2 large flocks were reported in North Dakota. With the mild weather, blackbirds and meadowlarks were reported more than usual, and the five Brown-headed Cowbirds on the Jamestown CBC Dec. 19 provided a rare winter record for North Dakota.

Only a few scattered Pine Grosbeaks were noted, but Purple Finches made a good showing across the Region. Red Crossbills

were virtually non-existent, but White-winged Crossbills were widespread in moderate numbers. The highest count was noted on the Jamestown CBC Dec. 19, where 58 were tallied. It was a very good year for redpolls in the Dakotas, but very few were seen in Montana. As usual, a few Hoary Redpolls were noted, the southernmost Jan. 28 in *Deuel*, SD (BKH). The only Evening Grosbeaks reported were from the more regular wintering areas of North Dakota, the Turtle Mts. and the Pembina Hills.

CORRIGENDA

In *Field Notes* 51:1014, the 21 Baird's Sparrow nests at Bowdoin were found by Paule Grouse, Julian Wood, Jeane Hamond, and Michele Anderson, not by Steve Dinsmore.

Cited observers (area editors in boldface):

MONTANA: Lou Bruno, Bill Cardin, **Charles Carlson**, Jim Clevenger, Diane Doyle, George Engler, Kathy Erickson, Roger Evans, Vince Galli, Paule Gouse, Gracia Hilde, Carley McCauley, Harriet Marble, Charles Marlen, Al Nelson, Dwain Prellwitz, Gorham Swanberg, Les Waite. NORTH DAKOTA: Corey D. Ellingson, Eve E. Freeberg, Pete Finley, Diane Gano, Dave and Carolyn Griffiths, Robert L. Howard, Gary C. Loder, David O. Lambeth, Ron E. Martin, J. Spencer Meeks, Beth Mehlhoff, Leland Mehlhoff, Ben Nielsen, Gary Nielsen, **Mark Ottes**, H. Clark Talkington. SOUTH DAKOTA: Dave and Carolyn Griffiths, Bruce K. Harris, Laura Hubers, Todd Jensen, Kieckhefer family, Ron Mabie, Michael M. Melius, Ernest E. Miller, **Jeffrey S. Palmer**, Robb F. Schenck, Ralph and Alice Shaykett, David Swanson, Steve Van Sickle.

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Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *Field Notes* are keyed on page 160.

southern great plains region



JOSEPH A. GRZYBOWSKI

This was a generally mild winter. The reporting showed it with a broad taxonomic selection of half-hardies, no-hardies, and fool-hardies hanging a little farther north. These included a number of ground-foraging seed-eaters, small omnivores, and a few of those "mud-poking" shorebirds. There were also some large groups of geese and cranes which maintained high numbers in central Kansas, and Common Mergansers in Nebraska, which simply didn't have to move farther south this season.

Some diving ducks can annually be forced down by local conditions, and risk less in doing this than many dabblers who may want only to risk average expectations. Larger bodies of water are always temporary foraging options for divers, even if conditions become really bad very quickly, not to mention the buffer of their fat reserves. So their numbers can be largest at their northern limits. Dabblers may be more sensitive, as a bad scene which freezes shallow water solid will not necessarily cause them to move. Many erring in their

choice of winter haven may die—a selective process favoring those making a better choice, particularly for smaller species with limited ability for fat reserve.

So, too, with the smaller landbirds. Only a relatively few will play their fall journey short; the long process of recovering from a severe winter parallels the process of larger numbers wintering farther north. Mild winters proliferate only scattered numbers.

Gulls have become a dominant and outstanding part of the winter report. Lake McConaughy has become a southern plains "mecca" for many vagrants which go astray. This season, Lake Waconda (Mitchell County) in Kansas was not far behind. These observations likely reflect a population boom for this taxon. To some extent, it is incredible—literally!!! Gull plumages being what they are, all is not what it appears, but at least some of it is, and even some of this season's reporting is incredible—figuratively. Ten years ago, I doubt anyone would have predicted counting Lesser Black-backed Gulls, seeing more than one Mew Gull for the season, much less at a time, or seeing several of the 13 species