

# prairie provinces region



Part of a notable concentration of 70 Trumpeter Swans present April 11, 1998, west of Nanton, Alberta. Photograph/Terry Korolyk

## RUDOLF F. KOES AND PETER TAYLOR

Warm, dry weather prevailed Region-wide for much of the season, with many forest fires, especially in central and northern Alberta. The Calgary area received record snowfall in the second half of March, and widespread rains eased the fire situation in late May. Warm weather in April and most of May led to an early breakup of major rivers and lakes, and most trees leafed out two to three weeks early. These conditions undoubtedly assisted the scattered early arrivals, but most migrants arrived on schedule. Many of the usual visible migration events, such as waterbird concentrations and passerine fallouts, varied from nonexistent to mediocre, and few vagrants were reported. Good numbers of migrating hawks were reported at the traditional sites in the Alberta Rockies, but few hawks concentrated in Manitoba river valleys. One Manitoba highlight was the best shorebird migration at Oak Hammock Marsh in a decade.

**Abbreviation:** O.H.M. (Oak Hammock Marsh Wildlife Management Area, MB).

## LOONS TO FALCONS

Unusually early arrivals included a Com. Loon at Patricia Beach, MB, Apr. 8 (HT); three Am. White Pelicans near Medicine

Hat, AB, Mar. 15 (BV, MVn); a Least Bittern at Delta, MB, May 2 (PG, GG); and a Great Egret at Winnipeg Mar. 26 (Rko). Another Great Egret was far north at Ft. McMurray, AB, May 28 (FK). Twenty White-faced Ibises at Pakowki L., AB, May 17 (JRo) was a high count at this traditional site; one was also reported at Red L., SK, in late May (IP, *fide* PW).

Impressive numbers of Tundra Swans in Alberta included 2000+ at Murray L. Mar.

28 (PH, MO) and 5000+ at Indus Apr. 12 (Jri, LV, LW). Two probable "Bewick's" Swans were reported in s.e. Saskatchewan Apr. 13 (BL). Seventy Trumpeter Swans provided a good count w. of Nanton, AB, Apr. 11 (TK); a pair near Pinawa, MB, May 10–16 (PT, RP, AC, RZ et al.) likely originated from the growing population in Minnesota and n.w. Ontario. Snow Goose migration was early, with a major movement in s. Saskatchewan Apr. 2–3 (BL et al.)



and 150,000+ at Windyates, MB, Apr. 10 (BS, A&DS). High counts of N. Pintails in Alberta included 8000+ at both Carseland Apr. 4 and Indus Apr. 8 (m.ob.). Unusual sightings were a male Cinnamon Teal near Minnedosa, MB, May 8 (*vide* CvC) and an Oldsquaw at O.H.M. May 17–19 (PT et al.).

Bald Eagle migration was impressive at Windy Pt., AB, with high counts of 105 Mar. 24, 104 Mar. 31, and a spring record 191 Apr. 2 (WS). Thirty-five Bald Eagles passed over Calgary in 90 minutes, also Apr. 2 (RD). The first of several early sightings of Bald Eagles at Churchill, MB, was Apr. 8 (BCh). The raptor migration in s. Manitoba was the poorest (most dispersed?) in years, the only highlight being 484 Red-tailed Hawks at Windyates Apr. 10 (BS, A&DS). Locally rare and early was a Red-tailed Hawk at Churchill in April (RMu). Forty-two Rough-legged Hawks at Windy Pt. Apr. 2 tripled the previous spring high count (WS). Four Gyrfalcons overwintered at Churchill, presumably feasting on the abundant Rock Ptarmigan; the last Gyrfalcon was seen Apr. 20 (BCh).

#### RAILS TO WOODPECKERS

A lonely, early Virginia Rail at Spruce Siding, MB, Apr. 29 responded to tape and delighted many (RKO et al.). The highest of several large counts of Black-bellied Plovers in s. Alberta was 1300+ at Brooks May 28 (FF, JRi, LV et al.). Single **Pacific Golden-Plovers** at Chestermere, AB, May 24 (JS, LV) and Pasqua Slough near Regina, SK, May 26



**Black-necked Stilts may be occurring more frequently in Alberta than in the past. This nesting pair was near Irricana, Alberta, May 18, 1998. Photograph/ Terry Korolyk**

(RKR, CP) were both well documented.

A Black-necked Stilt was early at Rush L., AB, Apr. 11 (D&TD), while two in Kananaskis Country May 7 (GM, CS) and one at Lac la Biche May 31 (RTh, PRO, MVK) were beyond the usual range. There were numerous additional reports of Black-necked Stilt in s. Alberta, including nesting birds near Calgary (TK, ph.), and one wandered to Lundar, MB, May 7 (BE). American Avocet numbers rebounded in s. Manitoba, with several pairs in the Minnedosa area and up to 24 birds and at least 6 nests at O.H.M. in May. Three Willets were e. of their normal range at Lac du Bonnet May 10 (PT, RZ, RP, AC et al.). More unusual were single W. Sandpipers at Churchill May 21 (RTo) and O.H.M. May 26 (GHO, CyC). A pair of Com. Snipe already had downy young at E. Shoal L., MB, May 15 (IG).

The only reported jaeger was an unidentified bird at Little Arm, Last Mountain L., SK, Apr. 12 (CP). A California Gull was early at Calgary Mar. 1 (RB). Few Thayer's and Glaucous gulls were reported. A yearling **Ross's Gull** was an exceptional find at O.H.M. May 16 (LdM, RC), but it did not linger.

Highlights at Medicine Hat included a Band-tailed Pigeon May 8–9, perhaps an escapee (S&RJ, JRi), and the continuing presence of a pair of E. Screech-Owls (BV). Short-eared Owls were extremely scarce Regionwide. Early songsters included a Boreal Owl at Churchill Feb. 7 (BCh) and a N. Saw-whet Owl at Pinawa Mar. 1 (PT). Also early was a Vaux's Swift at Mt. Lorette, AB, Apr. 29 (PSh). On Apr. 12, 184 N. Flickers migrated along the Assiniboine R., furnishing an impressive backyard count at Head-ingly, MB (BS).

#### PASSERINES

A Blue Jay at Mt. Lorette May 5 (JS) was the first spring record at that closely watched site. A Black-billed Magpie wandered to Churchill Apr. 22–24 (PRa). Out of normal habitat, a Rock Wren foraged along the limbs of an elm tree in Regina May 16 (RMY, RKR).

**SA** An otherwise on-schedule migration in Manitoba was punctuated by an assortment of exceptionally early passerines. Highlights were two Great Crested Flycatchers at Delta Apr. 29 (HdH), an E. Kingbird at Churchill Apr. 22 (PRa), a N. Parula at Bird's Hill Park Apr. 26 (DB), a Cape May Warbler in Winnipeg Apr. 24 (HM), a Pine Warbler in Winnipeg May 20 (GW), a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow in Winnipeg Apr. 26 (DB), a Harris's Sparrow at St. Adolphe Apr. 12 (AC), and 2 pairs of Orchard Orioles at St. Adolphe May 15 (AC).

Rare and early so far north was a Mt. Bluebird at Churchill Apr. 25 (MC). A Townsend's Solitaire at Brandon, MB, Mar. 15 (M&CS) may have wintered nearby; another visited St. Ambrose, MB, May 17 (GHO, CyC). A **Wood Thrush** was banded at Beaverhill L., AB, May 19 (EJ). A Varied Thrush hit a window in Regina Apr. 26, but recovered (GSu). Several N. Mockingbirds were reported in s.w. Manitoba (KDS), and one was in Winnipeg May 19 (TS).

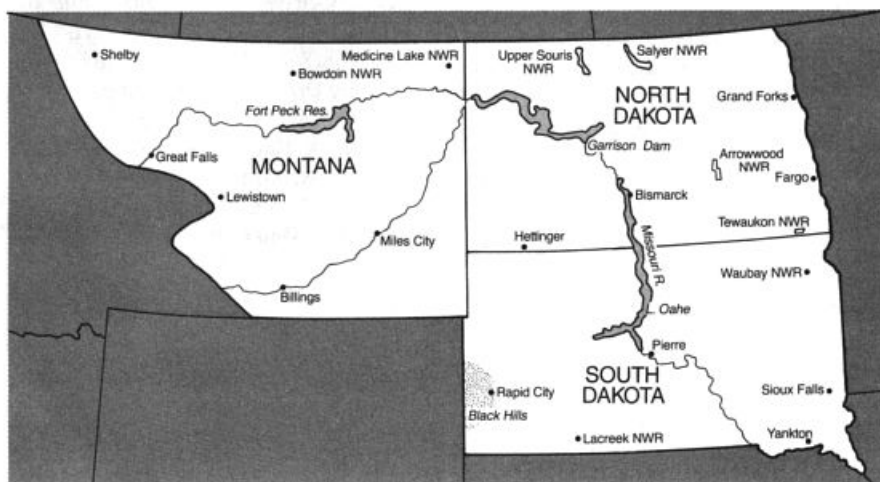
A flock of 3200 Bohemian Waxwings was an impressive sight at Morden, MB, Mar. 7 (RKO), and this species festooned trees in Calgary Mar. 25 (TK). An "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler was a rare visitor at Hidden Valley, SK, May 16 (GHI, RKR, RMY). Extraordinary if accepted was a reported **Kirtland's Warbler** at Delta, MB, May 16 (D&LH).

A Scarlet Tanager was well w. at Dinosaur P.P., AB, May 23 (BCL, ET). The only W. Tanager found in Manitoba was near Erickson May 8 (DW). A Lazuli Bunting sang on territory at Riding Mountain N.P., MB, from May 23 into June (CvC, JH), and an Indigo Bunting wandered to Standard, AB, May 25 (KC, GSh). A Field Sparrow was banded at Last Mountain L. May 22 (RW). Lark Buntings were numerous s.e. of Calgary in May, and a male wandered far north to Thompson, MB, May 18 (R&ZI).

A Golden-crowned Sparrow visited Regina Apr. 26–27 (SA, DV, PSa). A Chestnut-collared Longspur at Mt. Lorette Apr. 23 (PSh) was the 2nd at that site and only the 3rd recorded in the Canadian Rockies. An E. Meadowlark sang e. of Whitemouth, MB, May 21–22 (GHO, CyC, AC et al.). A pair of Red Crossbills attempted to nest in Lethbridge, but disappeared after a record snowfall Mar. 23 (WG). Many hundreds of White-winged Crossbills overwintered at Churchill, but dispersed in spring (BCh).

**Observers (subregional compilers in bold-face):** Sandy Ayer, Reid Barclay, Doug Barry, **Grahame Booth**, Bonnie Chartier (BCh), Karen Christensen, Red Clarke, Brook Clibbon (BCL), Michael Cobus, Andy Courcelles, Carolyn Curtis (CyC), Calvin Cuthbert (CvC), Doug & Teresa Dolman, Rodger Dunn, Bill Eyolfson, Fred Farcas, Irv Gardner, Heidi den Haan, Larry de March, Ken De Smet, Witek Gierulski, Paula Grief, Gordon Grief, David & Lucy Hartwell, Gale Hipperson (GHi), George Holland (GHo), Phil Horch, Jean Horton, Ray and Zoe Irvine, Edgar Jones, Sig & Ruby Jordheim, **Rudolf Koes (RKo)**, Fred Korbut, Terry Korolyk, **Robert Kreba (RKr)**, **Bob Luterbach**, Greg Meyer, Harry Mueller, Robert Mumford (RMu), Ron Myers (RMy), Mike O'Shea, Irene Park, Robert Parsons, Curtis Pollock, Paul Ratson (PRa), Jo-Anne Reynolds (JRe), **John Riddell (JRi)**, Jason Rogers (JRo), Peter Roxburgh (PRo), Murray and Carol Sangster, Pat Sargent (PSa), Al & Dorothy Schritt, Tom Scott, Peter Sherrington (PSh), Glen Sherritt (GSh), Bob Shettler, Cindy Smith, Wayne Smith, John Steeves, Glen Sutter (GSu), Peter Taylor, Richard Thomas, Robert Tolk, Hans Toom, Eric Tull, Ben Velner, Michael Velner (MVn), Mike Veloski (MVk), Dan Vetter, **Lynn Vogt**, Lynda Waddington, Gene Walz, Rob Waple, Dan Weedon, Peter Whelan, Reto Zach.

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# northern great plains region

## RON MARTIN

**F**ollowing the mild winter, March came in with some snow and cold. April and May were mild with little precipitation, particularly in western North Dakota and eastern Montana. The migration was unusual, with a few individuals of some species appearing early, only to be absent for a couple of weeks thereafter.

There was a spectacular waterfowl migration at Freezeout Lake, Montana, in mid-March. Shorebirds, in good numbers at Freezeout Lake and in South Dakota, were unspectacular in North Dakota. Warblers and thrushes were universally noted in low numbers, and sometimes only a few individuals of a species were seen very late in the season. One of the few fallouts was noted in *McHenry*, North Dakota, May 9.

Highlights included possible first state records for Anhinga in North Dakota, Black Rail in South Dakota, and the first Common Raven nest this century in North Dakota.

## GREBES TO MERGANSERS

South Dakota's earliest ever Pied-billed Grebe was in *Yankton* Mar. 9 (SVS), and one at Ft. Peck, MT, Mar. 29, was the earliest by 2 weeks (CC). Earliest by 7 days was a Red-necked Grebe at *Grand Forks*, ND, Apr. 5 (EEF). The first Eared Grebes were noted at Freezeout L., MT, Mar. 13, and W. Grebes arrived there Apr. 8, about 2 weeks earlier than average (MS).

At Medicine L., MT, 3302 Am. White Pelican nests with young were counted May 26 (MR, MK). If accepted, North Dakota's first **Anhinga** was documented in *Cass* Apr. 29 (MH, JM, p.a.). Furnishing new early records in South Dakota were Great Egrets in *Lake Mar.* 29 (RMK), and Cattle Egrets in *Brown* Apr. 13 (DAT). North Dakota's earliest Little Blue Heron was noted at Kelly's Slough N.W.R. May 11 (EEF). In South Dakota, Little Blue Herons were also early Apr. 25 in *Brown* (REM, BKH) and *Lincoln* (JPS). A Yellow-crowned Night-Heron at DeWald Slough, *Kidder*, ND, May 25, provided the state's 18th record (HCT). South Dakota's earliest-ever White-faced Ibises were in *Brown* Apr. 13 (SLS), and the first record in *Cass*, ND, was provided by a pair Apr. 25 (GEN).

Wandering Trumpeter Swans were noted in all 3 states. South Dakota's 2nd **Mute Swan** was present in *Brown* Mar. 1-7 (DAT, p.a.).

Northern Pintails peaked at around *one million* at Freezeout L., MT, Mar. 13-16 (MS). A hybrid Cinnamon × Blue-winged Teal was found May 17 in *Clark*, SD (RD, BD, BKH). Four times the previous record high for North Dakota, *1100* Greater Scaup were counted in *Grand Forks* Apr. 10; a few were still present at the end of the period (EEF). Rare in e. Montana, four were noted at Medicine L. Apr. 23 (MK). Very rare in spring in South Dakota, Oldsquaw were reported from *Hughes* and *Gregory* Mar. 17-Apr 2 (JCS, RFS, JSP, RM). Casual in spring, **Surf Scoters** were observed in *Yankton*, SD, Apr. 23 (SVS, p.a.), and in *Phillips*, MT, May 25 (SD, JJ). Very rare in spring, White-winged Scoters were noted in *Hughes*, SD, Apr. 8 (DAT) and *Grand Forks*, ND, May 13 (EEF).

## HAWKS TO TERNS

Seldom noted away from the badlands, a Sharp-shinned Hawk nest was found in Sibley Park, Bismarck, ND (CDE, HCT). A Red-shouldered Hawk was at Sica Hollow S.P., SD, May 25 (JPS, TH, BE, p.a.), and North Dakota's 14th was present for 3 weeks at Sully's Hill National Game Preserve, be-