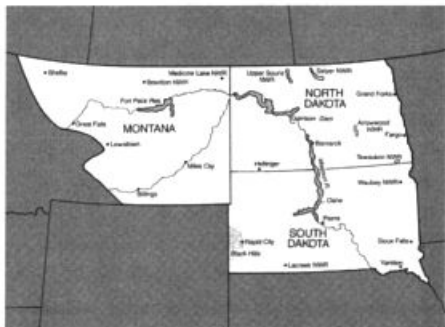


northern great plains region



RON MARTIN

It was a mild season with only a few brief cold periods in late December and January. Snowfall was average or above average in northeast Montana and northern North Dakota, but the rest of the Region often had little snow cover. There were no major blizzards, and the snow that fell in November was generally gone by early December. Some large lakes that froze over in November were open again by December, and lingering waterfowl were widespread. The warm weather up to the Christmas Bird Count period also produced numerous late passerines. Good numbers of open field species wintered in northern areas of the Region, but many northern birds failed to make an appearance. *Italicized dates indicate record-late birds.*

LOONS THROUGH HAWKS

The **Pacific Loon** reported in the fall season at Oahe Dam, SD, remained to Dec. 3 (MMM), and the individual at Garrison Dam, ND, was last noted Dec. 12 (HCT, CDE). A late Com. Loon was in *Meade*, SD, Dec. 12 (RAS), and two lingered until Dec. 10 in *Charles Mix*, SD (RM).

A Pied-billed Grebe at Fargo, ND, Dec. 5 provided the first winter record for *Cass* (DPW). Furnishing the first winter season records for their respective states, Red-necked Grebes were noted Dec. 12 in *Mercer*, ND (REM) and in *Charles Mix*, SD, Dec. 28 (LAS, RM). An Eared Grebe at Hettinger Dec. 5 was the latest ever recorded in North Dakota (DAG, CG). Winter season records of Double-crested Cormorant continue to

increase; no less than 12 reports were received, including North Dakota's latest and first CBC record at Garrison Dam Dec. 19; a first for South Dakota, the species apparently wintered in *Yankton* (SVS).

Six Blue-winged Teal were very late Dec. 2 in *Hughes*, SD (RDO), and a Surf Scoter Dec. 6 in *Kingsbury* provided the 2nd latest record for South Dakota (JSP, RFS). Northern Harriers were reported in higher-than-usual numbers, but, consistent with the lack of northern birds, N. Goshawks were few. A Red-shouldered Hawk in *Lincoln* Feb. 6 furnished the 3rd winter record for South Dakota (RFS). Rough-legged Hawks were widespread and present in above-average numbers; a mid-winter trip from Billings to Ft. Peck, MT, yielded 38 birds (CC); the species was moving N in good numbers by late February. Prairie Falcons were more frequently noted this winter, but the 5 Gyrfalcon reports from Montana were the only ones received.

PARTRIDGE THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Gray Partridge numbers remain low, and Wild Turkeys continue to increase in North Dakota. A Killdeer at Garrison Dam Dec. 12 provided the 3rd winter season record for North Dakota (HCT, CDE), and an early migrant was at Medicine L., MT, Feb. 26 (AJ).

A Bonaparte's Gull at Garrison Dam, ND, Dec. 12 was the latest for that state by 8 days (REM). Also at Garrison Dam Dec. 12 was an Iceland Gull, providing North Dakota's 12th record, and a **Lesser Black-backed Gull**. The latter furnished the 6th state record, and the species has now been recorded 4 consecutive years at Garrison Dam (REM, HCT, CDE). The usual peaks of large gulls at Garrison Dam and Ft. Peck never materialized this year.

Furnishing South Dakota's 6th record, a **Eurasian Collared-Dove** wintered in *Hughes* (RDO). Mourning Doves were more widespread than usual. Snowy Owl numbers were very low, but Short-eared Owls made a good showing.

A Red-bellied Woodpecker was unusual in *Kidder*, ND, Dec. 5-8 (CDE). Providing

the 5th winter record for South Dakota, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was noted in *Charles Mix* Jan. 9 and Feb. 14 (LAS, RM). Pileated Woodpeckers appear to be on the increase in e. North Dakota, and an individual in *Bottineau* Feb. 13 furnished the 6th record for the Turtle Mts. (REM, HCT, CDE).

HORNED LARK THROUGH WARBLERS

Horned Larks wintered in good numbers across the n. part of the Region. Brown Creepers were present in usual numbers, with seemingly everyone reporting a few individuals; after no CBC reports in e. Montana last year, 10 were noted this year, and a single wintered at Ft. Peck for the first time (CC). A Winter Wren spent the season in *Meade*, SD (MMM).

Two E. Bluebirds Dec. 20 on the Grand Forks, ND, CBC provided the first CBC and 2nd winter records for that state (DOL). The species wintered in 2 s. South Dakota counties and was also noted in *Day* Jan. 30 (JSP, RFS). Bohemian Waxwings were generally distributed in Montana and North Dakota. They were noted in higher than usual numbers in South Dakota, with a peak of 6000 in *Butte* Jan. 9 (RAS).

Casual in winter, Yellow-rumped Warblers were noted in *Yankton*, SD, Dec. 15 (SVS), and three were recorded on the Billings, MT, CBC. The year of the **Pine Warbler** in the Dakotas continued into the winter; North Dakota's latest and first for the winter season was photographed in Grand Forks Dec. 5-10 (DOL); this species joins Ovenbird and Yellow-rumped Warbler as the only warbler species on record for December in North Dakota. In South Dakota, a Pine Warbler spent the season far to the west in *Meade* (APB). This individual furnished the first winter record for that state. These two individuals bring the 1998 total for the species in the Dakotas to eight.

SPARROWS THROUGH EVENING GROSBREAK

If accepted, a Lark Sparrow in *Charles Mix*, SD, Dec. 28 would provide the latest record

for that state (LAS). Among the several White-throated Sparrow reports was an unusual peak of six on the Grand Forks CBC Dec. 20. This species wintered for the first time at Ft. Peck, MT (CC). Harris's Sparrows were also more numerous than normal.

Lapland Longspurs wintered in good numbers in w. North Dakota, and a flock of 70 was noted N of Bowdoin N.W.R., MT, Dec. 19 (DP). Snow Buntings were present in good numbers in North Dakota.

Five Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch reports were received from Montana and the Black Hills of South Dakota. Very few Purple Finches were reported. A single male House Finch returned to Ft. Peck Feb. 25 (CC). More widespread than in recent years in South Dakota, Red Crossbills were noted in 11 counties. Also widespread in North Dakota, the species was territorial in many areas by the end of the period, and an occupied nest was found in Mandan Feb. 21 (CDE). Only one White-winged Crossbill report was received.

Common Redpolls were in low numbers, but Pine Siskins and Am. Goldfinches were widespread. Pine Siskins peaked at 700 in Grand Forks Jan. 20 (EEF), and Am. Goldfinches topped out at 310 on the Garrison Dam, ND, CBC Dec. 19. Evening Grosbeaks were almost non-existent.

CORRIGENDA

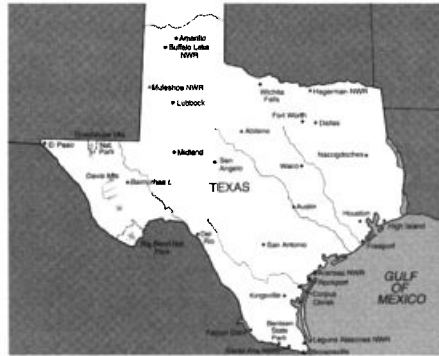
In *Field Notes* 52:215-216, the Pied-billed Grebe in *McLean* Dec. 14 represented the 2nd December record and 2nd latest for North Dakota. The Am. Coot in *Mercer*, ND, Dec. 16 should have read Dec. 6, the 2nd latest for North Dakota. In *Field Notes* 52:348, the Merlin nesting in *Grand Forks* was the first nesting away from the badlands since the 1920s.

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texas region



GREG W. LASLEY, CHUCK SEXTON, MARK LOCKWOOD, WILLIE SEKULA, and CLIFF SHACKELFORD

Mild, dry, and dull were the operative terms for this ho-hum season. Aside from a few brief cold snaps in the northern half of the state, there was "little real winter weather." A roadside sign in Austin, set amongst the new greenery and early wildflowers on a 75°F day in late January, read "These Hill Country winters sure are brutal." The central mountains of the Trans-Pecos got a good moisture-laden storm in early December, and an ice storm in late January in the northern Panhandle left Amarillo looking like a war zone with downed tree limbs lying about. Very locally, Rockport reported about four inches rain, but other than these notable exceptions a great portion of the state was dry and getting drier through the period.

Punctuated only by a single spectacular gull report, avid listers had few "zingers" to chase. As the mildness of the winter rolled on, most observers went about the countryside dutifully documenting the wide diversity of unexpected over-wintering species. Warblers always seem to hold sway in the lists compiled in years such as this, but it was also a season of hummingbirds, night-hawks, Swainson's Hawks, and Scissor-tails. Locally, there was an interesting changeover of avifaunas to monitor at Lake Balmorhea after a planned fish kill, and prairie bird censuses to initiate in eastern portions of the state. Wintering species such as House Wren and Common Yellowthroat, which a majority of observers at lower latitudes take

for granted, gained mention well to the north.

The timely and widespread dissemination of information on sightings (both the special and the mundane) has now become expected on the Internet as the number of subscribers for National Audubon Society's *TexBirds* discussion list continued to grow along with the willingness of subscribers to post just about everything that passed in front of their binoculars. Perhaps due to the dullness of the season and perhaps also due to the growing mindset of some to consider the quarterly publication of such birding information as increasingly outmoded, we saw the ranks of primary contributors continue to shrink.

We fondly dedicate this column to the memory of our friend and long-time Texas birder Sheriton Burr, who passed away in late March. Sheriton was a true gentleman; gracious and unassuming, knowledgeable and generous. Sheriton was an inveterate voyager on pelagic birding trips and, through his records keeping and encouragement, he played an inspirational role in the recent revolution in our understanding of the off-shore avifauna of Texas.

Abbreviations: L.R.G.V. (*Lower Rio Grande Valley*); T.B.R.C. (*Texas Bird Records Committee/Texas Ornithological Society*); T.P.R.F. (*Texas Photo Record File, Texas A & M University*); U.T.C. (*Upper Texas Coast*) V.C.D.B. (*Village Creek Drying Beds, Arlington, Tarrant Co.*). The following are shortened names for the respective county, state, or national parks, wildlife refuges, etc.: Aransas, Bentsen, Big Bend, Brazos Bend, Caprock Canyons, Pedernales Falls, and San Bernard.

LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

Red-throated Loons showed up at a pace of about one per month: single birds were at Cooper L., *Delta/Hopkins*, Dec. 9 (†MWh); Galveston I. Dec. 23 (JSt); L. Tawakoni Jan. 25 (†SML); and at Lake O' The Pines, *Marion*, Feb. 16 (CCo). About 11 Pacific Loons scattered across the state were perhaps the highest seasonal tally ever, more evidence of why the T.B.R.C. took the species off the Texas Review List 2 years ago. A very unseasonal nesting pair of Least Grebes was active at San Antonio's Mitchell