

# prairie provinces region



**RUDOLF F. KOES  
and PETER TAYLOR**

**M**ajor weather effects were felt across the Region. In the south, wet and cool conditions persisted from May through June and into July. Calgary, Alberta, reported cloudy, cold, and wet weather; it even snowed in several areas of the province on 15 July. Southeastern Saskatchewan and southwestern Manitoba were particularly hard hit: flooded fields prevented most farmers from seeding, and many waterfowl appeared to be flooded out. Later-breeding species—such as Eared Grebes, Soras, American Coots, and Black Terns—took advantage of the situation and nested in huge numbers in ephemeral wetlands. In Saskatchewan, Mary Houston found 223 dead Tree Swallows in 240 nest boxes after two particularly nasty days in late June. Conversely, northern areas experienced warmer and drier weather than normal: the resulting tally of “southern” species in Churchill was truly staggering.

## EGRETS THROUGH GULLS

A Great Egret near Innisfail, AB, 13 Jun (BH) and a Green Heron at Riding Mountain N.P., MB, 15 Jun (JL & VENT) were the only rare herons reported. White-faced Ibis continued its slow expansion in Alberta, where two pairs nested near Calgary (B&EG, TK, GO) and two–three pairs nested at Blizzard L. (MH). Eight Brant at Churchill 13 Jun were properly documented, a rare occurrence for this species (FT, MP). A pair of Cinnamon Teal was far east at Broomhill, MB, 8 Jun (GH & TS). A count of 99 Com. Mergansers at Churchill 5 Jun was one of the highest ever there (RK et al.).

Ospreys expanded their range in Saskatchewan to the Rosthern, Hague, and North Battleford areas, but nesting success was poor (SH). Swainson’s Hawks had their



**Black-necked Stilt continued to breed near Calgary, north of its traditional range, for the second successive year; this year there was successful breeding at three sites, up from two last year. This adult with four juveniles was near Shepard, Alberta, on 26 July. Photograph/Terry Korolyk**

**SA** Churchill, Manitoba, experienced an unprecedented influx of species more commonly associated with the s. Prairie Provinces and beyond. An early snow melt, coupled with ice breakup on Hudson Bay a month earlier than normal, allowed May temperatures at Churchill to climb to June values. At the same time conditions to the south were cold and wet, apparently causing numerous migrants to overshoot their normal breeding ranges; more sedentary species were also caught up in this movement. Only the highlights are indicated below, generally for species for which fewer than 10 records exist for the area (Table 1).

**Table 1  
“Southern” Species at Churchill in Summer 1999**

Species	Individuals	Date	Observers*
Turkey Vulture	1	20 Jun	JL & VENT
Trumpeter Swan	1	21–23 Jun	BC & CWE
American Coot	1	4 & 13 Jun	LdeM, RC; RK & CNSC2
Willet	1	13–28 Jun	DF
Franklin’s Gull	1	3 Jun	<i>fide</i> BC
	1	21 Jun	JL & VENT
Forster’s Tern	1	5 Jun	LdeM, RC
Hairy Woodpecker	1 male	11+ Jun	RK & CNSC1
	1 female	15 Jun	NB & LIMOSA
Olive-sided Flycatcher	1	8 Jun	TW & CNSC1
Eastern Kingbird	1	11 Jun	TW & CNSC1
	1	18 Jun	FT, MP
Red-eyed Vireo	1	5 Jul	NH Audubon
Black-billed Magpie	1	3–20 Jun	m.ob.
Brown Creeper	1–3	4+ Jun	m.ob.
		(nest 19 Jun)	<i>fide</i> BC
Winter Wren	2 males	8 Jun (only 1 later)	LdeM, RC, CNSC1
Gray Catbird	1	18 Jun	BC
	2	26 Jun	MW, AC, JK
	1	1 Jul	RM
Nashville Warbler	1 male	16 Jun	RK
Magnolia Warbler	1	4 Jun	WINGS tour
Clay-colored Sparrow	1–4	4–11 Jun	BC
Lark Bunting	1 female	6 Jun	HF
Le Conte’s Sparrow	1 male	5 Jun	RK & CNSC1
	1 male	16 Jun	NB & LIMOSA
Bobolink	1 male	16 Jun	BC & CWE

\* “&” denotes initial observer within a group; “,” denotes individual sightings.



**A male Black-headed Grosbeak photographed at a feeder near Bragg Creek, Alberta, on 24 July was one of several individuals and pairs of this species found outside their normal range in the province. Photograph/Terry Korolyk**

worst year in a 30-year study on the Saskatchewan prairies—e.g., there were 16 nests (only 4 successful) near Kindersley vs. 30 in 1998 and 60 in 1987. At Kyle, 5 nests produced five young, compared to 30 fledged from 16 nests in 1998. The wet spring and low numbers of Richardson's Ground Squirrels likely contributed to the poor results. Populations in the parkland regions farther north fared better (SH, JH, DZ). It was a better year for Ferruginous Hawks: 195 young were banded in 72 nests in Saskatchewan (SH), while a straggler was far east at Spruce Siding Rd., MB, 5 Jun (GH & TS). Three different Golden Eagles were noted near Churchill 5–7 Jun (BC, JJ), and a Gyrfalcon there 5 Jun was late (LdeM). Prairie Falcons did well in Saskatchewan, with 40 young from 11 nests (SH). One Prairie Falcon frequented Oak Hammock Marsh, MB, 27–31 July (RK, GH, CCs).

A count of 148 Semipalmated Plovers at Oak Hammock Marsh 31 Jul was high (GH, CCs). Like last year, Black-necked Stilts bred in the vicinity of Calgary and produced young at 3 sites (TK et al.), with others noted elsewhere in s. Alberta at Keho L. (MH) and Stirling L. (*vide* LV). Good shorebird counts were 300 Lesser Yellowlegs at Carseland, AB, 18 Jul (TK) and 70+ Marbled Godwits at Oak Lake, MB, 4 Jul (DH).

The godwits were all in pairs and may have been breeders that failed due to the wetness. Some 15 Pomarine Jaegers were sighted 15–17 Jun at Churchill (m.ob.). Rare gulls at Churchill included up to four Little Gulls present through at least June (m.ob.), single ad. Mew Gulls 4 Jun (RP, CNSC1) and 21 Jun–4 Jul (JL & VENT, m.ob.), a Lesser Black-backed Gull 2 Jun (*vide* BC, no details), and a single Ross's Gull, seen sporadically from 6 Jun onwards (BC et al.).

#### **CUCKOOS THROUGH FINCHES**

A Black-billed Cuckoo at Dinosaur P.P., AB, 30 Jun was a rarity (RWe, WS). A Snowy Owl was first reported at

Churchill 15 Jun and later attracted much attention; it may have been a rehabilitated bird released earlier in the year (RK, CNSC2 et al.). Northern Hawk Owls reportedly nested at Churchill again (*vide* LdeM). Accidental anywhere in Alberta, a **White-throated Swift** was at Dinosaur P.P. 22 Jun (CH). Somewhat less out-of-range were single Lewis's Woodpeckers at Turner Valley, AB, 13 Jun (JR et al.) and at Maycroft, AB, 6 Jul (WS, CW). Single Red-headed Woodpeckers visited Brooks and Medicine Hat, AB, 11 Jul (J&MM). A Red-bellied Woodpecker visited Pierson, MB, 6 Jun and later (RWa), and at least two Black-backed Woodpecker pairs produced young at Churchill (m.ob.).

In s.e. Manitoba Willow Flycatchers were beyond their normal range at Spruce Siding Rd. 5 Jun (GH & TS) and the E. Braintree-Sprague area (four birds!) 28 Jun (GH, CCs, RS). A **Gray Flycatcher** at Calgary in late June and early July was Alberta's first. Seen by many, it was photographed and tape-recorded (JP et al.). Loggerhead Shrikes, continuing their decline in Manitoba, decreased another 25% in the southwest (KD); they were also down in s.w. Saskatchewan (*vide* BL) and in the Calgary area, although one nest was found near the city 25 Jul (TK, MB). A Rock Wren visited Altona, MB, 12 Jun (DS, MK). Another at Churchill 16–21 Jun provided the 4th record for the area (TS et al.). A **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** at Elma 5 Jun was Manitoba's 6th (GH & TS). A female N. Wheatear at Churchill 15 Jun was about the 12th for the area (NB &

LIMOSA). Hermit Thrushes were more common than usual at Churchill, with eight heard 4 Jun (CNSC1). A Wood Thrush was a rare find at Pierson, MB, 8 Jun (*vide* KD & CCt), as was a N. Mockingbird banded at Beaverhill Bird Observatory, AB, 8 Jun (TF, CP) and another at Taber, AB, 22 Jun (LB). An Am. Pipit at Gimli, MB, 24 Jul was out-of-season (RK). A Black-throated Green Warbler at Calgary 13 Jun was unexpected at that time of year (DB), and single Scarlet Tanagers at Delbourne 20 Jun (GO) and Big Hill Springs P.P. 21 Jun (MS) were rare for Alberta. One of only a few well-documented Spotted Towhees in Manitoba sang near Lauder 3–10 Jul (AW, RP et al.). Pushing the edge of their normal Alberta range were Black-headed Grosbeaks at Bragg Cr., Lethbridge, Nanton, and Turner Valley between mid-June and late July; both pairs and single birds were seen (m.ob.). Male Lazuli Buntings were at Brandon Hills, MB, 10 Jun (NB & LIMOSA) and at Lyleton, MB, 25 Jun (RK). White-winged Crossbills were prominent at Paint L., MB, where at least 250 were noted 14 Jun (NB & LIMOSA).

**Contributors (subregional compilers in boldface):** R. Barclay, D. Beers, L. Bennett, G. Booth, M. Breiteneder, N. Brinkley, A. Campbell, B. Chartier, R. Clarke, CNSC1 (*Churchill Northern Studies Centre birding group 1*: L. & R. Jansson, R. Koes, S. Loeppky, R. Parsons, R. & T. Will), CNSC2 (*Churchill Northern Studies Centre group 2*: G. & S. Grief, R. Koes, Max Reid, Millie Reid, M. Yorke, R. Zach), C. Cuthbert (CCt), C. Curtis (CCs), CWE (*Churchill Wilderness Encounter*), L. de March, K. DeSmet, D. Fast, T. Flockhart, H.-G. Folz, B. & E. Goulet, J. Harris, M. Harrison, D. Hatch, B. Heinzman, C. Hitchon, G. Holland, S. Houston, J. Jehl, Jr., D. Jermyn, A. Kimberley, J. Knys, R. Koes, T. Korolyk, M. Krueger, J. Langham, LIMOSA (European birding tour company), B. Luterbach, B. Maybank, J. & M. McDonald, R. Mumford, Jr., G. Olin, R. Parsons, M. Peters, J. Podlubny, C. Priestly, J. Riddell, D. Schmitt, C. Sidwell, W. Smith, E. & M. Spitzer, R. Staniforth, F. Teeuwen, TS (*"Team Sweden" group*), VENT (*Victor Emanuel Nature Tours*), L. Vogt, A. Walley, R. Wang (RWa), C. Wershler, R. Wershler (RWe), T. Will, M. Wilson, D. Zazelenchuk, W. & L. Zwick.

**Rudolf F. Koes**, 135 Rossmere Cres., Winnipeg, MB, R2K 0G1 and **Peter Taylor**, Box 597, Pinawa, MB, R0E 1L0

