

# northern great plains region

**Dwarfed by the American Avocets in the background, this Snowy Plover at Minot on 9 July established a third North Dakota state record. The previous record occurred at Grand Forks on 1 May. Photograph/Gordon Berkey**

## RON MARTIN

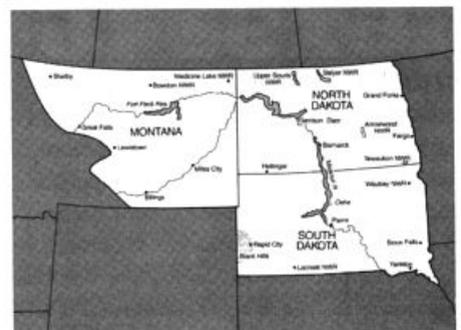
It was another wet season with precipitation well above average except in central Montana, where dry conditions prevailed. As has been the case for several years now, waterbirds and wet meadow species were present in good numbers and nesting success was good. The wet conditions prevented many farmland acres from being planted; while this imperiled troubled farmers, it was good for birds. Nesting activity was still strong at the end of the period.

Season highlights included possible first state records for Blue-throated Hummingbird and Eurasian Collared-Dove in North Dakota. Second North Dakota nestings were established for Golden-winged Warbler and Black-necked Stilt. South Dakota had its third White-winged Dove, and a Snowy Plover established a third state record for North Dakota.

## LOONS THROUGH GULLS

A **Pacific Loon** on a small impoundment in Meade, SD, 4 Jun furnished only the 5th record for the state (@DAT). Rarely reported in North Dakota, a Least Bittern was in Kidder, ND, 9 Jun (PB). Thirteen Great Egrets were n.w. of their present—but expanding—range in Sheridan, ND, 13 Jun (REM). Rare breeders in Montana, Snowy Egrets nested at Bowdoin N.W.R. 15 Jun, a first breeding record for the refuge (DP). A Tricolored Heron was noted 10 Jul at an egret colony in Clark, SD, where one was reported in the spring (RFS, @JSP). A Ross's Goose remained in Kidder, ND, until 10 Jun, providing the first summer record for the state (HCT); another was observed at Bowdoin, MT, 15 Jun (DP). A brood of six Wood Ducks below Tiber Dam, MT, 18 Jul furnished the first breeding record for Latilong 5 (HM). An unusual concentration of 4000 Redheads was noted in Benson, ND, 25 Jul (GBB).

**SA** Raptors nesting in significant numbers in urban areas are a relatively recent phenomenon. Surprisingly, some of the highest known nesting densities for Cooper's Hawks (Rosenfield et al. 1955, *Journal of Raptor Research* 29: 1–4) and Merlins (Sodhi et al. 1993, *The Birds of North America*, no. 44) occur in urban habitat. North Dakota observers have documented this new habitat acceptance by Cooper's Hawks over the last decade: city parks were occupied beginning in the late 1980s followed by residential areas in recent years—including the Governor's backyard in Bismarck. It is believed that 5–10 pairs use the Grand Forks area (DOL), with similar densities in Minot (REM) and Fargo (G. Nielsen). Merlins are beginning to follow the same pattern in the state. While the expansion of winter range and colonization of urban centers by this species began on the Canadian plains some 30 years ago (Sodhi et al., *ibid.*), the process has taken a little longer in North Dakota. The increase in winter Merlin numbers began in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At about the same time, numbers of wintering and nesting Am. Crows began to increase significantly. With old crow nests increasingly available for nesting sites, Merlins moved into urban areas to breed. Nesting occurred from 1995 to 1998 in downtown Dickinson (B. Cornatzer), in the last two years in Grand Forks (DOL), and at Minot A.E.B. in 1998. As noted previously for Cooper's Hawks (Boal & Mannan 1998, *Journal of Wildlife Management* 62: 864–871), levels of human disturbance seem to have little influence on nest site selection for either species. We will continue to monitor this unfolding story.



Casual in e. South Dakota in summer, an Osprey was in *Roberts* 9 Jul (DRS). A N. Goshawk nest was located n.w. of Chester, MT, 19 Jun, providing the first recorded nesting for the species in the Sweetgrass Hills (HM). An imm. Red-shouldered Hawk reported 23 Jun at Clark Salyer N.W.R. (*fide* DOL) was near where an individual was noted in the spring season. Providing rare summer records in their respective areas were single Broad-winged Hawks 2 Jun in the Little Rockies, MT (SD, DE, JF, TH), and in the Killdeer Mts., ND (DOL). A former and possibly current breeder in the Black Hills, a Peregrine Falcon was in *Meade*, SD, 27 Jun (@REP).

Casual in South Dakota, a Com. Moorhen was in *Day* 23 Jun (@WAS). Hot on the heels of this spring's 2nd state record, North Dakota's 3rd **Snowy Plover** was photographed at Minot 9 Jul (@REM, LEM, LRM, ph. GBB). The 900 ad. Piping Plovers in the area between *McLean*, ND, and n.e. Montana produced an average of 1.6 chicks per pair this year (BD). A **Black-necked Stilt** first noted in *Grand Forks*, ND, in May was joined by another on 5 Jun. Three half-grown young were found with them 31 Jul for the 2nd confirmed breeding record in the state (EEF, DOL). Becoming somewhat regular in South Dakota, a Black-necked Stilt was noted in early June in *Day* (JE). A Whimbrel 18 Jun in *Grand Forks*, ND, was a very late migrant (DOL). Wilson's Phalarope peak numbers included 11,000 at Bowdoin, MT, 24 Jul (SD) and 6000 at the Minot Sewage Lagoons, ND, 30 Jul (REM). A jaeger in *Bottineau*, ND, 11 Jul was thought to be a Parasitic, but positive identification was not possible (GBB). There are now 2 July jaeger records for North Dakota. A **Little Gull** found with Franklin's Gulls in *Brown*, SD, 29 Jun provided the 4th record for that state (@IV).

#### DOVES THROUGH ORIOLES

North Dakota became the last state in the Region to record **Eurasian Collared-Dove** with its first found in *Towner* 18 Jul (HCT, @CDE). Montana's 4th record for the species was provided by an individual that frequented a feeder through the period in Malta (@GF). South Dakota's 3rd **White-winged Dove** spent the season in *Potter* (@LS). Common Nighthawks seem to be on the decline in North Dakota, particularly in cities. As has been suggested for the Hudson-Delaware Region (*Field Notes* 49(5): 914), the increase in Am. Crow nesting in cities has coincided with a decrease in rooftop nesting populations of night-

hawks. A Whip-poor-will in *Harding* 2 Jun provided a rare record for w. South Dakota (REM, HCT). Two Chimney Swifts spent the period in Malta, MT, at the w. edge of their range (SD). Documentation was received for a possible **Blue-throated Hummingbird** in *Grand Forks*, ND, 6 Jun (AS, @EEF); if accepted, this record would be the first for the state and Region. On a more sober note, many reporters in North Dakota mentioned that Red-headed Woodpeckers seemed to be on the decline in recent years.

A rare nester and a species that is difficult to find in S. Dakota, a single Cassin's Kingbird was noted in *Custer* 4 Jun (RAP). A vagrant Com. Raven was at Lostwood N.W.R., ND, in late June (JH, SH, CW). Accidental in summer, a Carolina Wren spent the season in *Minnehaha*, SD (@MKZ). A **Golden-winged Warbler** seen carrying food into a thicket at Graham's Island S.P. 8 Jul documented the 2nd nesting for the species in North Dakota (DC, @SC). A total of seven reports of July migrant Tennessee Warblers in the Dakotas was higher than usual. A **Chestnut-sided Warbler**, seen at Sanford Park on the Marias R. 1 Jun (@HM), provided about the 6th record for w. Montana. In North Dakota, a single Chestnut-sided in Fargo 10 Jul provided the first summer record away from nesting areas (DPW). A Blackburnian Warbler was very late in *Day*, SD, 8 Jun (CS). A Prothonotary Warbler 9 Jun in *Meade* furnished the 3rd record for w. South Dakota (@EEM). Casual in that state, a Kentucky Warbler found 2 & 12 Jun in *Lincoln* (@RFS) was at Newton Hills S.P., where one was present last June.

A Dickcissel present 17 Jun-17 Jul near Roy, *Fergus* (MW, m.ob.), provided the 16th Montana record and the first since 1986. A Henslow's Sparrow in *Grand Forks*, ND, 4-9 Jun was the 17th record for the state (DOL). South of their regular South Dakota range, Le Conte's Sparrows were in *Sanborn* 11 Jun-24 Jul (RGR) and in *Brookings* (KB). As yet unconfirmed nesters in S. Dakota, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows were quite far south 19 Jun and 10 Jul in Kingsbury (JSP) and 1 Jul in *Sanborn* (RGR). Both Le Conte's and Sharp-tailed sparrows were again present in above-average numbers in N. Dakota. Accidental in summer, a White-throated Sparrow was singing 7-13 Jul in *Day*, SD (@DRS). A White-crowned Sparrow was out-of-range in Zortman, MT, 16 & 21 Jul (SD, AF, TH). Two Dark-eyed Juncos in the Pembina Gorge of North Dakota 17 Jul (CDE, HCT)

provided the first record for the state in that month. A McCown's Longspur in *Harding*, SD, 19 Jun was notable (@TJ); there are no recent breeding records for the state. A Baltimore Oriole was far west in Harlowton, MT, 15 Jun (R&RW).

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