

southern great plains



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The exceptionally warm winter weather this season made it difficult to distinguish the Southern Great Plains Region from the Gulf States or Texas. The Nebraska report resembled Oklahoma's in a more typical year of a decade past, with species such as American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, and Northern Shoveler becoming "expected." Individuals of many species that might winter a little farther north did, and didn't necessarily "sign" their death warrants. At the same time, it was also quite a season for rarities. In addition to the more friendly climate, there was also the factor of birding for the first time in our current millennium that probably spurred birders to find these lagards and displaced vagrants. A humbly condensed summary follows.

Abbreviations: Cheyenne Bottoms (*Cheyenne Bottoms W.M.A., Barton, KS*); McConaughy (*L. McConaughy, Keith, NE*); L. Ogallala (*L. Ogallala, Keith, NE*); Quivira (*Quivira N.W.R., Stafford, KS*).

LOONS THROUGH DUCKS

A Red-throated Loon was discovered in Oklahoma 7 Jan (JAG). A Pac. Loon, present since 31 Oct, was still being observed in Reno, KS, through 2 Feb (CG). An ad. and an imm. Com. Loon apparently wintered at McConaughy (WRS et al.), providing only the 4th mid-winter report in Nebraska (*vide*

WRS). They were widespread in Oklahoma.

A Red-necked Grebe, certainly a rare migrant, was noted 3 Dec in Tulsa (JWA), while three (two ad., one imm.) wintered at L. Ogallala and McConaughy (SJD, BFH), a first for Nebraska (*vide* WRS). Among W. Grebes overwintering at McConaughy were seven Clark's present to at least 28 Jan (SJD). One Clark's was at *Scotts Bluff*, NE, 2 Dec (SJD). At least one of 41 Double-crested Cormorants noted in *Harlan*, NE, 17 Dec (*vide* JGJ) made it through the winter; another was in *Douglas*, NE, 29 Jan (JGJ).

Among ardeids with northern inclinations were two Great Egrets 24 Feb in Tulsa (JWA) and one 26 Feb in *Leavenworth*, KS (JS). An injured Green Heron survived to at least 27 Jan in *Cleveland*, OK (JAG). A Black-crowned Night-Heron was at Cheyenne Bottoms 3 Jan (MG). Even more unexpected were White-faced Ibises at Quivira 18 Dec (BG, MR), *McCurtain*, OK, 19 Dec (BH), Cheyenne Bottoms 3 Jan (MG), and *Kingfisher*, OK, 29 Feb (JWA). Up to four ibises identified simply as *Plegadis* sp. were noted in *McCurtain*, OK 8 & 14 Dec (DA, BH). A Turkey Vulture in *Buffalo*, NE, 27 Feb (LB) was exceptionally early.

Geese were on the move by mid-February. About 50 Greater White-fronted Geese arrived by 13 Feb in *Phelps*, NE (LR, RH). About 20,000 Snow Geese were moving over *Buffalo*, NE, 20 Feb (LR, RH); 4,000 were over *Lancaster*, NE, 22 Feb (SH); and 1,500 were in *Phelps*, NE, 13 Feb (LR, RH). Ross's Geese were more sparsely reported, with 14 in *Scotts Bluff*, NE, 4 Dec (SJD); 51 in *Sequoyah*, OK 5 Dec (SB); 50 in *Trego*, KS, 16 Dec (SS); 55+ in *Pawnee*, KS, 27 Dec (SS); and six 18 Jan in *McCurtain*, OK (BH). A blue-morph Ross's was identified in *Reno*, KS, 24 Dec (CG).

Trumpeter Swan observations are becoming more commonplace in the Region, with 37 birds reported from Nebraska (*vide* WRS) and 19 from Kansas (LM). Some collared birds originated from Minnesota. Two Trumpeters were noted s. to *Osage*, OK, 2 Jan (*vide* DWo). Swan identification became an issue when 13 swans 18 Dec in Tulsa were considered *Cygnus* sp. (BGa, MA, JM). Among Tundra Swans were two noted in *Mitchell*, KS, 10 Dec (KDWP), one in *Cimarron*, OK, 1 Jan (JSt), one imm. in *Knox*, NE, 30 Jan (MB), six in *Rush*, KS, 6 Feb (DiS, SS, StS), and three at

Quivira 20–26 Feb (CG).

There was a small flood of Am. Black Ducks this season, with up to three in *Lancaster*, NE (JB, JSu), five reported from Kansas (*vide* LM), and from as far s. as *Comanche*, OK, 7 Jan (JAG) and *Wagoner*, OK, 24 Jan (JWA). Exceptional was a imm. male Blue-winged Teal in *Keith*, NE, 29 Jan (SJD), only the 2nd documented in winter for Nebraska. "Oh, wow" describes Nebraska's first **Tufted Duck**, which wintered at *Keystone L., Keith*, NE (SJD, m.ob). When discovered 3 Dec, it had an obvious tuft, which later disappeared but which became prominent again by 5 Feb (SJD). Greater Scaup also wintered in excellent numbers at *Keystone L.*, where as many as 74 were present (SJD). About 40 others were reported in the Region (*vide* WRS, LM, JWA).

Scoters are sought after in the Region. Four Surfs were at *Keith*, NE, 4 Dec (SJD), with one still present 20 Jan (SJD, DCE, JSU). Others were noted at Cheyenne Bottoms 3 Dec (LH) and *Sedgwick*, KS, 14 Jan (PJ). White-wingeds were reported from *Keith*, NE, 16 Dec (SJD), *Harlan*, NE, 19 Dec (GH, WH), and *Harper*, OK 5 Feb (G&MK). A female and an imm. male Black Scoter were in *Keith*, NE, 2 Dec–15 Jan (SJD, WRS). Among 15 Long-tailed Ducks observed in the Region, only one made it as far s. as Oklahoma, on 26 Dec in *Pawnee* (JWA). Five Barrow's Goldeneye, 3 males and 2 females, were in *Keith*, NE, 5 Feb (SJD), a record count for the Region. Immature male Barrow's were noted in *Sedgwick*, KS, 9 Feb (PJ et al.) and *Lyon*, KS, 12 Feb (MS). One has to take note of the 225 Hooded Mergansers at *Trego*, KS, 16 Dec (SS). The poor ice conditions allowed 32,000 Com. Mergansers to accumulate in *Harlan*, NE, 22 Jan (JGJ). Red-breasted Mergansers have become too commonplace to report individually.

RAPTORS THROUGH GULLS

Reports of N. Goshawk were limited, with singles in *Douglas*, KS, 18 Dec (GP) and *Buffalo*, NE, 24 Jan (GL). Red-shouldered Hawks continue to inch westward, with one in *Sedgwick*, KS, 7 Jan (CG) and another in *Saunders*, NE, 23 Jan (TH). Occasional Golden Eagles can be found across the Region to the very se. corner; one was in *McCurtain*, OK, 29 Dec (DA). Merlins continued their upward trend and were widely reported this season.

Virginia Rails have been found to winter locally n. to Nebraska. Warm springs and seeps in the North Platte Valley of Nebraska contained 20 in *Keith*, five in *Morrill*, and seven in *Scotts Bluff* 20 Feb (SJD). Among the Virginias in *Cleveland*, OK, were up to six Soras 15–29 Jan (JAG). A sign of the season were the 1,500–2,000 Sandhill Cranes in *Barber*, KS, 26 Dec (CG). By 7 Feb, at least 5,000 were at *Quivira* (CG), with that many in *Buffalo*, NE, by 26 Feb (JJ, LB). A Whooping Crane at *Cheyenne Bottoms* 3 Dec–1 Jan (LH, MR, TC) was avoiding some recent tradition (the entire world population has wintered along the central Texas coast for decades now).

Killdeer first arrived 1 Feb at *Dodge*, NE (DP) and *Harlan*, NE (GH, WH). At least four Greater Yellowlegs wintered n. to *Keith*, NE 15 Jan (SJD). The high count of 25 in *Sumner*, *Stafford*, and *Barton*, KS, 26 Feb (CG, Thi) probably included migrants. A Willet 18 Dec at *Quivira* (BG, MR, SF, JL) has to be considered a bizarre occurrence. A Spotted Sandpiper was in *McCurtain*, OK, 30 Dec (BC, MD). Least Sandpipers wintered north to *Douglas*, KS, where four were noted 4–18 Dec (GP, DS). Occasionally wintering, Dunlins were noted in *McCurtain*, OK, 16 & 23 Jan (DA) and in *Tillman*, OK, 18 Jan (JSt). Exceptionally early migrants were two Baird's Sandpipers, one Pectoral Sandpiper, and six Long-billed Dowitchers 28 Feb in *Kingfisher*, OK, (JWA). At least four Com. Snipe wintered in *Keith*, NE (SJD).

How about a dark-morph juvenile **Pomarine Jaeger** at *McConaughy* 3 Dec (SJD), only the 8th for Nebraska? A jaeger species was noted in *Jefferson*, KS, 4 Dec (RR). And what would a winter be without gulls: 15 (!) species, pending a few reviews by records committees. A Franklin's Gull in *Harlan*, NE, 17 Dec (JGJ, SJD) was still present 22 & 25 Jan (JGJ, GH, WH). Other Franklin's were noted in *Douglas*, KS, 8 Jan (MM) and *Sedgwick*, KS, 5 Feb (CG, m.ob.). An ad. Little Gull was photographed in *Tulsa* 19 Dec (SM). An ad. **Mew Gull** was in *Lincoln*, NE, 16 Dec (SJD). As many as 41 California Gulls wintered at *McConaughy* (SJD, m.ob.). Up to eight Californias were reported from Kansas (*vide LM*). An excellent count of 800 Herring Gulls was made in *Harlan*, NE, 22 Jan (JGJ). Thayer's Gulls are now seemingly regular during winter, with 17 of several year classes reported from Nebraska; five from Kansas included an adult in *Sedgwick* 23 Jan (PJ). Two **Iceland Gulls** were reported, one in third-basic plumage in *Knox*, NE, 19 Dec (DLS)

and one possible first-winter bird in *Sedgwick*, KS, 24 Jan–18 Feb (PJ, CG, m.ob). Lesser Black-backed Gulls included an ad. 15 Dec in *Oklahoma* (JWA, JAG), second and third basic-plumaged birds in *Gosper/Dawson*, NE, 1 & 22 Jan (JGJ) and 30 Jan (LR, RH), an adult in *Sedgwick*, KS, 17 Jan–10 Feb (CG), and one in *Knox*, NE, 26 Feb (JSP). An ad. **Slaty-backed Gull**, pending review, was photographed in *Harlan*, NE, 22 Jan (JGJ). About 10 Glaucous Gulls were reported from Nebraska (*vide WRS*), seven from Kansas (*vide LM*), and two from Oklahoma. A possible first-winter **Glaucous-winged Gull** reported from *Sedgwick*, KS, 12 Feb (DW, PJ) will require review by the Kansas Bird Records Committee. A third-winter **Great Black-backed Gull** documented at *Cheyenne Bottoms* 26 Dec–8 Feb (GP) is also pending review. And, our "Where's-Waldo" Black-legged Kittiwake appeared in *Harlan*, NE, 17–18 Dec (SJD et al.), an adult, no less, while another adult was seen at *McConaughy* 29 Jan (SJD). Although none were reported for Nebraska or Kansas, Forster's Terns wintered in at least five Oklahoma counties (*vide JWA*) west to *Oklahoma* (JAG).

DOVES THROUGH FINCHES

Eurasian Collared-Doves, perhaps soon-to-be-ubiquitous, were found at three new locations in Nebraska this winter—*Keith*, *Dakota*, and *Cass*—for a total of nine Nebraska locations to date (*vide WRS*). They were noted in five Kansas counties, including 18 birds in *Stevens* 29 Jan (MM, GP) and at least one new location in Oklahoma, *Jackson* (JSt). A White-winged Dove was found in *Sedgwick*, KS, 3–19 Feb. (D&MC, m.ob). Inca Doves also continue to increase in number and locations, with reports of 1–6 birds from four Kansas locations (*vide LM*), and 1–7 from seven Oklahoma locations (*vide JWA*). Certainly among the surprises for the season were the four **Anna's Hummingbirds**, including an ad. female in *Saline*, KS, 13–25 Jan (DR), an ad. female in *Johnson*, KS, 7 Feb (CH), an ad. male 22–23 Dec in *Tulsa* (SW, JWA), and im. male 12–13 Feb, also in *Tulsa* (L&RN, JWA). These records equal the previous total for the Region. A Rufous Hummingbird graced a feeding station in *Delaware*, OK, 15 Dec–3 Jan (EW). As many as 45 N. Shrikes were tallied in w. Nebraska for the period (SJD), with 11 counted in se. Nebraska 17 Dec (*vide JG*); four were in Kansas (*vide LM*) and one 23 Dec in *Cimarron*, OK (JD, JO). Western Scrub-Jays ventured out on the plains to *Ford*, KS, 12 Dec

(JD) and *Morton*, KS, 20 Jan (BP, CW). A Tree Swallow lingered to 18 Dec in *Riley*, KS (TC, DB), while a Purple Martin appeared 21 Feb in *McCurtain*, OK (BH).

The edges of winter ranges are defined by the daring that submit to the risk of succumbing. If the elements show favor, and the preference of the birds is founded in their double helices, so range extensions occur. This winter went to the daring House Wrens occurred in *Morton*, KS, 31 Dec (SP et al.) and *Barber*, KS, 3 Jan (PJ et al.). Winter Wrens braved the potential trials of *McConaughy* (SJD), with two in *Garden*, NE, 19 & 26 Feb (SJD). A Ruby-crowned Kinglet persisted in *Lancaster*, NE, to at least 30 Dec (LE). A Hermit Thrush wintered in *Keith*, NE (SJD, DCE), and another was in *Buffalo*, NE, 13 Feb (LB), among only a handful of winter records. A Gray Catbird in *Sioux*, NE, 3 Jan (SL) was only the second January record for Nebraska (*vide WRS*). Another was in *Johnson*, KS, 3–28 Jan (MC). A Brown Thrasher made it through the winter in *Douglas*, NE (JB); another at *McConaughy* 2 Jan (*vide SJD*) was not subsequently reported.

Winter warblers anyone? An Orange-crowned Warbler lasted to at least 18 Dec in *Lancaster*, NE (LE). Quite amazing were the N. Parulas reported, one an imm. male in *Keith*, NE, 4 Dec (ph. SJD), and another in *Cowley*, KS, 19 Dec (MT). Eighteen Yellow-rumped Warblers were still in *Harlan*, NE, 1 Jan (GH, WH). Also quite a surprise was an imm. male Cape May Warbler in *Douglas*, KS, 30–31 Jan (JC, PW). A Pine Warbler was documented in *Riley*, KS, 18 Dec (DR). Two to three Com. Yellowthroats kept a few rails company in *Cleveland*, OK, during January (JAG).

Among the half-hardy sparrows, a Lincoln's was observed in *Buffalo*, NE, 29–30 Jan (LR, RH). Almost never reported during winter, Henslow's Sparrows were observed in *Riley*, KS, 18 Dec (MS), with one unusual also for its westerly location in *Barber*, KS, 26 Dec (CG). A Harris's Sparrow was at a *Scottsbluff*, NE, feeder throughout the period (*vide AK*), with several in *Sioux*, NE (SL). Far from Venezuela was a male Dickcissel in *Harlan*, OK, 1 Jan (GH, WH). A big surprise was the presence of a Gray-headed Junco in *Douglas*, NE, 16 Jan–14 Feb (PS). Snow Buntings managed their way s. only to *Pottawatomie*, KS, 24–30 Dec (DM, m.ob) and *Franklin*, KS, 31 Jan–6 Feb (JN, m.ob).

Among those lingering north were a male Yellow-headed Blackbird in *Scotts*

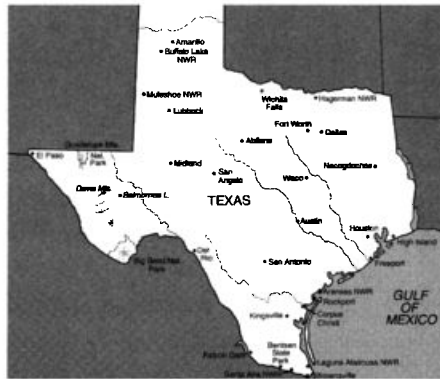
Bluff, NE, 4 Dec and again 20 Feb (SJD), with others in *Keith*, NE, 19 Feb (SJD). Rare westward was an ad. male Purple Finch in *Keith*, NE, 2 Jan (SJD), with a female in *Buffalo*, NE, 17 Jan (LR, RH). White-winged Crossbills were reported from *Burt*, NE, 5 Dec (JGJ), *Leavenworth*, KS, 15–28 Dec (GP, m.ob.), and *Morton*, KS, 31 Dec (SS). A Com. Redpoll was seen south in *Creek*, OK, 21 Jan (BGa).

Cited observers (area editors boldfaced):

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texas



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Observers tried to look for some silver lining around the edges of our “continuing saga of drought” (Sekula). The dry conditions forced raptors such as Red-tailed Hawks and Prairie Falcons to make foraging forays into urban Midland. Perhaps it was the lack of surface water in much of far west Texas (more so than usual) that prompted large concentrations of waterbirds at an oasis like Balmorhea and contributed to a memorable Christmas Bird Count there; the few other sizable west Texas water holes such as Imperial and Red Bluff Reservoirs were also hotspots. The record-low water levels of east Texas reservoirs prompted the winter occurrence of shorebirds and waders normally absent from that area. Longspurs in the northern Panhandle were principally confined to irrigated fields and sought moisture at leaky water wells or other precious local water sources. Only in our westernmost corner in El Paso was adequate rainfall reported; as well, deep south Texas (especially *Kenedy*) still had good freshwater levels as a fading reminder of Hurricane *Bret* last August. The lack of precipitation coupled with generally mild to warm temperatures were manifested in an unprecedented holdover of linger-

ing migrant passerines throughout the length of the state as well as an early push of northbound waterbirds in mid-February.

Abbreviations: L.R.G.V. (*Lower Rio Grande Valley*); S.S.W.T.P. (*South Side Water Treatment Plant, Dallas*); T.B.R.C. (*Texas Bird Records Committee—Texas Ornithological Society*); U.T.C. (*Upper Texas Coast*). Anzalduas, Aransas, Bentsen, Big Bend, Caprock Canyons, Garner, Hagerman, Huaco Tanks, Muleshoe, Palmetto, San Bernard, and Seminole Canyon are shortened names for the respective county, state, or national parks, wildlife refuges, etc.

LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

Three Red-throated Loons were reported from L. Texoma late Dec through mid-Feb (WM et al); the species has been annual there for about a decade. A total of nine Pac. Loons were scattered across the state; the most interesting was one picked up on U.S. 90 between Alpine and Marfa in w. Texas and eventually released at Balmorhea S.P. (*vide* KB, MAD). A gathering of 79 Pied-billed Grebes on Greenbelt L., *Donley*, 10 Feb was the largest group ever reported in the Panhandle (KS); another big concentration was 175 on Lake O’ The Pines, *Marion*, 3 Nov (HB). *Aechmophorus* grebes (and other waterbirds) rebounded at Balmorhea L. after being absent for several seasons following the planned fish kill in fall 1998 (KB). A symptom of the mild winter was the presence of large flocks of wintering Am. White Pelicans on several e. Texas reservoirs (e.g., ≤550 at Sam Rayburn Res.; DW, MW). Neotropical Cormorants pushed into e. Texas, a region with few prior records; there were reports from *Angelina*, *Gregg*, *Polk*, and *Smith*, including a first record for the Longview CBC. Seventy-eight Double-crested Cormorants in Lubbock through the winter was also a remarkable inland concentration (CSt). An Am. Bittern at Balmorhea S.P. 22 Jan+ was exceptional (TJ et al.). Sixty-six Great Egrets at L. Lonestar, *Morris*, 12 Jan must have been an impressive sight (DBro). Other unexpected wintering herons were a Little Blue in *Harrison*, 15 Dec (GLu, EdR), a Tricolored at Rio Grande Village, Big Bend, 27 Jan (BHe), and a Reddish Egret all winter at Balmorhea L. (ph. KB et al.), the latter providing a first Trans-Pecos winter record. White and *Plegadis* Ibises wintered in unprecedented numbers at inland loca-

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