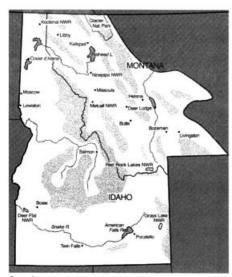
# idaho-western montana



### **David Trochlell**

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enjoyed a mild winter. Snowfall was relatively light, temperatures were above normal, and many lakes and reservoirs remained ice-free. Unlike typical winters, some colder mountain valley locations reported only a day or two of subzero temperatures. Open water, adequate food supplies, and warm temperatures encouraged record numbers of waterfowl and "half-hardy" species such as doves, wrens, and blackbirds to linger or overwinter. Winter finches were absent, with the exception of Common Redpolls.

Although the season's weather held few surprises, birders had plenty of excitement with the discoveries of several remarkable birds. Most incredible was the fact that the best birds of the winter season were a shorebird, a flycatcher, and a warbler! Please read on for the interesting details.

**Abbreviations:** A.F.R. (American Falls Res., by American Falls, ID); D.F.N.W.R. (Deer Flat N.W.R., Canyon, ID); Latilong (area encompassed by one degree latitude and one degree longitude, used in mapping bird distribution in both Idaho and Montana).

#### **LOONS THROUGH CRANES**

An imm. Yellow-billed Loon below A.F.R. dam 7 Dec–15 Feb (MCr, TS, m.ob.) provided the first winter record for Latilong 27. Unusually late grebes included a Pied-billed

in Flathead, MT, 3–8 Dec (SG), two Eareds in Boise, ID, 4 Dec (DT), and a Clark's in Gooding, ID, 18 Dec (m.ob.). Above-average numbers of Am. White Pelicans stayed in Idaho: up to eight wintered in Gooding (KF), one was in Lemhi 18 Dec (HR), one was at A.F.R. 26 Dec (CT), and three were in Owyhee 2 Jan (JD). Up to five Great Egrets were in Gooding, ID, 18 Dec–5 Feb (KF), where they are now expected in winter.

Higher-than-usual numbers of seasonally rare geese lingered in Idaho until mid-Jan, including two Greater White-fronteds, ≤36 Snows, and 11 Ross's. Record counts for Tundra Swans were reported on two CBCs: 268 on the Bigfork, MT, CBC 18 Dec and 245 on the American Falls, ID, CBC 26 Dec. A Mallard × N. Pintail hybrid was a noteworthy find in Helena, MT, 5 Dec (JS). As in the past several winters, a male Eur. Wigeon returned to Boise to winter. Two other Eurasians were in Kootenai, ID, 28 Dec (SS), and two were in Lewiston, ID, 2 Jan-6 Feb (KD, BJ, CS). Seldom reported in winter, 1-6 Long-tailed Ducks stayed below A.F.R. dam 1 Dec-7 Jan (CT, m.ob.) and one wintered in Canyon, ID. Several record duck counts were reported on CBCs, including 4144 Com. Goldeneyes at Bruneau, ID, 2 Jan, 103 Hooded Mergansers at Bigfork, MT, 18 Dec, and 798 Com. Mergansers at Nampa, ID, 26 Dec.

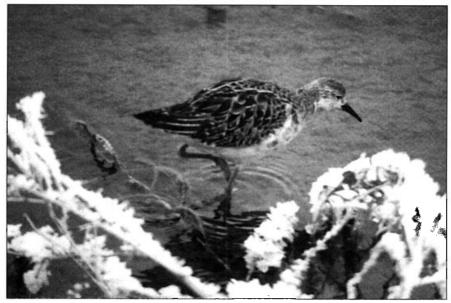
Although very rare in winter, two lingering Ospreys were tallied on the Libby, MT,

CBC 18 Dec and another, possibly an early migrant, was in *Gooding*, ID, 16 Feb (KF). The total of six Gyrfalcons observed during the period was about average. A Sora discovered near Bozeman 31 Dec (JRy) provided a rare winter record for Montana. The Sandhill Crane that overwintered in Blaine, ID (BS), and another at D.F.N.W.R. 4 Feb (JG) were unusual.

# SHOREBIRDS THROUGH FLYCATCHERS

Two Dunlins in *Canyon*, ID, 6–21 Feb were rare (JG, m.ob.), but another near Belgrade, MT, 16 Jan–29 Feb (MS, m.ob.) was even more unusual. The Greater Yellowlegs that persisted in *Nez Perce*, ID, 1 Dec–22 Jan (BJ, m.ob.) was rare but not unprecedented. An amazing discovery was Idaho's first **Ruff** at D.F.N.W.R. 26 Dec–9 Jan (ph. FH, †JG, m.ob.). Almost as surprising was an **American Woodcock** found dead in Helena, MT, 9 Jan (LG).

It was another banner season for rare gulls. Single Bonaparte's Gulls near Lewiston 4 Jan (CS) and at D.F.N.W.R. 6 Feb (DB) provided Idaho winter latilong firsts. Mew Gulls were unaccountably down by half from last year, with singles in *Gooding*, ID, 7 Dec (KF), Boise, ID, 31 Dec (CS), and near Bigfork, MT, 18 Dec (DC). Discovered in *Canyon* last November, Idaho's first **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was sporadic in Boise



Idaho's first Ruff was this unseasonable adult female at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge 26 Dec 1999—9 Jan 2000. Most records in the West are during fall. This image was captured on 28 Dec. Photograph by Fred A. Hill.

through 22 Jan (m.ob.). An ad. **Kumlien's Iceland Gull** at A.F.R. 26–27 Feb (DB, MCr, †CT) was especially significant because of increasing reports of Iceland Gulls in the West. A total of six Glaucous-winged Gulls were reported in Idaho, one of which overwintered in Boise (DT). Montana reported two Glaucous-winged × W. Gulls in *Lake* 4 Dec and one in *Flathead* 18 Dec (DC). Single Glaucous Gulls visited *Kootenai*, ID, 8 Jan (LH, m.ob.), A.F.R. 26 Feb (MCr), and Polson, MT, 26-27 Feb (CP, TT).

A wayward Band-tailed Pigeon stopped in Canvon, ID, 2 Feb (MI). For the second consecutive winter, record numbers of Mourning Doves were reported in w. Montana. With vole populations down from last year, owls wandered in both states. In a continuing trend, two Barn Owls strayed to Ravalli, MT, 1 Dec-9 Jan (WT). An E. Screech-Owl in Broadwater, MT, 17 Jan provided a first for Latilong 28 (EA) and a W. Screech-Owl in Blaine, ID, 23 Dec was a new addition to Latilong 25 (BS). Another seasonal first was a Barred Owl that wintered in Boise, ID. Sightings of at least four Great Gray Owls away from expected wintering areas were noteworthy. A Boreal Owl that wandered to Twin Falls, ID, 1 Jan provided a first for Latilong 25 (MT). Like last year, single Lewis's Woodpeckers overwintered in Boise, ID (DT), and Ravalli, MT (CPo). Montana's 6th Eastern Phoebe was an incredible find in Lake 5-26 Dec (FT, m.ob.). At least ten Say's Phoebes were reported in sw. Idaho, more than usual. One of the best birds of the season, a stunning male Vermilion Flycatcher graced Ravalli, MT, 2-11 Jan (BG, ph. CB, m.ob.) and furnished Montana's first record.

#### JAYS THROUGH GOLDFINCHES

Only five Blue Jays were reported in Idaho throughout the period, the lowest tally in many years. They were also scarce in Montana, with the exception of a record 13 counted on the Kalispell CBC 2 Jan. Two early **Tree Swallows** in *Gooding* 17 Feb (KF) provided a first winter record for Idaho and the Region. Usually absent or rare in winter, many Mountain and Western Bluebirds were reported in *Owyhee*, ID, throughout the period. Reports of several wintering Hermit and Varied Thrushes in sw. Idaho and single Gray Catbirds in Montana's *Lake* 19 Dec (SC) and *Gallatin* 31 Dec (SH) definitely indicated a mild winter.

More seasonally rare warblers than usual were reported in both states. Single Idaho Orange-crowned Warblers were in *Twin Falls* 2 Jan (*fide JR*), D.F.N.W.R. 16 Jan (DT), and below A.F.R. dam 17 Jan (*fide CT*).

Montana birders reported Yellow-rumped Warblers in Missoula 1 Dec–5 Feb (TT), Ravalli 25 Dec (WT), and Park 1 Jan (TM). A superb find was Idaho's first **Pine Warbler** at Moscow 7 Dec–29 Feb (†KD, †MD, ph. RH, m.ob.). Providing a first winter record for Montana was a **Common Yellowthroat** in Lake 13 Jan (JB).

Seasonally rare in Idaho, three Savannah Sparrows tarried in Canyon 26 Dec (FH), and one was below A.F.R. dam 8-22 Jan (MCr). Some sparrows that returned to Idaho early furnished winter latilong firsts, including a Sage Sparrow in Ada 21 Feb and nine Savannah Sparrows in Owyhee 4 Feb (DT). Single Lincoln's Sparrows persisted in Blaine, ID, 5 Dec (KF), Gallatin, MT, 31 Dec (EH), and Canyon, ID, 2 Feb (MJ). As usual, there were many reports of rare White-throated and Harris's Sparrows, but two Goldencrowned Sparrows that stayed below A.F.R. dam provided a first winter record for Latilong 27 (MCr). Another Goldencrowned in Cassia, ID, 13 Dec (MA) was a latilong first. An outstanding find was the imm. Rose-breasted Grosbeak near Pocatello 18 Dec (†CT), providing a first winter record for Idaho.

Rare and local in winter, single Yellowheaded Blackbirds were reported in *Gooding*, ID, 18 Dec–12 Jan (KF), *Blaine*, ID, 2 Jan (BS), and *Ravalli*, MT, 2 Jan (DL), but an astonishing 72 were tallied on the Bruneau, ID, CBC 2 Jan. The only report of Rusty Blackbirds featured 2–3 in *Gallatin*, MT, 26 Dec–23 Feb (EA, JP). Small numbers of

Brewer's Blackbirds usually winter in Idaho, but a record 610 tallied on the Bruneau CBC 2 Jan provided further evidence of the mild winter. In Great-tailed Grackle news, 32 were tallied at D.F.N.W.R. 26 Dec (JG), one wintered below A.F.R. dam (CT), and one visited Twin Falls, ID, 28 Jan (KF).

Montana's 5th **Brambling** was sporadic in Helena 1 Dec–13 Feb (†JS, m.ob.). The Com. Redpoll irruption from last fall continued through winter in most locations outside of sw. Idaho. Less than annual, two Hoary Redpolls were in Gardiner, MT, 12 Dec (TM) and *eight* were in *Flathead*, MT, 2 Jan (DC). A Lesser Goldfinch that stayed below A.F.R. dam 1 Jan–26 Feb provided a first winter record for Latilong 27 (MCr).

Observers cited (subregional editors in boldface): IDAHO: Miriam Austin, Dave Burrup, Marty Collar (MCr), Mike Denny, John Doremus, Kas Dumroese, Kent Fothergill, John Gatchet, Lisa Hardy, Fred Hill, Ray Hoff, Bryan Jamison, Marlin Jones, Merlene Koliner, Hadley Roberts, Jeff Ruprecht (JR), Terry Sadler, Brian Sturgis, Shirley Sturts (SS), Charles Swift, Michael Todd, David Trochlell, Chuck Trost, Poo Wright-Pullium. MONTANA: Eric Atkinson, Claude Birkeneder, Jim Brown, Dan Casey, Susannah Casey, Steve Gniadek, Bill Good, Laura Gould, Suzanne Hainsworth, Ed Harper, David Lockman, Jeff Marks, Terry McEneaney, John Parker, Colleen Powell (Cpo), Caleb Putnam (CP), Joan Ryshavy (JRy), John Shipley, Don Skaar, Marc Susser, Fred Tilly, Terry Toppins, Wayne Tree.

# mountain west



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This year most areas in the Region were above normal in temperature and about normal or slightly below in moisture. Many species wintered much farther north than usual. In Colorado, various species which normally do not winter were reported. Some included Sandhill Crane, Bonaparte's Gull, Burrowing Owl, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Savannah Sparrow, and Bullock's Oriole. Many others were reported in higher numbers than usual.

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