

Southern Great Plains



Spring Migration 2000

Sparrows Through Redpolls

American Tree Sparrows were present in several e. N. Dakota areas this winter where they are usually absent. A Chipping Sparrow found on the Grand Forks, ND C.B.C. 17 Dec was seen through the following week (DOL, EEF). This provided only the 3rd C.B.C. record for the state. A Gray-headed Junco was documented in Rolette, ND 13 Jan (REM, DNS). This provided at least the 3rd record for the state for this subspecies. A White-winged Junco was e. of usual haunts in Yankton, SD 31 Dec (DS).

Northern Cardinals made a strong showing, with 7 individuals reported from five N. Dakota counties. In n. S. Dakota the species was noted in Edmonds 27 Jan (JDW), and 2 spent the period in Brown (DAT).

The bird of the season, a *Pyrrhuloxia* was reported from a feeder by a casual observer in Billings, MT in early Dec. The sighting was later confirmed by Helen Carlson and others, and photos suitable for confirmation of the identification were obtained. The bird was later tallied on the Billings C.B.C.. The homeowner originally reported 2 birds, but others saw only the single individual. This furnished the first record for Montana and the Region.

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch peaks in the Dakotas were 100 in Lawrence, SD 20 Jan (RDO), and 85 on the Medora, ND C.B.C. 4 Jan (HCT). Red Crossbill numbers were low, with seven N. Dakota observations and reports from three e. S. Dakota counties. Two reports of White-winged Crossbills from N. Dakota totaled only four individuals. Common Redpolls were scarce, with only seven sightings in N. Dakota and two reports from Montana.

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Recent years have revealed changes in the breeding distributions of some southern waterbirds and shorebirds northward, some of which probably relates to good water conditions, at least on average. Some special birding areas have developed recently, in part through habitat management, as noted below. For whatever reasons, the several species of dove, particularly Eurasian Collared-Dove, continue to increase in the Region. Gulls did not offer the diversion of earlier seasons, and it was generally a weak season for warblers, expected to be most in evidence during spring periods. The very warm March weather provided for some exceptional arrival dates.

Abbreviations: Cheyenne Bottoms (Cheyenne Bottoms W.M.A., Barton, KS), K.B.R.C. (Kansas Bird Records Committee); L Ogallala (L. Ogallala, Keith, NE); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith, NE); Quivira (Quivira N.W.R. Stafford, KS); Red Slough (Red Slough W.M.A., McCurtain, OK).

Loons Through Ducks

Part of the relatively recently "outbreak," a **Yellow-billed Loon**, Oklahoma's 5th, was photographed 2-28 Apr at Sooner L., Pawnee, OK (JWA). Horned Grebes lingered until 20 & 21 May in Cimarron and Roger Mills, OK, respectively (JL et al.) Also among relative recent outbreaks were Red-necked Grebes noted 19 Mar–8 Apr in Tulsa (BC et al.) and 12 Apr in Sedgwick, KS (CG). Western Grebe numbers built to about 18,000 on 22 Apr at McConaughy (SJD). Formerly uncommon





Yellow-billed Loons have shown a tendency toward widespread dispersal in the continent's interior in recent years; this bird was at Sooner Lake, Pawnee County, Oklahoma 7 April 2000. Photograph by James W. Arterburn.

elsewhere in the Region, the high count for Westerns outside McConaughy was the 18 noted in *Cimarron*, OK 20 May (JM et al). Western Grebes again nested at Cheyenne Bottoms, with six pairs present 21 Apr (CG), one with a chick on its back 31 May (DG). Clark's Grebes were found at Cheyenne Bottoms 21 Apr (CG), up to 2 in *Morton*, KS 19 Apr–9 May (EW, m.ob.), in *Oklahoma* 27 Apr (JAG), *Dodge*, NE 29–30 Apr (DP, JP), and *Cimarron*, OK 20 May (JM et al.). Courting was seen in *Sheridan*, NE 19 May (WRS) and in *Garden*, NE 9 & 16 May (SJD, JG). Three additional Clark's were present in *Sheridan*, NE 19 May (LR, RH).

Single Neotropic Cormorants appeared in *Douglas*, KS 3–6 Mar (GP, CG), *Oklahoma* 27 Apr (JAG), *Quivira* 13 May (SS), and at Red Slough 14 May (DA). Anhingas seldom make it past the very se. county of Oklahoma, so one 23 Apr in *Muskogee*, OK (JM) was exceptional. Up to 5 were seen in *McCurtain*, OK 28 May (BH).

Generally a rare post-season vagrant, single Tricolored Herons made it n. to *Quivira* by 23 Apr (LE), *Alfalfa* 22 Apr (JAG), *Johnston*, OK 27 Apr (MS), and *Tulsa* 3–4 May (LFr, JL, MK, GK). Two Yellow-crowned Night-Herons in *Rock*, NE 10 May (CHa) were quite northerly.

Who would have imagined that from a Region where one White Ibis was noteworthy, the count of **2000** at Red Slough (19 Apr; DA) could occur? The first of this group to arrive were 4 on 23 Mar (DA). The ad. **White Ibis** seen briefly at L. *Ogallala* 17 May (AB, SJD), if accepted, would provide the 2nd documented for Nebraska.

Continuing in a general pattern of increase for wading birds were reports for Glossy Ibis this season. Although certainly a challenge to identify, well-documented reports were received of singles at Red Slough 1 May (DA), *Quivira* 6 May (DS), *Kingfisher*, OK 11–30 May (JWA), and *Major*, OK 11 May (JWA). One Glossy Ibis with 15 White-faced Ibises in *Clay*, NE 6 May (JGJ) provided only the 2nd record



The first Tufted Duck documented for Nebraska was this male at Lake Ogallala, Keith County on 23 April 2000. Photograph by Stephen J. Dinsmore.

for Nebraska. White-faced Ibises were first noted 14 Mar in *Kingfisher*, OK (JWA). This area eventually hosted 21+ nesting pairs 30 May (JWA), only the 2nd known nesting area in Oklahoma. Rounding out the vagrant Ciconiidae list were **13–14** Roseate Spoonbills (!) 22 May at (yes) Red Slough (BH, DA). Just wait until the vagrants really start arriving.

The expansion of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks continues, with 2–8 noted in *Major*, OK 28 Apr–25 May (JWA, JDo, JAG) and 2–4 at Red Slough 7 & 14 May (DA). The high count for Ross's Goose was 410 on 25 Mar in *Clay*, NE (JGJ). Three of the very rare blue-morph Ross's were noted in a flock of 50+ in *Hall*, NE 18 Mar (SS)—not at all a common occurrence

A Eurasian Wigeon was identified in *Clay*, NE 5 Apr (*vide* LB). A hybrid wigeon was in *Clay*, NE 9 & 22 Apr (JGJ). This 3rd such documented hybrid for Nebraska may indicate the mating complications of rarity—and complicate the identification of presumed “pure” individuals in the Region. An American Black Duck in *Linn*, KS 18 Mar (MG) was the only report for the Region this season. Easterly were 2 Cinnamon Teal 1 Mar at Red Slough (DA) and one 9 May in *Tulsa* (MK, GK).

The **Tufted Duck** that wintered on Keystone L, *Keith*, NE (the Region's only) was last seen 29 Apr (SJD). Two female Surf Scoters were found there 22 & 29 Apr (SJD). An imm male White-winged Scoter in *Kimball*, NE 26 Mar (SJD) rounded out a short list for this group. Four Long-tailed Ducks lingered to 23 Apr on Keystone L., with a male last observed there 29 Apr (SJD). Two ad. male and one ad female Barrow's Goldeneyes that wintered on Keystone L. were last observed 25 Mar (SJD) Among other lingering waterfowl was a male Common Goldeneye at L. *Ogallala* 17 May (SJD). A Hooded Merganser with 8 young at *Linn*, KS 2 May (MG) provided one of few breeding records for the Region.

Raptors Through Terns

An Osprey 19 Mar at *Harlan*, NE (GH,WH) was quite early. Bald Eagles have made a marvelous comeback in the Region. There may now be 30 breeding pairs in Oklahoma (*vide* AJ), with at least 10 pairs breeding in Kansas (*vide* LM), much credited to the efforts of the G.M. Sutton Avian Research Center, Alan Jenkins in particular. The numbers of Peregrine Falcons reported in recent years is also encouraging, with 21 from Nebraska, 6 from Kansas, and at least 9 from Oklahoma this season, most windowing the primary migration period.

Northern Goshawks, always a rare find, were in *Rush*, KS 13 Mar (SS), and *Kay*, OK 9

Apr (GM). Among many extralimitals slightly beyond their range edges, a Red-shouldered Hawk was especially noteworthy 20 Apr in *Morton*, KS (PJ, AT). A dark-morph Broad-winged Hawk was reported in *Omaha* 29 Apr (JGJ). Golden Eagles were reported e. to *Atoka*, OK 18 Apr (JH, JM et al.).

Although many marsh species have shown prominent increases, for some, reports have been more modest. Up to 5 King Rails were noted at Red Slough, the earliest 23 Mar (DA). Virginia Rails on the other hand have been much more evident, with birds wintering n. to *Phelps*, NE (5 Mar; LR, RH). Three Black Rails were found in *Comanche*, KS 21 May (PJ), with one at Cheyenne Bottoms also 21 May (DW, TW). A Purple Gallinule was present 28 May at Red Slough (DA).

An exciting event was the **Common Crane** near Prosser, *Adams*, NE 10 Mar–2 Apr (M&AC, J&MC, m.ob.), somehow Nebraska's 6th! Interestingly, it associated with an apparent Lesser Sandhill Crane and 2 young birds that appeared to be hybrids (*vide* MU). [A similar situation has been noted in New Jersey; see the Hudson-Delaware Winter Season report, this issue. —Ed.]

As go the marsh birds, so go the shorebirds, with higher numbers of most species being reported in recent years. The diversity in the Southern Plains Region rivals, perhaps even exceeds, that of many coastal areas. Record high counts for Black-bellied Plovers in the Region were the 469 in the Rainwater Basin of s.-cen. Nebraska 10 May, including 334 in *Clay*, NE (SJD). Snowy Plovers have become a regular rare spring visitor in s.-cen. Nebraska, with 6 recorded for the season (*vide* WRS). Piping Plovers continue to hang on as breeders in Nebraska, with five nests found at McConaughy 21 May (WRS). Nesting was underway by 30 May in *Saunders*, NE (MO) and *Cass*, NE (BP, LP). Mountain Plovers arrived at their lone Nebraska breeding area in *Kimball* on the record-early date of 26 Mar (SJD).

Black-necked Stilt numbers continue their increases, with 18 reported from Nebraska (*vide* WRS). They appear to be establishing themselves in a series of playa ponds in *Kingfisher/Major*, OK (JWA, JAG) and *Hackberry Flats*, *Tillman*, OK (m.ob.). Exceptionally early were the 4 Long-billed Curlews in *Seward*, KS 10 Mar (LE).

I can remember when reporting a single Whimbrel was significant. This season, there were up to 10 at McConaughy 9–15 May (SJD); 20 were recorded in *Clay*, NE 14–15 May (JGJ); and 29 in *Meade*, KS 21 May (PJ). Ten others were reported for the Region this season. The

count of 264 Marbled Godwits at McConaughy 22 Apr, 196 in one group (SJD), was quite remarkable, inasmuch as that species is less given to aggregations of this size in our area. Thousands of Hudsonian Godwits staged at Cheyenne Bottoms (*vide* LM). The small groups of Buff-breasted Sandpipers reported from the Region this season were less impressive.

The appearance of Dunlin at Quivira 31 Mar (6; MR, SS), and 8 Apr (12; CG) was puzzling given their normally later migration window; however, this was not the first year for this to happen. The 3 Red Knots in *Riley*, KS 13 May (CHe), and one at Quivira, also 13 May (SS), were still exceptional for spring.

Sixty-six Short-billed Dowitchers in the e. Rainwater Basin of Nebraska 14 May were identified by voice (JGJ), part of the normal passage through the e. portions of the Region. Silcock tallied 20 Red-necked Phalaropes from e. Nebraska. The only others for Kansas or Oklahoma were one from *Riley*, KS 13 May (DB) and 5 at Quivira 18 May (GF et al.).

In comparison to shorebirding, gull-watching was a little tepid this season but nonetheless interesting. Laughing Gulls managed to wander to *Wagoner*, OK 24 Apr & 1 May (JWA), and Cheyenne Bottoms 10 May (MR, m.ob.). A Little Gull in first-alternate plumage seen in the e. Rainwater Basin 6 May (JGJ) was only the 3rd spring record for Nebraska. California Gulls away from McConaughy included singles in *Sedgwick*, KS 4 Mar (JB), and *Morton*, KS 19 May (SP et al.). An ad. Mew Gull documented at L. Ogallala 1 Mar (SJD) was Nebraska's 11th. Thayer's Gulls, identification problems aside, appear to be increasing in the Region. Five were reported from Nebraska, including an ad. in *Scotts Bluff* 25 Mar (SJD). But the only report of Lesser Black-backed Gull this season was one in first-alternate plumage at McConaughy 30 Apr (SJD).

A clear "zootie" was an **Arctic Tern** observed the afternoon of 26 May in *Tulsa* (BC, JL et al.), documented but not photographed as the first for Oklahoma. And one must see a picture to know how impressive, as



Two (of up to eight) Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were found near Ames, Major County, Oklahoma this spring. This species is expanding its range into the Region. Photograph by James W. Arterburn.

well as unusual, 348 Caspian Terns, observed 2 May in *Wagoner*, OK (JWA), can be.

Doves Through Waxwings

A Band-tailed Pigeon 14–18 May in *Scotts Bluff*, NE (JC, *vide* AK) was only the 2nd for Nebraska. Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to increase in the Region. From 1995 to 1999, there was an approximate doubling of locations at which they were being reported. We would thus expect them now at over 100 locations in the Region. Some towns with higher numbers were Cherokee and Guymon, OK, Hugoton, KS, and Kearney, NE. Inca Doves and White-winged Doves are also increasing but still remain very localized and more southerly. Double-digit numbers of both species were reported from Lawton, OK (J&LM). Five Incas were seen in Meade, KS, and a single White-winged Dove was still present in Kearney, NE.

From reading the email, I know the birders that found the **Flammulated Owl** in *Morton*, KS 20 May (SP, SS, MR, AP) were absolutely thrilled. This was a first for the Region. Nearly as stunning, a Lesser Nighthawk reported in *Morton*, KS 30 Apr (CH, SP) would be the 2nd for Kansas if accepted by the K.B.R.C. Demonstrating the early and warm March season was a Ruby-throated Hummingbird 20 Mar in *McCurtain*, OK (BH). An ad. male Black-chinned Hummingbird noted in *Morton*, KS 20 May (SP, SS, MR) may be part of a general range expansion in this area.

A Lewis's Woodpecker in *Ellsworth*, KS 9–11 May (LQ, MR) was unusual, especially given the sparse occurrences of this species in the Oklahoma Panhandle during recent years. Northerly was an Acadian Flycatcher identified

by song in *Dixon*, NE 24 May (JJ). Also identified by song was a Dusky Flycatcher in *Morton*, KS 20 May (SS). A Hammond's Flycatcher was in *Kimball*, NE 24 May (CLW), Nebraska's 3rd in spring. Ash-throated Flycatchers are expanding their range into *Morton*, KS, with 12 pairs located 31 May (JR). Scissor-tailed Flycatchers arrived on exceptionally early dates 5 Mar in *Sedgwick*, KS (CS), with 2 in *Cowley*, KS 14 Mar (GY). A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher made it to Omaha 3 May (JWH).

Northern Shrikes were located in *Riley*, KS 2 Mar (LJ) and *Cimarron*, OK 12 Mar (JSt, JM et al.), and as late as 29 Mar in *Rush*, KS (SS). A number of early arrivals were noted among vireos, including a Warbling Vireo and White-eyed Vireo 25 Mar in *Sequoyah*, OK (SB), and 2 Yellow-throated Vireos 26 Mar in *McCurtain*, OK (BH). Philadelphia Vireos made a poorer showing this season, with only 2 reported from Oklahoma, both in Tulsa 14 & 19 May (BC), and 3 in Nebraska (*fide* WRS). Adding to the list of early arrivals were a Bank Swallow 2 Apr (JW) and a Cliff Swallow 18 Mar (GK), both in Tulsa.

The scattering of summer and nesting reports for Red-breasted Nuthatches in the Region has been curious. This year a pair with two fledglings was observed in Wichita, KS 27 May (HG). Although possibly a very late migrant, a Winter Wren singing at Fort Niobrara N.W.R., *Cherry*, NE 23 May was surprising (*CA fide* DR). Blue-gray Gnatcatchers continue to invade the s. Panhandle of Nebraska, with 7 in *Banner/Scotts Bluff* 6 May (SJD) being a high count.

Two Veeries in *Cedar*, NE 18 May (BFH) were the only ones reported for Nebraska (*fide* WRS). Only casual in the Nebraska Panhandle was a Gray-cheeked Thrush in *Garden* 9 May (SJD). A pair of Mountain Bluebirds nesting 20 May in *Cimarron*, OK (JBo) may reflect the success of the nest box program.

Warblers Through Finches

Some might ask what the spring would be like without warblers. In general, they have been harder and harder to find in cen. and w. portions of the Region, but there were still a few around. Blue-winged Warblers were found 31 May in *Adair*, OK (DV, JM), where they likely breed. Only three migrants were reported, one in *Johnson*, KS 24 Apr (MG), one in Omaha 7 May (NR), and one quite far west in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 6 May (SJD). The 2 Blue-wingeds in *Wyandotte*, KS 30 Apr–27 May (CH, m.ob.) may also be breeding.

The 4 Golden-winged Warblers reported from e. Nebraska (*fide* WRS) and 6 from e. Kansas (*fide* LM) were about the expected

number. Westerly was a Golden-winged in *Sedgwick*, KS 13 May (CG). Tennessee Warblers made it w. to L. Ogallala 16 May (SJD) and *Scotts Bluff*, NE 18 May (AK). This was an exceptionally slow year for Nashville Warblers across the Region, normally among the most abundant species. A Cerulean Warbler was noted in *Jefferson*, KS 13-19 May (RR), beyond the edge of its expected range. Seasonally exceptional, and possibly also geographically, was a very yellow Palm Warbler documented 19 Mar in *Buffalo*, NE (JV, RD). Among the early arrivals was a Yellow-throated Warbler 17 Mar in Tulsa (GK), with 5 in *Leavenworth*, KS 8 Apr (JS).

Among the exceptional eastern warblers west were Northern Parulas in *Morton*, KS 20 Apr (EW, BH, JL) and one singing in *Hitchcock*, NE 15 May (BP, LP). A Chestnut-sided Warbler was found in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 20 May (MB, DH, WRS). A male Prairie Warbler singing in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 6 May provided a major surprise (SJD). Hooded Warblers were found in *Sedgwick*, KS 1 May (CG), and even farther w. in *Morton*, KS 20 May (SP, SS, MR), and in *Sheridan*, NE 21 May (MB, DH).

Western warblers east included MacGillivray's Warblers in *Sedgwick*, KS 13 May (CG), and *Stafford*, KS, also 13 May (SS). An apparent first-year male Black-throated Gray Warbler in *Otoe*, NE 25 May (LF, CF) was the 2nd documented for Nebraska. Even more exceptional was a male **Painted Redstart** noted at Quivira 5 Apr (CFZ), currently under review by the K.B.R.C.

Among the rarer warblers in the Region were Cape Mays in *Riley*, KS 13 May (PF) and *Douglas*, KS 19 May (GP, RA). Individuals of another "zootie," Black-throated Blue Warbler, appeared in *Linn*, KS 5 May (MM), *Sedgwick*, KS 5-7 May (CS, HG, m.ob.), *Shawnee*, KS 13 May (JBr), and at L. Ogallala 15 May (JF, SJD).

Five Cassin's Sparrows wandered e. to *Stafford*, KS 13 May (SS, MR). The Brewer's Sparrow in *Morton*, KS 19 May (SP, m.ob.) was on the edge of its migration corridor. Among those birds you just hope will hang in there were 2 Henslow's Sparrows in *Lancaster*, NE 6-31 May (KP, SJD). Others were reported from *Linn*, KS (*fide* LM), and *Tulsa* (*fide* JL). Always a good find, especially in the spring, was a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow in *Washington*, NE 22 May (JT). Bachman's Sparrows in *Osage*, OK 20 Apr (BG) and *Atoka*, OK 18 Apr (6; WAC et al.) provide data points for this very local species. A rare Gray-headed Junco in *Sarpy*, NE this winter made its final appearance 9 Mar (PS). Hopeful news for McCown's Longspurs was the 2302 counted in sw.

Kimball, NE 8 Apr (SJD), a record count.

Certainly wandering considerably from their home bases were a male Pyrrhuloxia in *Ford*, KS 25 Apr (JD) and a female at Quivira 19 May (LW). Rose-breasted Grosbeaks wandered w. to *Kimball*, NE 17 May (SJD), *Scotts Bluff*, NE 20 May (DH), and in *Sioux* and *Dawes*, NE 20-21 May (m.ob.). A Baltimore Oriole was with 2 male Bullock's Orioles in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 13 May (AK).

A family group of Red Crossbills with three juveniles was in *Banner/Scotts Bluff*, NE 22 Apr (SJD); no direct evidence for breeding has yet been observed in Nebraska. A Common Redpoll (re)appeared in *Scottsbluff* 27 Mar–1 Apr (*fide* AK), a rather late date. A pair of Pine Siskins was nest-building in *Sumner*, KS 14 Mar (MT), not a usual event.

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