

Idaho-Western Montana



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Winter 2000 temperatures were normal to slightly colder than usual across the Region. There were few subzero days, but the season seemed especially long because of the very cold late fall. At most locations, an absence of expected late winter thaws meant that November's snowfalls persisted until March. Perhaps more significantly, the season was unusually dry—the sixth driest ever recorded in Idaho, in fact. Expected Pacific storms never reached the Region, so mountain snowpack was very low. As a result, drought, fires, and diminished streams and reservoirs are predicted for the coming months.

Despite the long, cold season, good numbers of semi-hardy birds lingered or overwintered. Winter finches were scarce or absent, fol-

lowing the trend of the past three winters. Avian highlights of the period included the Region's first Eurasian Collared-Doves and second Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Abbreviations: A.F.R. (American Falls Res., by American Falls, Idaho); D.F. (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); L.M. (Lee Metcalf N.W.R., Ravalli, MT).

Loons Through Gulls

Best *Gavia* of the period was a Pacific Loon at C.J. Strike Res., *Owyhee*, ID 30 Dec (DH). Pied-billed Grebes stayed farther n. than typical, with unusually high counts of 7-11 at L.M. 6 Jan–2 Feb (WT) and 24 in *Kootenai*, ID 17 Dec (SS). Also unseasonal were 3 Eared Grebes at D.F. 23 Dec (JG) and C.J. Strike Res., ID 30 Dec (JG), another Eared at L.M. 8 Dec–16 Feb

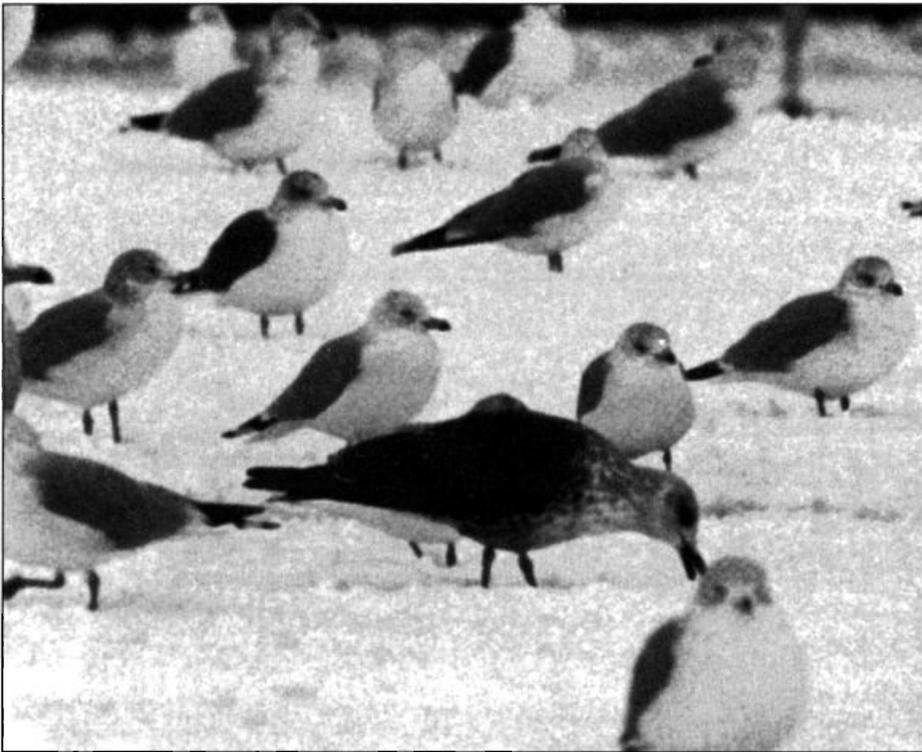
(WT), and a Clark's Grebe at C.J. Strike Res 30 Dec (JG). Reports of Great Egrets in sw Idaho were down by half from last year, with singles in *Gooding* 8-30 Dec (JC, KF) and *Canyon* 8 Jan–25 Feb (m.ob.). A record count of 96 Trumpeter Swans at A.F.R. 23 Dec (CT) suggested an increasing population. Fewer than usual white geese lingered in sw. Idaho, with only 2 Greater White-fronteds, 5 Snows, and 4 Ross's Geese reported. The **American Black Duck** in *Nez Perce*, ID persisted until 10 Dec. An odd find was a Mallard x American Wigeon hybrid at L.M. 20-23 Dec (†WT). Six Eurasian Wigeon noted in Idaho were about average for the period. Diving ducks were plentiful in the Region's n., but counts of 12,000 Redheads and 6000 Lesser Scaup near Sandpoint, ID 16 Dec were especially impressive. Usually absent in winter, Long-tailed Ducks were at A.F.R. 23 Dec (CT) and Lewiston, ID 28 Jan–18 Feb (KD). Three reports of Red-breasted Mergansers from n Idaho were more than usual.

An extremely late Osprey in Boise, ID 2 Dec (DT) provided a winter first for Latilong 17. Gyrfalcons were scarce, with only two reports from each state in Dec. Newsworthy were several Prairie Falcons that wandered far n. to Bigfork and Kalispell, MT in mid- to late Dec (DC). Single Sandhill Cranes lingered in *Owyhee*, ID 13 Dec (JCu) and near Bigfork, MT 16 Dec (MR). Also tardy were 2 Greater Yellowlegs at D.F. 3 Dec (BC) and 2-7 Least Sandpipers near Boise, ID 9 & 23 Dec (DH, RLR). Up to 3 Dunlin at Mann L., *Nez Perce*, ID 3 Dec & 2-4 Feb (m.ob.) were unseasonal but not unprecedented, but the **Dunlin** at L.M. 6 Jan (WT) provided a first winter record for Montana. Out of place and season was a **Franklin's Gull** near Libby, MT 16 Dec (AB). The rare-but-expected gulls made a good showing, with 3 Mews, 9 Thayer's, 6 Glaucous-winged, and 5 Glaucous Gulls reported. The best larid of the season was a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** in Boise 5 Jan–2 Feb (†, ph. DT) that provided Idaho's and the Region's 2nd record.

Doves Through Waxwings

Mourning Doves continue to winter farther northward, but 393 in Kalispell, MT 31 Dec was a local record. This season was Idaho's turn in the **Eurasian Collared-Dove** invasion. One that stayed in Soda Springs 3 Aug–26 Feb (ph. GD) and up to 3 near American Falls 13 Jan–28 Feb (ph. MJ, CT) provided the Gem State's 1st and 2nd records. The season's owl highlights featured 3 Snowies in nw. Montana (DC) and a Barred that wintered in Boise for the 2nd consecutive winter (DT). For the 3rd

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Only the second in the Region, a second-winter Lesser Black-backed Gull was at Boise for most of January.
Photograph by David Trochlell.



Now in Idaho: the advance of Eurasian Collared-Dove continued this season, with Idaho's first and second records established. This bird was one of three at American Falls, photographed 1 March 2001. Photograph by Martin Jones.

year in a row, single Lewis's Woodpeckers wintered in Boise, ID (DT) and Ravalli, MT (CP). Even more unusual was a very tardy Red-naped Sapsucker filmed in the mts. of Adams, ID 13 Dec (MC, FK). Unlike the past few winters, the only Say's Phoebe reported was s. of D.F. 20 Jan (CLO). Idaho reported only 6 Blue Jays, close to last winter's dismal total. Montana fared better, with at least 38, including a record count of 20 in Kalispell 31 Dec (DC). The 2 Blue Jay x Steller's Jay hybrids found in Coeur d'Alene, ID last fall stayed through the period (BG). Reports of extralimital jays featured Western Scrub-Jays in Twin Falls, ID 25 Dec-28 Feb (B&SM) and Gooding 24 Feb (KF) and at least 15 Pinyon Jays that wintered in w. Montana's Bitterroot Valley (JM).

Horned Larks made a good showing throughout w. Montana, but an estimated flock of 700 in Ravalli 31 Dec (DG) was unprecedented. An apparent Black-capped x Mountain Chickadee was described near Kalispell, MT 31 Dec (DC). A White-breasted Nuthatch in Pocatello, ID 16 Dec (CT) and Bewick's Wren in Canyon, ID 24-28 Feb (m.ob.) were also rare strays. Small numbers of bluebirds now winter in sw. Idaho, but 5 Mountain Bluebirds in Owyhee, ID 7 Jan (CS) were still noteworthy. Much more unusual were 4 Western Bluebirds in Kootenai, ID (CL) and 4 Mountain Bluebirds in Lake, MT 4 Jan (ED). American Robins invaded the Region in unprecedented numbers, with counts of 700-2500 at many locations in s. Idaho in mid-late Dec and an impressive 148 in Kalispell, MT 31 Dec. Unlike the past few winters, Hermit and Varied Thrushes were scarce in s. Idaho, with only 5 Hermit and 3 Varied Thrushes reported. More interesting was the Hermit Thrush in Missoula, MT 16-27 Dec (MB, HW), where few winter records exist. Although especially rare in winter, single Idaho Northern Mockingbirds were discovered in Canyon 8 Dec-16 Feb (RLR), Pocatello 16 Dec (DM), and Nampa 4 Feb (CLO). Both waxwing species also staged major invasions in parts of the Region, with record counts of 5964 Bohemians in Flathead, MT 31 Dec and 2165 Cedars in Owyhee, ID 30 Dec.

Warblers Through Goldfinches

A few Orange-crowned Warblers now winter in sw. Idaho, but this season's 8+ in Canyon and Gooding more than doubled last year's total. Even more unusual was the **Common Yellowthroat** in Boise 19-21 Jan (DT) that provided a winter first for Latilong 17 and Idaho's 1st or 2nd winter record. Another 2nd winter record was provided by a **Rose-breast-**

Mountain West



ed Grosbeak in Boise, ID 10-15 Jan (LG). A surprising variety and number of seasonally rare sparrows were found in both states. These included a Green-tailed Towhee that wintered below A.F.R. dam (DB), several Spotted Towhees in w. Montana, 4 Savannah Sparrows in Canyon, ID, 14 Jan (HK), a Chipping Sparrow in Pocatello, ID 11-30 Dec (MCR), several Fox Sparrows in both states, and 6 Lincoln's Sparrows in Idaho. The only Swamp Sparrow of the period visited Pocatello, ID 16-28 Dec (CT). Reports of rare *Zonotrichia* sparrows were up from last year, with a total of 6 White-throated, one Golden-crowned, and 26 Harris's Sparrows.

Snow Buntings made a spectacular invasion, with 225 in Lake, MT 17 Dec (m.ob.), 240 in Bonneville, ID 1 Jan (DCI), 400+ in Idaho Falls, ID 4 Feb (GR), and 400+ in Sanders, MT 10 Feb (JM, CO). Rusty Blackbirds also had an unusually good showing, with 3 in Idaho and at least 11 in Montana. Idaho's Great-tailed Grackle news featured 22+ that persisted in Owyhee (JG), 5 that wintered in Mimidoka (JC, ES), and one that strayed to Meridian 17 Dec (RE). Three Common Grackles were reported in Montana, about average for the season. Two Purple Finches were in Libby, MT 16 Dec (AB); they are rare but increasingly reported in nw. Montana. Especially rare in a poor season for redpolls were 2 Hoary Redpolls near Bigfork, MT 16 Dec (DC). Lesser Goldfinches successfully wintered in Idaho again, with one below A.F.R. (DB) and up to 4 near Boise (DT).

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The Region experienced cold weather early, and most areas remained cold. Lakes became frozen early but appeared to open earlier than normal. The fall mountain species' invasion onto the plains continued through the season. All locations in this report are from Colorado unless otherwise noted.

Abbreviations: Barr (Barr Lake State Park, Adams); Chatfield (Chatfield Reservoir, Jefferson/Douglas); C.B.R. (Chico Basin Ranch, El Paso/Pueblo); C.C.R. (Cherry Creek Reservoir, Arapahoe); C.V.C.G. (Crow Valley Campground, Weld); F.C.R.P. (Fountain Creek Regional Park, El Paso); G.V. (Greenhorn Valley, near Colorado City and Rye, Pueblo); J.M.R. (John Martin Reservoir, Bent); S.L.V. (San Luis Valley, in south-central Colorado); W.R.G. (Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, Jefferson).

Loons Through Raptors

Most of the Region's loons were at Pueblo Res. Pueblo had a Red-throated 13-16 Dec (†BKP, MJ), one to 2 Pacifics stayed to 13 Jan (BKP), and one to 5 Commons all season. Trinidad L, Las Animas had a Pacific and a Common 13 Dec (VAT). Single Red-necked Grebes were in Boulder 4 Dec (LS) and Pueblo 16 Dec (†DSi). Late American White Pelicans included 2 at J.M.R. 3 Dec (BKP, MJ, DN) & one there 15 Jan (DAL) and early spring migrants were in Otero & Crowley on 25 Feb. A **Great Egret** at Totten Res. 6 Dec (SA, DF) provided one of the few winter records for the state. In w. Colorado, 7 Ross's Geese were in Mesa 17 Jan (TL, RLv) and 3 in Delta 3 Feb (LS). A **Black Brant** was at Greeley 15-21 Jan (DB, †PG). Three Trumpeter Swans were seen at Ft. Collins 30 Dec (RKL). Two ad. Tundra Swans were in Otero & Crowley 19-25 Feb (MJ, BKP, SO). In Greeley, observers noted a Gadwall x Mallard hybrid 18-21 Jan (DAL, PG) and a probable American Black Duck x Mallard 18-30 Jan (DAL, LS). Three Greater Scaup were at McPhee Res. in sw Colorado 6 Dec (DF). An unexpected female **Harlequin Duck** was in Durango, La Plata along the Animas R. 12 Jan-28 Feb+ (M&DH, †m.ob.). A female White-winged Scoter was in