

# Prairie Provinces



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**D**rought conditions prevailed over much of Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan. Many water bodies were completely or partially dry, resulting in diminished or concentrated breeding of wetland birds, such as White-faced Ibis and Black-necked Stilt. Prairie songbirds like Lark Bunting, Le Conte's Sparrow, and longspurs were also notably scarce. Grass and forest fires raged through Alberta, whereas southern Manitoba received plenty of moisture in the form of runoff and rain. Winds were stronger than usual; a sustained southerly flow in late April and early May blew a wave of early migrants into southern Manitoba. Unfortunately, no Saskatchewan report was received.

**Abbreviations:** I.B.S. (Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary, AB); O.H.M. (Oak Hammock Marsh W.M.A., MB); S.R.V. (Sheep R. Valley hawkwatch, AB).

## GREBES THROUGH RAPTORS

Natalie L., MB hosted a concentration of 800+ Red-necked Grebes 27 Apr (PT). A Clark's Grebe was at Reed L., SK 29 May (RK). An American White Pelican at Medicine Hat, AB 26 Mar was early (BL), while 20 at S.R.V. 6 May provided a local first (WS, RW). Numerous reports of Great Egrets in s. Manitoba may reflect the growth of the colony at Dog L., though there is speculation about nesting elsewhere. Manitoba had 2 Snowy Egrets—the first since 1993—at Argyle 10 May (JM, m. ob.) and at St. Norbert in late May (LJ, m. ob.); a 3rd was at Medicine Hat 21 May (J&RD, E&MS). There were five Cattle Egret reports in s. Manitoba. A Green Heron at Frank L., AB 26 May was the only one noted Regionwide (DG, IH, DM). Forty Turkey Vultures at the Windygates, MB hawkwatch 14 Apr provided a record-high count for the site (A&DS et al.).

Snow Geese largely bypassed s. Manitoba this spring. For the 3rd consecutive year, an escapee Whooper Swan, with a Tundra Swan and 2 offspring, visited Irricana, AB 15 Apr (JB, GT). Tundra Swan concentrations included 1000 at Frank L. 31 Mar (MM, BWr) and 1100+ at Stephensfield, MB 30 Apr (FG et al.). Eurasian Wigeon numbers continue to climb in s. Alberta, with 30+ reports this period (m. ob.). A male Cinnamon Teal,

courting a female Blue-winged Teal, was at O.H.M. 30 Apr–12 May (MC, m. ob.). At least 10,000 Northern Pintails massed at Langdon Res., AB 25 Mar (TK). A possible hybrid Green-winged x Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal was at Lac du Bonnet, MB 12 May (PT, RZ). Medicine Hat had its first, long-overdue Harlequin Duck 6 May (PH, m. ob.).

Diurnal raptor migration in s. Manitoba was concentrated in a few favorable days. Highlights included a record 168 Bald Eagles at St. Adolphe 3 Apr (RK), 277 Sharp-shinned Hawks at Windygates 14 Apr (A&DS et al.), plus 120 at St. Adolphe the same day (BSh et al.), a fair Northern Goshawk flight in Mar and early Apr (m. ob.), and a Red-shouldered Hawk at Windygates 6 Apr (RK, BSh). Windygates also had 3011 Red-tailed Hawks, its 3rd highest total ever, 14 Apr (A&DS et al.). Drought was probably responsible for low numbers of Ferruginous Hawk across s. Alberta and s. Saskatchewan. Sixteen Golden Eagles at Windygates, plus another nearby, 17 Mar doubled the previous provincial high count (GG, SG, RK, A&DS).

## RAILS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

A Yellow Rail near Spruce Siding, MB 2 May was early (RK et al.). Two of four Whooping Crane sightings in Manitoba 13–18 Apr were convincingly described (MZ, MSt; ED et al.). Shorebird numbers were generally low, particularly in se. Manitoba. Alberta highlights included 48 Black-necked Stilts near Langdon 23 Apr (IH), an early American Avocet at I.B.S. 4 Apr (KF, JG, HP), 126 Whimbrels at Taber 20 May (LB), 75 Red Knots at Scandia 19 May (LB), 1400 Semipalmated Sandpipers at Namaka L. 21 May (IH), and four Dunlin sightings 15–28 May (TK et al.). Single male Ruffs at Dauphin L., MB 3 May (BW) and at Crossfield, AB 15–18 May (BWr, m. ob., ph TK) were very rare.

It was a good season for gull-watchers. A flock of 2100 Franklin's Gulls heading w. at S.R.V. 23 May may have been displaced by drought (WS). A California Gull at Winnipeg, MB 7 Apr was early (CA, JS, AW). Rarities included 2 first-year Iceland Gulls at I.B.S. 17 May (BSt), one of which was still present 19 May (TK); single ad. Lesser Black-backed Gulls at O.H.M. 25 Apr (PT, RK et al.) and Edmonton, AB 28 Apr (RT); and an imm. Glaucous-winged Gull, also at Edmonton 28 Apr (SGo, TT, m. ob.). A flock of 15 Sabine's Gulls passed through S.R.V. 27 May (WS, RW). An Arctic Tern, accidental in s. Saskatchewan, allowed close comparison with Common Terns at Reed L. 29 May (RK)



One of at least 13 Boreal Owls reported in southeastern Manitoba between mid-February and mid-March, this bird conveniently roosted in the Winnipeg yard of one of the regional editors on 27 February. *Photograph by Richard Staniforth.*

A Yellow-billed Cuckoo was heard at Grosse Isle, MB 28 May (KG). Great Gray Owl numbers slowly dwindled in se. Manitoba; the peak count was 47 in the Pine Falls–Lac du Bonnet region 4 Mar (PT, GGr, RK). The Boreal Owl movement in se. Manitoba, first noted in Feb, continued into the first half of Mar, with at least 10 birds reported (m. ob.). A total of 18 Boreal Owls on a 20-stop survey near Bird L., MB 6 Apr was exceptional (RK, PT, RZ). Red-bellied Woodpeckers successfully wintered in Winnipeg and near Stonewall, MB (m. ob.).

### PASSERINES

A Philadelphia Vireo at Taber 16 May was a local rarity (*vide* MH), while a Northern

Rough-winged Swallow at Wyndham-Carseland P.P., AB 19 Apr was early (JR, LV). A Rock Wren visited Delta, MB 14 May (HdH); possibly the same bird was at nearby St. Ambrose 19 May (B&HN). Observed *Catharus* thrush migration in Manitoba was generally sparse (KG, m. ob.). The Northern Mockingbird that wintered at Pincher Creek, AB was last seen 25 May (B&IB); singles in Manitoba were seen at Seven Sisters Falls 5 May (DF, FG) and near Dugald 19 May (B&CM, m. ob.). American Pipits went unreported, except for 3 late birds by the Brokenhead R., MB May 25 (PT). A locally rare Black-and-white Warbler was banded in Calgary 15 May (Calgary Bird Banding Society). A female **Prothonotary Warbler** in

Winnipeg 12 May represents the 2nd confirmed sighting in the province (R&TU, m. ob.; v.t.). An Ovenbird in Winnipeg 28 Apr was very early (LdM).

A Field Sparrow at a St. Adolphe feeder 28 Apr was rare (AC). *Zonotrichia* sparrows were generally scarce and local during migration in s. Manitoba. A flock of Snow Buntings near Brunkild, MB 8 Apr was conservatively estimated at 10,000+ birds (BC, WC, MW). A Northern Cardinal was noted in Calgary 19 Mar (D&GP); others were in Winnipeg and near Beausejour, MB (m. ob.). A pair of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks was carrying nesting material at S.R.V. 27 May, in the same area where a Black-headed Grosbeak was seen 24 May (JR, LV). This may be the only location in Alberta where the two species' breeding ranges overlap. A Lazuli Bunting visited Portage la Prairie, MB 21–24 May (SB, BS et al.). A male Indigo Bunting at Gimli, MB 28 Apr was almost a month ahead of schedule (BCh).

A possible hybrid Eastern x Western Meadowlark sang songs of both species near Vivian, MB 16 May (PT). Seventy Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches wintering at Exshaw, AB 3 Mar included 3 of the Hepburn's race (EM, BSt). A Grosse Isle feeder hosted a late female Pine Grosbeak 13–16 Apr and 80+ Purple Finches—the most there in years—21 Apr (KG).

### CORRIGENDUM

Dates for a Field Sparrow at Bryant Cr., AB should read 8 Jun to at least 16 Jul 2000 (*N.A.B.* 54: 395).

### Observers (regional compiler in boldface)

C. Artuso, L. Bennett, J. Black, B.&I Blackford, S. Brown, B. Carey, B. Chartier (BCh), W. Christianson, M. Cobus, A. Courcelles, E. Dobrzanski, J.&R. Dunn, D. Fast, K. Forsher, K. Gardner, D. Gibson, F. Giesbrecht, S. Gosche (SGo), G. Grief, S. Grief, J. Grutz, H. den Haan, I. Halliday, **M. Harrison**, P. Horch, L. Janzen, R. Koes, T. Korozyk, B. Luterbach, D. Magnusson, E. Mah-Lim, L. de March, B.&C. McKay, J. Morgan, M. Mulligan, B.&H. Nation, H. Pinel, D.&G. Poland, J. Riddell, B. Shettler (BSh), B. Schnurr, A.&D. Schmitt, W. Smith, E.&M. Spitzer, M. Stokes (MSt), B. Storms (BSt), J. Swartz, P. Taylor, R. Thomas, T. Thormin, G. Tomasson, R.&T. Underwood, L. Vogt, M. Waldron, B. Walker (BWr), B. Walley, A. Walley, R. Wershler, M. Zach, R. Zach.

