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Prairie Provinces



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A generally mild and dry winter was punctuated by a cold and snowy second half of January and another cold spell at the end of February. Overall precipitation remained below normal; fears of a continued drought remain, particularly in southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan. Birding was rather lacklustre, though numerous lingerers were reported in December and some survived the period. The majority of Christmas Bird Count sightings are not included here.

Abbreviations: C.B.C. (Christmas Bird Count); W.L. (Wabamun L., AB).

LOONS THROUGH FALCONS

Waterton Lakes N.P., AB hosted a late Pacific Loon, 4 Horned Grebes, and 11 Western Grebes 11 Dec (LB), while 3 Common Loons were there 16 Dec (D&TD). Two American White Pelicans lingered at Lethbridge, AB 1 Dec (D&TD), while one at Wascana Marsh, Regina, SK was eventually captured 25 Dec (*vide* BE). Three Double-crested Cormorants at W.L. 15 Jan likely overwintered there (RKL, FW). A Greater White-fronted Goose was unexpected at Lethbridge 23 Jan (LB). A tardy Snow Goose was at Gardiner Dam, SK 1 Dec (*vide* WG), while a flock passed Kleefeld, MB the same day (FF). Canada Geese near Pierson, MB 17 Feb (RWg), Eastend, SK 20 Feb (*vide* FL), and near Neepawa, MB 26 Feb (CC) were believed to be early migrants. Eight Tundra Swans were seen at W.L. 15 Jan (RKL, FW).

An American Wigeon on the Qu'Appelle R., SK 11 Dec (TR), 2500+ Mallards at Gardiner Dam 18 Jan (HL, D&FF), 8 Canvasbacks at W.L. 14 Dec (J&MM), and 2 Redheads at Gardiner Dam 18 Jan (HL, D&FF) all merited

mention. Four Ring-necked Ducks and 3 Lesser Scaup at a Winnipeg sewage lagoon disappeared during bitter cold in late Feb (m. ob.), while 4 Greater Scaup survived the period in Calgary (m. ob.). Alberta's 2nd **Common Eider** was a female of the *v-nigra* race at Cold L. 8-13 Dec (DNa, TT). Two Long-tailed Ducks wintered on the Bow R. in Calgary (m. ob.), a lone Red-breasted Merganser was there 23 Dec (GY), with another 2 noted at W.L. 4 Jan (RE, DV). Five Ruddy Ducks at W.L. 15 Jan (RKL, FW) and a single male at Cookson Res., SK 17 Feb (BL, JC) were also noteworthy.

A late migration of Bald Eagles at Windy Point, Sheep R. Valley, AB 2 Dec involved 344 birds (*vide* WS). A Northern Harrier at High River, AB 1 Feb likely wintered (TK), but one at St. Adolphe 22 Feb was no doubt a migrant (AC). Sharp-shinned Hawks were unusually prominent Regionwide, with at least 24 sightings altogether, the majority in Alberta (m. ob.). Most Gyrfalcon and Prairie Falcon reports came from Saskatchewan, with 17 and 16 respectively; a Prairie Falcon near Whitewater L., MB 24 Feb was rare (PJ).

GROUSE THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Willow Ptarmigan were prominent in cen Saskatchewan near La Ronge, Creighton and Hanson Lake Road (B&HS et al.). An American Coot at Lockport, MB 4 Dec was tardy (RK), but more remarkable were 15 loudly calling Sandhill Cranes migrating over St. Adolphe 1 Dec (SC). A **Long-billed Curlew** near Maple Cr. 14 Dec was a winter first in Saskatchewan and likely for the Region (RJ, GW, WR). A very late unidentified jaeger harassed gulls at Cold L. 10 Dec (FW). A remarkably late movement of 640 Herring and 14 Ring-billed Gulls migrated upstream along the Winnipeg R. at Pine Falls, MB in 1.5 hours 1 Dec (PT et al.). The only other gull of note was a Glaucous at Cold L. 1 Dec (RKL).

Manitoba's 7th **Band-tailed Pigeon**, first found on the Brandon C.B.C. 16 Dec, lingered until at least 11 Jan (CC, m. ob.). An Eastern



Among a wintering flock of over 600 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches at Exshaw, Alberta, there were several of the “Hepburn’s” subspecies and at least one albino! This image was captured 27 February 2002. Photograph by Terry Korolyk.

Screech-Owl called in temperatures of -30 degrees C in Winnipeg 27 Jan (RN). After last fall’s influx of Snowy Owls, a fair number remained; 43 were banded in Saskatchewan in Dec and Jan (MS, DZ, BT). Only se. Manitoba experienced a strong “echo” of last winter’s Northern Hawk Owl and Great Gray Owl incursion. A Long-eared Owl was in the Swift Current, SK area 29 Dec (*vide* WH). Seventeen Short-eared Owls were seen in Saskatchewan (RW, CB, DH), and about 10 in Alberta, while 3 in Winnipeg 26 Jan were the only ones in Manitoba (RP, JS, AW). A female Red-bellied Woodpecker, Saskatchewan’s 7th or 8th, overwintered in Regina (TR, m. ob.).

PASSERINES

Black-capped Chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches staged a major incursion in the Region. High numbers, often doubling previous records, were found on numerous C.B.C.s. Unusually late were a Winter Wren at the Cave-and-Basin marsh in Banff N.P., AB 2 Dec (J&MM), 2 Eastern Bluebirds at Treherne, MB 4 Dec (AM), and 3 Mountain Bluebirds on two Saskatchewan C.B.C.s 5 Jan, with one at Pike L. remaining through 3 Feb (DN). In Alberta, a Hermit Thrush wintered at Lethbridge (*vide* D&TD), and another was at St. Albert until at least mid-Dec (DS, m. ob.). More American Robins than usual remained across the south of the Region. Eight Varied Thrushes were tallied in Saskatchewan and 4 in Manitoba.

Bohemian Waxwings were numerous in sw. Manitoba and cen. Saskatchewan, but scarce in Alberta except for a flock of 4000 in Calgary 26 Feb (TK). Cedar Waxwings were well above normal in all three provinces, with

Saskatchewan reporting “unprecedented” numbers (BL et al.). A Yellow-rumped Warbler videotaped at a Lockport feeder 18 Jan represented the first midwinter warbler record for Manitoba (GM); it likely perished during bitter cold that night. Another exceptional lingerer was the **Summer Tanager** at Dauphin, MB 21 Nov—14 Dec (D&JM, BW).

Rare winter sparrows included single Chipping Sparrows at Kutawagan L., SK 26 Dec (*vide* WH) and in Winnipeg through the period (RP), a Clay-colored Sparrow about 23 Dec at La Ronge (*vide* WH) and another through winter in downtown Winnipeg (WC, m. ob.), and lone Swamp Sparrows at Cave-and-Basin marsh 2-12 Dec (KB, m. ob.) and at Harris, SK 18 Dec (WR). Notable were about 1000 Lapland Longspurs at Cookson Res. 17 Feb (BL, JC) and 10,000 Snow Buntings near Strathmore, AB 24 Feb (TK). A female Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Saskatoon 1 Dec was exceptionally late (PhT). Rarely reported in winter was a Brown-headed Cowbird at Taber, AB 17 Dec (LB); 4 others were tallied on C.B.C.s.

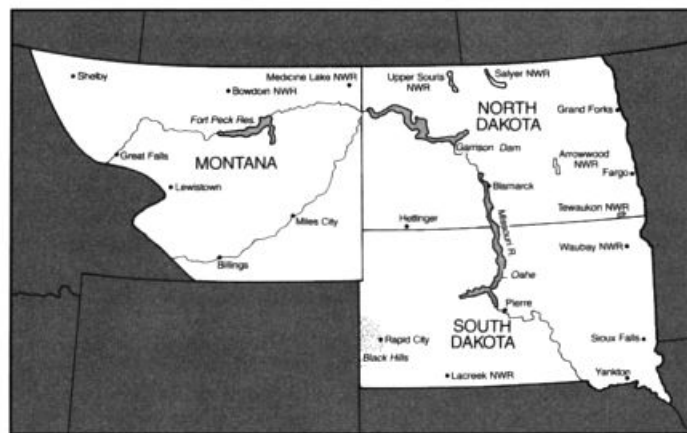
A spectacular overwintering flock of 600+ Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches at an Exshaw, AB

feeder included one albino and a few individuals of the “Hepburn’s” subspecies (CH, TK, m. ob.). One at Hodgeville, SK 12 Feb was locally rare (MP). White-winged Crossbills irrupted over a wide front, from the Alberta Foothills through Saskatchewan to sw. Manitoba, while Common Redpolls were especially common in Saskatchewan, and American Goldfinches were high in s. Alberta

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Northern Great Plains



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The winter weather was a continuation of the fall, with mild temperatures and little precip-

itation. With snow cover light or nonexistent, access to C.B.C. circles was unusually good. Most of February was particularly warm, and north-bound migrants were noted by the middle of the month. Glasgow, Montana had a record high of 66° Fahrenheit on 22 February. However, the last week of February brought very cold weather, and