

Southern Great Plains



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This winter was a generally mild and dry period for the Region, with continued drought for much of western Oklahoma and elsewhere. After several severe ice storms in recent years, another one in western Oklahoma this season was especially detrimental.

Invasions of Snowy Owl and White-winged Crossbill swept over the north of the Region, and loons' numbers swelled on Oklahoma reservoirs this season. Some half-hardies lingered farther north than is typical, but the dry conditions probably limited the shorebird possibilities for lack of habitat, and some granivores' numbers might also have been reduced by a poorer seed crop brought on by the drier conditions or perhaps mortality related to earlier ice storms.

Abbreviations: Cheyenne Bottoms (Cheyenne Bottoms W.M.A., Barton, KS); Hefner (Hefner L., Oklahoma, OK); L. Ogallala (Keith, NE); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith, NE); Red Slough (Red Slough W.M.A., McCurtain, OK); Tenkiller (L. Tenkiller, Sequoyah, OK).

LOONS THROUGH DUCKS

Common Loons, previously overwintering

rarely, are now being found commonly across Oklahoma. Several hundred were reported at Tenkiller, Sequoyah, OK (JWA). Among them were up to 5 Red-throated and 3-4 Pacific Loons (JWA, m. ob.). A Red-throated Loon was also noted at Hefner through the period (m. ob.), with 2 in Noble/Pawnee, OK 27 Dec (JWA, JS). Among Pacific Loon reports were singles in Russell, KS 1 Dec (MR), Hefner 12 Dec (JAG), and Mitchell, KS 16 Dec (SS), with 2 observed in Custer, OK 20 (SG) & 29 Dec (JWA et al.).

An astounding count of 611 Horned Grebes was made at Tenkiller 22 Feb (JWA). One to 2 Red-necked Grebes were present at McConaughy 16-17 Dec (SJD, JF, KN). A very late Eared Grebe lingered on L. Ogallala to 17 Dec (SJD, JF, KN). Western Grebes, apparently responding to a crash in alewives at McConaughy, declined to a modest 122 on 16 Dec (SJD, JF). The only sightings of Clark's Grebe were the 1-2 on McConaughy 16-18 Dec (SJD et al.).

An American Bittern lingered to at least 10 Dec in Douglas, KS (GPa). One White-faced Ibis wintered at Red Slough (DA, BH et al.) with a *Plegadis* sp. in Washington, OK 21 Jan (LMA).

Among some high winter Snow Goose counts were 33,035 in Washington, NE 22 Dec (fide JT). Trumpeter Swan numbers at McConaughy peaked at 26 on 17 Dec (23 ad. &

3 juvs.; SJD, JF, KN). At least 13 Trumpeters wandered south to Kansas (fide LM), but none were located in Oklahoma. The small scattering of Tundra Swans included singles in Dixon, NE 8 Dec (BFH), Elsworth, KS 8 Dec (TS, SSH), Sedgwick, KS 17 Dec (LHi, PJ), with two in Sequoyah, OK 26 Dec (JWA).

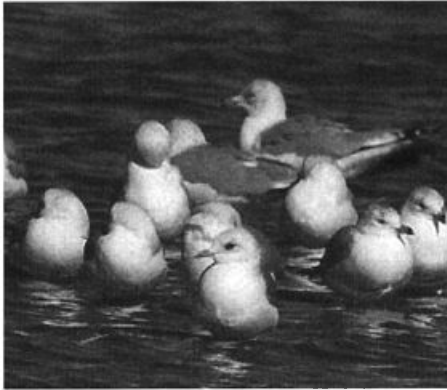
Quite unexpected that late and that far west was a Wood Duck in Scotts Bluff, NE 15 Dec (fide AK). More remarkable was a male Cinnamon Teal in Frontier, NE 9 Dec (LR, RH). More than the usual lot in recent years were the American Black Ducks in Mitchell, KS 2 Dec-15 Jan (HA), Wagoner, OK 22 Dec (JWA, JS), Jefferson, KS 28 Dec (RR), Wyandotte, KS 5 Jan (GP), Wilson, KS 12 Jan (MG), and Greenwood, KS 12 Jan (MG).

Also improving in the region are numbers of Greater Scaup. Reliable reports are now scattered through the Region with high counts of 54 at L. Ogallala 16 Dec (SJD, JF) and 100 in Douglas, KS 26 Jan (DG). A male Tufted Duck, possibly the same bird present the past two winters, was at L. Ogallala 16 Dec (SJD, JF) & 19 Jan (DS).

Scoters this season included only White-winged 16 Dec at L. Ogallala (two different birds (SJD, m. ob.), and Lancaster, NE 24 Feb (LE), and a Black in Tulsa 15 Dec (JL et al.). At least five Long-tailed Ducks were reported from Nebraska (fide WRS) with seven from Kansas (fide LM), and one from Washington, OK (BG, m. ob.). Among the exceptional diving-duck extralimitals were an ad. female Barrow's Goldeneye at L. Ogallala 17 Dec (SJD, JF, KN) and a male in Sedgwick, KS 26 Jan—2 Feb (PJ, m. ob.). The very low numbers of Common Mergansers in Oklahoma this winter are explained by numbers of up to 20,000 in places such as Harlan, NE (fide WRS).

HAWKS THROUGH TERNS

Lingering were Ospreys 12 Dec at Hefner (JAG), and 11 (BGe et al.) & 15 Dec in Tulsa (JWA). Northern Goshawks were noted as far s. as Wyandotte, KS 17 Dec (BY) and Morris, KS 5 Jan (TC, DL, CA). Golden Eagles were noted to the e. reaches of the Region in Dixon, NE 3 Feb (BFH), Jefferson, KS 16 Dec (RR), and Red Slough 6 Jan—20 Feb (BH et al.) Although appearing more sparsely in areas of Oklahoma, raptors were considered especially numerous in the w. half of Kansas (fide LM). The numbers of Merlin reports has increased dramatically in recent years. More are being noted "in town," and one male spent the winter picking off House Sparrows on a junk-food alley in Norman, OK (JAG). An exceptional



Several interior states were fortunate in recording their first or second Mew Gulls this winter. This bird, a first for Oklahoma, was a great find at Lake Hefner 25 January 2002. Photograph by James W. Arterburn.

find was a **Gyr Falcon** in *Sedgwick*, KS 9 Jan (B&NB). Peregrine Falcons were noted in *Seward*, NE 16 Dec (*fide* JG), and *Osage*, KS 8 Dec (MC, MM, GP), likely both *F. p. anatum*.

Sandhill Cranes lingered in unusual numbers, with 4000 still in *Kearny*, KS 15 Dec (TS). The n. boundary of exceptionally tardy shorebirds was in Nebraska this season with the following exceptional array: Greater Yellowlegs in *Lincoln* 27 Dec (RP); Spotted Sandpiper in *Lancaster* 15 Dec (MOr); and Pectoral Sandpiper in *Lancaster* 15 (MOr) to 22 Dec (LE). Long-billed Dowitchers began arriving by at least 24 Feb, when 6 were noted at Red Slough (DA et al.).

Gulls have always found a way to highlight the winter season, and so it was this season. An ad **Mew Gull** noted briefly at Hefner 25 Jan (JWA) was the first for Oklahoma. Other ad Mew Gulls were found at L. Ogallala 16 Dec (SJD, JF) and *Knox/Cedar*, NE 22 (DSw) & 25 Dec (SV). Sixteen Thayer's Gulls were reported this season, 11 of these from Nebraska (*fide* WRS); reports now routinely include ad. birds. A possible first-winter **Iceland Gull** was scrutinized at Hefner 13-22 Feb (JWA, m. ob.); the secondary bar and tail band still raise some issue with regard to Thayer's Gull and presumed intergrades. Another Iceland Gull was documented in *Osage*, KS 24 Feb (AP, AN). Lesser Black-backed Gull reports were perhaps more limited this season, with ads. at McConaughy 16-17 Dec (SJD, JF, m. ob.), Hefner 12 Dec (JAG) and 13 Feb (JWA, JS, JL), and *Johnson*, KS 19 Jan (MCo). More difficult to detect were the first-winter Lesser Black-backed noted in *Tulsa* 28 Dec (JWA) and Hefner 14 & 16 Feb (JAG).

Surprisingly, only 2 Glaucous Gulls were reported from Nebraska (*fide* WRS) and 5 from Kansas (*fide* LM). A second-winter Great

Black-backed Gull was at McConaughy 19 Jan (MB, DS). Two Black-legged Kittiwakes were reported this season, both on the 1 Dec, at *Sequoyah*, OK (SB) and *Woodward*, OK (JAG).

DOVES THROUGH FINCHES

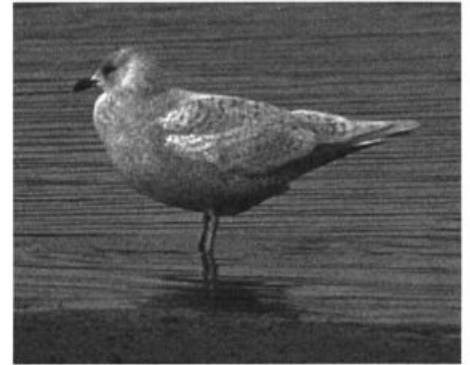
Eurasian Collared-Doves now occur Regionwide, with 25-47 reported from some individual localities in Kansas (*fide* LM). White-winged Doves were noted as far afield as *Cimarron*, OK 30 Dec (BH et al.) and *Gray*, KS 3 Jan (TS, SS). A scattering of Inca Doves occurred n. to *Kearny*, KS 15 Dec (TS) and 12 Jan (SS, MO). Perhaps the most notable dove sighting of the season was a **Common Ground-Dove** in *Johnson*, KS 2 Jan—28 Feb (MC, EC, m. ob.).

This was an invasion year for Snowy Owls: the infrequency of this event makes listing the records imperative. In Nebraska: a juv. male in *Keith* 16 Dec (JF, SJD); a juv. female at McConaughy 17 Dec (SJD, JF, KN); other singles in *Knox* 22 Dec (MB) and *Garden* 21 Feb (HW, SW). In Kansas: one in *Wyandotte* 19 Dec—11 Jan (*fide* MM), 2 at Cheyenne Bottoms 30 Dec—12 Jan (ST, m. ob.), 1-2 in *Marion* 14-17 Jan (m. ob.); one in *Douglas* 29 Jan—12 Feb (ML, m. ob.), and one in *Clay* 29 Jan (CO, JO). In Oklahoma: singles in *Custer* 1 Dec—22 Jan (D&LR, m. ob.), in *Tillman* during late Jan (KM, m. ob.; dying on site), and *Pawnee* 6-13 Feb (CD, MY, m. ob.).

An **Anna's Hummingbird** was found in *Washington*, OK 22 Nov—31 Dec (S&JV, m. ob.), only the 4th for Oklahoma. At least 2 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers may have wintered as far n. as Omaha, NE (BP, LP). Northern Shrike reports were routine for Nebraska. Six were reported from Kansas (*fide* LM); one in *Payne*, OK 3 Jan (JcC) was the farthest south. While the up to 12 Steller's Jays reported from *Cimarron*, OK (PS, BG, JL) would suggest an invasion, this was the only locality in the Region from which they were reported. Black-billed Magpies wandered e. to *Dakota*, NE 6 Jan (BFH), and *Dixon*, NE 2 Feb (BFH). A Fish Crow in *Douglas*, KS 3 Feb (MRo) was exceptional both for northerly location and date.

A northerly Carolina Wren was banded in *Dixon*, NE 26 Jan (MB, EB). Numbers farther s. were still depressed by the severe weather and ice storms of past winters. Also surprising for more w. location was a Winter Wren in *Keith*, NE 9 Feb (CW, BKP). Half-hardy surprises were Ruby-crowned Kinglets in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 14 Feb (KL) and *Keith*, NE 16 Dec (SJD).

Three Mountain Bluebirds were unexpected in *Knox*, NE 5-10 Jan (MB, DH), as were 12 in



This *kumlieni* Iceland Gull was also at Lake Hefner, Oklahoma, at least 13-22 February 2002 (here photographed on the first day). The problem of distinguishing larger, darker Iceland Gulls from Thayer's Gulls persists throughout North America. Photograph by Richard Thacker.

Sedgwick, KS 22 Jan (GM). A Townsend's Solitaire was also noted in *Sedgwick*, KS 15 Dec (PJ). Two Curve-billed Thrashers were located in *Morton*, KS 29 Dec (SP). A Sage Thrasher in *Scotts Bluff* 14 Dec—27 Jan (VN, AK, m. ob.) provided only the 2nd winter record for Nebraska. Testing a potential harsh fate was a Brown Thrasher in *Buffalo*, NE 6 Jan (LB).

Although normally persisting into Dec in Nebraska, the Myrtle Warblers noted in *Nemaha/Richardson* 23 Feb (DS) and *Knox* 2 Feb (MB) were quite exceptional. A clear "zootie" was a **Cape May Warbler** 11-17 Jan in *Douglas*, KS (JC, PW). Among those oddball wandering Pine Warblers were individuals located in *Sarpy*, NE 18 Dec—28 Feb (BP, LP) and *Clay*, KS 16 Dec (CO, JO). A Common Yellowthroat in *Lancaster*, NE 15 Dec (JG, TEL) was the first Dec record for Nebraska. One in *Douglas*, KS 26 Jan (AP, AN) was also pushing the n. limits for survival.

This was perhaps a season for ground-foraging emberizids to push their n. limits. Among the more northerly observations were those of a Spotted Towhee at McConaughy 16 Dec (*fide* SJD), an Eastern Towhee in *Riley*, KS 1 Feb (TC), a Dickcissel in *Sedgwick*, KS 15 Jan (D&MC), a Field Sparrow in *Geary*, KS 20 Jan (HA), a Lark Sparrow in *Barber*, KS 5 Jan (PJ), a Le Conte's Sparrow in *Lyon*, KS 1 Dec (SS), and a Grasshopper Sparrow in *Comanche*, OK 29 Dec (JAG). Also northerly was a Lincoln's Sparrow in *Lancaster*, NE 15 Dec (LE). Westerly were 2 White-throated Sparrows in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 15 Dec (*fide* AK).

Quite exceptional was a **Pyrrhuloxia** in *Comanche*, OK 12 Dec (KM)—21 Feb (JAG) But the undoubtedly most outstanding record of the season was a **Brambling** videotaped at a *Washington*, KS feeder 22-23 Jan (WB)—

unfortunately escaping the observation of many a Kansas birder.

A juv. female Yellow-headed Blackbird lingered until 15 Dec in *Scotts Bluff*, NE (SJD, m. ob.), with a male noted in *Boone*, NE 4 Jan (WM). The 2-7 Brown-headed Cowbirds wintering in *Scotts Bluff*, NE (SJD, KL, m. ob.) provided the first Jan—Feb record for the Nebraska Panhandle. Three cowbirds in *Scotts Bluff* itself 7 Jan (KL, PD, DD, AD) were the 2nd record. Also indicative of mild winter was an imm. Baltimore Oriole that survived in Omaha until 11 Dec (*fide* WRS).

One of the surprises of the winter was an invasion of White-winged Crossbills into Nebraska and Kansas. In Nebraska, a rough tally indicates that about 75 birds were reported, most at feeders, the largest flocks being of 16 in Omaha (BP, LP, m. ob.) and of 12 in *Keyapaha* (CH). A scattering of White-wingeds was reported from Kansas, including *Barton* (MR, LH), *Douglas* (RB), *Pottawatomie* (DB, G&DS, m. ob.), *Hamilton* (SS, MO), *Leavenworth* (GP), *Finney* (TS, SSh), *Geary* (CO, JO), *Shawnee* (PW), and *Butler* (*fide* CO). One was also observed in *Payne*, OK 9 Jan (OT). Common Redpolls were reported from five Nebraska locations. A few wandered to Kansas, with 2 in *Riley* 15 Dec (DR), 2 at *Cheyenne Bottoms* 13 Dec (*fide* MR), and another in *Riley* 5-10 Feb (DBu, G&DS). Among few reports of Evening Grosbeaks for the past few years were meager singles in *Hamilton* and *Kearny*, KS, both 12 Jan (SS, MO).

Cited observers (area editors in boldface):

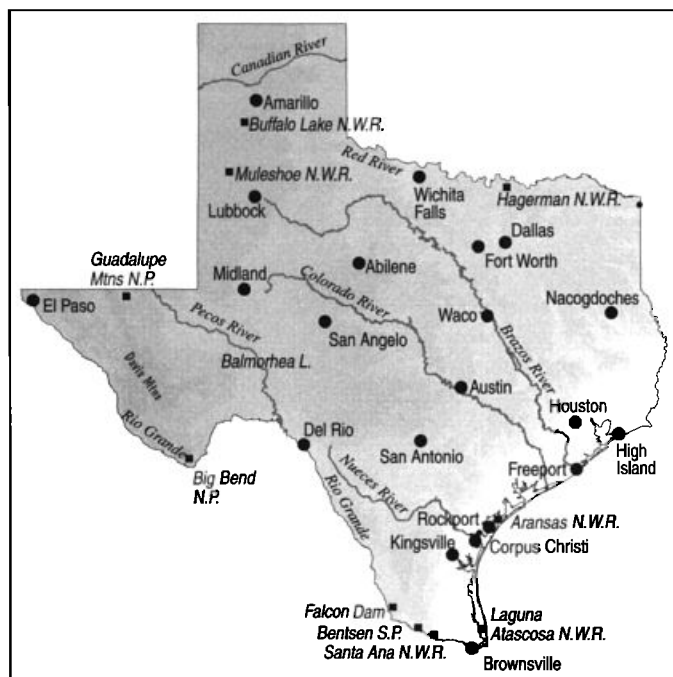
KANSAS: Henry Armknecht, Charles Anderson, Roger Boyd, Bill & Nancy Beard, Doris Burnett (DBu), Warren Buss, Mark Corder, Elaine Corder, Mike Cooper (MCo), Ted Cable, Jan Conrad, Don & Margaret Clemence, Dan Gish, Larry Hesed, Leon Hicks (LHi), Pete Janzen, Dan Larson, Mark Land, Mick McHugh, Gary Maxey, **Lloyd Moore**, Arpi Nyari, Chuck Otte, Jaye Otte, Marie Osterbuhr, Galen Pitman, Gerry Parkinson (GP), Sebastian Patti, Alexis Powell, Mark Radar, Mark Robbins (MRo), Dave Rintoul, Richard Rucker, Scott Seltman, Tom Shane, Sara Shane (SSh), Gary & Donna Shavers (G&DS), Steve Teske, Phil Wedge, Paul Willis (PW), Beverly Yates. **NEBRASKA:** Laurel Badura, Ed Brogie, Mark Brogie, Stephen J. Dinsmore, Dean Drawbaugh, Phyllis Drawbaugh, Larry Einemann, Joe Fontaine, Joe Gubanyi, Robin Harding, Dave Heidt, Bill F Huser, Alice Kenitz, Tom E. Labeledz, Kathy Larson, Wayne Mollhoff, Valerie Naylor, Kay Niyo, Mark Orsag (MOr), Babs Padelford,

Loren Padelford, Rob Parsons, Brandon K. Percival, Larry Randolph, **W. Ross Silcock**, Dave Stage, Dave Swanson (DSw), Jerry Toll, Steve Van Sickle, Harley Winfrey, Sarah Winfrey, Chris Wood. **OKLAHOMA:** David Arbour, **James W. Arterburn**, Sandy Berger, John Couch (Jc), C. Dormer, Bonnie Gall,

Bob Germany (BGe), S. Greetham, Joseph A. Grzybowski, Berlin Heck, Jo Loyd, L. Mallonee (LMa), Kurt Meisenzahl, Donna and Justin Roach, Pat Seibert, Jerry Sisler, O. Thomas, S.&J. Vredenburg, M. Yancey.



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This winter saw almost normal rainfall in the eastern third of the state, while most of the remainder either lapsed back into drought conditions or simply saw a continuation of dry conditions. Much of the South Texas region had virtually no measurable rainfall during the period. The same was true in the western half of the state; for example, Big Bend National Park recorded the second driest winter since 1953. Drought conditions impacted wintering bird populations, as seed and insect food sources were minimal in much of the state. In areas with more normal precipitation, observers also noted that species and individual numbers were well below average. Although there were a few fairly strong northern fronts, producing freezing conditions well into South Texas, the winter could most easily be described as mild.