

British Columbia–Yukon



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Basically another “winter that wasn’t,” with mild temperatures and moderate snowpacks the rule, although the Yukon experienced a winter with normal temperatures and snowpack. There were several mini-Arctic air invasions during the second week of December and the third week of January, the latter depositing the most snow of the period. As a result, many species lingered farther north than usual and/or remained in higher numbers. With mild winters such as this one, it is often difficult to determine whether birds are moving north or south; for such an example, see the Barn Swallow S. A. Other highlights of the season included a winter high count of eight species of warblers, a record 14 species of gulls, and Canada’s first overwintering Pacific-slope Flycatcher.

Abbreviations: Chichester (Chichester Bird Sanctuary, Kelowna); P.G. (Prince George); P.G.N.C. (Prince George Naturalists’ Club); R.P.B.O (Rocky Point Bird Observatory, s. Vancouver I.); Whse. (Whitehorse, Yukon).

LOONS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

At least 3 imm. Yellow-billed Loons continued

in the Comox area through the period (GLM et al.), and an imm. was in Kelowna 16-18 Feb (CC, RT0 et al.), the only interior report. Winter occurrences of Pied-billed Grebes are noteworthy in the cen. interior: one was along the Crooked R. 20 Jan (P.G.N.C.), and 3 were at William’s L. 16 Dec (PR). There are only a handful of Brown Pelican winter records for the Region. The individual found on Long Beach, Tofino 3 Dec was rescued by parks staff but died shortly thereafter (AD). Double-crested Cormorants are occasional winterers in the s. interior; an imm. was along the Okanagan Lakeshore, Kelowna 16-17 Feb (CC et al.).

Accidental in the Region, one or possibly 2 **Bewick’s Swans** were reported: one was at Kilby P.P. 2 Jan (JV) and possibly the same bird 3 & 24 Feb (DB) in Abbotsford. Brant are very rarely encountered in the interior, and one found 9 Dec (TP) in the Nicola Valley furnished a first local record. A very rare coastal vagrant, a **King Eider** in third-basic plumage, was off Denman I. 10 Jan+ (PF GLM et al.). A new species was recorded on the P.G. C.B.C. when a pair of Bufflehead was found 16 Dec (*vide* JB); 2 females were along the Crooked R. 20 Jan (P.G.N.C.). Turkey Vultures remained on Vancouver I. in above-average numbers, with 8 at Esquimalt Lagoon area 9 Feb, and by mid-month, vultures were being recorded farther n., most notably, 2 in Port Alberni 24 Feb (ReCr) and one at Campbell R. 28 Feb (DS).

An Osprey was very late in Tofino 8 & 16 Dec (AD). An ad. Peregrine Falcon provided a very rare sight for the Peace R. area 5 Jan at Dawson Cr. (MP, JP). Wild Turkeys continue to do well in the West Kootenays with 115 on the Lardeau C.B.C. and 151 on the West Kootenay winter count (*vide* EB, GS). Sandhill Cranes are casual winter visitors to the s. coast: one remained in Parksville, mid Vancouver I. 20 Jan+ (JB, GLM). A record winter total of 80 Least Sandpipers occurred on the Ladner C.B.C (RT0, JF). A high count of 61 Long-billed Dowitchers was present at Brydon Park Lagoons 5 Jan (DB).

GULLS THROUGH FLYCATCHERS

Very rare in winter, a Heermann’s Gull first found in Nov, remained in White Rock to 1 Jan (m. ob.). Rare in the province, **Iceland Gulls** reported were: a first-basic bird at Goldstream Park near Victoria 9-11 Dec (DF et al.); a basic ad. at R.P.B.O. 23 Dec—15 Feb (AMa, DA); and a basic ad. in Vernon 26 Jan+ (DGC ph.). A second-basic **Lesser Black-backed Gull** in Vernon provided the first record for the Okanagan Valley and 4th for the province 9 Feb+ (†DGC et al., ph.). The only Slaty-backed Gull away from the lower mainland was a third-basic bird at Nakusp 5 & 13 Jan and 3 Feb (†GSD, PW). Vancouver’s first and the province’s 6th **Ivory Gull** was found in Delta 4-23 Dec (JK, RT0, MM, TP, †BB et al.) The bird was believed to be in second-basic plumage and frequented the shipyard at the Deltaport Jetty. Due to the well-lit environs, many birders were able to tick this one in the middle of the night! A basic ad. **Black-tailed Gull** was reported from Ucluelet 5 Jan (†RT0, MM, †JF) and if accepted would be a 2nd record for the province.

Rare at any time on the outer coast, a Mourning Dove was in Tofino 2 Dec (AD). In marked contrast to last year, there were few reports of Northern Hawk Owls (except in s Yukon) and Great Gray Owls. Smashing a pre-

SA Fifty to 60 **Eurasian Collared-Doves** were present 17 Feb in the Similkameen Valley, where a specimen was retrieved (CC, CS, ph., †DGC). According to locals, this population has been present since the 1970s when a local aviculturist released the birds. Surprisingly, these birds do not appear to have the dispersal instincts of those that have rapidly expanded across the continent from stock released in the Bahamas. The population here bears monitoring.

vious record—early arrival by two weeks, 2 male Rufous Hummingbirds were in Nanaimo 20 Feb (*vide* GLM). Lewis's Woodpeckers very rarely visit the s. coast during winter, but one was near Victoria 27-29 Dec (*vide* DM). Two Downy Woodpeckers on the 29 Dec Mayo C.B.C. (*vide* MOD) provided a rare winter record for cen. Yukon. A male **Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker** provided the Territory's first documented winter record in Whse. 29 Jan (RE ph.). **Pacific-slope Flycatchers** are unheard of after Oct, but one individual spent the winter at Blenkinsop L., Saanich 24 Jan+ and provided a first Canadian winter record (JG, RS, m. ob.).

SWALLOWS THROUGH FINCHES

SA Barn Swallows have been known to occur in winter along the s. coast. These sightings have increased in frequency over the past decade; however, rarely are double-digit figures recorded. This winter, Barn Swallows staged a true invasion in Feb that contained a minimum of 52 birds. The outer coast's first winter record came 27 Dec (CS) at Chesterman Beach, Tofino. January records included: one at Swan L., Saanich 5 Jan (Victoria R.B.A.); one at Iona I. 5-14 Jan (CG, RT_o) joined by another 10-14 Jan (CG); and one at Reifel I. 13 Jan (CG). This latter location saw increases to 3 on 17 Feb, 8-10 on 18 Feb, 10 on 23 Feb, 12 on 26 Feb, and finally 19 on 28 Feb (m. ob.). Other significant counts included: 15 at Serpentine Fen 26 Feb (CG) and 8 at Iona I. 25 Feb (RT_o). The most northerly birds were encountered in mid-Feb in Comox (NH). Considering the significant increase in February and the relative lack of birds in December and January, it seems likely that these birds were traveling northward. Given that Vancouver's average arrival for this species is in early Apr, these are not likely early spring migrants. Weather would seem to present the likely reason behind this incursion. Persistent warm southwesterly winds dominated coastal weather for the first two weeks of Jan, but why would it affect predominantly Barn Swallows? Perhaps these winds originated from an area with a dense concentration of wintering Barn Swallows (probably in Mexico). This flood of early Barn Swallows was strictly a coastal phenomenon, much as it was to the south, in the Pacific Northwest and northern California.

SA Common Redpolls continued their invasion that had them scattered across the Region from the fall. Flocks seemed to be everywhere, and feeder watchers shelled out a lot of money and seeds to support them. Most C.B.C.s did not tally record numbers, but taken in aggregate, this will undoubtedly go down as one of the best irruptions ever to spread right across the province. As is often the case when large numbers of seed-eating birds congregate at feeders, disease eventually took its toll. The first inkling that something bad may have been afoot was when Vanderhoof birders noted several succumbing near the end of January. The accumulated evidence pointed to a salmonella epidemic. Endemic within the population, the bacterium is passed along readily via the feces of birds, a process exacerbated by the large numbers at feeders this winter. People feeding birds should note that wooden platform feeders are especially dangerous, as the toxin persists most readily on that substrate. Plastic feeders and a regular cleaning regimen using a mild bleach solution are the best defense.

A leucistic male Common Redpoll with a white-headed appearance was a daily visitor at Arras 8 Feb+ (ph. JP). Hoary Redpolls joined the flocks of Commons just about everywhere. Although they were relatively few in number, they were also liberally scattered across the province. As is usual, the best place to find them was the Peace R. area, where 12 were seen at Dawson Cr. 29 Dec (*vide* MP). Another 10 were reported from the s. interior and the s. coast, most notably a female on Vancouver I. in Duncan 19 Jan (GLM). It would seem likely that searching out breeding activity in the northern boreal forests of the province this summer could be productive.

As has been the trend, Blue Jays continue to increase in the province, with at least 40 reported this season. Most notably were 20 at Dawson Cr. 29 Dec (*vide* JB) and 2 in Comox, mid-Vancouver I. 20 Dec+ (NH). A casual visitor to the lower mainland, an ad. **Western Scrub-Jay** was in Port Coquitlam 30 Dec+ (FV, MV et al.). American Crows set a record 867 on the P.G. C.B.C. (*vide* JB). This could be a result of an increase in the local population but more likely is due to a greater proportion of the breeding population overwintering. Only rarely do interior Chestnut-backed Chickadees stray from the cedar belt. Such strays included: one or 2 in Cranbrook early Feb+ (RG et al) and a single at a P.G. feeder 27 Jan (MA). Rare in winter in the Peace R. area were 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches at Brassey Cr. 9 Dec (MP). A pair of Mountain Bluebirds was a good find near Comox 20 Dec (NH). American Robins responded to the mild weather by remaining both in large numbers and farther north. Christmas Bird Counts in the cen. interior had record numbers, with a few individuals lingering along the Nechako R. P.G. 8 Jan (JF). In the Yukon, robins numbered 3 at Wolf Cr. 12 Dec (JJ, AR), a single at Jackfish Bay on L. Laberge 7-13 Dec (AR, MR), a single at Hillcrest through Jan (m. ob.), and 2 at Riverdale through Jan (m. ob.).

Very rare in winter, single Northern Mockingbirds persisted in Castlegar 26 Dec (RK), Trail 16 Jan (DoB) and Duncan all winter (DM). The Okanagan's first Jan record of American Pipit was a single bird near Kelowna 27 Jan (CC RyT). Bohemian Waxwing numbers were near normal in most areas. In con-

trast, numbers of their smaller cousins, Cedar Waxwing, were up noticeably. Both Quesnel and P.G. had record-high numbers, with 19 and 15 respectively on local C.B.C.s. At least 8 attempted to overwinter in P.G. 15 Jan (JF) Vancouver's Crested Myna population continues its precipitous decline with only 4-6 birds left (*vide* RT_o). Although there are a number of reports of **Yellow Warblers** during the winter, they are scarcely ever substantiated. One such bird was discovered on the Ladner C.B.C. (TP) and seen again the next day (DTy). This individual furnished the first confirmed winter record for Vancouver. A Palm Warbler provided the first winter record for the Okanagan and overwintered in Kelowna 21 Jan+ (RyT, DGC ph. et al.). Casual in winter along the s. coast, 2 Northern Waterthrushes were at Reifel I. 9-16 Jan (JI et al.), and one remained to the end of the month. Very rare in winter, Common Yellowthroats included: a male near Oliver 23 Dec—17 Feb (AB et al.) and a female in a bog in Langley 5 Jan (DB). Casual in winter on Vancouver Island, a Wilson's Warbler was found in the Cowichan Valley 6 Jan (*vide* DM) Also casual on Vancouver I., a juv. Rose-breasted Grosbeak was in Tofino 9, 10 & 19 Dec (ph AD).

An American Tree Sparrow survived at a Whse. feeder through 23 Dec but subsequently disappeared (CE,PS). No fewer than 10 Swamp Sparrows were reported from s. areas of the province. Most notable was one on the outer coast in Tofino 28 Dec—14 Jan (AD). Golden-crowned Sparrows are very rare in winter in the interior; thus one recorded on the Quesnel C.B.C. was a count highlight (JMc, LMc)

White-crowned Sparrows are rarely found in winter as far n. as the cen. interior, where an imm. was found in P.G. 12 Dec (TH). Harris's Sparrows rarely stray as far as the outer coast, but one individual was in Tofino 2, 9 & 28 Dec (AD). Very rare in winter in the Peace R. area, a Red-winged Blackbird looked out of place at Arras 15 Dec (MP). An imm. male Yellow-headed Blackbird provided a first winter record at Vanderhoof 1 Jan (SK, LL, NK, TH). Both rare in winter, a Rusty Blackbird and a Brown-headed Cowbird were visiting a feeder in Nanaimo 1 Dec (GLM). Kelowna's male **Great-tailed Grackle** first discovered in May 2000 furnished a first Canadian C.B.C. record 15 Dec (ph. DGC) and remained through the period for its 2nd consecutive winter (m. ob.). Casual in winter on the outer coast, a Bullock's

Oriole was in Tofino 3 & 9 Dec (AD). The recent uninterrupted series of mild winters has allowed House Finches to flourish. New record C.B.C. tallies included: 53 at P.G., 161 at Quesnel, and 203 at Williams L. A female-type Evening Grosbeak, rare in Whse., was at a Riverdale feeder through Jan (RE).

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Oregon–Washington



species had first or second winter records, and 16 species of warblers were found this winter, better than some autumn seasons. Irruptive species formed a remarkably diverse group, including Emperor Goose, Barn Swallow, and Common Redpoll. Also, many kudos to the observers who put in time researching and documenting subspecific identification, tallying sparrow reports, or otherwise going beyond the call of duty. This Region is truly seeing a boom in observer effort and knowledge. The weather this winter was generally warmer and wetter than normal through January, but became cool and dry in February

Abbreviations: F.R.R. (Fern Ridge Res., Lane), Malheur (Malheur N.W.R., Harney); N.S.C.B. (N. Spit Coos Bay, Coos); O.S. (Ocean Shores, Grays Harbor); P.N.P. (Pt. No Pt., Kitsap), Ridgefield (Ridgefield N.W.R., Clark); Y.R.D. (Yakima R. delta, Benton, WA). "Eastside" and "westside" refer to locations east and west of the Cascade crest, respectively.

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This winter was perhaps even more extraordinary than the fall that preceded it. Rarities abounded, including two first Washington records. Perhaps more noteworthy, however, was the impressive array of lingerers and irruptions. Four non-vagrant

LOONS THROUGH RAILS

Seven Yellow-billed Loons this winter was above recent norms. Two Clark's Grebes represented a paltry winter total, with singles at Bay Center, *Pacific* 18-20 Jan (SM, DD, TP) and Coquille, *Coos* 18 Feb (TR). A Northern Fulmar inside Yaquina Bay, *Lincoln* 24 Feb was as close to being inland as this species ever comes (J. Sullivan). Eight American White Pelicans at Sauvie I. 1 Dec provided the only westside record this winter (J. Pendleton)