

This winter was neither uninteresting nor exceptional, though the recent pattern of more species wintering increasingly farther north was strengthened, and half-hardies generally rule the season's report. Some waterfowl wintered in exceptionally high numbers in Kansas, which, for instance, held the major concentration of Common Merganser; such numbers appear to be a thing of the past in Oklahoma. Lake Tenkiller in eastern Oklahoma, however, is proving to be a mecca for loons, with four species wintering. Finally, it was a better-than-normal winter for Northern Goshawks and Northern Shrikes in Nebraska and Kansas.

Abbreviations: Hefner (L. Hefner, Oklahoma, OK); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith, NE); Quivira (Quivira N.W.R., Stafford, KS); Red Slough (Red Slough W.M.A., McCurtain, OK); Tenkiller (L. Tenkiller, Sequoyah, OK).

LOONS THROUGH DUCKS

Numbers of loons have increased in the Region in recent years. Still rare, Red-throated Loons were reported at Hefner 9 & 30 Dec (JWA et al.) and Tulsa 14 Dec (CC, DHo et al.), with up to 6 noted at Tenkiller (JWA, m. ob.). Pacific Loons were found at McConaughy 14-15 Dec (MB, DH, SJD), with reports of 7 birds from Kansas through 25 Jan (*fide* LM), and up to 4 at Tenkiller through the season (JWA, m. ob.). A top count of 322 Common Loons was made at Tenkiller 3 Jan (JWA). And rounding out with the rarest, a Yellow-billed Loon also wintered at Tenkiller (JWA, m. ob.). A Red-necked Grebe was noted at McConaughy 15 Dec (SJD); one in Marion, KS 31 Dec was found dead on the ice 20 Jan (AP, m. ob.). Two Western Grebes lingered at McConaughy to 18 Jan (JGJ, WRS), with one in Custer, OK 18 Dec (JAG, JO, DB) and 2 in Riley, KS as late as 21 Dec (DRi). Single Clark's Grebes were in Scotts Bluff, NE 14 Dec (SJD, KN, WRS) and Sedgwick, KS 1-14 Dec (PJ et al.). Exceptional for the winter period were one to 2 Neotropical Cormorants in Coffey, KS 12 Dec (AS, TFI) and 26 Jan (AP, AN, MP).

American Bitterns were noted at Red Slough 26 Dec and 11 Feb (DA, BH). Unexpected was a Great Egret in McCurtain, OK 11 Jan (BH, CHE).

Southern Great Plains



Also lingering was an imm. Black-crowned Night-Heron 30 Dec in Oklahoma City (JWA). Six Trumpeter Swans were in Douglas, NE 5-19 Feb, including 2 with neckbands (CaG) that indicated origin from the Iowa reintroduction effort (*fide* MG). Outside w. Nebraska, the only other Trumpeters were 2 in Jefferson, KS 15 Jan—5 Feb (SR, m. ob.) and one in Roger Mills, OK 3 Jan (JAG). Tundra Swans made a better showing, with an imm. at McConaughy 15 Jan (MI), up to 5 at Quivira (LH, MR, m. ob.), and 6-8 in Roger Mills, OK 18 Dec—9 Feb (JAG, m. ob.). Global warming and population highs may be responsible for large goose concentrations in the Region this winter. Among highlights were estimates of 166,000 Greater White-fronted Geese, 400,000 Snow Geese, and 350,000 Canada Geese made at Quivira 18 Dec (MR et al.). About

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30,000 Snow Geese were still in Lancaster, NE 14 Dec (JG), with 30,000 to 40,000 in Washington, NE 11 Jan (DM). A "scoop" for the Region was a juv. Black Brant in Deuel, NE 16 Dec (SJD).

The apparently declining American Black Duck was reported in Cedar/Knox, NE, with 2 on 1 Jan (DH, MB) and one in Douglas, KS 26 Jan (AP, AN, MP). For the 4th consecutive winter, a Tufted Duck was found at L. Ogallala, Keith, NE 15 Dec. (SJD). Greater Scaup continue to increase in the Region, with highs of 64 in Keith, NE 15 Dec (SJD, MU) and 73 in Douglas, KS 31 Dec—15 Jan (AP). Although scoters are even less evident in the Region during winter, single Surf

Scoters were reported in Coffey, KS 8 Dec (MG, WCT), Keith, NE 16 Dec (SJD, KN), and Sedgwick, KS 19-25 Jan (CG, PJ, m. ob.). White-winged Scoters were present in Keith, NE 2-19 Dec (1-3; SJD, LR, RH, m. ob.) and Sumner, KS 10 Dec (TH). Long-tailed Ducks were noted as far s. as Tulsa 27 Dec—24 Feb (BC, m. ob.) and Pawnee, OK 19 Feb (JWA, JS, SM). The only report of a Barrow's Goldeneye was that of a male in Keith, NE 15 Dec (SJD). The Common Merganser concentration was in Kansas this winter, with 70,000 in Mitchell 15 Dec (MR).

KITES THROUGH GULLS

A most pleasant find was the 2 White-tailed Kites discovered on Fort Sill, Comanche, OK 27 Dec—21 Feb (JR, m. ob.). A perhaps better-than-average showing of Northern Goshawks tallied 6 in Nebraska (*fide* WRS) and 6 in Kansas (*fide* LM), with Oklahoma birds as far s. as Roger Mills (JAG) and McCurtain (CC, BH et al.) 3 Jan. A few Golden Eagles typically make it to e. reaches of the Region; this season, an ad. was in Harlan, NE 22 Dec and 1 Feb (GH, WH), and others were in Cherokee, OK 19 Jan and 1 Feb (D&JV), and McCurtain, OK 18 Feb (DA). Merlins have become more routine, many now wintering in towns. Virginia Rails wintered n. to at least McConaughy, where 7 were counted 15 Dec (SJD, MU). Among the linger-

ing and half-hardy shorebirds were 3 Killdeer in Kearney NE 1 Feb (LR, RH), a Greater Yellowlegs in Lancaster, NE 3 Dec (LE), a Spotted Sandpiper 14 Dec in McCurtain, OK (BH), single



This Yellow-billed Loon wintered in the clear waters of Lake Tenkiller, Sequoyah County, Oklahoma during 2002-2003 (here 6 December 2002), a favored site of over 300 loons of four species. Photograph by James W. Arterburn.

Dunlin both in Osage, KS 8 Dec (MG, WCT) and Coffey, KS 3 Jan (MC), and a Long-billed Dowitcher present until 11 Dec in Harlan, NE (GH, WH).

A few mixed-up Franklin's Gulls, usually in alternate plumage, winter or arrive early in the Region, this season in Harlan, NE 12 Dec (GH, WH), Douglas, KS 14 Dec (GP), Tulsa 21 Jan—19 Feb (JWA), Oklahoma City 5 Feb



One of two White-tailed Kites that appeared during December on Fort Sill, Comanche County, Oklahoma, this bird photographed 14 January 2003 shows feather edgings indicating that it hatched the previous summer. Photograph by Kurt Meisenzahl.

(JWA), and Pittsburg, OK 11 Feb (CC, JWA, SM). A second-basic Mew Gull wintered in Keith, NE (including McConaughy) 16 Dec—18 Jan (SJD, m. ob.), with one winter ad. seen briefly at Hefner 16 Dec (MO, JAG), the latter only the 2nd for Oklahoma.

California Gulls were fewer than in recent winters, noted only 6 & 30 Dec in Oklahoma City (JWA), 5 & 11 Feb in Pittsburg, OK (SM, JWA), and in Sedgwick, KS 27 Feb (CG). As many as 5 Thayer's Gulls, including 2 ads., 2 juvs., and a second-basic bird, were at McConaughy 15 Dec—18 Jan (AB, m. ob.). Other Thayer's were noted in Oklahoma City 9 Dec (ad.) & 17 Jan (2 first-winters; JWA et al.), Russell, KS 14 Dec (ad.; SSe), Douglas, KS 25 Jan (first-winter; AP) & 15 Feb (ad.; MM), and Morris, KS 17 Feb (first-winter; C&JO). A basic ad. Iceland (Kumlien's) Gull was carefully studied at McConaughy 15-27 Dec (SJD, MU, KN, CNK). Lesser Black-backed Gulls included ads. in Oklahoma City 7 Dec—30 Jan (JAG, SG, MO), at McConaughy 15-19 Dec (SJD, MU, TyH), and in Mitchell, KS 18 Jan (HA), with a second-winter bird in Oklahoma City 28 Dec (JAG, SG). Surprisingly few Glaucous Gulls were reported this winter: 2 from Nebraska (*fide* WRS), 5 from Kansas (*fide* LM), and one from Oklahoma, 28 Jan in LeFlore (CC).

DOVES THROUGH FINCHES

Doves have become an old story: Eurasian Collared-Doves are now seen routinely n. into Nebraska, Inca Doves are well into Kansas (with double-digit groups in Oklahoma), and there are several established areas for White-winged Doves in Oklahoma. Following last year's fairly good showing, only 3 Snowy Owls were reported this season from Nebraska (*fide* WRS), with one in Barton, KS 20 Jan—3 Feb (HH, SSe). A Northern Saw-whet Owl was found in Sumner, KS 10 Dec (TH).

Among the oddball hummingbirds was the latest-ever stand for a Ruby-throated in the Region: until 23 Jan in Tulsa (Waugh, JWA, JSc).

Rufous Hummingbirds lasted to 13 Dec in Johnson, KS (NL, JL), 4 Jan in Creek, OK (DL, m. ob.), with one in Saline, KS 15 Dec (DR, DB). The Broad-billed Hummingbird—nicknamed "Elvis"—that was first reported in Comanche, OK 12 Sep was last seen

18 Jan (P&DB, KM, m. ob.). Wandering e. were a Lewis's Woodpecker in Scott, KS 21 Dec (DBa, TS) and a Ladder-backed Woodpecker exceptionally to Riley, KS 8 Feb (LJ). Quite unexpected, but carefully studied, was an Ash-throated Flycatcher at Red Slough 2-14 Jan (DA, m. ob.). Northern Shrikes were widely reported this season, with 24 from Nebraska (*vide* WRS), 11 from Kansas (*vide* LM), and one from Oklahoma, the latter in Roger Mills 8 Jan (JAG). Loggerhead Shrikes were reported n. to Lancaster, NE 21 & 28 Jan (LE), and in Otoe, NE 10 Dec (LF, CF).

This season saw a minor incursion of corvids into the Region. Steller's Jays were seen in Seward, KS 30 Dec (SP, AP) and Meade, KS 26 Jan—22 Feb (CA, m. ob.). A few Western Scrub-Jays from last fall's invasion persisted in sw. Kansas (*vide* LM), with one e. to Roger Mills, OK 7 Jan (JAG). Five Pinyon Jays made it out to Keith, NE in early Dec (CWH), with 5-10 present in Cheyenne, KS through the period (HA). Most notable was a Clark's Nutcracker far e. to Jefferson, KS 15 Dec (BW). Also wandering somewhat far afield were several Mountain Chickadees in Keith, NE (CWH, m. ob.). A clearly extralimital Tufted Titmouse visited a feeder in Rock, NE 30 Dec (*vide* CH). The e. form of White-breasted Nuthatch was westerly this winter to Cheyenne, NE 1 Feb (2 birds; KD), and Scotts Bluff, NE 14 Dec (SJD, WRS, KN).

Rock Wrens were noted wandering to Scott, KS 2 Dec (TS, SS), Logan, KS 15 Dec (TS, SS), and Cherokee, OK through the period (CC, m. ob.). House Wrens lasted n. to at least 6 Dec in Wyandotte, KS (BY) and Harvey, KS 25 Dec (GF). Townsend's Solitaires wandered e. to at least Sumner, KS 22 Dec (TH, LH). A vagrant Varied Thrush was observed in Meade, KS 4 Dec—9 Feb (TF). Gray Catbirds lingered exceptionally n. to McConaughy 15-16 Dec (SJD, MU, KN) and Lancaster, NE 14 Dec (*vide* JG), with others reported for Kansas (*vide* LM) and Oklahoma (*vide* JWA). A Curve-billed Thrasher wintered in Sioux, NE

(L&JF)—the 5th for Nebraska. Upon capture, it was aged as a first-winter male (RG, HW). Another Curve-billed was in Meade, KS through 14 Dec (TF). A Sage Thrasher was n. to Roger Mills, OK 7 Jan (JAG). Rather far n. for the date were 3 Sprague's Pipits 12 Dec in Tulsa (BC, TM, DW), 3 in Custer, OK 18 Dec (JAG, JO, BD), and one in Noble, OK 29 Dec (SM).

Among a small scattering of warblers risking winter mortality were



Part of a minor outbreak was this Steller's Jay present in January and February 2003 in Meade County, Kansas (here 9 February).

Photograph by Kevin Groeneweg.

single Orange-crowned Warblers in Sarpy, NE 4 Dec (BR, LP), Douglas, NE 17 Dec (CHy), and Shawnee, KS 23 Dec (RF). Pine Warblers wintered in Hall, NE (*vide* SJD) and Johnson, KS (RM, ML, m. ob.). Even more exceptional was a Palm Warbler in Calamus-Loup, NE 27 Dec (BB). Other half-hardies hanging n. were a Spotted Towhee in Scotts Bluff, NE 14 Dec (SJD, WRS, KN) and an Eastern Towhee in Riley, KS 21 Dec (DRi). A one-eyed Clay-colored Sparrow wintering in Sioux, NE, and first noticed 5 Jan (MB), provided a first winter record for Nebraska. It was netted 12 Feb and found to be "healthy and fat." Another Clay-colored was found 15 Dec in Jefferson, KS (BR).

Up to 15 Le Conte's Sparrows in Roger Mills and Custer, OK 18 Dec—8 Jan extend westward the expected winter range for this species (JAG). The 16 White-winged Juncos in Logan, KS 15 Dec (TS, SS) also provide a nice data point. A Swamp Sparrow apparently wintering in Lancaster, NE was last noted 21 Jan (LE). Among lingering icterids were 8 Yellow-headed Blackbirds in Scotts Bluff, NE 14 Dec (SJD, WRS, KN) and one in Keith, NE 15 Dec (SJD, MU). Snow Buntings, up to 5 per location, were reported for five counties in Kansas: Stafford, Cowley, Russell, Elsworth, and Lincoln (*vide* LM). Fourteen Cassin's Finches made it e. to Keith, NE 15 Dec (WRS, KN).

Cited observers (state editors in bold-face): **NEBRASKA:** Bub Blake, Aaron Brees, Mark Brogie, Kathy DeLara, Stephen J. Dinsmore, Carol Falk, Laurence Falk, Lonnie & Janet Frimann, Larry Einemann, Carlos Grande (CaG), Ruth Green, Joe Gubanyi, Mary Gustafson, Carolyn Hall, Robin Harding, Carr Heaney (CHy), Dave Heidt, Tyler Hicks, Glen Hoge, Wanda Hoge, C.W. Huntley, Marshall Iliff, Joel G. Jorgensen, Clem N. Klaphake, Don Maas, Kay Niyo, Babs Padelford, Loren Padelford, Larry Randolph, W. Ross Silcock, Mark Urwiller, Harley Winfrey. **KANSAS:** Henry Armknecht, Charles Anderson, Doris Burnett, Dan Baffa (DBa), Mark Corder, Tom Flowers, Tom Flanigan (TFI), Gregg Friesen, Richard Field, Matt Gearheart, Chet Gresham, Tyler Hicks, Leon Hicks, Helen Hands, Pete Janzen, Lowell Johnson, Jane Leo, Nancy Leo, Mick McHugh, Rex Miller, Lloyd Moore, Arpad Nyari, Chuck & Jaye Otto, Galen Pittman, Alexis Powell, Monica Papes, Sebastian Patti, Mike Rader, Bob Rucker, Doug Rudick, Dave Rintoul (DRi), Scott Rice, Sara Shane, Tom Shane, Scott Seltman (SSe), Art Swalwell, Will Chatfield Taylor, Bunnie Watkins, Beverly Yates. **OKLAHOMA:** David Arbour, James W. Arterburn, David Barrett, P&D Bueller, Bill Carrell, Cameron Cox, Joseph A. Grzybowski, Stephen Grzybowski, Berlin Heck, C. Heck (CHe), D. Horton (DHo), D. Lambert, Kurt Meisenzahl, Steve Metz, Terry Mitchell, Mitch Oliphant, Jack Olson, Joe Roberts, J Scarborough (JSc), Jerry Sisler, Don & Joyce Varner, Don Woodfin. ☺