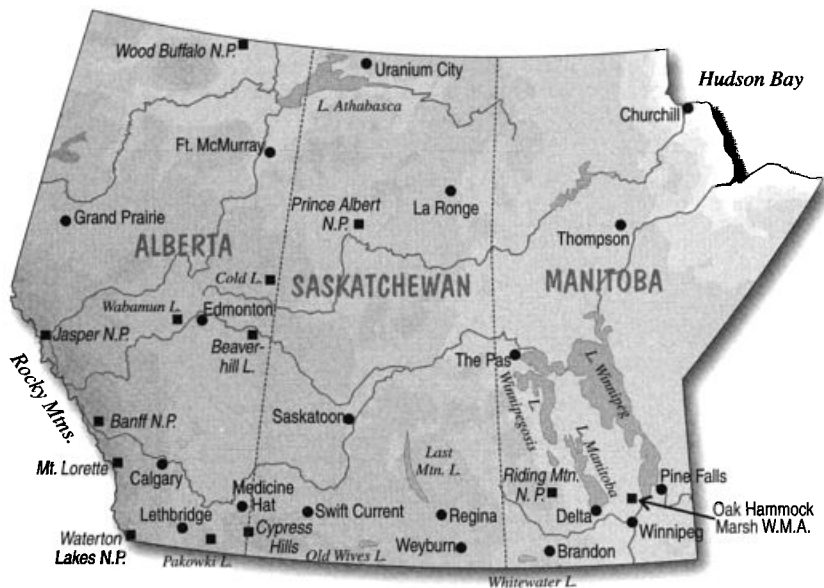


Prairie Provinces



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Severe winter conditions gave way to milder weather through most of the south in mid-March. Southern Manitoba experienced a mild spring from then on, with few interruptions by major systems, and trees leafed out a full month earlier than last year. In contrast, from mid-April to mid-May Alberta was on the "wrong" side of the jet stream, resulting in persistently cold and snowy weather. Migration on the whole was delayed by at least a week, even in balmy Manitoba, where few significant waves were noted. Precipitation was near to above average throughout, alleviating the severe drought that had gripped much of the southwest of the Region for years. A strong showing by rare waders, particularly in southern

Manitoba, and a scattering of extreme rarities in all three provinces, provided the high points of the season.

Abbreviations: S.R.V. (Sheep River Valley, AB); Wascana (Wascana Park and Marsh, Regina, SK).

LOONS THROUGH RAILS

Rare in Alberta in spring, 4 Red-throated Loons visited Lesser Slave L. 27 May (JWj). Alberta and Saskatchewan had 2 Great Egrets each, while there were several reports in Manitoba. A Snowy Egret was seen by many at Whitewater L., MB from 19 to late May (DF, m. ob.); another was noted at Pierson, MB in May (RW, *vide* PT). Cattle Egrets staged a major influx, with eight reports involving 13+ birds in Saskatchewan, including an early one 24 Apr near Regina (BL), and sightings at six or more locations in Manitoba. At Whitewater L., up to 50 were present in late May, and nesting activity was noted (KD et al.). Also in Manitoba were lone Green Herons at Elie 16 May (DS) and Winnipeg 25 May (JW) and an ad. Yellow-crowned Night-Heron that lingered at Oak Hammock Marsh W.M.A. from 22 May into Jun (BB, m. ob.). Manitoba's 2nd White Ibis at Delta 9–10 May was the star attraction of the local birding festival (RPO, m. ob.). Two *Plegadis ibis* near Redvers, SK 7–8 May were believed to have been Glossy (JM). Two White-faced Ibis were at San Francisco L., AB, a new location, 18 May (TH, RKL), and up to 5 were at Whitewater L. in late May

(DF, CC, m. ob.).

An Alberta first was the Fulvous Whistling-Duck, provenance unknown, at Calgary 25 May into Jun (C&KH, m. ob.). Greater White-fronted Geese were more numerous than usual in s. Manitoba and Saskatchewan, while Snow Geese shifted their migration westward, almost completely avoiding se. Manitoba. A nesting pair of Tundra Swans was confirmed at Patience L. near Saskatoon, SK 11–12 May (CB, m. ob.). Although this is over 1000 km s. of the normal range, there is a precedent, of a pair breeding near North Battleford between 1973 and 1980. Notable duck concentrations included 500+ Gadwall and 600+ Northern Shovelers at Fairy Hill Marsh, SK 24 Apr (BL) and a staggering 80,000 Northern Pintails at Pakowki L., AB in the first week of Apr (BF, BV).

Raptor migration was uneventful, although there was a good Bald Eagle passage in s. Manitoba, with peaks of 108 at Windygates 30 Mar (A&DS et al.) and 103 at St. Adolphe 6 Apr (AC et al.). The season's tally of 2972 Golden Eagles at Mt. Lorette, AB was 26% below the 1993–2002 average (PS), while at Windygates, a record-high 20 were counted 22 Mar (A&DS, RK et al.). Grasslands N.P., SK and the nearby Dixon Ranch each held a tree-nesting pair of Golden Eagles 20 Apr (SS, JT).

SHOREBIRDS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Although observers bemoaned the lack of shorebirds, some impressive counts were nevertheless made. Black-bellied Plovers peaked 17 May in Alberta, with 2000 near Brooks (MM) and 2830 at Rolling Hills (J&RD). Besides the usual reports in s. Alberta, there were up to 6 Black-necked Stilts near Frontier, SK 4–16 May (J&JW), and nesting was confirmed near Viceroy, SK in late May (JS, RS, m. ob.). Near Brooks, 157 Whimbrel were seen 17 May (MM), while 344 were tallied the same day at Rolling Hills (J&RD). Reed L., SK held 500 Red Knots 17 May (TK). Several Buff-breasted Sandpipers were seen in the Buck L., SK area during the 2nd half of May, and 95 were counted near Allan, SK 29 May (RJ, KE). Over 800 Long-billed Dowitchers were observed 11 May in the Thunder Creek Marsh–Chaplin L., SK area (BL). Chaplin L. held 10,000 Red-necked Phalaropes 20 May (TK).

An apparent Herring Gull x Glaucous Gull near Calgary 13 Apr was rare (TK). Rarer still was Saskatchewan's 5th or 6th Glaucous-winged Gull at Last Mountain L. 23 & 30 Apr (JM). Best of all was an apparent ad. Western Gull at Wascana 30 Mar–8 Apr, a first for the Region and one of few from the continent's interior (BL, m. ob.). The identification was confirmed by experts from digiscoped images taken 8 Apr by Scott

Wilson. A Caspian Tern at Winnipeg 24 Apr was early (JW), while an Arctic Tern, rare anywhere in the southern Prairie Provinces, was at Buck L. 19 May (SA, BL).

Eurasian Collared-Doves have now reached all three provinces: Manitoba's first confirmed bird was at Holland for about a week to 12 May (CS, AW, m. ob.). There had been a probable occurrence at Winnipeg in January 2000. In Alberta, up to 3 birds wintered at Red Deer (SSz), and another was at Medicine Hat 1 May (BV, m. ob.). Saskatchewan reports came from Laird (nesting), Mortlach, and Swift Current (m. ob.). A White-winged Dove at Ashern 9–12 May was Manitoba's 3rd (HJ, MP).

A count of 19 Northern Hawk Owls near Chisholm, AB 14 May was remarkable (RC). Short-eared Owls were virtually absent in s. Manitoba, but more common farther west, with up to 11 in late Mar and early Apr at Frank L., AB (GWr, JP, D&LF), 6 near St. Albert, AB 19 Apr (SG, m. ob.), and 8 southeast of Saskatoon 16 Apr (GW). Overnight owling forays 21–22, 26–27, and 29–30 Mar at Nopiming P.P. and Sandilands P.F., MB yielded grand totals of 12 Great Horned, 7 Barred, 8 Great Gray, 6 Long-eared, 42 Boreal, and 37 Northern Saw-whet Owls (CA, BB, RP, LV, AW).

A White-throated Swift at Mt. Lorette 12–13 May was Alberta's 3rd (PS). The Red-headed Woodpecker that wintered at Grosse Isle, MB was still present 21 May (KG). A Red-bellied Woodpecker was at Cypress River, MB 24 May (*vide* KD).

PASSERINES

A Sedge Wren at S.R.V. 24 May was the 2nd for the site (WS). Western Bluebirds were nesting w. of Longview, AB 1 May (DK, m. ob.). Rare visitors included a Wood Thrush at Riding Mountain N.P., MB 23 May (AW), a Varied Thrush at Reston, MB 1–5 Apr (*vide* DB), and lone Northern Mockingbirds at Wascana 4–5 May (B&SE, m. ob.) and Pinawa, MB 23 May (RZ). Warbler migration was generally late and drew few favorable comments. A Wilson's Warbler at Swift Current, SK 26 Apr was exceptionally early (L, M&RD).

A Clay-colored Sparrow reached Churchill, MB 9 May (*vide* BC), and a Field Sparrow briefly visited Assiniboine Park, Winnipeg 8 May (GH). Lark Buntings were common only in the Wildhorse–Onefour, AB area in May (TH, RKL) and scarce or absent elsewhere; none was reported in Manitoba. A count of 50+ Baird's Sparrows near Radville, SK 17 May was high (CBj), as were the 30+



This obliging Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, locally extremely rare, frequented Oak Hammock Marsh W.M.A., Manitoba from 22 May (here 24 May) into June 2003. Photograph by Ward Christianson.



From mid-May 2003 onward, Whitewater Lake in southwestern Manitoba hosted numerous "southern" waders, as did many northern locations this spring. This Snowy Egret, photographed here 19 May 2003, was one of at least two present. Photograph by Dennis Fast.



With at least five White-faced Ibis present this spring at Whitewater Lake, Manitoba, there was hope that the species would remain to breed at this productive marsh. These two birds were photographed 19 May 2003. Photograph by Dennis Fast.



Manitoba added Eurasian Collared-Dove to its list when this bird showed up in Holland in early May 2003. Seen by many birders on 12 May, the day of this image, it apparently was gone a day later. Photograph by Dennis Fast.

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows scattered along the Qu'Appelle Valley, SK 28 May (BL). Concentrations of White-crowned Sparrows included hundreds grounded by a blizzard at Edmonton, AB 8 May (DN); high numbers were also in s. Saskatchewan 4–9 May. Huge concentrations of Dark-eyed Juncos in Saskatchewan in mid-Apr included 1000+ at Harris 14 Apr (*vide* GW). A Gray-headed Junco at Mt. Lorette 28 Apr was a provincial first for this subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco (PS). Both McCown's and Chestnut-collared Longspurs drew comments about declining numbers.

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Orchard and Baltimore Orioles were scarce in s. Manitoba, likely reflecting losses during the cold spring of 2002. A Lazuli Bunting visited a Pierson feeder in May (RW, *vide* PT). About 500 male Brown-headed Cowbirds flocked at a dump near St. Ambrose, MB 10 May (RK). Manitoba's 6th Brambling made a brief visit to a Winnipeg yard 18 Mar (JS). Purple Finches thronged feeders across s. Manitoba and at Creighton, SK from Apr into early May (m. ob.). Two Cassin's Finches at Waterton N.P., AB 6 Apr were considered early (D&TD). Common Redpolls, scarce through the winter, became somewhat more common at feeders towards spring, e.g. 250+ were at Creighton 15 Mar (B&HS).

Observers (provincial compilers in boldface): Christian Artuso, Sandy Ayer, Bruno Bergmans, Carol Bjorklund (CBj), Carol Blenkin, David Braddell, Bonnie Chartier, Andy Courcelles, Ray Cromie, Cal Cuthbert, Ken De Smet, Doug & Theresa Dolman, Larry, Mary Ann and Ryan Dudragne, Jean & Rodger Dunn, Bob & Sandra Ewart, Kathy Exner, Dennis Fast, Dick & Lenora Flynn, Bob Frew, Ken Gardner, Stan Gosché, Michael Harrison, Chris & Ken Havard, Ted Hindmarch, George Holland, Robert Johanson, Harvard Johnson, Richard Klauke (RKL), Dwight Knapik, Rudolf Koes, Terry Korolyk, Harvey Lane, Bob Luterbach, John Madsen, Jim McKay (JMc), Mike Mulligan, David Nadeau, Rob Parsons, Jerry Pilny, Ryan Porteous (RPo), Marlene Priske, Brenda & Harvey Schmidt, Al & Dorothy Schritt, Stan Shadick, Peter Sherrington, Richard Silverman, Wayne Smith, Colleen Steinke, D. Stepler, Jo Swartz, S. Szabo (SSz), Peter Taylor, Jan Tedesco, Liis Veelma, Ben Velner, Greg Wagner (GWr), Adam Walleyn, Ralph Wang, Guy Wapple, John Weier, Jack & Jan Wilkinson, Jul Wojnowski (JWj), Reto Zach. ☺