

This was, in many respects, a “typical” winter, but one without major weather events. Nebraska, at least, returned to some modicum of normal winter harshness—relative to the recent decade of milder winters—and there was even some accumulation of snow. This resulted in a more “normal” exodus and arrival of most species. Waterfowl and blackbirds generally departed in early January and returned at the end of February, as in old times. “Half-hardies” were still much in evidence, with typical winter limits for some species, especially shorebirds, now reaching into Oklahoma. Sapsuckers seemed particularly abundant, with some even into Nebraska.

Nebraska had an influx of Common Redpolls, and the entire eastern edge of the Region had Purple Finches in good numbers, an unusual event in recent times. Accipiters were also conspicuous, especially in Oklahoma. Huge numbers of geese arrived in Nebraska in late February, and amazing sparrow counts were made in Kansas. It was a phenomenal winter for gulls throughout the Region, especially at L. McConaughy, where 11 species were recorded. On the down side, numbers of Black-capped Chickadees appeared to plummet in parts of Nebraska and Kansas.

Abbreviations: Harlan (Harlan County Res., Harlan, NE); Hefner (L. Hefner, Oklahoma, OK); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith, NE); Red Slough (Red Slough W.M.A., McCurtain, OK); Salt Plains (Salt Plains N.W.R., Alfalfa, OK); Tenkiller (L. Tenkiller, Sequoyah, OK).

## LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

All the loon excitement was in Oklahoma, with Tenkiller hosting its recently amazing aggregations, including a remarkable 428 Commons on 22 Jan (JWA). Peak Red-throated count at Tenkiller was 7 on 22 Jan (JWA); one to 2 were in Oklahoma 29 Dec and 24 Jan (JWA, JAG). The high count of Pacific Loons at Tenkiller was 5 on 27 Feb (JWA), and singles were in Custer 19 Dec (DE, JAG, JO) and Cherokee 21 Jan (JWA). The icing on the loon cake was provided by the 2 different Yellow-billed Loons at Tenkiller 22 & 24 Jan (JWA, m. ob.) and 27 Feb (JWA, JL). Tenkiller also hosted a remarkable 400 Horned Grebes 27 Feb (JWA, JSt, KM).

Providing Nebraska's 2nd latest fall date for Eared Grebe were a juv. in Lincoln (SJD) and 3 at McConaughy (SJD, KN), both 19 Dec. The 71 Western Grebes at McConaughy 19 Dec (SJD) declined to 5 by 21 Feb (DAE, TR, PK, WRS). Westerns were noted eastward in Oklahoma to Murray 24 & 26 Feb (BC, EBr, GLA; 2 birds) and Noble 11 Jan (TH, LH). Rather late were one to 2 Clark's Grebes at McConaughy 19 & 21 Dec (SJD). The only other Clark's reported was in Comanche, OK 7–10 Dec (KD, m. ob.); the species is rare in Oklahoma.

Surprising was an imm. Brown Pelican in Jackson, OK 5 Jan (DB) that was later found dead. A Neotropic Cormorant provided an unexpected winter record for Coffey, KS 3 Jan (ML, MG). Late and early were Great Egrets in

# Southern Great Plains



Oklahoma, OK 11 Dec (JAG) and McCurtain, OK 13 Feb (BH). A bit w. of the usual range was a Black Vulture in Pawnee, OK 27–28 Jan (PP).

## WATERFOWL

Indicative of a northward shift in wintering patterns were the 35,000 Snow Geese still present at Harlan 22 Dec (SJD, GB). Spring build-ups were already spectacular by Feb, with 250,000 Snows flying over Harlan 22 Feb (LR, RH) and at least 200,000 Canada Geese in Sioux, NE by 15 Feb (KDe). Numbers of Ross's Geese continue to increase; 2000 were in Pawnee, KS 27 Jan (SS), with more than 800 in Coffey, KS 10 Jan (TH, CS). Surprising was a Brant in Texas, OK 1–13 Jan (JSt, m. ob.), one of fewer than 5 ever documented for Oklahoma.

Trumpeter Swans from reintroduction programs are becoming numerous farther s. during winter. Birds with red collars from Iowa reintroductions were found at six locations in e. Nebraska and e. Kansas (fide WRS, LM, KG), while others from extreme sw. Minnesota (marked with orange patagial tags) were at

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three locations in e. Kansas (*vide* LM). A male Trumpeter with a green neck collar (hatched in Washington in 1994 and released in Iowa in 1995) was photographed in *Johnson*, KS in Feb (*vide* LM). There were five reports of 37 Trumpeter Swans in Oklahoma, including 14 in *Custer* 19 Dec (NV) and 8 each at the Salt Plains 12–30 Jan (AW) and in *Oklahoma* 14 Dec (PM). The only Tundra Swans were 11 at the Salt Plains 1 Dec–28 Jan (RS).

A male Eurasian Wigeon in *Texas*, OK 29 Dec–13 Jan (L.Ma, JW, NH) was quite unexpected. An American Black Duck was a bit far afield in *Gosper*, NE 19 Dec (SJD), with others in *Douglas*, KS 20 Dec (GP) and *Butler*, KS 21 Feb (DW). Rather early were one to 2 Blue-winged Teal at Red Slough 22–25 Feb (DA, BH). Mid-winter reports of Northern Shoveler now extend into Nebraska, with a female in *Dawson* 12 Jan (LR, RH) and 5 at North Platte SL 2 Feb (TJW).

Redheads were largely absent in many areas this winter but returned with a flurry by 22 Feb, with 700 at Harlan (LR, RH) and 450 at McConaughy (WRS, DAE, TR, PK). For the 5th winter, a male Tufted Duck was at L. Ogallala, *Keith*, NE 19–22 Dec (SJD, KN). Continuing a pattern of higher frequency for Greater Scaup was a scattering of reports, with high counts of 100 in *Tulsa*, OK 2 Jan (BGe) and 50–60 in *Douglas*, KS 19 Jan (DG). Strangely, the only scoter was a White-winged in *Douglas*, KS 2–19 Jan (GP, KaM, MP, DG).

Long-tailed Ducks were most common in Kansas, with 7 reported (*vide* LM, SJD); Nebraska's lone bird was at Harlan 22 Dec (SJD, GB), with others in *Tulsa*, OK (JWA, m. ob.), *Blaine*, OK 17 Feb (BH, JSt), and *Sequoyah*, OK 26 Jan (BB). Quite a surprise was a female Barrow's Goldeneye in *Custer*, OK 19 (JAG, DE, JO) & 21 Dec (BH). A good count of Hooded Mergansers was of 150+ in *Russell*, KS 8 Dec (MR). Amazing tallies of Common Mergansers were the 40,000 holding on in *Mitchell*, KS 21 Dec (MR) and the 36,000 at McConaughy, also 21 Dec (*vide* SJD).

Among hybrid ducks reported, Mallard x Northern Pintail and Gadwall x Northern Pintail males were in *Oklahoma*, OK 29 Dec and 25 Feb, respectively (JWA, JAG, JSt, KM). Male Common Goldeneye x Hooded Mergansers were in *Oklahoma*, OK 4 Dec (JWA) and at McConaughy 19 Jan (MI); this hybrid has been reported at McConaughy during two of the three winters beginning 1999–2000, probably the same bird. A photographed male goldeneye first thought to be a Barrow's in *Blaine*, OK 3–7 Feb turned out to be a Barrow's Goldeneye x Common Goldeneye hybrid (DT, m. ob.).

### OSPREY THROUGH CRANES

An Osprey in *Tulsa*, OK 20 Dec (ER) was very tardy. Best count of Bald Eagles was of 240 at McConaughy, including 60 percent ads., on 22

Feb (DAE, TR, WRS, PK). A White-tailed Kite appeared briefly in *Comanche*, OK 6 Dec (KM), an unprecedented record. *Accipiters* were widely reported in the Region, with good numbers in Oklahoma (*vide* JAG). Eight Northern Goshawks were noted, 6 in Nebraska (*vide* WRS), with singles in *Jefferson*, KS 18 Dec (SJD) and as far s. as *Washington*, OK 31 Dec (BG). Golden Eagles, rare in e. Oklahoma, were found in *Osage* 22 Feb (JC) and in *McCurtain*



This adult Black Brant at Guymon, Texas County, Oklahoma 13 January 2004 was photographed resting in a local park after forays to local fields. The state has only a handful of records of this subspecies. Photograph by James W. Arterburn.

on four occasions through the winter (BH, DA). Merlin reports declined drastically southward, with 33 in Nebraska (all 16 identified to subspecies were *richardsoni*), only 2 in Kansas (*vide* LM), and 6 from Oklahoma (*vide* JWA, JM). Easterly was a Prairie Falcon in *Sarpy*, NE 1 Jan (CNK). Peregrine Falcons in *Mitchell*, KS 21 Dec (MR), Harlan 22 Feb (LR, RH), and in *Lancaster*, NE 27 Dec (*vide* LRB) and 20 Feb (TR, DAE, WRS, PK) were likely of wintering *anatum*; none were found in Oklahoma.

Surprising were the 2 King Rails at Red Slough 11 & 13 Jan (DA, BH); the species may be establishing year-round residency there. Also a surprise at Red Slough were 5 Sandhill Cranes 4–25 Feb (BH, DF, DA), although the 5000 in *Barber*, KS 3 Jan (PJ) were more exceptional for at that latitude in winter.

### SHOREBIRDS THROUGH TERNS

Rather late was a Black-bellied Plover in *Johnston*, OK 8 Dec (BC, EBr). American Avocets were all over Oklahoma: one was still at Salt Plains 8 Dec (JWA), 3 were in *Sequoyah* 2 Dec (CH), and one of the 3 present in *Oklahoma* 4 Dec (JWA) wintered (JAG, JWA, PV, FS). There was a scattering of half-hardy shorebirds in the s. part of the Region, including the 11 Least Sandpipers n. to *Coffey*, KS 3 Jan (ML, MG). Also of more notable interest in Oklahoma were the single Spotted Sandpipers in *Cherokee* 20 Dec (MM, DJ, JN, DC) and 24 Jan (JWA), and in *Wagoner* 27 Dec (VO, JD) and 15 Feb (JM, BH, JD), a Dunlin in *Cleveland* 4 Jan (JAG, B&SD, CBy), and as many as 38 Long-billed Dowitchers at Salt Plains 12–13 Jan (GL, AW), with 2 in *Noble* 11 Jan (LH, TH). An excellent count of Wilson's Snipe was of 70 in *Sequoyah*, OK 24 Feb (JM).

Gulls continue to educate and excite the Region's birders, with 11 species just on the McConaughy C.B.C. 21 Dec (*vide* SJD), and 14 species total plus one hybrid for the Regional season total. To start with those found only in Oklahoma, Laughing Gulls were in *Cherokee* 10 Feb (JM) and *LeFlore* 1 Jan–29 Feb (SB, DT, m. ob.), with up to 2 Franklin's Gulls in *Tulsa* 2 Dec–3 Feb (BGd, JWA). Bonaparte's Gulls have been lingering later northward and in numbers; a group of 284 at McConaughy 19 Dec (SJD) also yielded an ad. basic Little Gull and an ad. basic Black-headed Gull (SJD, KN), the latter only the 2nd for Nebraska. Both birds were seen again on 21 Dec (*vide* SJD). An imm. Bonaparte's Gull persisted at McConaughy until 21 Feb (WRS, DAE, TR, PK), Nebraska's first winter record. Merely rare at McConaughy were basic ad. Mew Gulls 19 (SJD) & 21 Dec (WRS, KN; 2 birds), but a definite "zootie" was the 3rd for Oklahoma in *Blaine* 4–7 Feb (DT, m. ob.).

California Gulls are regular in low numbers in winter at McConaughy but rare elsewhere. Single Californias were at Harlan 14–27 Dec (GH, WH), *Sedgwick*, KS 30 Jan (PJ), *Tulsa*, OK 13 Feb (BCI), and *Cheyenne Bottoms* 24 Feb (SS), with one to 2 in *Oklahoma*, OK 11 Dec (JAG) through 24 Jan (JWA, CB, PF). Herring Gulls are only locally more common, but by far the best tally was an amazing 650, including 85 percent ads., 22 Feb at McConaughy (WRS, DAE, TR, PK). Thayer's Gull reports declined southward, with 9 from Nebraska (*vide* WRS), 3 from Kansas (MR, AS), and one or 2 birds in Oklahoma at Hefner (JWA, JAG, m. ob.). Clearly one of the rarer gull species in the Region is Iceland Gull; a first-winter bird was at McConaughy 21 Dec–1 Jan (SJD, WRS, BKP, TL, MI, ph.).

Lesser Black-backed Gulls are increasing in numbers; this winter, the Region hosted about 9, including 3 that wintered in *Oklahoma*, OK (JAG, m. ob.) and one in *Stephens*, OK 27 Dec (KM, SM, L&MT). Glaucous Gull is also more regular northward, with a total of 15 in Nebraska and Kansas (*vide* WRS, LM); from Oklahoma, only 4 were reported this season (*vide* JWA). A Glaucous recovered at Hefner 8 Jan apparently succumbed to a fungal infection in its air-sacs, probably *Aspergillus* (JAG). Less conspicuous was an apparent ad. Glaucous Gull x Herring Gull hybrid at Hefner 8 Jan (JAG), possibly the same bird as suspected two years ago. Finally, a first-winter Great Black-backed Gull was well described at McConaughy 19 Jan (MI). An excellent count of Forster's Terns was the 45+ wintering as far n. as *Wagoner*, OK (JWA, JM).

### DOVES THROUGH WRENS

Barely rating a mention, Eurasian Collared-Doves are now found throughout the Region. White-winged Doves are moving northward

also; northerly was one in *Elk*, KS 20 Dec (GJW), and 2 were in *Cimarron*, OK 9–18 Dec (JAG, JWA, BH, JSt). Inca Doves also are moving northward, with 2 in *Meade*, KS 11 Dec (TF) and an amazing 16 in *Wagoner*, OK through the period (JH, m. ob.). Still a rarity, however, is Common Ground-Dove: the only reports were of singles in *Cleveland*, OK 27 Dec (RG) and 27–28 Jan (JHy). Sporadically reported in extreme sw. Kansas, a Western Screech-Owl was in *Morton* 27 Dec (SP). The only other known location is in neighboring *Cimarron*, OK. Only 2 Snowy Owls came to light, one in *Lancaster*, NE 18 Dec (*vide* KP), another as far s. as *Rogers*, OK 28 Jan (GS).

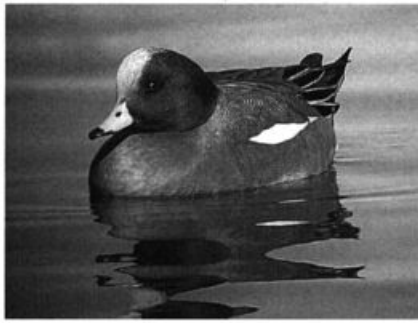
A few hummers survived at food sources, all Rufous or simply *Selasphorus*. Most northerly was a Rufous in *Saline*, KS Oct–10 Dec (NH). A Rufous in *Cleveland*, OK succumbed 12 Dec (RL), while another, along with 3 *Selasphorus*, wintered at *Tulsa*, OK residences (*vide* JWA). Another *Selasphorus* wintered in *Comanche*, OK (BM, EM, KM). An unusual cluster of 3 Lewis's Woodpeckers wintering in *Comanche*, OK were e. of their usual range (KM, WW, RA, m. ob.). Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were numerous, both in Oklahoma (*vide* JAG) and in Nebraska, where an exceptional 22 were noted, including a juv. nw. as far as *Brown* 15 Jan (*vide* MB).

An early Eastern Phoebe was as far nw. as *Alfalfa*, OK by 7 Feb (PJ, KG), and a late Say's Phoebe was still in *Cimarron*, OK 16–17 Dec (BH, JSt). Most surprising was Oklahoma's 2nd mid-winter Ash-throated Flycatcher in *Murray* 15 Jan (BJ). Not unexpected, but a good count, were the 4 Blue-headed Vireos in *McCurtain*, OK 11 Dec (BH). A high (or supplemented) winter count was the 96 Fish Crows in *McCurtain*, OK 13 Feb, up from 37 on 8 Dec (BH). The first Purple Martin appeared in *Tulsa*, OK 19 Feb (DS), followed closely by 5 Tree Swallows in *Seqoyah*, OK 24 Feb (JM, JHr).

Nebraska observers expressed considerable concern about low counts of Black-capped Chickadees. Two e. Nebraska C.B.C.s reported record low counts that were 10–15 percent lower than previous lows (*vide* JG, LRB), and a similar pattern was noted in ne. Kansas (*vide* LM). West Nile virus was suggested but unconfirmed as the culprit. A Rock Wren at *McConaughy* 21 Dec (LR, RH) was most tardy, while the one or 2 at Fort Gibson Dam in *Cherokee*, OK 27 Dec–15 Feb (JHr, SR, CR) were out of range. Other northerly wrens included several Carolina Wrens; one as far n. and w. as *Scotts Bluff*, NE 20 Dec (TR, WRS) provided the first Nebraska Panhandle record. Also risking the elements were a House Wren in *Leavenworth*, KS 28 Dec (MS, JS) and single Sedge Wrens in *Tulsa*, OK 10 Jan (TM) & 10 Feb (BGe, BF).

## THRUSHES THROUGH FINCHES

A Varied Thrush in *Cowley*, KS 21 Dec (GY) was the only one recorded. Unusually far n.



With only a few records for Oklahoma, this male Eurasian Wigeon at *Guymon*, Texas County (here 13 January 2004) was a popular visitor here. Photograph by James W. Arterburn.

was a Gray Catbird in *Adams*, NE 19 Jan (PD). Three Sage Thrashers persisted in *Cimarron*, OK 16–17 Dec (BH, JSt), as did a Brown Thrasher in *Madison*, NE 20 Dec (*vide* DH). The Curve-billed Thrasher in *Sioux*, NE entered the 18th month of its stay there (*vide* AK). Two Orange-crowned Warblers hoping for a tepid winter were in *Sedgwick*, KS 20 Dec (PJ), as were 2 Audubon's Warblers in *Cimarron*, OK 10 Dec (JAG, JWA), 18 Myrtle Warblers in *Knox*, NE 26 Dec (MB), with 2 in *Lincoln* 17 Jan (LR, RH). A Palm Warbler at Red Slough 16 Dec (DA) was most unexpected. Two tanagers attempting to survive the winter were a female Summer in *McCurtain*, OK 17 Jan+ (BH) and an even more surprising female Western Tanager at a *Riley*, KS feeder 31 Jan (DR).

Incredible numbers of sparrows were found in *Cowley*, KS, including 3000 American Tree Sparrows and 5000+ Harris's Sparrows (*vide* MT). Unusual in midwinter, single Lark Sparrows appeared in Oklahoma in *Alfalfa* 9 Feb (GL, LL, JLa) and *Osage* 29 Jan (RA). A Savannah Sparrow in *Otoe*, NE (LF, CF) was only the 2nd in midwinter for Nebraska, as was a Lin-



A rare find was this female Western Tanager coming to a feeder in *Manhattan*, Riley County, Kansas 31 January 2004. Photograph by Dave Rintoul.

coln's Sparrow in *Dixon* 24 Jan (BFH). Rare Dark-eyed Junco sightings included a Pink-sided e. to *Sarpy*, NE 1 Jan (CNK) and a Gray-headed wintering in *Sioux*, NE (HKH). The southernmost Snow Bunting was in *Sumner*, KS 2 Feb (TH).

The only report of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch was of 35 wintering at a regular location in *Sioux*, NE (HKH). Purple Finches were widely reported in e. parts of the Region after a

few lean years, including several counts of 50+ in Nebraska (*vide* WRS), 47+ in *Jefferson*, KS 29 Dec (MG), and a high count of 17 as far s. as *McCurtain*, OK 11 Dec (BH). Red Crossbills were inconspicuous this winter; Nebraska had only three reports (*vide* WRS), with 6 in *Morton*, KS 27 Dec (SP), 2–3 in *Wagoner*, OK 25 Nov (JWA), and one or 2 in *Cherokee*, OK 4 Feb (JM). This was a fairly good year for Common Redpolls in the Region, with about 30 scattered statewide in Nebraska Jan–Feb (*vide* WRS) and a few in Kansas s. to *Finney* 7 Dec–18 Jan (T&SS), *Riley* 14 Dec (TC), and *Saline* 3 Feb (JZ), the latter a report of 4 birds. Few Pine Siskins were reported. A first winter record of Lesser Goldfinch in *Pittsburg*, OK 26–29 Feb (BGh) was noteworthy by both date and e. location.

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