

# Idaho & Western Montana



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The autumn period was unusually moist in most areas of the Region, providing a welcome departure from the past three dry autumns. Major exceptions occurred in drought-stricken

portions of southeastern Idaho and southwestern Montana, where scattered storms brought little relief. For the fifth consecutive year, drought and irrigation draw-downs in southern Idaho reservoirs and streams seriously impacted waterbirds. With no extreme weather events or storms, it was assumed that flight conditions for migrating birds were mostly favorable. In addition to an impressive list of rarities that included three first state records, the season will be remembered for an unprecedented Blue Jay irruption and a widespread influx of montane bird species.

**Abbreviations:** A.F.R. (American Falls Res., Bingham and Power, ID); Camas (Camas N.W.R., Jefferson, ID); L.P. (Idaho Bird Observatory's banding station at Lucky Peak near Boise).

## LOONS THROUGH JAEGERS

It was Idaho's best season ever for Red-throated Loons, with 3 in Valley 22 Oct (ES)

and one in Owyhee 27 Nov (HK). Pacific Loons also came through in high numbers, with a total of 15 reported. A peak count of 230 Common Loons at Ennis L., Madison, MT was impressive (JP). Doubling previous counts at Canyon Ferry Res., MT were an estimated 3000 Western Grebes 22–25 Sep (BM, JP). A Great Egret lingered near Lewiston, ID 4 Sep–13 Nov (TG), where the species is rare but increasingly reported. Widespread and numerous were Cattle Egrets that strayed out of range, with at least 21 reported at 13 locations 20 Oct–17 Nov. An errant Green Heron was a noteworthy find in Bingham, ID 8 Aug (JT). As in last autumn, a White-faced Ibis wandered to Mann L., Nez Perce, ID 6 Aug (C&SW). A Greater White-fronted Goose, rare in w. Montana, stopped in Polson 28–29 Nov (DC). The recent elevation of Cackling Goose to full species status now encourages closer scrutiny and detailed documentation of all smaller white-cheeked geese. Verified reports included up to 2 minima in Boise, ID 10–29 Oct (HK) and 2 others in Nez Perce, ID 16 Oct–7 Nov (TG); a *hutchinsii* in Boise 26 Nov (HK); a *taverneri* in Nampa, ID 26 Nov (HK); and 4 *taverneri* in Polson, MT 28–29 Nov (DC). A total of only 3 Eurasian Wigeon reports matched last year's unusually poor showing. About average for fall were 6 Long-tailed Ducks. An incredible 50 Surf Scoters and 25 White-winged Scoters were observed, numbers that were surpassed only in fall 2002. Most notable were flocks of 15 of each species at Sandpoint, ID 12–13 Oct (EC).

An imm. *elegans* Red-shouldered Hawk flew over L.P. 11 Sep (JC), where the species is nearly annual. The tally of 17 Broad-winged Hawks at L.P. 21–30 Sep (JC) was fairly typical, but one discovered in Lake, MT 25 Sep (SR) was unexpected. The only Gyrfalcon was near Warm Springs, MT 11 Nov (CS), where it has returned for the past three years. Nine Black-bellied Plovers at Mann L. 26–29 Sep (MW) represented a record high count for n. Idaho. Doubling the usual fall tally were 12 American Golden-Plovers. Both states reported Hudsonian Godwits: one in Jefferson 31 Aug–2 Sep (D&EF, vt. KC) provided Idaho's 7th record, and another near Helena 14–15 Sep (BM) was w. Montana's 2nd. Unusually high for w. Montana were counts of 270 Baird's Sandpipers and 100 Pectoral Sandpipers near Missoula 1 Oct (TT). A Buff-breasted Sandpiper near Boise 30 Aug–3 Sep (†CF) provided Idaho's 3rd record, and one in Lake 18–23

Aug (DH) represented w. Montana's 7th. The total of 6 Short-billed Dowitchers constituted a fairly typical fall tally. Idaho's 10th **Red Phalarope** paused in *Owyhee* 5 Nov (†HK). Tripling the usual tally were reports of 7 single **Parasitic Jaegers** 4 Sep–8 Oct. Idaho's 6th and 7th **Long-tailed Jaegers** were exciting discoveries near Boise 25–27 Aug (MC, ph. HK) and in *Fremont* 28 Aug–3 Sep (ph. CW).

### GULLS THROUGH BLACKBIRDS

Bonaparte's Gulls were unusually numerous and peaked at 350 at A.F.R. 30 Oct (HK, CT). The tally of rare-but-regular gulls was about average, with 6 Mews, 8 Thayer's, and single Glaucous-winged and Glaucous Gulls reported. Sabine's Gulls came through in superb numbers, with a total of 21 reported. Single Arctic Terns were identified at A.F.R. 27 Aug & 12 Sep (HK, CT), where they are now expected. One to 2 Eurasian Collared-Doves were discovered in each of four new s. Idaho locations. The only Snowy Owl showed up in *Lake*, MT 19–20 Nov (DH). Also noteworthy in *Lake* were 2 Burrowing Owls 6 Oct (DH), rare in w. Montana. As in last winter, a wandering Banded Owl was present below A.F.R. 30 Oct–30 Nov+ (CT). With only two known Black Swift nest sites in Montana, another probable breeding site was discovered in Glacier N.P. 2 Aug (DC). An imm. female **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** in Mountain Home 14–15 Sep (HK, †ph. SP) provided Idaho's first record. The Gem State posted a record 8 **Anna's Hummingbird**—representing more than half of the fall extralimital reports of this species in the United States. Another Idaho first was an imm. male **Costa's Hummingbird** in Meridian 14 Oct–30 Nov+ (HK, ph. SP). A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** seen in *Fremont* 1–2 Oct (†CW) was Idaho's 7th. Single **Blue-headed Vireo** captures at L.P. 8 & 25 Sep (ph. JC) provided Idaho with 3rd and 4th confirmed records. No less interesting was Idaho's 4th **Philadelphia Vireo** in Boise 25 Aug (†CF).



On 14 September 2004, Idaho hummingbird bander Stacy Peterson captured an immature female Ruby-throated Hummingbird at Mountain Home in Elmore County, the Gem State's first. Photographs, measurements, and written documentation were examined by experts, who confirmed the identification. Photograph by Stacy Peterson.

As in the past few years, Blue Jay x Steller's Jay hybrids were noted in Coeur d'Alene, ID and Hamilton, MT. Up to 3 Pinyon Jays wandered to L.P. throughout Sep (JC), where they are nearly annual. Western Montana's 5th **Brown Thrasher** came through Stevensville 28 Oct (DC). The season's rare-but-regular warblers were few: a Tennessee Warbler at Camas 2 Oct (MCR), a Chestnut-sided near Three Forks, MT 9 Sep (RW), a Magnolia in *Fremont*, ID 1–2 Oct (CW), a Black-throated Blue at L.P. 25 Sep (ph. JC), a Palm in *Bonner*, ID 30 Sep (BB), single Blackpolls in Boise, ID 22 Sep (MC) and at Camas 9 Oct (MCR), and a Black-and-white at Minidoka N.W.R., ID 7 Sep (SB). Potentially a 2nd record for Idaho was the **Pine Warbler** found in *Fremont* 30 Sep (†CW). If accepted, a **Bay-breasted Warbler** near Challis 24 Sep (†JT) would be Idaho's 5th. Another highlight of the season was the Region's first **Worm-eating Warbler** at Camas 26 Sep (vt. MCR, CW). An exceptionally late Wilson's Warbler tarried in Stevensville,

MT 26 Nov (JH). The only Rose-breasted Grosbeak reported was near Hailey, ID 20 Sep (PWP). At least 3 Swamp Sparrows were found in *Elmore*, ID 13 Nov (m. ob.), where they are rare but annual. Reports of rare *Zonotrichia* sparrows were disappointingly low, with only 6 White-throateds, 4 Golden-crowned, and 6 Harris's Sparrows noted. The only Rusty Blackbird was discovered in *Bonner*, ID 20 Oct (BB).

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**SA** Unprecedented numbers of Blue Jays visited the Region this fall. From mid-Sep through the end of the period, a staggering 319 Blue Jays were recorded at 191 locations in Idaho, and 132 from 39 sites in western Montana. In comparison, only 6 Blue Jays were reported in the entire Region last fall, and the 27 recorded the year before represented the highest total in three years. One well-respected Montana bird authority who initially doubted the exceptional nature of this year's irruption became a firm believer—after 8 Blue Jays showed up in his yard! It was speculated that Blue Jay counts were significantly under-reported in portions of Montana where the species is resident, as they might not have been considered unusual there. Examination of extensive photographic documentation and careful descriptions indicated that *bromia*, the widespread subspecies that nests in western Alberta and northeastern British Columbia, was likely the source of this year's dispersal. The reason for this amazing movement remains unknown, but low food availability over a vast portion of the species' typical range may have triggered the exodus. Whatever the cause of the dispersal, it will be interesting to see if any of these birds remain in the Region in the coming months.