

Northern Great Plains



Ron Martin

The Region experienced one of the mildest winters on record. December temperatures were well above average, followed by record-breaking temperatures in January. The average January temperature in Minot, North Dakota was 28.3° F, five degrees above the previous high mark. In Grand Forks, North Dakota, the January temperature was 16° F above average. For the first time in recorded history, the temperature did not go below zero in January in Bismarck and Minot, North Dakota. In Malta, Montana, the temperature did not go below zero from 22 December through 15 February. Colder temperatures returned by mid-February, with most areas recording below-average temperatures for the month.

As is not uncommon in the Northern Great Plains, precipitation amounts varied widely. Eastern North Dakota had average precipitation, but the western Dakotas were devoid of snow for most of the winter. In eastern Montana, snow amounts were above average, but the mild temperatures melted most snowfalls within a few days. As might be expected, feeder activity was very low. Northern finches were almost non-existent. Good numbers of late and semi-hardy species were noted, and raptors made a good showing in the Dakotas.

GEESE THROUGH GREBES

Small flocks of early Snow Geese were moving into e. South Dakota by late Jan, and a Ross's Goose was record early in *Oliver*, ND 28 Feb (CDE). A flock of 160 Cackling Geese wintered in *Union*, SD (BH), and migrant Cackling Geese reached *Oliver*, ND by 28 Feb (HCT, CDE). Unusual in winter, 5 Trumpeter Swans were at Freezeout L., MT 4 Feb (MS). Ducks were moving into se. South Dakota by late Feb. A Surf Scoter wintered at Great Falls,

MT (AE), and one that lingered through 30 Dec in *Hughes*, SD (SJD) provided the latest record for the state. White-winged Scoters lingered through 29 Jan at Great Falls, MT (AN) and through 14 Jan in *Sully*, SD (RDO). Only the 2nd winter record for South Dakota, a Black Scoter remained in *Sully* until 11 Jan (p.a., RDO). Well above average were reports of 5 scattered Long-tailed Ducks in Montana in Jan and Feb. A Common Loon was late in *Sully*, SD 23 Dec (RDO). Single Pied-billed, Horned, and Western Grebes wintered in Great Falls, MT (AN). In South

Crane was in *Sully* 1 Jan (p.a., RDO). Unusual in Montana, 2 Sandhill Cranes were in *Stillwater* 23-24 Jan (BH), and the species was reported in mid-Feb in *Yellowstone* (CW).

A Franklin's Gull was late 30 Dec at Ft. Randall, SD, as were 12 Bonaparte's Gulls at the same location (SJD). A potential 4th record for South Dakota, an Iceland Gull was in *Pierre* 11-25 Feb (p.a., RDO); another was photographed at Great Falls, MT 8 Dec (p.a., AN). Good numbers of Snowy Owls were present in South Dakota, sw. North Dakota, and in Montana. Twelve were noted in the Glasgow/Ft. Peck area of Montana 7 Jan (AS), and 15-20 were reported for South Dakota. A



Furnishing a third record for Montana, this Northern Cardinal was present since July near *Nashua*, Valley County (here 9 December 2005). Photograph by Chuck Carlson.

Dakota, a Western Grebe 14 Jan in *Sully* provided a rare mid-winter record (RDO).

RAPTORS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Bald Eagles were again widespread in North Dakota, and the annual winter survey along the Missouri R. produced a record 75 birds (NDGFD). An imm. Red-Shouldered Hawk on the C.B.C. at Upper Souris N.W.R. 23 Dec. furnished the first winter record of the species for North Dakota (p.a., RR, DR, TP).

An American Coot wintered at Nelson L., *Oliver*, ND, a first wintering record for the state (HCT, CDE). Also furnishing the first winter record for South Dakota, a Whooping

Northern Hawk Owl was in *Pembina*, ND 6-14 Jan (p.a., JM, REM, CDE). Casual in winter in North Dakota, a Red-headed Woodpecker was on the C.B.C. at Icelandic S.P. 20 Dec. Late Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers included one in *Grand Forks*, ND 12 Dec (EEF) and one in *Yankton*, SD 29 Jan (RD).

CHICKADEES THROUGH WARBLERS

Two Mountain Chickadees and a possible Mountain Chickadee x Black-capped Chickadee hybrid spent the season at Ft. Peck, MT (CC). A Carolina Wren remained through 2 Dec in *Brown*, SD (ET), and an individual photographed at Devils Lake provided the 4th record for North Dakota (p.a., EA). The bird was seen once in Dec and once in early Feb and then 22-27 Feb. Golden-crowned Kinglets wintered in good numbers in North Dakota, possibly a result of the unusually mild winter. Casual in winter in North Dakota, 4 Eastern Bluebirds were in *Bismarck* 18 Dec (SD, JH, LS). Single Mountain Bluebirds were unusual in *Stillwater*, MT 12 Jan (BJ)

SA The number of wintering raptors in much of North Dakota is usually low, except for the sw. corner of the state, where moderate numbers can be encountered. This winter, an unprecedented concentration occurred in the sw. counties of *Slope*, *Bowman*, *Adams*, and *Hettinger*. Notable peak numbers included 111 Rough-legged Hawks and 49 Golden Eagles 30 Jan (JPL). Up to 3 Ferruginous Hawks were noted, the first wintering records for North Dakota (DWR, DOL). The Prairie Falcon peak was 12 on 28 Jan (DWR). Gyrfalcon numbers were also unprecedented. Lefor estimated 8-9 in the four-county area. Gyrfalcon numbers in the *Pierre*, SD area were also above average, with Backlund estimating a minimum of 21 (7 juv. and 14 ad./subad.) within a 60-km radius of the capitol city.

and in Valley 12 Feb (BL). Also casual in winter in North Dakota, a Hermit Thrush remained through 6 Jan in Grand Forks (DOL).

Two Dec Northern Mockingbird reports in North Dakota brought the total for 2005 to 12 individuals. Another was reported 7 Jan at Minot (DW). Casual in winter, a Yellow-rumped Warbler was in Kingsbury, SD 14 Jan (JSP).



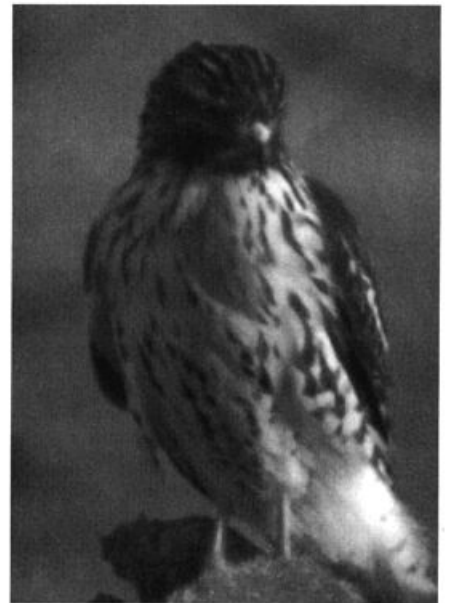
Present since September, this Green-tailed Towhee wintered near Grafton, Walsh County, North Dakota (here 21 December 2005). The fourth report for the state, this represented the first documented record. Photograph by Tim Driscoll.

mid-Dec, the bird first appeared at that location with another individual in late Sep. Usually very rare in the winter season, 5 White-crowned Sparrows were reported in North Dakota, with at least 2 individuals wintering. Northern Cardinals made a strong showing in North Dakota, with reports of 13 individuals. Present since Jul, a Northern Cardinal wintered near Nashua, Valley, MT

(p.a., †LS, †CC; ph.), apparently the 3rd record for the state.

The only Pine Grosbeak report was of a single bird at Denbigh Experimental Forest, ND 3 Dec (REM). Only 2 Red Crossbill reports were tallied in the Dakotas away from regular haunts in w. pine areas, while 2 White-winged Crossbills in Jamestown, ND 16 Dec were the only ones noted (LDI). Only 5 Common Redpolls were reported from three locations in North Dakota, and South Dakota had two Dec reports of the species.

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Providing a first winter-season record for North Dakota, this Red-shouldered Hawk was found on the Upper Souris National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota Christmas Bird Count 23 (here 26) December 2005. Photograph by Ron Martin.

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TOWHEES THROUGH REDPOLLS

The 4th report for North Dakota, and the first documented, a Green-tailed Towhee wintered near Grafton, Walsh, ND (p.a., LM). First reported to the birding community in



This possible Kumlien's Iceland Gull was photographed in Great Falls, Montana 8 December 2005. The status of Iceland Gull in Montana is currently under review. Photograph by Alan Nelson.

tered near Grafton, Walsh, ND (p.a., LM). First reported to the birding community in

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