

# Idaho & Western Montana



## David Trochlell

The winter of 2006 was relatively mild, despite a widespread period of subzero temperatures in mid-January. December and January were disappointingly dry with unusually meager snowfalls, and even February's ample precipitation failed to bring moisture levels back up to normal. It was yet another no-show winter for the winter finch fraternity, as has been the trend for many years now; numbers were either very low or the birds were absent. Mild weather encouraged waterfowl and a surprising variety of other half-hardy birds to linger in unusually high numbers, and this was reflected in a bevy of record Christmas Bird Count totals. Other avian highlights of the period included a flurry of first winter records and a few remarkable vagrants.

The Idaho Bird Records Committee (I.B.R.C.) has reconvened; many thanks to its Secretary, Shirley Sturts, and webmaster, Stacy Peterson, for their work in revitalizing this important group. In the last six months of 2006, Sturts and Peterson collected and prepared scores of bird reports—a daunting backlog of over 300 records, some of which go back almost 40 years.

**Abbreviation:** latilong (area encompassed by one degree latitude and one degree longitude used in mapping bird distribution in both Idaho and Montana).

## GEESE THROUGH DOVES

Single Idaho Greater White-fronted Geese

near Hagerman 23 Dec (*vide* SH) and Rupert 30 Dec (*vide* RL) were noteworthy, because they are casual in early winter. Even less expected were 2 in Warm Springs, MT 10 Feb (NK), where there are only four previous winter records. A total of 13 Cackling Geese was recorded, nearly double last winter's tally. Above average were reports of 4 Eurasian Wigeons in Idaho in early through mid-Feb. The season's tally of 11 Long-tailed Ducks likely topped all previous highest counts. If accepted, a Yellow-billed Loon at Sandpoint 29 Dec+ (†EC) will make Idaho's 6th record. Idaho's 7th winter Red-shouldered Hawk was an imm. *elegans* in Canyon 18 Dec (†CW), the typical age and subspecies documented in most reports. Perhaps record early was a spring migrant Turkey Vulture near Boise, ID 23 Jan (NM). Six Gyrfalcons, all from usual w. Montana locations, was a fairly typical season total. Establishing a first winter record for Montana was a Greater Yellowlegs near Three Forks 26 Dec (MG et al.). A Lesser Yellowlegs near Rexburg 15 Dec (ph. DCI) brought in Idaho's 7th winter record. With only about 15 winter precedents, a Spotted Sandpiper in Twin Falls, ID 16 Dec (JR) was noteworthy. Idaho's 16th winter Least Sandpiper was near Bruneau 23 Dec (LR); the species appears to be increasingly reported in sw. Idaho in winter. The rare winter gull tally was respectable, with reports of 3 Mew, 4 Thayer's, 3 Glaucous-winged, and 6 Glaucous Gulls. Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to thrive in Idaho, as evidenced by a record 87 recorded on Idaho Christmas counts; this represented a 40 per cent increase from last year.

## OWLS THROUGH SPARROWS

Just about average were reports of 3 Snowy Owls in w. Montana 16 Dec–4 Feb. Western Montana's first winter-period Burrowing Owl was near Dillon 6 Dec–15 Jan (SS). With only four previous winter records in Montana, a Boreal Owl near Missoula 16 Dec–25 Feb (DH) was great news. Two rare Idaho Anna's Hummingbirds held over into Dec (SP), where they add to about 13 previous winter reports. Montana Bewick's Wrens made headline news: one in Lake 17–21 Dec (DC) provided a first winter record for Montana, and a pair

stayed near Missoula 20 Dec+ (TT) to garner a first record of overwintering. It was a better-than-average Blue Jay flight year in Idaho, with 14 recorded. Another winter first for w. Montana was a Northern Mockingbird near Dillon 21 Dec (GS). A vagrant Eastern Bluebird at Montana City 20 Jan+ (DHo, ph. BM) represented a winter first for Montana and the Region. An incredible first for Latilong 38 was a Brown Thrasher that wintered near Bozeman, MT 23 Dec–28 Feb (KO, ph. JP). One of the top birds of the season was a hardy Curve-billed Thrasher (subspecies *oberholseri*) that survived the winter at Eureka 1 Dec+ (WB) to bring in a first record for w. Montana. Another winter first for Montana was a Green-tailed Towhee near Bozeman 28 Dec+ (KC). Incredible was a Chipping Sparrow recorded in Hailley, ID 1–18 Dec (ph. PWP) that provided a winter first for Latilong 19. A rare Clay-colored Sparrow in Moscow 3–13 Dec (ph. TG) was Idaho's first winter period report and 16th overall sighting. Representing Idaho's 8th winter record and a first for Latilong 25 was a Vesper Sparrow near Hagerman 23 Dec (*vide* SH). Both states reported very rare Red Fox Sparrows; one overwintered near Ola, Gem, ID (FZ), and 3 were near Red Lodge, MT 2 Jan (BJ). Rare *Zonotrichia* sparrows were relatively numerous, with 7 White-throated Sparrows and 13 Harris's Sparrows reported. Likely a winter-period first for Idaho was a record-early Black-headed Grosbeak in Garden Valley 24 Feb (MV).

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