

THE CHANGING SEASONS

by William B. Robertson, Jr.*

The luckless inheritors of this space tend to stress the continental panorama of changing birdlife. Properly so, no doubt. *American Birds* (*AB* hereafter) stands alone in attempting a timely seasonal ornithological exposé on so broad a canvas. But, to summarize a season coherently within *AB*'s Procrustean limits is a nightmare, even a winter that many editors considered dull. I probably should rejoice, not regret, that I write without having seen the 1975 CBC issue or reports from several key regions. Another point. The seasons change indeed, but the ways to view *AB* data are limited and by now are almost immutably focused on the forest, not the trees. One could, I suppose, peg the whole column to such questions as, what became of the Monk Parakeet scourge, recently so ominous? Or, why are Whistling Swans busting out all over? (I doubt any strong correlation between these trends.) This would give breathing room, and guarantee against a second invitation, but the timid must be conventional. I mean only to suggest that *AB* might at times do well to look more intently at fewer events. [*AB* welcomes and frequently publishes papers on trends and events in bird population dynamics; The Changing Seasons' role is as a broad seasonal review. — Ed.]

The effect on birds of man's ecological changes is a ready target for closer study. Massive habitat hybridization and its results are widely remarked, but poorly analyzed. This winter showed how thoroughly one such change, creating large lakes where no lakes were, has outmoded old concepts of "sea ducks," "sea gulls" and other strictly marine species. George Hall notes that aging of Appalachian impoundments may reduce their attraction for water birds. One can guess, however, that our industrious dam builders won't let this become a serious problem. Feeders, so neatly ticketed here last year (Paxton, *AB* 28:605), tend to hybridize climatic zones and their stratagems become ever more elaborate (see Hummingbirds). Many "tropical" richmondine finches, orioles and tanagers are proving as capable as titmice and carduelines in exploiting feeders. And, of course, feeders also feed bird predators, such as Sharpies and Merlins, not to mention the Snowy Owl Clive Goodwin attests came to an Ontario feeder to eat raisins. More subtle climatic

effects continually emerge, as in observations that warm power plant effluent supports enough insects to sustain late-lingering swallows.

WEATHER

It was a seductive sort of winter for man and bird and needs brief separate billing. Despite a cold autumn and the size of squirrels' nut caches, early winter was exceptionally mild every place where winter counts for much. "Shirt-sleeve birding" on the north shore of Lake Superior and pleasant hiking with little snow in central Canada, both in Mid-December, tell the story. The later winter turned nasty. The first and most decisive change was in the northern Great Plains with the savage Jan. 10-11 storm that Robert Janssen termed "the blizzard of the century." Temperature dropped 30°F in a few hours and the data on wind force and barometric depression sound like the vital statistics of a strong Florida hurricane. Where this storm struck, east to northwest Iowa and Minnesota, it decimated populations of small birds. Reports speak of almost total kill at some feeders. The rest of the winter there saw a steady parade of low pressure systems across an almost birdless land. Away from the mid-continental caldron of winds, the winter soured slowly as it aged into a cold, blustery and retarded March. Indeed, southern Ontario had no winter until winter was past, then suffered an historic worst April blizzard. It was unusually dry across the southernmost regions. Storms, mostly late, brought heavy snow to the northern Rockies, but less southward and in the Great Basin where Salt Lake City had its mildest winter in years.

Except in the northern Great Plains birds met with little direct mortality from weather. Locally in the West snow drove some species out of the high country, but, generally, mild weather, light snow and much open water far north kept birds dispersed and led to frequent complaints of poor birding. Coast-to-coast the backwardness of the season delayed March migrants. Barring a few notables mentioned beyond, I'll say no more about migration during the period.

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LAGGARDS

Predictably, mild early winter, in some areas the fourth and fifth such in a row, led birds to stay unusually far north. The phenomenon is usual, but the variety of birds that ignored the calendar this year approached the absurd. I note over 200 species reported well north of where they should have been with some 25 regional, state or provincial "first winter records." Soul-searching on the subject of "true" wintering *vs.* late straggling was prominent (oddly, more so in southern regions than in the North), but it tends to become a semantic exercise. The many mid-to-late winter reports of "tender" species in remarkable places rudely shook the belief that winter stragglers only delay their death date. But, it is no doubt too soon to suggest that migration is becoming obsolete.

So many species wintered or lingered so widely north of their "normal" seasonal range that detailed review is infeasible. Laggards included: the Anhinga; most herons and puddle ducks; many diurnal raptors, with about 15 Ospreys in at least six out-of-range regions; the Am. Coot, both gallinules and several rails; most shorebirds; many flycatchers and almost all the swallows; at least six vireos; at least 21 parulids north of 35°N; orioles, tanagers and almost all the richmondene finches; and, practically the entire suite of sparrows. I mention beyond a few reports notable for other reasons. For the rest, I offer a sampler of 15, chosen with great difficulty. How, then, do you fancy: a Great Blue Heron at mud pots near Old Faithful, Yellowstone N.P., Jan. 10; a Reddish Egret *inland* in south central Texas, Feb. 22; January records of Turkey Vultures in five states of the upper Midwest; an Osprey at St. Louis, Feb. 15; a small flock of Pectoral Sandpipers in Tennessee, Feb. 19; 30 Dunlin in eastern New Mexico in January; a Great Crested Flycatcher in central Arkansas to at least late February; House Wrens in southern Ontario and Keokuk, Ia., in January; a Swainson's Thrush at Brigantine, N J, Mar. 2, that probably had wintered; a Yellow-throated Vireo near Hot Springs, Ark., Jan. 22; a Black-and-white Warbler in Duluth through March; a Tennessee Warbler at Charleston, Ill., to at least Mar. 6; a Cape May Warbler in Tennessee, Jan. 9; and, Indigo Buntings that wintered at five feeders in Illinois, Kentucky and Tennessee. My number 15 has to be the Rose-breasted Grosbeak found consorting with a flock of Evening Grosbeaks in *Cook Co., Minn., Jan. 24*

IRRUPTIVES

Incursions of tundra and boreal forest land

birds south in the East, south and downhill in the West, since most winters. Last year Paxton (*AB* 28:608) rated the 5-year performances of 12 such species on a descending scale of XX, X and O. This year would show more O's than X's, for it was a winter when many boreal birds stayed home. The major mouse-lemming predators moved in force, the bird predators moved less decisively, and (with exceptions) the gleaners and seed-and-berry eaters evidently found little need to move.

Predators — Goshawks ranged fairly far south in the Midwest and a few invaded lowlands in the Southwest, but it wasn't a flight year. Rough-legged Hawks were moving last fall (Zimmerman, *AB* 29:26) and the flight brought record numbers from the lake plains, Midwest and northern Great Basin to the extreme southern range limits. Rough-leggeds reached the Carolina barrier islands, the Lower Florida Keys, the Gulf coast, south Texas ("too numerous to report in detail"), northern Chihuahua, Mex., and southwestern California. Critical gaps in the reports make it difficult for me to say much about the Gyrfalcon flight. Only in the northern Great Plains, where Esther Serr suggests Gyrs may follow waterfowl down the Missouri R., were observers much impressed. Still, 31 reports from a sketchy coverage is half the total for the "explosive invasion" of 1971-72 (Buckley, *AB* 26:568) and the southern limits of the flight were nearly the same as three years ago. The East's heralded Snowy Owl invasion developed little steam despite a thin scatter south to Pea I., N.C., and fair numbers in Washington and a few in Oregon echoed last winter's record flight in the West (Paxton, *AB* 28:607). This year (perhaps just for variety) the owls came south in mid-continent and a reasonable guess is they numbered in the low thousands of individuals. Every editor from the Midwest to the Rockies reached for strong superlatives. Southern outposts (a report from central Florida went unconfirmed) were Waco, Tex., and Opelika, Ala., where one obliged visitors from several states by staying almost a month. Great Horned Owls aren't usually thought of as boreal irruptives, but birds of the Hudson Bay and Labrador subspecies reportedly occurred around Ottawa. It's not evident from the reports I have that Great Gray, Hawk or Boreal owls moved much. Northern Shrike reports were patchy, and, as several editors noted, identification may have been more of a problem than usual because many Loggerhead Shrikes stayed north. No major surge was evident, in any case, though southern Arizona reported its first "convincing" sight records.

Three-toed Woodpeckers — The big flight

forecast last fall fizzled except in eastern Ontario, where Ottawa's total of 110 was notable in that numbers of the Northern (= barred-backed) almost equalled the usually much commoner Black-backed. A fair scatter reached southwest Ontario and probably accounted for the lone Black-backed in Detroit. Areas south of the eastern Great Lakes produced only four reports (Black-backed from Reading, Pa., Buffalo and eastern Ohio; Northern at Presque I., said to be the first Pennsylvania report), and the western Great Lakes had only a disappointing half dozen or so of the two species combined.

Corvids through Waxwings — The best the East had to offer was a modest push of Gray Jays into eastern Ontario, and western montane corvids were nearly absent from the lowlands. Russ Balda's report that Piñon Jays nested a month early (late February) in northern Arizona, apparently responding to good cone crops, may give a clue to their lack of movement. Early-flying Red-breasted Nuthatches wintered from the southern Great Plains across the mid-South to Florida. Northward, across an 800+ mile gap where they were almost absent, Clive Goodwin reported saturation numbers in northern Ontario (647, Algonquin CBC; 433, Minden CBC vs. 3 last year). It would be fascinating to know which geographical or age segments came south and which remained. Boreal and Black-capped chickadees were virtually immobile and Black-capped also "abounded" in northern Ontario in midwinter. From sea to sea, both kinglets wintered north in exceptional numbers, and the Golden-crowns in the lowland Southwest seem to have arrived last fall. Outside their Northwestern stronghold, numbers of Bohemian Waxwings scarcely deserve mention. Southern California had two "totally unexpected" records and reports in the East south of Ontario also averaged about two per region, presumably by observers who painfully sorted the non-too-plentiful flocks of Cedar Waxwings.

Finches and Buntings — East of the Rockies and south of the Great Lakes it must have been the worst modern winter for northern finches. Most watchers had to be content with Pine Siskins and Purple Finches, and, southward, there were few enough of those, especially siskins. Evening Grosbeaks (now reported somewhat apologetically) were general east of the Appalachians but rather scarce west, and most numbers were small (but a flock of 1400 in the Virginia piedmont) and didn't carry far south (40 to Birmingham). For most easterners and lowland westerners, redpolls, crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks might almost as well have been birds of myth. But, as if to prove we have yet a little to learn,

Common (and a few Hoary) Redpolls began a "spectacular" invasion of Ontario in late March

In the West, rosy finches and Cassin's Finches evidently made only local and sporadic descents to the valleys, but some of these were notable indeed, as the estimated 100,000 Horned Larks and rosy finches found near Helena, Mont., after a storm. Red Crossbills were locally abundant in northern Arizona, and several western areas reported winter breeding, most notably a pair found nesting on the Denver CBC. Looking at the "big picture," however, one could almost say that the Rose-breasted Grosbeak (at least a dozen well north in at least five eastern regions) was the winter's outstanding "northern" finch, and could imagine that some incalculable disaster had overtaken the carduelines. Happily, not so. Impressive numbers of all missing species found in northern Ontario, the northern Rockies or both make it plain that most of the northern finches simply stayed put this winter. The tundra longspurs (Lapland, Smith's) swarmed in the southern Great Plains. Laplands ranged to Arkansas (4096, Slovak CBC) and northwestern Alabama, and normal, smaller numbers were in the East south to southern New Jersey, with a trickle down the coast as far as northeastern Florida. The return flight of Smith's Longspurs (it must have one of the narrowest migration routes of any common North American bird) was detected at several places in the Midwest in March. The Great Plains short-grass longspurs are misplaced here, but it's convenient to mention that southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona experienced a massive flight of Chestnut-collared that spread well into northern Mexico and included unusual numbers of McCown's in some areas. Newsworthy numbers of Snow Buntings were mainly in Ontario with ten reports of flocks of 1000+ and 11,400 on the Barrie CBC. A McKay's Bunting trapped on Adak in March (first Aleutian record, 600 miles south of the usual winter range) made a last, and unusual, boreal irruptive.

DISPLACEMENTS

After its open-handed donation of warblers last fall (Zimmerman, *AB* 29:27), the East did a bit better in the winter exchange. Movements of less migratory western species east across the central and northern Great Plains were especially interesting. These included: a Lewis' Woodpecker that wintered in central Minnesota; Black-billed Magpies in St. Louis and northwestern Ontario, Rock Wrens at Dodge City, Kans., and all winter in southern Illinois; about 15 Varied Thrushes east to Wisconsin and Illinois; House Finches at

Yankton and Rapid City, S.D., and Waco, Tex. (from the West?); and, Green-tailed Towhees in Michigan and Missouri. Townsend's Solitaire staged a minor invasion of the plains with numbers east to the Missouri River in South Dakota, "up to 30 a day" near Amarillo, and an outpost record in east central Kansas. The Mountain Bluebird could be discussed as well as an irruptive, because it not only flooded the plains, but was also abundant in several parts of the West. The easternmost record was at Coxsackie, N.Y., in December and January. Many Sage Thrashers were east of usual range in Texas and one reached southwestern Louisiana. Black-throated Gray Warblers were about as usual in the East (two in Virginia, northwestern Florida, two in Louisiana), but, typical of the season, one at Bozeman, Dec 15, was the first Montana report. The Golden-fronted Woodpecker with the erratic compass (AB 29:63) stayed at Cheboygan, Mich., until Dec. 22, and it seems to be the consensus that the one reported from southern Florida (AB 29 46) was an aberrant Red-bellied.

OUTLANDERS

The Florida neotropical fringe had little beyond three single Am. Flamingos and an utter confusion of coots. I'm afraid I persist in believing that the Am. Flamingos are likely to be escapes, no matter how red they may be. Some of the coots presumably were Caribbean Coots, if that indeed is a distinct species, but wide variation in shield size and color of Am. Coots also seems evident. The Mexican sector's reports suggest a good winter with some border species that rarely winter (Coppery-tailed Trogon, Yellow-green Vireo, Varied Bunting), some old-timers that are seldom reported (Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, White-collared Seedeater), and many of the newcomers (Mexican Crow, Brown Jay, Clay-colored Robin, and Crimson-collared Grosbeak in southern Texas, and six Rufous-backed Robins in Southern Arizona).

Action on the palaeartic fringe shifted from Adak to the Pacific coast (including the Southwest and N. Rockies). Regions there reported a Bewick's Swan in northern California, European Wigeon and Eurasian-type Green-winged Teal in numbers, two Baikal Teal killed in northern California, a Garganey at Long Beach, five Tufted Ducks, a male Smew at Vancouver, six Ruffs, a Little Gull, and an immature White Wagtail in northeastern Oregon. Adak had four Whooper Swans, a Tufted Duck and some Smew, but also it had a hard winter. The available East shows comparatively little: Ruffs in Virginia and Florida; seven Lesser Black-backed Gulls,

mostly at places they had wintered before; and, about five Black-headed and 15 Little gulls, including a possible Little Gull on the Texas coast. The mid-continent provided only a Barnacle Goose (Tishimingo N.W.R., Okla., Nov. 7).

Buckley (AB 25:543-4) has argued forcefully that palaeartic stragglers shouldn't be dismissed casually as escapes, and that some species may even breed undetected in the New World arctic. Similarly, Guy McCaskie suggests that the California Garganey may be a natural vagrant, because the species is not a notable long-distance migrant. I agree that each case needs careful judgment, but the Garganey may not be the best case to argue, because it breeds considerably farther south than most Old World waterfowl that have reached North America (See Voous 1960, *Atlas Eur. Birds*, p. 40). Continuing argument is predictable until yet-unknown breeding grounds are found or banded birds are recovered. McCaskie presents elegant evidence of the latter sort in his report that the Snow Geese wintering on Salton Sea included seven marked last summer on Wrangle I., Siberia.

EXPANSIONISTS

The White-tailed Kite, by now an old story here, appeared at St. Marks N.W.R., Fla. (from where?), and at several places well inland in south central Texas. In California, where it seems to increase continually in its normal (= re-claimed) range, it penetrated the desert to the Imperial Valley, and new sightings around Reno suggest that it may be colonizing (of all places) Nevada. Black-necked Stilts possibly wintered at their new breeding area near Mobile, and may also be moving north, and wintering (22, Oakland CBC), in the Central Valley of California. Records from Ontario and south central New York hint that the Com. Raven may be closing the gap between its Appalachian and northern range in the East. Three species (Inca Dove, Verdin, Ladder-backed Woodpecker) seem to be moving north in north central Texas and the latter species was reported twice this winter from Oklahoma City. Nuttall's Woodpecker is said to be continuing its advance up the San Francisco peninsula, seemingly at no great pace as the peninsula is barely 60 miles long. The familiar eastern species still move west and north. Red-bellied Woodpeckers, increasing in Ontario and the northern Appalachians, ranged into the Great Plains as far as Roswell, N. Mex., and wintered at feeders in both Dakotas. The Mockingbird, with few worlds left to conquer in the U.S., wintered at Ottawa, Bozeman, Mont., and four localities in the Northern Pacific Region. Carolina Wrens report-

edly have regained the range lost in past hard winters in Ontario, Michigan and Wisconsin. Cardinals survived the winter at Ottawa, Manitoulin I., Ont., Omaha, Bismarck, and Rapid City, S.D. That should be good enough to carry them almost any place north where someone will toss out a few sunflower seeds.

CONCERNS

Good news first. Increased Canvasback drew comment in at least 12 regions. Most eastern editors detected slight increases of Cooper's Hawks. Interpretation of Bald Eagle data is vexed by the uncertain source of winter birds in many areas, and I suspect that adult:immature ratios tend to be biased because older sub-adults are counted as adults. Unambiguous and most welcome, however, is the news that seven young were reared in Louisiana, two in Wakulla Co., Fla., and possibly others near Charleston, S.C. A total of 83 Peregrine Falcons outside the likely range of *F. p. pealei* seems at least mildly encouraging. The glass is clouded in the case of the Brown Pelican (signs of improvement in places, but nothing heartening from the western Gulf), Red-headed Woodpecker (mostly down, but not in parts of the Midwest), and E. Bluebird (up some, down some). Bewick's Wren, from the grand total of seven mentioned this winter and the few reported on the 1974 CBCs, must be well on its way toward becoming one of the rarest birds in the East.

The much-feared outbreak of newly detected duck virus enteritis didn't happen, but fowl cholera, a long-time waterfowl scourge, killed 25,000 Am. Coots in Back Bay N.W.R., Va., and 4000 Am. Coots, 1100 Whistling Swans, and smaller numbers of other species in California.

ROOSTS

Half a dozen icterids (and the Starling) are prime beneficiaries of man's ecological changes, and their immense winter roosts can be local hazards to agriculture, airplanes and possibly human health. Last winter about *half a billion* "blackbirds" occupied known, major roosts in a belt across the mid-South from the Atlantic to the Rockies. What part of the total population that was is anybody's guess, but some roosts were in the million-pie range (four-and-twenty X 10⁶). A roost in W. Carroll Par., La., of 21 million was dwarfed by one in Hertford Co., N.C., estimated at 50 million. Red-wings predominated, but a roost near Winston-Salem, N.C., held 15,000 Rusty Blackbirds and one at Bitter L. N.W.R., N Mex, a million Brewer's. The U S Army's

attempt to kill a mere 2 million blackbirds at Ft Campbell, Ky., had poor success and bad publicity, but Vernon Kleen may be correct in predicting general demand for tergitol spraying as the technological quick fix for pesky bird roosts. Dispersing roosts by removing roosting places, as was done with 170,000 Red-wings at the Denver airport, seems a saner solution. Any major control effort must include ornithologists from the planning to the body count. Much about the biology of massive bird roosts remains poorly known, and it would at least be nice to have someone involved who knew that all roost birds aren't blackbirds. Nashville, for example, reported a roost of 400,000 Am. Robins, and a Starling roost at Yakima, Wash., had 22,000 Am Robins, many Varied Thrushes and a scattering of other species.

EXOTICS

AB's "parrot fever" seems to be subsiding, for only two regions mentioned the subject. Yellow-headed Parrots and Canary-winged and Orange-fronted parakeets (apparently known escapes) lasted out the winter at Wilmington, Del, and in southeast Pennsylvania. Suburban Florida added three more species of *Amazona* and the Black-hooded Parakeet to its list of free-living psittacids. Also, several Saffron Finches (presumably *Sicalis flaveola*) were seen at large near Miami.

The eastern House Finches reached Nashville and are becoming widely established in eastern West Virginia and central and western Pennsylvania. In the mid-Atlantic area, nearer the heartland, some CBCs reported counts approaching 1000.

ODDITIES

Every season produces a few sightings that are so exceptional that the records remain in limbo unless later events make them appear prophetic. One notes this winter: a flock of 50 Black Brant on Hulah Reservoir, Okla.; a Swainson's Hawk in coastal Washington, Feb. 1; a Prairie Falcon in Birmingham; a Bristle-thighed Curlew at Laguna Atascosa N.W.R.; a "Scaled Pigeon" (= *Columba squamosa*?) in North Carolina; and, a possible W. Flycatcher in southwestern Louisiana, Dec. 7. Most comments indicate that both observers and editors viewed these extraordinary reports with exemplary caution. With out-of-range, out-of-season hawks, an obvious possibility is that the birds escaped from falconers. South Florida for example, has half a dozen such "records" of Harris' Hawks

ROLL CALL

Pelagics — Offshore trips for pelagic birds became more common in the East, at times with exciting results. Records that radically altered ideas about winter pelagics off the Delmarva coast included: immature Yellow-nosed Albatross (57 miles out, Feb. 1); 39 Com. Puffins (first Maryland and second Virginia records); many Red Phalaropes (113, Jan. 12); and, 29 Skuas. Other notable records in the East were a N. Fulmar on the New York shore of Lake Ontario in December, a beached Razorbill in South Carolina, Red Phalaropes at three places on the Great Lakes as late as Feb. 9, and a Bridled Tern at Key West, Jan. 17, perhaps only the second Florida winter record. Exactly where Bridled Terns winter seems a bit vague, however, as the few definite records include others in January from Newfoundland (Godfrey, 1966, *The Birds of Canada*, p. 192) and south of Cape Horn (Peterson and Watson, *Auk* 88:671). The West gets scanted here, due largely to my ignorance of its seabirds, but records editors considered especially interesting were an Ashy Storm-Petrel off Santa Barbara I., Dec. 20, Thick-billed Murres again in Monterey Bay, and fair numbers of wintering Pomarine and Parasitic jaegers off southern California.

Swans — It seems almost indecent to speak of an explosion of swans, but something vigorous is suggested by the reports of Mute Swans far from known feral populations and as far west as Livingston, Mont., and wintering or lingering Whistling Swans at scores of places in 19 regions. Southern California recorded yet another Trumpeter Swan.

Other Waterfowl — Wintering Fulvous Tree Ducks at two localities were considered unusual for California, but the East had a number of northerly records, the zaniest being one found dead on Skyline Drive, Shenandoah N.P. Barrow's Goldeneye were inland in numbers in the West, 57 at Davis Dam south of Las Vegas providing first records for both southern Nevada and Arizona. Adult male Com. Eiders at Wolfe I., Ont., and Lorain, O., were notable on the Great Lakes, where most eiders seem to be immature Kings, as apparently was a much-debated individual near Pensacola, Fla. All three scoter species occurred in the Gulf of Mexico and on inland impoundments in near-record numbers. I count 11 reports of waterfowl hybrids representing seven putative crosses, the most interesting taxonomically (if available for study) being Mexican Duck x Mallard (New Mexico), possible Bewick's x Whistling swans (three imms., northern

California), and Ring-necked x Tufted ducks (northern California).

Shorebirds — Arizona had its first wintering Semipalmated Plover, Alabama its first wintering Long-billed Curlew and Wilson's Phalarope, and Cleveland reported very late or wintering records of a Ruddy Turnstone and a N. Phalarope. One hardly knows what to say about a Black Turnstone inland near Eugene, Ore., Dec. 19, "bathing with Killdeer."

Larids — From persistent rumors and features in the popular media, it would appear that an unusual gull in Massachusetts attracted considerable attention, but I lack definite information [see pg. 000 and cover photo. —Ed.]. An equally unbelievable, if less publicized gull of a great gull winter, was the Band-tailed, or Belcher's Gull (*Larus Belcheri*) in the Naples, Fla., area, nov. 11 - Jan. 29. Ted Below's fine movies of the bird make the identification certain. How this Humboldt Current species got from the west coast of South America to the west coast of Florida is another question, and one perhaps equally relevant in the case of that other gull in Massachusetts.

The major happening among the ordinary gulls was a spate of inland records of coastal species such as Glaucous (seven regions), Glaucous-winged (five western regions), Iceland (Alton, Ill.), Laughing (Havasu L., Ariz.), and Black-legged Kittiwake (five regions, not counting the Great Lakes). I never saw a Thayer's Gull and never hope to see one, but, now that it's a full species, many seem to be realizing their hopes. Reports, mostly of first-year immatures, inland and east included birds on L. Erie, Ont., L. Chataqua, Ill., northeast Colorado reservoirs (10), L. Mead, Davis Dam, and Salton Sea. A record 434 at Cornwall, Ont., topped Great Lakes area counts of Great Black-backed Gulls. Other notable winter larids were Franklin's Gulls (about six reports, December through February), Common Terns and two Black Skimmers in San Diego Bay, and Forster's Terns in Louisiana and inland in northeastern Texas.

Hummingbirds — Each winter it seems more hummingbirds elect to test the limits of torpor at northern feeders, the more sophisticated of which are now lighted and provide heated sugar water enriched with proteins and vitamins. I suppose it's an accomplishment to winter a hummer outdoors in a rigorous climate, but what can be the use of it is more than I can see. This winter we had: Buff-bellied (Louisiana, eastern Texas), Black-chinned (Louisiana and Jan. 5 at Amarillo "amid snowdrifts"); a host of Rufous (southern Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, Bartlesville, Okla.), Anna's and Broad-tailed (El Paso); and Costa's

(Salt Lake City). Wintering Anna's Hummingbirds were common in the milder Northwest north to Vancouver. In harsher climates, two tried to winter at feeders in Auke Bay, Alaska, losing to zero temperatures in early January; several made it through in eastern Washington; and, one at Okanagan Falls, interior B.C., took the hard luck prize when it died "by collision" after surviving until Jan. 13.

Doves through Vireos — A Mourning Dove nested in Nashville, December 28 - January 9, and Tennessee also had a Ground Dove (its second) in early December. In indeterminate area near Las Cruces, N. Mex., Dec. 7, was probably a Groove-billed. Pileated Woodpeckers seem to be on the increase; one at an Omaha feeder in Feb. gave Nebraska its first record since 1895. Late or wintering records hard to ignore included: Black-billed Cuckoo (Louisiana, probably wintered); Com. Nighthawk (Pocatello, Ida., to Dec. 16); Vaux's Swifts (wintering, Louisiana and southern California); Ontario's first December swallows (Rough-winged, Tree); Bank Swallow (Salton Sea, Dec. 28); and, Warbling Vireo (southern Calif., Jan. 4). Notably out-of-range were an eastern Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*S. v. varius*) in southern California and Sprague's Pipits at many places in the Southwest ("consistently overlooked" before?). Many regions reported record numbers of Winter Wrens.

Parulids — At least 11 species that used to be "eastern" warblers, remnants of the fall of 1974 invasion, wintered or probably did so in the West from eastern Washington south. A Virginia's Warbler and two Lucy's Warblers in coastal California added to the few winter records of these arid Southwest species. Invasion of the S. Great Plains, west to Lubbock, Tex., by Pine Warblers defies analysis (at least by me).

Icterids — Coastal Washington reported a "bronze-backed" Com. Grackle and a Rusty Blackbird, and Rusties wintered at four places in central and southern California. Unless it was indeed an escape (*AB* 29:81), the Black-headed Oriole that wintered at a feeder in Midland, Tex., was the most notable among the flood of reports of five species of *Icterus* north of usual seasonal range. A meadowlark, probably Western, at Auke Bay, Jan. 10, was only the third Alaska record of the genus.

Finches — Wintering richmondennies, besides those already noted, included: Black-headed Grosbeaks (four eastern regions); Blue Grosbeaks (four in the East north to Virginia, one near Corvallis for a first Oregon record, numbers around Nogales, Ariz.); Lazuli Bunting ("almost full-plumaged male," Elverson, Pa., Jan. 10 - Mar. 16); and, Painted Buntings northern Flori-

da, Louisiana). A third Gray-crowned Rosy Finch reached Thunder Bay, Ont., and southern Arizona had a mass invasion of Lawrence's Goldfinches. Notable reports of salt-marsh sparrows inland were a Sharp-tailed on the California side of the lower Colorado R. and a Seaside at Waco, Tex., all winter. The far West reported several more Clay-colored Sparrows from Tillamook, Ore., to San Diego, and Swamp Sparrows broke records from Texas across the Southwest to California. White-throated Sparrows seem to have been abundant almost everywhere, but especially in Texas, the Southwest and along the entire Pacific coast. Thus endeth an exhausting tour of the salient winter avifauna

TAILPIECE

Once a regional editor of sorts, I wondered how different writing Changing Seasons (CS hereafter) might be. What's different about CS is the lack of contact. A regional editor has some personal idea of birds and observers in his area. With CS, one deals with observations by people he'll likely never meet and birds many of which he'll never see. That takes real cheek. I trust that most CS writers have the job thrust upon them. At least I hate to think that many people outside confinement have the peculiar madness it would take to seek the job. Functionally, regional reports and CS have much in common. They share many practical vexations: late reports; overlapping areas; localities that must be in the parts of Middle Earth that Tolkien didn't map in detail (don't suppose I'll ever locate Zumdotski S.P.); and, all the other routine heat in the kitchen. The two jobs share many doubts as well. Did the editor (observer) actually see the critical photo and where can someone else see it? How many records announced for later publication in more detail will be published? Does a dead bird on a beach prove any more than that birds may float a long time before they wash ashore? What does a cryptic "found dead" add to a record, if no scrap was saved? Not much, perhaps, if the bird was found dead after being run over by a bus. Finally, the ultimate nagging doubt, How long before the new things about bird distribution *AB* has amply shown to be factual enter standard ornithological sources? *AB* is unique, sometimes exciting, but erratic in treating important details. Judged by its potential, it remains a fitfully sleeping giant

If this summary has any virtue, it belongs to the editors who sent well-reasoned, carefully summarized reports promptly. As for those who waited until June was on the meadow, may Monk Parakeets inhabit their attics and all their Dickcissels be House Sparrows.