

# Southern Great Plains Region

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This was the season of the half-hardies and foolhardies who gambled and likely won in their quest to save a little mileage and wear-and-tear on the ol' primaries. If it is genetically ingrained and gives birds a reproductive advantage, we may see more of the same until the next serious cold snap of an upcoming winter.

Yes, it was a relatively mild winter, with more than the usual number of insectivorous birds wintering up into Nebraska. The mild invasion of Snowy Owls underscored that the species is driven south not by the weather, but by the lack of food. Movements of some ducks were likely weather influenced, as winter was almost over before any numbers of Common Mergansers showed up in Oklahoma.

Some species were both up and down, depending on where birders looked. In central Oklahoma, Pine Siskin and goldfinch numbers seemed low, while no complaints came from Nebraska. No winter fringillid invasion materialized for yet another year. Also down in numbers in Oklahoma were species such as Brown Creepers and possibly

sapsuckers. On the other hand, Red-breasted Nuthatches were everywhere, as during the fall period.

Abbreviations: Fontenelle Forest (*Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy County, NE*); Quivira (*Quivira Nat'l Wildlife Ref., Stafford Co., KS*).

## Loons to Ducks

The Com. Loon mecca of the Region remains L. Tenkiller, where >140 were counted in its clear waters Feb. 12 (JM, JH, JN). Three Am. White Pelicans wintered at *Lincoln, NE*. (RS). The high count was >100 Feb. 22 in *Wagoner, OK* (JM, JH, JN).

Three Great Egrets lingered in *Tulsa* until Dec. 19 (BJ). Three Black-crowned Night-Herons wintering in *Sedgwick, KS* (ES) were among very few for the period in Kansas. Even more unusual was a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron Dec. 28 in *Tulsa* (KH).

Tundra Swans were discovered Dec. 5–11 in *Geary, KS* (DR, CO), Nov. 6–Dec. 5 at Quivira (SS, m.ob.), and in *Barber, KS* Feb. 28 (ES). Trumpeter Swans are finding their way into the Region from introduced populations in the north. Tagged birds were observed Dec. 30 in *Anderson, KS* and Jan. 26 in *Kingman, KS* (JD). Three additional birds appeared in *Kearney, KS* Jan. 8. Six and seven birds were present in *Keith, NE* Dec. 16 (SD, RS) and Feb. 28 (JJ) respectively. Three made it as far s. as *Creek, OK* Jan. 9–30 (JCH *et al.*), and one was found in *Alfalfa, OK* Feb. 25 (BG *et al.*).

Several small groups of Greater White-fronted Geese wintered n. to *Buffalo, NE* (RH) and *Gosper, NE* (LR, RH). Possible early arrivals were ten Ross' Geese at Quivira Jan. 29 (SS); one–three were noted there as late as Dec. 11 (SS). One Ross' was observed in *Kearney, KS* Jan. 8. Although fewer Ross' were reported this season than in recent years, the high count of 20 in *Muskogee, OK* Jan. 29 (MMI) was still higher than the highest number ever observed ten years ago.

Single Am. Black Ducks were discovered in *Osage, KS* Dec. 30 (LM), and *Wyandotte, KS* Jan. 3 (CH). Several were observed in Nebraska during December w. to *Boone* (WM). This is more than had been reported in the past several years. Northern Shovelers at *Buffalo, NE* Jan. 30 (LR, RH) and *Saunders, NE* (TH) are among few wintering

records for Nebraska.

A group of 15 Greater Scaup Dec. 16 at *Keith, NE* (RS) was the highest number reported this season; three were present there Feb. 21 (JJ). Two–three were observed in n. *Tulsa* Dec. 19–Jan. 9 (JL, PS), two were documented in *Cherokee, OK* Feb. 17 (MMI), and several were present in *Muskogee, OK* Feb 21 & 22 (JM *et al.*).

Better-than-average numbers of Oldsquaw appeared in Nebraska, with a high count of six from *Cedar, NE* Dec. 12–19 (BHu, MB). Southernmost were two in *Leflore, OK*, Feb. 5 (RJ). The only scoter reported for the season was a ♀ Black Scoter documented Dec. 9–12 in *Miami, KS*



Female Barrow's Goldeneye accompanying a Common Goldeneye in *Tulsa, Oklahoma* January 23, 1994. Photograph/Patricia Seibert.

(LM). Perhaps the scoop "ID" for the season was a ♀ Barrow's Goldeneye Jan. 1–23 in *Tulsa* (PS, JL, m.ob.). Up to 144 Red-breasted Mergansers were counted in *Cherokee, OK* Dec. 15 (MMI).

## Raptors to Owls

The 300 Black Vultures noted in *Cherokee, OK* Jan. 29 (MMI) were an unusual concentration. Reports of only three N. Goshawks were received from both Kansas (*vide* LM) and Nebraska (*vide* RS). High counts of 156 Bald Eagles in *Douglas, KS* (*vide* LM) and 284 below Kingsley Dam, *Keith, NE* (*vide* RS) speaks well for the species recovery. Nesting pairs began their season in 5 Kansas counties this season (*vide* LM).

Among a peculiar array of wintering records was three and four Virginia Rails in *Scott, and Kearney, KS*, respectively (TS), with an additional five in *Sequoyah, OK* Dec. 17 (JM *et al.*), four in *McCurtain, OK* Dec. 19 (JM *et al.*), and one Dec. 18 in *Tulsa* (LMA). Even more unusual were two Soras Dec. 17 in *Sequoyah, OK* (JM *et al.*). About 1000 Sandhill Cranes spent the winter in *Stafford, KS* west of Quivira—an unusually high count for Kansas during the winter, and two may have wintered as far north as *Lincoln, NE* (SD).

Greater Yellowlegs during late January in *Oklahoma* (JGN) were hardy or tardy. However, the >100 Jan. 15 in *McCurtain,*



OK (BH, JM) was an exceptional count. Thirteen Long-billed Dowitchers were also present in *McCurtain*, OK Jan. 15 (BH). Even more unusual was a Solitary Sandpiper Jan. 1 in *Tulsa* (JL, PS *et al.*).

Recent years have shown that not all Franklin's Gulls winter s. of the Mexican border. One in *Keith*, NE Dec. 17 and Feb. 13 & 21 was very unusual (*fide* RS), as was one Feb. 15 in *Tulsa* (AR), another Feb. 26 in *Alfalfa*, OK (BG *et al.*), and still others in *Oklahoma* Feb. 5 (DR *et al.*). Among the "scoop" gulls of the season was a **Common Black-headed Gull** Jan. 30–Feb. 16 in *Tulsa* (JCH *et al.*).

At least two California Gulls crept down into Kansas to appear in *Douglas* Dec. 2 (LM) and *Coffey* Dec. 30 (LM). Up to 74 were present Dec. 16–17 in *Keith*, NE (SD). Thayer's Gulls were reported at 4 locations in Kansas, one in Nebraska, and one in Oklahoma. Red-letter birds were an **Ice-land Gull** in first-winter plumage below Kingsley Dam, *Keith*, NE Feb. 26 (RS). However, no details were provided for Nebraska's 2nd observed Great Black-backed Gull Feb. 21, also below Kingsley Dam. The Lesser Black-backed Gull appearing in *Oklahoma* since 1984 made still another showing from at least Jan. 1–3 (JGN). At least seven Glaucous Gulls were reported from Kansas (*fide* LM), but only two in Oklahoma. Forster's Terns were found Dec. 17 in *Sequoyah*, OK (JM *et al.*) and Jan. 3 in *Oklahoma* (JAG, JGN, DN).

The dove magic of recent seasons has quieted a little, but an Inca Dove in *Ellis*, KS Feb 6 & 20 was the first record for that county (RN, CE). While nothing like the invasion of the mid-1970s, Snowy Owls were reported from 9 localities in Kansas and 5 in Nebraska. Several appeared in Oklahoma, the southernmost of these being one in *Comanche*, OK Dec. 26 (N&VC). Perhaps peculiarly, most were noted for brief periods of only one to several days. However, the one in *Pawnee*, OK was present for over a month after its initial discovery Jan. 6 (AT, m.ob.). Long-eared Owls were well reported, with a high count of 24–30 at *Trego*, KS Dec. 26–Feb. 19 (m.ob.).

### Woodpeckers to Shrikes

A Say's Phoebe was risking it Dec. 26 in *Trego*, KS (SS). Only a casual winter visitor to the Region, the two Clark's Nutcrackers first noted Dec. 13 in *Scotts Bluff* (*fide* RS) were noteworthy. Extralimital was a Canyon Wren in *Scott*, KS Dec. 30–Feb. 13 (TS). A Rock Wren was noted there Feb. 13 (TS).

A few semi-hardy Marsh Wrens winter in Nebraska; two were found Dec. 14 in *Garden*, NE (RS). Others found Feb. 28 in *Woodward*, OK (BG *et al.*) likely wintered. Other semi-hardies risking the downside of

natural selection were Hermit Thrushes in Fontenelle Forest Jan. 20 (JA) and in a *Sarpy*, NE yard Feb. 22 (BP, LP), and a Brown Thrasher Feb. 23 in *Cass*, NE (GW). Exceptional were Gray Catbirds in *McClain*, OK (PB) Dec. 3 and *Tulsa* Dec. 19 (MK *et al.*).

An entourage of 179 Mt. Bluebirds in *Trego* Dec. 26 (SS) and 180 in *Russell*, KS (MR) were no small treat. But more unusual was a Varied Thrush seen Dec. 26+ in *McPhearson*, KS (AJ). A Sage Thrasher wandered out to *Trego* (SS) Dec. 26, while wandering members of the more sedentary Curve-billed Thrashers were observed Dec. 28–Jan 29 in *Pratt*, KS (L&JQ), Jan. 18 in *Ellis*, KS (CE), and *Hamilton*, KS Jan. 9–16 (AN).

Northern Shrikes were reported from only 5 locations in Kansas. The southernmost for the Region was found in *Osage*, OK Dec. 18–20 (JCH *et al.*).

### Vireos to Finches

Solitary Vireos have now been observed for several years during winter in *McCurtain*, OK, this year Dec. 19 & 21 (BH). Among the semi-hardy warblers were an Orange-crowned in *Sumner*, KS (WC, ND), and Com. Yellowthroats Dec. 17 in *Sequoyah*, OK (JM *et al.*), Dec. 19 in *Tulsa* (JT *et al.*), and Jan. 12 at Quivira (VR).

Unprecedented were three Nashville Warblers in Omaha Dec. 18–20 (CK *et al.*), a N. Waterthrush Dec. 8 in Fontenelle Forest (BP, LP), and a Louisiana Waterthrush Jan. 2 in *Tulsa* (PS, JL). Pine Warblers wandered to *Muskogee*, OK Feb. 20 (VJ); one wintered in *Cleveland*, OK (JAG) only the 2nd county record, and only 3 doors down from the first. A Summer Tanager survived in *Sarpy*, NE until at least Dec. 27 (KR), and one appearing Dec. 31 in *Oklahoma* was present until the end of the period (LK).

A **Pyrrhuloxia** in *Hamilton*, KS Jan. 9–16 (AN) provided the 3rd record for Kansas. Two White-throated Sparrows wintering in *Dawes*, NE were the only ones known to survive the winter there (RCR, DJR). A Golden-crowned Sparrow Dec. 31 in *Morton*, KS (SP) was a hot find, but not to be found again. Unusual was an imm. ♀ "White-winged" Dark-eyed Junco banded Jan. 31 in Hays, KS (CE). Two Snow Buntings wandered S to *Osage*, KS Dec. 28–Feb. 1 (DG, GK, m.ob.).

Surprising were four Pine Grosbeaks Dec. 18 in *Douglas*, KS with an additional six noted Jan. 26 in *Geary*, KS (WH). The only Red Crossbills spotted outside of the Nebraska Panhandle were two in *Geary*, KS Jan. 29 (DLS). This was good year for Com. Redpolls in n. and w. Nebraska. While uncommon to rare in Oklahoma, good numbers of Pine Siskins were reported from Nebraska (*fide* RS).

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