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# Prairie Provinces Region

## RUDOLF F. KOES AND PETER TAYLOR

The unusually mild fall ended with snow and low temperatures throughout the Region in early December. Conditions eased up later in the month and January was generally mild, especially in southern Alberta. The few cold snaps were short-lived; indeed, one of the harshest occurred in late February and early March. Bird-wise, there was a little bit of everything that might be expected, but few major highlights. The high diversity of lingering waterbirds across the Region was noteworthy.

### Grebes to Raptors

More lingering grebes than usual were reported: a Piedbilled at Pinawa, MB to Dec. 21 (PT, RZ); a Horned at Natalie L., MB Dec. 3 (PT *et al.*); a Red-necked at Wabamun L., AB Feb. 19 (DN); an Eared killed by a Bald Eagle on the Lower Kananaskis R., AB Nov. 27 (NP); one W. Grebe at McArthur Falls, MB Dec. 3 (PT *et al.*), and four at Wabamun L., Feb. 19 (DN). Also very late was an Am. White Pelican at Regina Dec. 1 (RKr, PC), and a Double-

crested Cormorant was still at Wabamun L., Feb. 19 (DN). Two out of five Great Blue Herons—one at Moose Jaw, (SK, *vide* LK<sub>n</sub>) and four in Alberta—were injured.

Twenty-eight species of waterfowl were reported in the period, but only 12 after December. Migrant Tundra Swans reached Taber, AB by Feb. 23, and 50 were there Feb. 28 (LB). Two Snow Geese overwintered near Taber (LB) and a Ross' Goose was at Regina Dec. 1 (RKr, PC). Five Alberta reports of Green-winged Teal included seven at Calgary Jan. 12 (WS, JR). The largest Mallard concentrations in Saskatchewan totaled 15,000 near Moose Jaw and 5000 near Cabri (WH). Four N. Pintails overwintered at Medicine Hat, AB (BV, *vide* DB), and there were several scattered reports in Saskatchewan (*vide* RKr). Three Greater Scaup were seen at L. Wabamun Feb. 19 (RD). The imm. ♂ **Common Eider** at Saskatoon remained until Dec. 10 (FR, BL). An ad. ♂ White-winged Scoter lingered at Gardiner Dam, SK Dec. 2–3 (RKr, MW, SSH). Red-breasted Mergansers were noted in all 3 provinces: three at Lethbridge, AB Dec. 26 (*vide* PS), one at Gardiner Dam Dec. 1–3 (RKr, FR) and Dec. 19 (JP, PC), and one at Silver Falls, MB Dec. 18 (PT). Lone Ruddy Ducks were noted at St. Albert, AB Dec. 1 (DN), Gardiner Dam Dec. 2–3 (RKr, MW) and Coronach, SK Dec. 19 (JP).

A Turkey Vulture was exceptionally late at Edmonton Dec. 2 (JA). Sharp-shinned Hawks remained in Alberta in unprecedented numbers: >nine birds were reported in December, four in January, and one in February (m.ob., *vide* PS). At least three Cooper's Hawks were also found in Alberta Dec. 9–Feb. 19 (m.ob.), plus one at Mile-





**Immature Sharp-shinned Hawk at Calgary, Alberta, in December 1994. Photograph/Terry Korolyk.**

stone, SK Dec. 2 (RB). Early migrant Ferruginous Hawks appeared near Swift Current, SK Feb. 23 (DH) and Taber, AB Feb. 28 (LB). Good concentrations of Rough-legged Hawks in the foothills and high plains of s.w. Alberta included 39 in the Chain Lakes P.P. area Feb. 12 (TK), as well as some excellent CBC totals. Four migrating Golden Eagles at Mt. Lorette, AB Feb. 28 were record-early (JSt). Gyrfalcons showed a gradient of abundance from west to east, with about 30 sightings in Alberta, nine in Saskatchewan, and only one in Manitoba.

### Partridges to Owls

Several sightings of Gray Partridge coveys in s.w. Manitoba hinted at a comeback by this hard-hit species (CC, R&TW). Lone Am. Coots at Great Falls, MB Dec. 3 (PT, RKo *et al.*) and Gardiner Dam Dec. 2-3 (RKr, FR) were unusual; 70 at Coronach, SK Dec. 16 (JP, PC) were unprecedented. Seven Killdeer sightings in Alberta included at least three birds near Mt. Lorette Dec. 13 (PS) and one at Medicine Hat Feb. 26 (BV). Four Com. Snipe were found: near Sundre, AB Dec. 31 (*vide* PS), Chain Lakes, AB Feb. 11 & 25 (TK); L. Diefenbaker, SK Dec. 18 (MW); and Saskatchewan Landing P.P., SK Dec. 28 (WH).

Several Ring-billed Gulls stayed much later than usual: five at Gardiner Dam Dec. 2 (RKr, RE); four at Natalie L., Dec. 3 (PT, GW, LKl), and one at Neepawa, MB Dec. 3 (BGr). Also at Gardiner Dam Dec. 2 were an ad. California Gull (RKr) and three first-year Thayer's Gulls (RKr, RE).

The owling scene was very patchy. The rarest find was an E. Screech-Owl near Dunmore, AB Feb. 28 (DB). The highest Snowy Owl count was 25, mostly s.w. of Winnipeg, Jan. 14 (RKO). There were 2 reports of Snowies preying on Rock Doves in Regina (OH, DR). Few N. Hawk Owls or Great Gray Owls emerged from the forest. Some good concentrations of Short-eared Owls included ≤10 overwintering near New Bothwell, MB (LPl, FG, DF) and 20 at Yellow Grass Marsh s. of Regina Feb. 18 (CB, MB). Owlers had good success in s.w. Alberta, finding calling N. Pygmy-Owls and Barred, Boreal and N. Saw-whet owls before the end of January (WS *et al.*).

More on last season's report of a strange hummingbird at Peter Lougheed P.P., AB Aug. 13-Sep. 18: Kenn Kaufman has seen the photos, and concurs that it was not a Magnificent Hummingbird; it was most likely a hybrid.

### Passerines

Blue Jays continued their westward expansion, with record numbers on several Alberta CBCs and small numbers scattered across s. Saskatchewan, outside their breeding range. A Chestnut-backed Chickadee was a very rare visitor to Waterton N.P., AB from early December-early January (JSm). At least three Brown Creepers survived the period in Regina (KS, CB, RKr, DH); this species often lingers into December in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, but rarely overwinters. A Winter Wren frequented the Mt. Lorette area Dec. 6-Jan. 2, and a provincial record-late Hermit Thrush was last seen there Dec. 1 (PS). This winter's most northeasterly Townsend's Solitaire was photographed at The Pas, MB Dec. 11-17 (JD, FW). Varied Thrush reports totaled six in Alberta and three each in Saskatchewan and Manitoba; individuals overwintered in Regina (JM) and Winnipeg (N&EM) More N. Shrikes than usual were seen in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

A Rufous-sided Towhee of the e. race was a first for Alberta at Jackfish L. near Edmonton Dec. 4-8 (RKL), and another was at Preeceville, SK Nov. 29-Dec. 2 (LPo). A Lincoln's Sparrow survived in Edmonton until at least Feb. 10 (DD). Single White-crowned Sparrows were at Calgary Feb. 5 (BR), Weyburn, SK into December (SSt), and one overwintered near Swanson, SK (BGi). Three Brown-headed Cowbirds stay-

ed at Whitewood, SK to Dec 10 (JP). Ten W. Meadowlarks was a high count Region-wide; the latest were near Medicine Hat Feb. 11 (DB), Hitchcock, SK Jan. 19 (GB), and two between New Bothwell and Ile-des-Chenes, MB Jan. 8 (DF).

A Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch overwintered at Good Spirit L., SK (BA), and one visited a Minnedosa, MB feeder Dec. 28-Jan. 18 (T&DB, m.ob.); three at Cochrane, AB Jan. 19 included one of the "Hepburn's" race (PS). Pine Grosbeaks visited s.w. Alberta and s.e. Manitoba in excellent numbers, yielding several record CBC totals. House Finch highlights included 40 all winter at an Altona, MB feeder (MK), 19 at a Regina feeder Dec. 26 (DH), and four overwintering in Edmonton (*vide* PM). House Finches in Weyburn, SK declined from 20 in December to 10 at the end of February (*vide* GB). Small numbers of both crossbill species were reported across s. Manitoba, but very few indeed were found elsewhere. Common Redpolls were scarce to non-existent over most of the Region, except for a modest influx in s.e. Manitoba, where flocks of ≤60 birds occurred. Pine Siskins compensated for this dearth in some regions; they were the 2nd most abundant species overall on Manitoba CBCs, and appeared in good numbers in Alberta. Although far from invasion numbers, Am. Goldfinches were scattered across s. Manitoba. Evening Grosbeak numbers were very low in Saskatchewan and Alberta, and below average in Manitoba.

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