

Northern Great Plains

GORDON BERKEY

The entire region enjoyed a very mild winter. It was very dry in Montana and portions of the Dakotas, but precipitation was near normal over most of North Dakota. The many boldfaced items in the report attest to the quantity of late survivors and successful winterings among semi-hardy species.

Abbreviations: The symbol ‡ indicates an observation subject to review by a state records committee.

Grebes to Raptors

It seems probable that the Pied-billed Grebe seen below a dam at Arrowwood N.W.R., Dec. 20 and again Feb. 27 (PS, MV) was the first ever to winter in North Dakota, even though it was not found at that location between those dates. An Am. White Pelican was late at Yankton Dec. 16 (SVS). A Double-crested Cormorant at L. Sakakawea, ND Dec. 3 was record late (GB) and South Dakota had one as late as Dec. 12 at Rapid City (E&VP). The two **Greater White-fronted Geese** at Tewaukon N.W.R., Jan. 5 beat the previous late date for North Dakota (Nov. 20) by a sizeable amount. South Dakota had a wide variety of late and wintering ducks, and the majority of species had reappeared by Feb. 25. A Blue-winged Teal in *Brown*, SD Dec. 2 (JS) was very late. A

Eur. Wigeon arrived early Feb. 22 at Freeze-out L., MT (MS), while the **American Wigeon** at Arrowwood represented only the 2nd successful wintering for North Dakota. A Ring-necked Duck at Hettinger Feb. 22 (D&CG) was record early by 2 weeks. Wintering Oldsquaw included two at Ft. Peck and four at Garrison Dam. The Rapid City Barrow's Goldeneye returned for yet another winter (NW)!

A Turkey Vulture on the Sheyenne N.G., Dec. 27 (*fide* DW) was very late for North Dakota. An Osprey reported Jan. 16 in *Gregory* (RM, ‡) would provide the first winter record for South Dakota. Sharp-shinned Hawks were widespread this winter; perhaps they were attracted by fair numbers of siskins and goldfinches. Fourteen Rough-legged Hawks were in a 3 square mi area in *Grand Forks* Dec. 9, and a few remained in the area all winter (EF). Gyrfalcon wintered around Garrison Dam again, and others were reported from *Edmunds*, SD Feb. 20 (DT) and Ft. Peck Jan. 4.

Grouse to Kingfishers

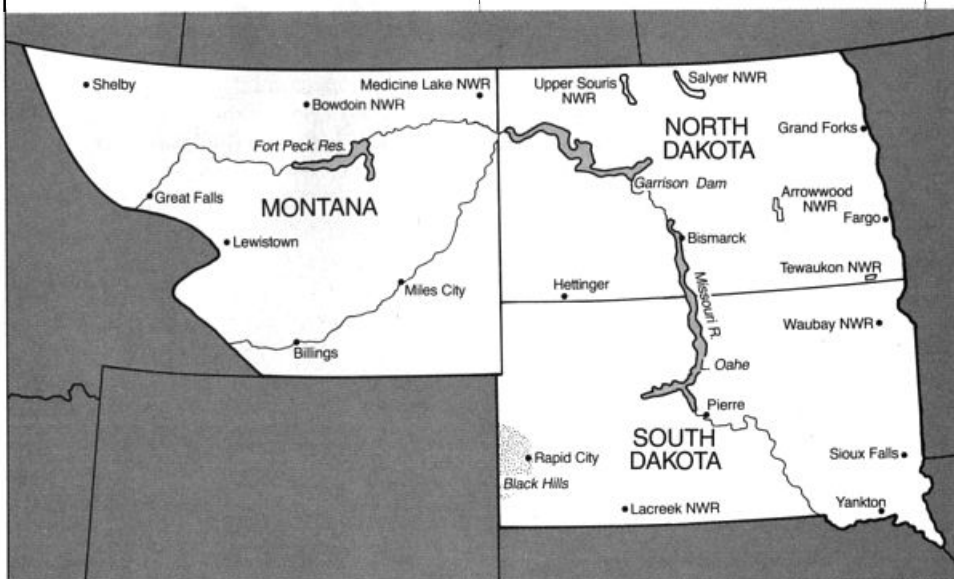
The general impression that Gray Partridge numbers remain low over the Region is supported by North Dakota CBCs, as the average per count was the lowest since 1952; readers are reminded that observer effort was much less per count in those days, so the decline is more severe than the average per count would indicate. The flock of 150 Am. Coots which wintered at Ft. Peck was far above the previous number that have even *attempted* to winter there previously. There were a number of interesting gulls along the Missouri reservoir system. The 13 Bonaparte's at Garrison Dam Dec. 11 were a week later than the previous record-late date (CT). A Franklin's Gull at Pickston, SD Jan.

3 was reminiscent of North Dakota's only winter record in that it had failed to molt from breeding plumage (BH). A first-winter **Mew Gull** was at Ft. Peck Jan. 17–Feb. 22 (CC). Two Thayer's Gulls were at Oahe Dam Jan. 4, and Glaucous were at Pickston Jan 4 and at Oahe Jan. 4 & 14 and Feb. 19 (BH, JP); both species are regular at Garrison and Ft. Peck dams farther upstream. A first-year **Iceland Gull** was at Garrison Dam Dec. 3 and an adult was there Dec. 24; an ad. and imm. Black-legged Kittiwake were at Garrison Dam Dec. 10–18 with the immature remaining until Jan. 7 (REM). Two kittiwakes were also reported in *Charles Mix*, SD Dec. 30 (‡RM).

The mid-winter Snowy Owl distribution was somewhat unusual. From Westby (TN) and Medicine L., MT east to Minot, ND, birds could be found rather easily throughout the winter; but Salyer refuge, just 60 mi n.e. of Minot, had none and there were fewer than normal in the east. Numbers were apparently low in areas such as *Grand Forks* and Bowdoin refuge, which are normally favored by Snowies, and only a few made it to South Dakota. Great Horned Owls continue down throughout the Dakotas; the average of 2.2 per North Dakota CBC was the lowest since 1969. There were several Short-eared Owl reports but numbers were disappointingly scarce after an increase in breeding birds last summer. There were seven N. Saw-whet Owls well scattered over the Dakotas. A **Belted Kingfisher** near Mandan (RR) was the 3rd to survive a North Dakota winter.

Passerines

Blue Jays were more numerous and more widespread in w. North Dakota and e. Montana this winter. The two Clark's Nutcrackers near Medora, ND Dec. 17 provided a good find (CT). Red-breasted Nuthatches were low. Townsend's Solitaire was present in fair numbers in North Dakota after a total absence last winter. A **Hermit Thrush** wintered successfully at a Grand Forks feeder. A **Varied Thrush** was at Fargo Dec. 20–25 (D&DW, RO) and another wintered at Sturgis. The **Northern Mockingbird** which spent the entire period in a yard near Chester, MT (HM) may be only the 2nd to have made it in that state. Brown Thrashers wintered at Grand Forks (*fide* DL) and in *Hyde*, SD (*fide* DT). Bohemian Waxwings were scarce in South Dakota and e. North Dakota, but well represented elsewhere. Northern Shrikes held up well through mid-winter. The >four **Yellow-rumped Warblers** at Oakwood Lake S.P., SD Jan. 28 were unusual at that date (JP).



A Rufous-sided Towhee wintered near Burlington, ND and another was seen at L. Andrea Calderone, SD Dec. 21. A dark Fox Sparrow, believed to be an Alaskan bird rather than a Rocky Mts. one, wintered at the same Burlington, ND feeder (SL, REM, GB). All previous North Dakota Fox Sparrows have been light eastern birds. An imm. Golden-crowned Sparrow graced Carlson's Ft. Peck yard Dec. 15–17 and stayed just long enough to become the first for a Montana CBC. Pine Grosbeak numbers were the best in some years, though not spectacular; the largest number was the 12 at Denbigh, ND Jan. 14. Most plains observations were from North Dakota, but the other 2 states had a few reports. There were two Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch flocks reported from w. North Dakota and singles in *Meade* and *Custer*, SD. Over 300 rosy-finches used a Ft. Smith, MT feeder. There were only 2 reports of each crossbill species from North Dakota. Redpolls drew comments because of their near absence. American Goldfinches were present in North Dakota in the best numbers since 1982–1983, when redpolls were completely absent. Do winter goldfinch peaks and redpoll *minima* normally coincide? North Dakota had only one report of a single Evening Grosbeak.

Corrections: The first Sage Thrasher nest for South Dakota reported last breeding season should have been credited to Juanita L. Peterson. The *Edmunds*, SD Rufous Hummingbird in the fall 1994 report was present Sept. 20–25.

Contributors (subregional editors in bold-face): MONTANA: Charles Carlson, Harriet Marble, Ted Nordhagen, Michael Schwitters. N. DAKOTA: Gordon Berkey, Eve Freeberg, David & Carolyn Griffiths, David Lambeth, Sherry Leslie, Ron E. Martin, Robert O'Connor, Robert Randall, Paulette Scherr, Clark Talkington, Mark Vaniman, Dennis & Diane Wiesenborn. S. DAKOTA: Bruce Harris, Ron Mabie, Earl & Vernet Palmer, **Jeffrey Palmer**, Steve Van Sickle, Jerry Stanford, Dan Tallman, Nathaniel Whitney.

—Gordon Berkey, *Division of Science, Minot State University, Minot, ND, 58707.*

Southern Great Plains Region

JOSEPH A. GRZYBOWSKI

Winters have all been relatively mild the past five or so years, with only brief periods of difficult weather—not enough in most places to eliminate the half-hardies, fool-hardies, and aspiring “tough guys” (those that think they could make it through worse). This season featured many of these birds staying north of their expected northern limits.

Mixed with the effects of a warmer season were the effects of the adequately wet or wetter years of late. Perhaps this helps species like Sandhill Cranes to winter farther north, or Virginia Rails and Marsh Wrens to simply be present, not to mention the more northerly lingerings of Ospreys, Killdeer, snipe, and a several other shorebirds.

Common Loons, cormorants, American White Pelicans and many dabbling ducks did not let winter decide their flights or fate. The push of Common Mergansers normally expected to materialize in Oklahoma during the season from freeze-ups in Nebraska and Kansas suffered in part from the open water on reservoirs at least as far north as Ne-

braska. And, with the grand warm weather of February to the south, many waterbirds moved northward early, with seemingly exceptional numbers of geese in Nebraska during early February.

The winter finch populations continued their meager numbers. Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches are down Region-wide; redpolls, Red Crossbills, and Snow Buntings were in less than moderate numbers in northern Nebraska. No irruption of finches was seen, though House Finch populations are still on the rise. It didn't appear as if sparrow numbers in Oklahoma were impressive this season, but Kansans thought it a better year for some. The pulse of LeConte's Sparrows noted in the past few years has apparently dissipated.

Abbreviations: McConaughy (*Lake McConaughy, Keith Co., NE*); Quivira (*Quivira N.W.R., Stafford Co., KS*).

Loons to Ducks

Common Loons in *Scottsbluff* Feb. 15 (LK) and in *Cass* Feb. 24 (GW) appear to provide the first February records for Nebraska (*fide* WRS). More than the usual numbers were present in c. and e. Oklahoma during February, with >80 at L. Tenkiller, *Sequoyah*, OK Feb. 27 (JM, JH). A Horned Grebe in *Gosper-Dawson*, NE Jan. 29 (JJ) was the first January record for Nebraska (*fide* WRS). Two W. Grebes each overwintered at McConaughy (SJD) and *Scottsbluff*, NE (LKM). Others were noted Dec. 3 in *Geary*, KS (DLS) and Feb. 12 in *McIntosh*, OK (JI).

An Am. White Pelican in *Lincoln*, NE Feb. 5 (SJD) was the northernmost overwintering. A Great Egret lingered to Dec. 21 in *Johnston*, OK (JW).

Six Tundra Swans were observed in *Pawnee*, OK Jan. 7 (LC, JD), and five were spotted in *Alfalfa* Feb. 17 (JH *et al.*). A group of 10–11 Trumpeter Swans was present Jan. 15 & 29 at McConaughy (LKM, JJ); four returned to Crescent Lake N.W.R., *Garden*, NE Feb. 27 (LKM). Others were observed Dec. 20–31 at Quivira (BF), Jan. 3 (GL) to Feb. 17 (JM *et al.*) in *Alfalfa*, OK, Jan. 8 in *Wyandotte*, KS (LM), and Jan. 17 & 21 in *Garfield*, OK (JR).

Among early moving waterfowl were 5000 Greater White-fronted, 20,000 Snow and 40,000 Canada geese in *Phelps*, NE Feb. 4–5 (SJD, WRS). Several Ross' Geese were present in *Buffalo*, NE Jan. 22 (LR, RH), and five in *Lincoln*, NE Feb. 5 (SJD). Exceptional in the Region was a **Brant** in *Geary*, KS Dec. 3–4 (DLS).

American Black Ducks were reported only in *Linn*, KS Jan. 7 (two, MM), and *Douglas*, KS Jan. 15 (five; GP). An impressive 60,000 Mallards were counted in *Scotts-*

