

### Flycatchers to Warblers

Very far from its normal breeding range was a ♀ Vermilion Flycatcher June 13 in *Washington*, AR (RS). Lone Bank Swallows were very late in *Benton*, AR June 3 (MMI, DC) and quite early in St. Gabriel, LA July 15 (VR). A singing Swainson's Thrush in *Shelby*, TN June 3 (JRW, MG) was late even for a species which traditionally straggles into late May in its spring migration. There were 5 reports of Cedar Waxwings between June 16 and the end of the period, highlighted by 20 in *Beauregard*, LA on the very late date of June 16 (MPo, GP) and 4 records totaling 11 individuals by Mlodinow between June 27–July 30 in *Benton* and *Washington*, AR. The species is rare in summer in Arkansas. Also out of season was a Solitary Vireo in Conway, AR July 11 (RS). It is interesting that a Yellow Warbler in the well-birded Starkville, MS area July 27 (TS) was the earliest ever by one day, given that south-bound migrants reach the gulf coast a week or 2 earlier. A Cerulean Warbler in the same area July 30 (TS) furnished only the 2nd summer record.

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# Prairie Provinces Region

### RUDOLF F. KOES AND PETER TAYLOR

Weather conditions varied greatly across the Region. Southern Alberta was cool and very wet, with some severe flooding in early June, whereas southern Manitoba was mostly hot, windy and dry, especially in June. In the north, more seasonal conditions in June and early July gave way to very cool and wet weather later. It was another major forest-fire season in northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba. A good waterfowl nesting season was tempered by concerns for a number of grassland birds. There was an excellent array of rarities Regionwide.

### Loons to Falcons

A **Yellow-billed Loon** at Churchill June 9, Manitoba's 6th, was reported without details (*vide* BC). Several large concentrations of Am. White Pelicans in Alberta included >1000 at St. Mary's Res. spillway June 23 (LS, AH), and three visited Churchill June 25–26 (*vide* BC). Another sparse crop of s. herons included a Great Egret near Morse, SK June 17–29 (MP, RKr), Alberta's 2nd **Little Blue Heron** at Fort McMurray June 29 (FK, ph.), and a Cattle Egret at Oak Lake, MB June 29 (PGr, DBo).

A Cinnamon Teal visited Coulter, MB June 30 (R&TW), and 3 Saskatchewan reports involved seven birds, a rather low total after this spring's influx. Two ♂ Harlequin Ducks at Katepwa L., SK June 17–24 (TR, BL) may have been escapes; one had 2 unrecognized bands. A pair of Barrow's Goldeneyes lingered through June at Old Channel L., Medicine Hat, AB, well e. of their breeding range (GN, BV, MV).

Turkey Vultures seem to be expanding their range on the prairies: Two were flushed from abandoned farmhouses at Minnedosa, MB in June (CCt), one appeared over Regina July 16 (BL), and scattered records across s. Alberta included ≤five at Medicine Hat (m.ob.). Somewhat out-of-range were an Osprey at Cypress Hills P.P., SK June 16 (RKr) and a Sharp-shinned Hawk at Churchill June 26 (W&SW).



**Turkey Vulture near Irricana, Alberta, July 23, 1995. The species seems to be spreading in the southern Prairie Provinces. Photograph/Terry Korolyk.**



Swainson's Hawks endured another poor breeding season in Saskatchewan, averaging 1.5 young per successful nest (SH *et al.*); this species also appears to be declining in Manitoba (RKO). Churchill's first Red-tailed Hawk nest was found in early July (BC, AC *et al.*). Ferruginous Hawks fared better than Swainson's, with 2.6 young per successful nest in Saskatchewan (SH), and stable numbers in Manitoba (KDS). American Kestrels were generally scarce in Saskatchewan, whereas Merlins continue to increase in rural Manitoba. Both Winnipeg and the Calgary area now boast 3 Peregrine Falcon nest sites.

### Rails to Woodpeckers

Yellow Rail reports included 3 Alberta and 4 Saskatchewan locations (m.ob.), and a rather early bird at Churchill June 10 (VENT). We have no details on a Snowy Plover report near Lloydminster, AB May 24–26 (KC). Beleaguered Piping Plovers were prevented from nesting by high water at Quill Lakes, SK and were flooded out at L. Diefenbaker, SK. Preliminary success was reported with artificial nesting islands for this species at West Shoal L., MB (BJ, *vide* Winnipeg Free Press). A Mt. Plover near Lumsden, SK July 24 was carefully described (C&MP). It was the best summer yet for Black-necked Stilts in Alberta, with 23 adults at 5 localities (m.ob.), including 12 with four or five young at Kinivie Marsh July 2 (JD) and 3 other proven or suspected breeding sites. Ten Am. Avocets was a good count in the mountains at Waterton Lakes N.P., AB June 23 (PS). Major summer concentrations of Hudsonian Godwits in s. Saskatchewan are hard to characterize; are

they non-breeding sub-adults? This year's peak count was 4000 July 22 at Luck L., where Marbled Godwits peaked at 1500 July 11 & 19 (RD).

An ad. Laughing Gull at Beausejour June 20, Manitoba's 6th report, was well described (TB, MA). Little Gulls summered again at Churchill, with a maximum of four June 2 (PL), and a subadult was seen at Oak L., MB June 10 (RKO). Additional Churchill highlights were: a Mew Gull June 21–July 8 (m.ob.), two Iceland Gulls for

most of the period (BC, m.ob.), an ad. Black-legged Kittiwake June 26 (Shinwa Tour, CCt) and two July 9 (RKO *et al.*), ≤three summering Ross' Gulls (how long can this magic last?), and a peak of 60 Sabine's Gulls June 3 (PL). But all of this was overshadowed by the rarity of the season: an elusive White-winged Tern videotaped and thoroughly documented June 24 (AS) and seen occasionally to July 14 (BC, JJ *et al.*).

A Yellow-billed Cuckoo highlighted a bird survey at Shilo, MB June 16 (GH). Burrowing Owls were reduced to only 4 known pairs in Manitoba (KDS), and continued to decline in Saskatchewan, where they are now almost extirpated n. of the S. Saskatchewan R. (SH). More likely to be a temporary phenomenon was the absence of breeding Great Gray Owls in s.e. Manitoba (*vide* RN). Alberta's 3rd Black-chinned Hummingbird record was furnished at Priddis July 28 (LS, m.ob.), whereas photographs of Saskatchewan's 3rd reported Black-chinned at Whitewood in early July were not quite diagnostic (*vide* RKR). Out of range was a Lewis' Woodpecker near High River, AB June 17 (TK) and single Red-headed Woodpeckers at Wanipigow, MB June 2 (GH, CCs) and near La Ronge, SK June 29 (AL).

### Passerines

A Purple Martin near Lethbridge June 7 (RM) and a small nesting colony near Chestermere L., June 17 (RL) were s. of the known breeding range in Alberta. At least



Adult Black-legged Kittiwake (with Bonaparte's Gulls) at Churchill, Manitoba, June 26, 1995. Photograph/Akira Kumagai.

two Blue Jays summered in Medicine Hat, AB (DBa), and a fledgling near Taber, AB July 4 (LB) furnished a first local breeding record. A Winter Wren in Cypress Hills P.P., June 15–17 was a first for the park (RKr). A Wood Thrush in La Barrière Park (GH, AC) provided Manitoba's first report since 1988. Two N. Mockingbirds were near Medicine Hat June 18–July 23 (BV, DB), another was at nearby Suffield June 25 (PGo), and singles were seen in Manitoba at St. Adolphe June 15 (LL) and Stonewall June 20 (KG). A Sage Thrasher—another species with a marginal toehold in the Region—was found in Big Muddy Valley, SK July 10 (CP). Unusual at Churchill were several reports of Brown Thrasher (LdM *et al.*) and a Cedar Waxwing July 5 (DF).

**SA** These seasonal summaries capture most of the rare bird sightings and some of the more spectacular fluctuations and concentrations, but gradual change is easily overlooked. What is happening to prairie bird populations? There is no doubt that the Burrowing Owl is in disastrous decline, and that Swainson's Hawks are experiencing poor breeding success, but observers have disturbing impressions about many other grassland species. Stuart and Mary Houston comment that "the overhead 'umbrella' of birdsong is a small, pale remnant of what existed 20 or 30 years ago in Saskatchewan's grasslands and large community pastures." They note a continuing decline of Horned Larks, W. Meadowlarks, and Chestnut-collared Longspurs. In the s.e. corner of the Region, at the edge of the prairie, we find Upland Sandpiper, Willet, Sprague's Pipit, and Chestnut-collared Longspur increasingly hard to find. These concerns were echoed by Sherrington in Alberta. Some declines, such as Brewer's Sparrow in s. Alberta (LB) and Lark Bunting in all 3 provinces (m.ob.), can be tied to recent increases in rainfall, but continuing piecemeal habitat alteration seems to be driving down many other prairie birds.

A ♂ Golden-winged Warbler was in possible breeding habitat in the Brandon Hills, MB May 29 (PL), and another was in Duck Mountain P.P., SK June 22–24 (RKr). Tennessee Warblers were unusually common at Churchill, whereas singing males were found s. of the breeding range at the end of June in Medicine Hat (DBa) and Winnipeg (RKO). Much farther out of range

were a N. Parula at Lethbridge June 3 (RM *et al.*) and a well-described but unconfirmed Prairie Warbler, Saskatchewan's first, near Bladworth June 8 (PLB). Other significant wanderers were a Nashville Warbler June 3 (PL), a ♂ and a ♀ Cape May Warbler June 5 (LdM *et al.*), and an Am. Redstart June 9 (LdM), all at Churchill, and an Ovenbird at Mt. Lorette, AB (JS). A ♂ Hooded Warbler near Vibank June 9 (GB) and a female banded at Whitewood July 3 (JP) provided Saskatchewan's 4th and 5th record. Manitoba's first Yellow-breasted Chat in 7 years was another Shilo highlight June 14 (GH, m.ob.).

An imm. ♂ Summer Tanager, found at St. Paul, AB July 3, furnished a provincial first (BR, †). Two ♂ and a ♀ Indigo Bunting spent June 18–July 31+ near Medicine Hat (BV *et al.*). A Field Sparrow was near Lyleton, MB June 17 (DF), and ≤two were at their now-traditional site near Roche Percee, SK June 5–July 20 (m.ob.). Most unseasonal in the south were lone Harris' Sparrows in Winnipeg June 13 (RT) and at Oak Hammock Marsh, MB July 2 (MZ, RZ). Mid-June brought a good influx of White-winged Crossbills into s.w. Alberta (m.ob.) and a more modest movement of Red Crossbills into s.e. Manitoba. Up to 140 White-winged Crossbills were found in Lac La Ronge P.P., SK July 13–30 (AL). The best counts of Pine Siskins were >800 in a tamarack stand near Lac du Bonnet, MB June 24 (RZ), and hundreds daily at spilled flax and canola seeds near Melfort, SK.

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# Northern Great Plains

## GORDON BERKEY

The third year of this wet cycle continued the trend. High water in northeast South Dakota benefited water birds, especially Red-necked Grebe and herons. Vigorous grassland growth led to an increase in many grassland species, including Yellow Rail, Sedge Wren, Baird's and LeConte's sparrows, and Bobolink. On the down side, a few—such as Ferruginous Hawk, Burrowing Owl, and Lark Bunting—saw declines. The breeding season was very late as June was quite cool, but it was extremely productive for many species.

## Loons to Rails

A Pacific Loon at Kelly's Slough N.W.R., ND July 23–29 (BE, EF, DL) was most unusual, as the state's 3 previous sightings were in October. A two-person sight record of Red-throated Loon from L. Audubon, ND would provide the 5th record, if accepted (CH, SG). More Red-necked Grebes were reported in South Dakota this summer than during the entire 6-year Breeding Bird Atlas project completed last year, but W. Grebes were down in many places because of flooding of emergents. Waders did especially well in the Dakotas. Cattle Egrets were more numerous than ever before, with peaks reaching 1000 at Grass L., Codington, SD (PS) and 300 at DeWald Slough, Kidder, ND (AV). The 10 Little Blue Heron nests in the rookery at Sand Lake N.W.R., SD was an astounding number for our Region. A rare Tricolored Heron was found in Brown, SD June 23 (WM, m.ob.), but even better was the first state record White Ibis from July 14+ at Sand L., SD. White-faced Ibis bred widely across the Region, with colonies at Sand L., DeWald Slough, ND (BS), and Benton L., MT (RJ).

While North Dakota Game and Fish surveys did not find quite as many duck broods as last year, reproduction may have been as good or better as abundant wetlands dispersed birds more. Several interesting vagrant waterfowl were also found. An apparently unmarked Trumpeter Swan was at the W. Fargo, ND lagoons July 30 (GN). A Greater White-fronted Goose in Codington,