

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

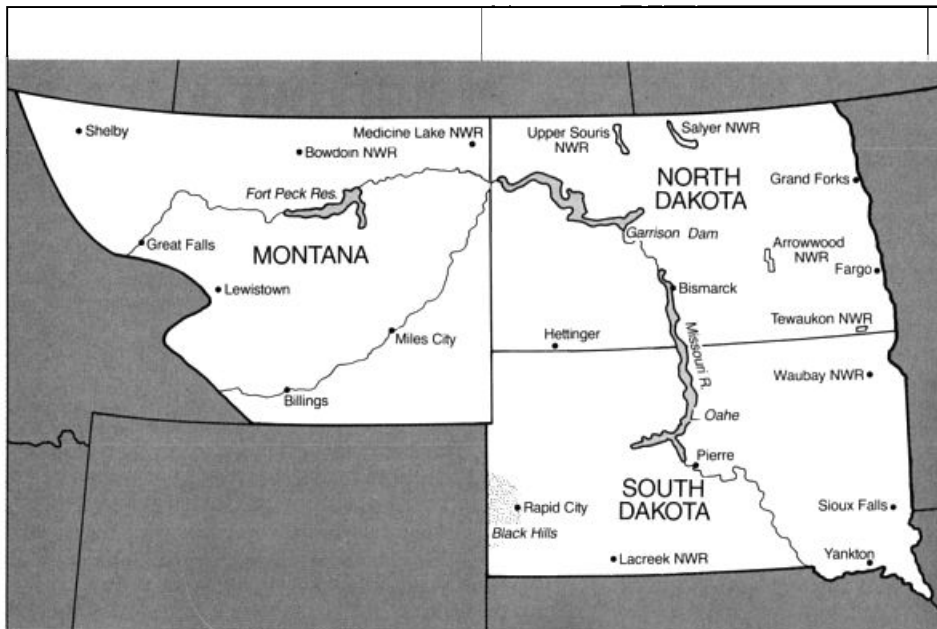
GORDON BERKEY

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,



totalled 14,000 at Audubon, where 276 Com. Tern nests were also tallied (CH). A partially molted ad. **Little Gull** was at Minot July 21 (REM). The **Laughing Gull** at Halfbreed L., MT July 28 (ST, HC) was the 2nd for that state.

Black-billed Cuckoos did not seem to become territorial at Salyer until about July 1, in keeping with the general lateness of the season. Burrowing Owl continued a long-term decline. The trend may have accelerated during the past 3 years of increased grass growth as their requirements are similar to those of Ferruginous Hawk. In contrast to last year's irruption, only *one* Short-eared Owl was reported in North Dakota all summer! A Com. Poorwill at Sawyer, ND June 10 was a very late migrant. Ruby-throated Hummingbird reports greatly increased in North Dakota. The peak at a feeder at Graham's Island S.P. was 12 June 20 (DH), and young birds were likely present. In addition, \leq four were present in e. *McKenzie* late June through at least July 22 (BCH); this is about 75 mi w. of previous breeding sites. Ruby-throateds were building a nest in *Roberts*, SD June 11 and were reported from 6 South Dakota counties. At least 4 pairs of

SD June 3 (JSP) was very late. An Am. Black Duck banded at Medicine L., July 26 (LK) had wandered rather far west. Red-breasted Mergansers were unusual in *Charles Mix*, SD June 3 (RM) and at L. Preston June 24 (BKH). The flock of 47 Turkey Vultures near Bismarck July 30 (RR) was an exceptional number. Osprey in *Pennington* (RP) and Bald Eagle in *Brown*, SD were again confirmed breeding. Ferruginous Hawks have declined drastically in North Dakota the past 3 years; perhaps the wet weather has been to their detriment as they prefer short grass for hunting. This same period has seen an increase in Red-tailed Hawk. Single Peregrine Falcons were seen regularly at Benton L., and two were noted June 26. (MM).

Gallinids experienced mixed success in North Dakota; pheasants have rebounded from lows of 2 years ago and have benefited greatly from Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), but partridge numbers are still very low. Most likely both heavy rains, which are thought to drown broods, and CRP fields, which are too thick for the birds, were contributing factors. This year was at least as good as last for rails. American Coots were again abundant, as expected, but the **Common Moorhen** nest photographed at Sand L., July 16 (BKH) was a nice surprise. Yellow Rails were again widespread in North Dakota; although some former strongholds were flooded, birds readily took to new sites.

Shorebirds to Woodpeckers

With Missouri R. reservoirs rising rapidly and high water releases imminent, North Dakota Game and Fish attempted to salvage as much of the breeding season as possible for Piping Plovers and Least Terns below Garrison Dam. Some nests and young were moved to higher ground and eggs were collected from others. The captive-reared

young were later released along the river in both Dakotas. Observers should look for tagged birds returning along the Missouri next spring and report all sightings to help monitor the success of the program. Summer shorebird migrations were not spectacular. Two Hudsonian Godwits at Salyer N.W.R., July 6 (B&MP) and three at Minot July 10 (REM) both beat the previous earliest date for this rare fall migrant. Franklin's Gull nests were estimated at over 120,000 at Sand L. Ring-billed and California gull nests

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Adult Henslow's Sparrow on territory at J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota, July 7, 1995. First for the state since 1981. Photograph/Gordon B. Berkey.



Lewis' Woodpeckers were found in the area of the 1985 Flint Hills Wildfire in *Fall River*, SD (DW).

Passerines

Western Kingbird numbers have returned to normal after the 1993 decline. At least seven Cassin's Kingbirds were found in Montana's Bull Mts., June 22 (WR). Clark's Nutcrackers were present all season at Harney Peak and the Black Elk Wilderness in the Black Hills (DW); at least 50 were seen in *Custer* June 11 (R&JLP). Dependent young Black-capped Chickadees were very late in *Grand Forks*, ND Aug. 1 (DL). A singing Brown Creeper was at Sica Hollow S.P., SD June 3 (PS). The daily high count of 182 Sedge Wrens in *Grand Forks*, ND July 10 (EF) was indicative of what CRP and good precipitation has done for grassland birds of cover. A pair of N. Mockingbirds fledged three young near Richardson, ND (JH). At least four Bell's Vireos were at Bowman-Haley Res., ND June 24 (CT). A daily total of 35 Yellow-throated Vireos was found in 3 n.e. North Dakota counties June 13 (EF).

Tennessee Warbler spring migration in North Dakota extends through at least June 10, and apparent fall migrants begin to show up singing, but out of potential breeding habitat, about 2 weeks early, so the singing bird in *Grant*, SD June 15 (PS) may have been an exceptionally late spring migrant. An agitated ♂ Tennessee carrying insects in the aspen sandhills at Salyer July 26 (GB) provided the best evidence so far obtained of breeding in North Dakota. At least two singing Orange-crowned Warblers were present in oaks in the Salyer sandhills; this species has proven to be present in good numbers in both the Pembina Hills and Turtle Mts. A Cerulean Warbler sang for several days in mid-June in Fargo-Moorhead, with the territory spanning the states' boundary (RO).

A Rose-breasted Grosbeak was far west at a feeder near Custer, SD June 1 (JJ). Brewer's Sparrow was feeding young in *Bowman*, ND June 24. Lark Buntings have declined drastically in North Dakota the past 3 wet years, and cannot be found easily n. of Belfield. A **Henslow's Sparrow** on territory at Salyer July 5–18 was the first for North Dakota since 1981 (GB). Baird's Sparrows continued in good supply. A good number was present at the s. edge of the range in the Grand River N.G. in South Dakota (DG), and the species was much increased at the w. edge of the range at Chester, MT (HM). LeConte's Sparrow was even more numerous than last year; 59 were found July 10 in *Grand Forks*, ND (EF). At least three LeConte's were at Bitter L., *Day*, SD June 22–July 15 (JSP). At least two each of LeConte's and Sharp-tailed

sparrows were at Medicine Lake N.W.R., MT June 2 (MR). A McCown's Longspur nest with young was found in *Bowman*, ND June 24 (REM).

↘ A **Great-tailed Grackle** (ouch!) at L. Bertha in *Cass*, ND June 3 (GN) was North Dakota's first. An E. Meadowlark was again on territory near Hope, ND (DK) and a 2nd was at Brien in *Morton*, ND (CT).

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Southern Great Plains Region

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Overall, this was probably a wetter-than-average season—excessively so early, but waning as the season progressed, particularly in the southern portion of the Region. It also started out cooler than normal. This may have produced some records for lingering waterfowl. However, by the end of June (July in Nebraska), things eventually heated up to normal intensity.

Following in the wings of a series of more benign years, a number of waterbird populations are probably to the point of filling or near filling available habitats, and some may have moved into being controlled increasingly by density-dependent, rather than abiotic, factors. This is expressed in an increase of Pied-billed Grebes and several rail species. Least Bitterns and Virginia Rails are breeding more broadly in the Region, and one new location for Black Rails was discovered.

