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Prairie Provinces Region

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The whole Region was unseasonably cold through most of the period, with snow and ice remaining almost a month later than normal. As a result, migration was consistently two to three weeks late until the final catch-up in late May and early June. Ice conditions led to some large, local concentrations of waterbirds in April and early May, while many winter visitors remained later than normal. Shorebird migration was diffuse, due at least in part to abundant standing water on the prairies in May.

A widespread, heavy migration of sparrows, along with the first wave of warblers, occurred as conditions haltingly improved in mid-May. This extended across much of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, north to Thompson. Frank Roy described it as one of the richest spring migrations of warblers and thrushes on record at Saskatoon, and several other Saskatchewan observers reported likewise. There was an exciting spell of rare bird reports in mid-May.

Abbreviations: I.B.S. (*Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary, AB*); O.H.M. (*Oak Hammock Marsh W.M.A., MB*).

Loons to Raptors

An unprecedented 20 Red-throated Loons at Natalie L., plus one at nearby Eleanor L., May 11 (PT *et al.*) equalled the total of all previous sightings of this species in s. Manitoba. They coincided with a concentration of >600 Com. Loons on Natalie L., and hundreds more in the Pinawa-Otter Falls area. Ice conditions presumably pushed these birds S and W of their normal migration route. Bucking the season's trend were exceptionally early Pied-billed Grebes picked up near Rennie, MB Mar. 12 (*fide* NB) and Winnipeg Mar. 14 (BJ), and an Eared Grebe near Winnipeg Apr. 9 (Rko). One-thousand W. Grebes, along with two Clark's, were hemmed in by the ice at Delta, MB May 20–22 (GG, PG, SG *et al.*).

Great Egrets were well represented Regionwide, including \geq seven birds in



Great Egret near Calgary, Alberta, May 31, 1996. One of several in the Prairie Provinces this spring. Photograph/Terry Korolyk.

Saskatchewan (v.ob.), one at Rochon Sands P.P., AB May 26 (RA), and one near Calgary May 30–31 (MH, TK*). A Cattle Egret visited Alameda, SK May 19 (JP), and one near Estevan, SK May 23 was joined by a 2nd May 30 (CD). Single Green Herons were seen at 2 Calgary localities, May 30 & 31 (AS, DS). An ad. White-faced Ibis was at St. Germain, MB May 12–13 (B&JS, m.ob.).

The Trumpeter Swan's recent range expansion in e. Saskatchewan was emphasized by 22 birds seen near Greenwater P.P. in May (*fide* BL). Snow Geese shunned O.H.M. this spring, but a concentration farther south near Carman peaked at 130,000 birds Apr. 25 (GH, CC). Four thousand late white geese at Beaverhill L., AB May 18 were >90% Ross' Geese (RDk, EM). About 20 Cinnamon Teal were reported in Saskatchewan, including 3 pairs near Cypress L., May 23 (FR) and 2 pairs near Dilke May 18 (D&VL).

Fewer Eur. Wigeon than usual were reported in Alberta, but a male was a rare find at Lac du Bonnet, MB May 12 (RZ, PT). Rare in spring were a pair of Black Scoters in Pinawa May 14–22 (RZ, PT) and a flock of 11 Surf Scoters at Edmonton May 15–16 (BD, MP). Single ♂ Barrow's Goldeneyes visited Manitou L., SK May 24 and Reflux L., SK May 30 (BL).

Late snowcover resulted in a late but excellent hawk migration along Manitoba's Red and Pembina Rivers, monitored at St. Adolphe and Windygates, respectively. Peak counts are tabulated below. Rarities included single Red-shouldered Hawks at St. Adolphe Apr. 7 (GH *et al.*), Windygates Apr. 13 (A&DS *et al.*), and near Pinawa Apr. 8 & 23 (JN, PT).

Table 1: Hawk migration in Manitoba

	BALD EAGLE		RED-TAILED HAWK	
	St. Adolphe	Windygates	St. Adolphe	Windygates
April 7	40	44	626	877
April 8	91		1012	
April 9				624

At nowhere but Mt. Lorette, AB would a season's total of 3671 Golden Eagles be considered rather low (PS); the migration lasted over 3 months, with a peak of 461 birds Apr. 3 and 38 as late as May 12. Other highlights from 80 days of observation at Mt. Lorette included 266 Bald Eagles, 108 Sharp-shinned Hawks, and the first 3 spring records of Swainson's Hawk (*vide* PS).

Cranes to Woodpeckers

SA Whooping Crane occurrence outside Saskatchewan and n. Alberta is extremely rare, and most Manitoba reports are thought to be erroneous, but the following northbound sequence was more convincing than usual: two at Sprague Apr. 17 (D. Starkell); and singles near Balmoral Apr. 21 (DC), Argyle Apr. 29 (CM, JT), and Ponton May 11 (BK). Even more tantalizing were 2 reports of Eskimo Curlew: three birds at a small slough near Killarney, MB May 15 (LP) and one near Kipling, SK May 20 (JP). Descriptions were fairly detailed, and consistent with this species, but not fully diagnostic.

Among the very few reported shorebird concentrations were 725 Black-bellied Plovers at Stirling L., AB May 21 (RM), 60 Solitary Sandpipers at I.B.S., May 8 (WS), 400 Whimbrels at Stirling L., May 10 (RM), and a peak of 160 Whimbrels near Fincastle L., AB May 14 (LB). Two Semipalmated and four Least sandpipers were locally rare at Vermilion Lakes, Banff N.P., May 14 (DL). Regional rarities were two W. Sandpipers at Manitou L., SK May 17 (BL) and a Ruff at Estlin, SK May 9 (DBa).

It was an excellent season for rare gulls, perhaps another consequence of the late thaw. Alberta's first spring Little Gull (and 3rd overall) was an adult at I.B.S., May 4 (BS, ET, BC, HT). Thayer's Gull reports included four at Calgary Apr. 25–May 13 (m.ob.), three adults at Gardiner Dam, SK May 7 (BL, BWi), and s. Manitoba's first in several years at O.H.M., May 25 (RKO, DF, GG, PT). Calgary hosted both an Iceland Gull and an ad. Lesser Black-backed Gull May 10 (BS). Three Great Black-backed Gulls were found in s.e. Manitoba: an adult in s. Winnipeg Apr. 8 (JW), an immature in n. Winnipeg Apr. 10 (RKO), and an adult at Natalie L., May 11–12 (PT *et al.*). A probable Ross' Gull graced the Red R.

near Lockport, MB Apr. 14 (L&JH). Alberta's 2nd-largest flock ever of Sabine's Gulls totaled 30 adults e. of Calgary May 26 (JR, OD, RBl). Single Arctic Terns were reported at Delta May 21 (DF, J&VR) and Fort Qu'Appelle, SK May 22 (RHo).

Owl reports were generally sparse. A few scattered N. Hawk Owls lingered in s. Manitoba into May (v.ob.), while 21 were counted between Flin Flon and Grand Rapids, MB in late March (DH). Owl *aficionados* Bob Nero and Herb Copland banded their 1000th lifetime Great Gray Owl shortly before last winter's irruption in s.e. Manitoba dissipated.

Passerines

A Say's Phoebe at Mt. Lorette May 14 (PS) and a W. Kingbird at Redwater, AB (CF) were beyond their usual range. Heavy snow concentrated Horned Larks along s. Manitoba roadsides, including 3800 in 20 mi between Elm Cr. and Oakville Apr. 1 (GH, CC). Red-breasted Nuthatches were very common in Medicine Hat, AB (DBo) and Saskatoon (FR), but scarce in s. Manitoba. An E. Bluebird wandered W to Lethbridge, AB May 26 (JMa). An ad. N. Wheatear was reported at Winnipeg May 13 (RdG). A pair of Varied Thrushes nested in Calgary in May, well e. of their normal breeding range (DA). Rare in the mountains was a Gray Catbird at Banff N.P., May 22 (M&DM). At least one N. Mockingbird was found near Regina in May (DD, BE), and another visited I.B.S., May 22 (JR *et al.*). Several observers in s. Manitoba found Bohemian Waxwings until late April; even later were 25 at Mt. Lorette May 13 (PS) and six at Red Deer, AB May 17 (IR).

Regina's May Bird Count May 18 hit a good early warbler wave; 8 parties of observers tallied 163 Orange-crowned, 583 Yellow, and 3804 Yellow-rumped warblers. Manitoba birders enjoyed an outstanding string of e. warblers: a Black-throated Blue Warbler at Bird's Hill P.P., May 21–22 (L&JH) was overshadowed by the province's 3rd Yellow-throated Warbler, stunned at an Argyle window May 19 (JMo). Then the region's 2nd and Manitoba's first Worm-eating Warbler delighted all comers at Delta May 20–27 (AE, RN, RBo, m.ob.). Finally, a Kentucky Warbler at Altona May 21–22 (HGa, m.ob.) was more elusive, but still well seen by many for Manitoba's 2nd confirmed record. The only unusual warbler farther west was a Pine Warbler at Moose Mountain P.P., SK May 20–21 (RDx).

A ♂ Summer Tanager lingered at Lunder, MB May 21+ (B&EE *et al.*), a ♀ Scarlet Tanager wandered W to Calgary





Several "southeastern" warblers were found in Manitoba this spring, including this Worm-eating Warbler, a first for the province, at Delta May 21, 1996. Photograph/Dennis Fast.

May 30 (JS), and \geq four W. Tanagers visited Manitoba feeders in the 2nd half of May. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were especially conspicuous during migration at many locations, with reports extending as far west as Banff, AB May 29–31 (SM, M&DM). Alberta's first documented Green-tailed Towhee (HGr) drew many birders at Calgary May 30. Out-of-range were a Lark Sparrow at Good Spirit Lake P.P., SK May 23 (BA), a Golden-crowned Sparrow in Regina May 20 (ES), a Lazuli Bunting at Vegreville, AB May 27+ (RHu), and two σ Indigo Buntings near Medicine Hat Apr. 27+ (BV). Additional highlights of the Regina May Count included 1760 Chipping and 2015 Clay-colored sparrows, and an unprecedented 1850 White-crowned Sparrows. A possible "White-winged" Dark-eyed Junco was an interesting find at Dilke, SK Apr. 20 (MB).

An Orchard Oriole was well north at Lundar May 26 (R&TW), and several birds sustained the species' toehold in s.e. Saskatchewan. Rare in the mountains were two Purple Finches at Mt. Lorette May 11–12 (JS, PS). In the aftermath of last winter's invasion, White-winged Crossbills nested at Cypress Hills P.P., SK, where a fledgling was seen May 28 (RKr, RT), and nesting was suspected in urban settings at Regina, Altona, and Winnipeg. Common Redpolls lingered very late, with many large flocks swarming over feeders in April, and numerous May records in both s. Manitoba and s. Alberta.

Observers (Subregional compilers in boldface): Des Allen, Ray Allen, Bill Anaka, Dennis Baresco (DBo), David Baron (DBa), Stuart & Jean Bawr, Margaret Belcher, Lloyd Bennett, Ron Blakely (RBl), Ron Boese (RBo), Nancy Bremner, Brook Clibbon, D. Crawford, Carolyn Curtis, Rob de Graaf, Ross Dickson

(RDk), Ruth Dixon (RDx), Olga Droppo, D. Duncan, Bruce Dunlop, C. Durr, Adolf Ens, Bob Ewart, Bill & Evelyn Eyolfson, Dennis Fast, Chris Fisher, Lenora Flynn, Hélène Gauthier (HGa), Horst Grothman (HGr), Gordon Grief, Paula Grief, Susan Grief, Michael Harrison, David Hatch, George Holland, Len & Joyce Holmes, Ron Hooper (RHo), Rob Hughes (RHu), Bruce Jennings, Rudolf Koes (RKO), Terry Korolyk, Bruce Kowal, Robert Kreba (RKr), Doug & Vera Laing, Doug Leighton, Bob Luterbach, Shelly Maderos, Ed Mah-Lim, Jennifer Mather (JMa), Mike & Dianne McIvor, Ross Monroe, Carol Morgan, John Morgan (JMo), Rob Nickel, Jamie Noel, J. Paton, John Pollock, Lloyd Powell, Margaret Powell, Jim & Victor Reimer, Ian Richards, John Riddell, Frank Roy, E. Schindler, Al & Dorothy Schritt, Peter Sherrington, Bev & Janice Smith, Wayne Smith, John Steeves, Bob Storms, Andrew Styles, Don Styles, Peter Taylor, Jacqueline Thompson, Ron Tillie, Howard Troughton, Eric Tull, Ben Velner, Bill Walker (BWA), John Weier, Renee & Tom Will, Bill Williams (BWi), Reto Zach.

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Southern Great Plains Region

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Spring is usually the rainy season. Not so this year over southern portions of the Region, particularly northwestern Oklahoma, large portions of which had almost no rain from October 1995 to May 1996. Perhaps as significant was the drought in Texas, creating a substantive gap of drought-stricken terrain for migrants to traverse. While the season seemed advanced early, it also seemed drawn out, perhaps a little late in the primary migration periods of late April and early May. It may have been that fattening up for the next leg of the migratory trip came more slowly this year.

What patterns of abundances in species populations did this create? This was hard to interpret from reports, as there were birds to be found, perhaps localized and easier to find by the constraints of surface water. Except for what appeared to be some potential protraction in migration, and perhaps first nesting attempts among more closely observed species, there is not much obvious comment to be made other

