

British Columbia/ Yukon Region

JACK BOWLING

It was another brutal winter across British Columbia, with snow and cold dominating for the most part, including a memorable blizzard on the south coast through Christmas and New Year's, which impacted Christmas Bird Counts. And when it wasn't snowing on the coast, it was windy and wetter than normal. Conversely, the Yukon enjoyed lower snowfalls than usual, with only a couple of short-lived but sharp cold snaps early on, followed by a warmer than average February. Although deemed a rather quiet season by most compilers, coastal areas saw plenty of action as birds were pushed out of the interior by the cold. Only one Asian passerine showed up, a Brambling on the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Abbreviations: B.C. (*British Columbia*); Ok. L. (*Okanagan L.*); Ok. Vly (*Okanagan Valley*); P.G. (*Prince George*); p.v. (*pending verification by responsible Bird*

Records Committee); Reifel (*Reifel Waterfowl Sanctuary, Ladner, s.w. B.C.*); S.T.P. (*Sewage Treatment Plant/Ponds*); Van. (*Vancouver*); Van. I. (*Vancouver I.*); Vic. (*Victoria*); Whse. (*Whitehorse*).

Loons to Rails

The nine Red-throated Loons recorded at Port Alberni Jan. 11 (DGC) provided a new local high tally. However, this paled in comparison to the 816 on Van. Harbour Feb. 8 (MPR, GS). Normally this area sees influxes of this species in March, but peak counts are usually well below this huge raft. Only a couple of Yellow-billed Loons were reported from the s. coast, with one young of the year in Vancouver's Inner harbor Dec. 8 and Jan. 16 (†MPR), and another off s.e. Van. I. on the Duncan CBC Jan. 5 (DM). Casual in B.C., a Clark's Grebe was present off the Iona I. South Jetty Dec. 1 (TP, MTo, DTy), and \leq two others frequented nearby side-channels of the Fraser R., Jan. 22+ (MKM, m.ob.). Exhibiting behavior more typical of Florida Great Blue Herons, a probable near-starving one at Wood L., Winfield, c. Ok. Vly, was seen begging for scraps from ice fishermen Jan. 5 (CS). A Cattle Egret was found dead at Skookumchuck, E. Kootenays, Jan. 17 (MW), but there was no indication of how long it had been so. An all-time high count of 458 Trumpeter Swans was tallied on the Victoria CBC Dec. 21.

Also totaling new high counts for the same CBC were 4476 Canada Geese and 23 Greater White-fronted Geese; 10 more White-fronteds were at Duncan Dec. 10 (DM). A very rare Emperor Goose was reported from near Courtenay Dec. 9 (*fide* DGC), another at Tofino Dec. 14 (DGC, KJ), and a 3rd from the Qualicum R. Estuary Dec. 24, likely all sightings of the same bird wandering around s. Van. I. Bucking the odds in such a cold winter, a ♂ Wood Duck successfully overwintered well inland at Grand Forks, E. Kootenays (RW). Dashing the wishes of many eager listers, the Falcated Teal did not return to the Tofino mudflats this January (*fide* DGC), as it had the previous 2 years. Casual in winter in the Yukon, seven Mallards were at Johnson's Crossing Dec. 1

(CE, HG, PS), while another seven wintered at the McIntyre wetlands in Whse. (CE). A ♂ Cinnamon Teal, a casual species on the inner s. coast in winter, remained in the vicinity of Iona I., Dec. 3–Jan. 25 (m.ob.). A high of four Tufted Ducks was counted at Iona S.T.P., Feb. 8 (RTO), while another two were at Stanley Park's Lost Lagoon Jan. 12+ (m.ob.). Discovered earlier in the fall, the first-winter ♂ Common Eider present in Vancouver's Inner and Outer Harbours in December and January wandered southward around the Pt. Grey shoreline to Iona I. in February (m.ob.). Based on various field marks, most observers felt the bird belonged to the geographically closest *V-nigra* race. A higher-than-normal 91 Oldsquaw were in Van. Harbour Feb. 8 (MPR). Wintering well n. was a ♂ Barrow's Goldeneye at the Nautley R. near Fraser L., c. B.C., Feb. 1 (CA, NK, MPH).

SA Brent Beach of Vic. came over to Van., Jan. 31 in search of the young Com. Eider in the harbor. As well as the eider, he found 3 or 4 rafts of scoters totalling >20,000 birds, a number historically seen only during herring spawning season in March. Numbers had started building up the previous week. All 3 scoter species were represented: about 85% Surf, 10% Black and 5% White-winged. What impressed the observer was the behavior of the scoters, which were constantly moving about, rafts forming and reforming. Once in a raft, the birds would paddle madly in place without moving much. After a minute or two, a group dive would begin at one side of the raft and progress to the other side until they were all down. It was not clear if this was a feeding strategy. However, given the precedent of the largest rafts being associated with food, as well as much higher numbers of Red-throated Loons, Oldsquaw, and Com. Murres than normal in the harbor, it is likely they were feeding. But on what? Had the herring come in early? Had the previous cold weather changed marine prey distribution? Large flocks of Oldsquaw and scoters were also reported from the Parkville-Qualicum Beach area of s.e. Van. I. the same day (DM). The scoter rafts were still present in Van. Harbour Feb. 8, when numbers were estimated at 16,000–18,000 (MPR).

Turkey Vultures are known to linger at extreme s. B.C. latitudes in mild winters, but it was surprising to have not one but 5



separate sites visited by Turkey Vultures during the period. One was at Reifel Dec. 15 (JI), six on the Vic. CBC Dec. 21, three on the Sooke CBC, one on the Penticton CBC Dec. 28 (DnW, JJ), and another at Sechelt Jan. 27 (PGo), which was joined by another later in February (*fide* TG); A patagially-tagged sub-ad. Bald Eagle, which turned up at Goldstream P.P. outside of Vic. in December, had been banded as a nestling in California (MG, *fide* KM). The first deep cold snap of the season was coincident with a notable influx of Bald Eagles to the coast at Vancouver; 61 passed E along the n. shore of Burrard Inlet during a 90-minute period Dec. 22 (MPr). Usually the local buildup does not occur there until January. Deep snow years correlate fairly well with increased numbers of N. Goshawks in the valley bottoms of the s. interior, with two in the Vernon area in late December, while another was watched chasing a Red Squirrel at Nakusp Jan. 2 (GSD). Also, a high six were seen on the Penticton CBC Dec. 28 (*fide* RJC). On the coast, another "Gos" frequented Reifel Feb. 19–29 (JI, m.ob.). A couple Gyrfalcons hunted the P.G. area: a gray-morph e. of town Dec. 10 (CA), and a 2nd downtown chasing pigeons on the CBC Jan. 5 (MPh, CF). Another Gyr was farther south at Merritt, s. B.C., Feb. 1 (WCW). A Prairie Falcon was observed at the traditional site of Brunswick Pt., near Ladner, Dec. 21–Jan. 26 (m.ob.), and another was 40 km n. at Pitt Meadows Jan. 1 (RCr). At Mendenhall, Yukon, both Spruce Grouse and ptarmigan numbers were lower than normal, the apparent result of a meager snowpack impacting escape from predators, in the opinion of the observer (GD). It should be noted that there were no reports of Virginia Rails from the s. coas, perhaps a sign of significant weather-related mortality.

Shorebirds to Woodpeckers

Casual on the coast in winter, a plover of the American/Pacific Golden-Plover complex was at Delta Jan. 3 (BS, RTo), and two more were seen during the Masset CBC count week (*fide* PH). Seldom missing a winter the past decade in the Tsawwassen/White Rock areas, a Willet was present along the Tsawwassen Jetty through the period (m.ob.). Another scarce winterer is the Spotted Sandpiper. One was seen along the Chehalis R. in the e. Lower Fraser Valley Dec. 3 (MTo), with another at N. Van., Dec. 22–Jan. 22 (m.ob.). But the most curious was the Spotted which turned up at Egmont on the Sunshine Coast Dec. 18 (TG, RTk, DoB), 3 years to the date that the first one

was recorded at the exact same spot. The species was unheard of in winter on the Sunshine Coast before then. Eclipsing last winter's tally of beachcombing Sanderlings at Comber's Beach, Pacific Rim N.P., s. of Tofino, was the count of 900 there Dec. 14 (DGC), the largest on record in the Region for any season. Always big news, three Rock Sandpipers were along the Stanley Park Seawall, Van., Dec. 26–27 (M.&J. Tabac). A couple Com. Snipe braved the frigid inland weather of the s. interior, with one at Okanagan Landing, c. Ok. Vly, Dec. 28 (CS), and another at Burton, W. Kootenays, Jan. 3 (GSD). In a marked departure from last year's wreck, the only Red Phalarope was one at China Cr. near Port Alberni, s.c. Van. I., Jan. 4 (B. Slater, R. Cripps). Unlike last winter, when a strong, persistent westerly jetstream impacted the coast during the wreck, the jetstream was weaker and more irregular, with low pressure systems arriving from different trajectories.

A Slaty-backed Gull was back in Delta Jan. 5 (TB); this species is now fairly regular in winter in the Delta area. A sign of how entrenched Glaucous-winged Gulls have become on Ok. L., ≥18 (4 adults, 14 immatures) were at the s. end Feb. 2 (WCW). Another two adults were thought to be Glaucous-winged x Western hybrids. The only Glaucous Gulls reported were two first-years seen on the Vernon CBC Dec. 22 (CS, DnW, GSD).

A tally of 101 Com. Murres in Van. Harbour Feb. 8 (MPr, GS) was higher than more normal winter numbers. Reported only infrequently along the s. coast the past several years, two Marbled Murrelets off the Iona S. Jetty, Richmond, Dec. 10 (MKM) were noteworthy. This species may be in trouble in s. B.C. waters.

The 99 Mourning Doves tallied on the Grand Forks CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* RW) comprised one of the larger winter totals on record. Only recently confirmed as a constituent of the Alberni Valley fauna, a Barn Owl at McCoy L., Jan. 4 (DGC) was a surprise. Elsewhere on s. Van. I., at least one Barn Owl overwintered successfully at the Hovey Rd., C. Saanich, location where they nested in 1996 (BWh). Following the 1995 winter sighting at Sicamous, a very pale Great Horned Owl matching the description of the more northern and eastern *subarcticus* race was observed at Okanagan Landing, c. Ok. Vly, Dec. 22 (DG, PG). The 11 Great Horned Owls tallied on the Kluane CBC Dec. 28 (HG, TH) provided the highest number ever for the s.w. Yukon count. Snowshoe Hare numbers have been increasing there over the past few years. A Great Horned found

floating dead, but still warm, in Arrow L., Jan. 4 on the Nakusp CBC (*fide* GSD) stimulated much discussion whether to add the bird to the count. Deep snowcover with a crusty surface may have contributed to owl fatalities. A N. Pygmy-Owl near Nakusp spent the winter whittling down an overwintering flock of six Rusty Blackbirds—only one was left by the end of the period (M. Allard). Great Gray Owls were reported from Prince George (five), Kelowna (one), and Kamloops (two) through the period, and even a single from downtown Van., Jan. 12 (K Shaeffer). Unusual were very rare Yukon sightings of Great Grays: one near Watson L., s.c. Yukon, in mid-January (RMue, JS), and another w. of Jake's Corner Feb. 28 (MC, AM). Considered resident in the Thompson-Okanagan Plateau, but seldom seen in winter, a Long-eared Owl on the Vaseux L. CBC Dec. 29 (RJC) furnished a good find. A Short-eared Owl winging over frozen Swan L., s. Yukon, Jan. 12 (†HG, †BM) provided one of few winter records for the Territory. A Boreal Owl found injured on a Whse. road Dec. 10 (BrB, RMul) was released nearby Dec. 20. Possibly the same individual was seen Jan. 4 (TH).

SA The jury is in on this winter's Snowy Owl flight, and by all accounts it was one of the best ever, 2nd only to 1973–1974. The heaviest concentration was, as usual, along the foreshore at the n. end of Boundary Bay, where one day tallies—such as the 24 seen Nov. 29 (DP)—increased to the highest one-day total of 62 on the Ladner CBC Jan. 4. Numbers decreased slowly thereafter. Other s. B.C. locations reporting more than usual through the period were the greater Vic. area (two, plus one dead), Nanaimo (eight, plus six in rehab), Merritt (one), and Vernon (two–three).

Anna's Hummingbirds in the greater Vic area seemed little affected by the late December blizzard, with traditional locations reporting survivors. Unusual was a well-described ♀ *Selasphorus* matching the description of a Rufous at a Vic. feeder Feb. 2+ (J. Owen); there has only been one accepted winter report of the species for the area. Very local in winter in the s. interior, several Lewis' Woodpeckers were observed, including one on the Kamloops CBC Dec. 22 (*fide* RRH), two on the Penticton CBC Dec. 28 (*fide* RJC), and singles at Kaleden and Vaseux L., Dec. 29 (*fide* RJC). Discovered on the White Rock CBC Jan. 4 (S. Peterson), a ♂ Yellow-bellied

Sapsucker remained at a S. Surrey location through Feb. 5 (m.ob.). It was joined for one day by a female Jan. 5 (†JAM). As usual in severe winters, Red-breasted Sapsuckers moved to the coast, with many reports in the greater Vic. area after the blizzard. However, the deep snows prevented an organized census. New count records of Red-breasteds were recorded on the Q.C.I., with 20 on the Queen Charlotte City CBC Dec. 28, and seven on the Port Clements CBC Jan. 4 (SD, BE, MH, PH). There were 2 sightings of the very rare White-headed Woodpecker from the ponderosa pine country of the s. Ok. Villy: the first on the Penticton CBC Dec. 28 (DnW, JJ), and the next on the lower slopes of Anarchist Mt., e. of Osoyoos, Feb. 23 (H.&J. King). In an area of beetle outbreak, 23 Three-toed Woodpeckers were recorded at the Alaska Hwy near Jarvis Cr. during the Kluane CBC Dec. 28 (TH *et al.*), a count record. Three Black-backed Woodpeckers, usually a rare Yukon species, were noted there Feb. 16 (TH).

Flycatchers to Fringillids

At least some of the Sky Larks of C. Saanich, s.e. Van. I., survived the late December snows by taking advantage of the patchy nature of the snowpack. The largest flock reported was 30 in the Martindale Valley Dec. 31 (GA). Very unusual was one at a seed feeder at Sooke Dec. 28 (DMcD, *fide* BB). The first swallows returned early to Van. I., with three Tree Swallows at Cowichan Bay Feb. 15; "many" were there Feb. 17 (DM). On the other side of Georgia Strait, the first Trees were noted at Burnaby L. and Matsqui Feb. 27. Two very early Violet-green Swallows flew over Vic., Jan. 31 (DA), the 2nd earliest return date on record. There were relatively few Blue Jay sightings compared to the past few winters, with one at Deep Cove, N. Saanich, its 2nd winter there (E.&K. Peerless, BB); another frequented the area near the Kelowna hospital through January (m.ob.). A few Clark's Nutcrackers descended to the valley floor and visited feeders in the Nakusp area through the period, a rare event any time of the year (GSD). Chestnut-backed Chickadees are local residents of the wetter interior forests, but not often seen in winter. Noteworthy were two at a feeder atop Silver Star Mt., Vernon, c. Ok. Villy, during January (B.&J. Walker). A pair of **Bushtits** was seen with roving Black-capped Chickadees in S. Kelowna Feb. 21 (RY, NG), the Ok Villy's 3rd sighting. Together with the nearby sighting in December 1995, this may indicate the species is trying to establishing a toehold

in the valley. Are these birds infiltrating east from s.w. B.C., or north from Washington state? Rare and local on the Q.C.I., four Red-breasted Nuthatches on the Port Clements CBC Jan. 4 (SD, BE, MH, PH) was a high number. Ruby-crowned Kinglets lingered well inland, as they did last winter, with one at Nakusp Dec. 3 (GSD). A ♀ Mt. Bluebird at Rose Spit, n.e. tip of the Q.C.I., Jan. 1 provided about the 7th record for the islands (MH, PH); another female was at Kimberley, E. Kootenays, Dec. 9–11 (D.&E. Schmidt).

At least four Townsend's Solitaires were reported from the greater Vic. area beginning Dec. 22 (m.ob.). Other thrushes in notable concentrations on s. Van. I. included 12 Hermit Thrushes at a Sooke feeder Dec. 30 (DMcD), and a high 334 Varied Thrushes on the Tofino CBC Dec. 14 (AD, *et al.*). Apparently fleeing the deep snows after the blizzard, flocks of Am. Robins were seen flying E and SE across Haro Strait from Ten Mile Pt., Saanich, s.e. Van. I., Dec. 30 (H. Petch).

Bohemian Waxwings seemed undaunted by the weather, with a high 7000 on the Kamloops CBC Dec. 22 (*fide* RRH), and 4000 on the Penticton CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* RJC). A few even made it to the coast where rare, with one at Sea I., Richmond, Dec. 22–26 (KW, m.ob.), and 19 at New Westminster Jan. 20 (MPr). Two more Bohemians were found in Duncan Dec. 24 (DM), and a single bird was with robins on Martindale Flats, C. Saanich, Dec. 26 (GA). Cedar Waxwings are very rare on the Sunshine Coast in winter. Noteworthy were the two at Gibsons Jan. 2 (DoB), and five at Sechelt Jan. 5 (TG). All were at ornamental berry bushes; it is possible that with the increasing suburbanization of the peninsula, waxwings may become a more regular cold season visitor. A rare winter N. Shrike report came from Teslin, s. Yukon, Feb. 24 (PA, DS) as the weather warmed to the south. Although Crested Mynas were reported 9 times from the Van. areaduring the season, only four were tallied on the Van. CBC Dec. 22, the lowest ever.

Wood-warblers lingering late included an Orange-crowned Warbler on Sea I., Richmond, Dec. 6 (MKM), and a Townsend's with Golden-crowned Kinglets in N. Van. Jan. 21 (TP). The Vic. area compiler reported average numbers of Orange-crowneds, Yellow-rumpeds, and Townsend's through the period, despite the snow and cold. Even rarer in winter was a Wilson's Warbler located at Boundary Bay, Delta, Dec. 16 (MWy). There were no Palm Warblers this winter. Casual in winter, a **Western Tanager** frequented a

Saanich location Dec. 12–30 (J. Inglis). There was a noticeable influx of Am. Tree Sparrows to the coast, where rare. Several lingered from the fall on the Q.C.I., with one at Rose Spit Jan. 1, two at Sandspit Jan. 15, and two at Masset Feb. 1 (MH, PH). Six others were at Serpentine Fen, Surrey, Jan. 4 (DTy, PM), and another was as the Nanaimo R. Estuary the same day (DM). The only Swamp Sparrow noted was at Rocky Pt., extreme s. Van. I., Jan. 4. White-throated Sparrows at feeders included one at Nakusp Dec. 1 (L. Wells), and singles at 8 locations around the greater Vic. through the period. A Harris' Sparrow was at a downtown Vic. feeder most of the period (D. Finding), and another was seen in Saanich Jan. 14 (C. Motherwell). A rare winter lingerer, a Lapland Longspur was at Clover Pt., Vic., Jan. 1 (AC). Two casual winter icterids were recorded on the Oliver-Osoyoos CBC Jan. 4 (*fide* RJC): a Yellow-headed Blackbird and a Brown-headed Cowbird. Rusty Blackbirds, always rare in winter, were scattered across the Region, including a holdover from November at Goldstream P.P. near Vic., seen through early February (m.ob.), a flock of six near Nakusp (*see owl sreport*); an ad. male at Teslin, s. Yukon, Dec. 1 (DD, CE, HG, PS); and one at 72nd Street, Delta, Dec. 1–9 (BS, JAM). An ad. ♂ **Brambling** frequented a Masset, Q.C.I., feeder Dec. 10+ (OD, MH, PH, BWi). This is the 3rd consecutive year for the species on the Charlottes, with 5 records since 1989 and 8 since 1971—the Brambling capital of Canada! A ♂ Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch at a Whse. feeder late November–Dec. 5 (LC, †CE) provided a rare Yukon winter record; and 100 were tallied on the Grand Forks CBC Dec. 27 (*fide* RW). Rare on the s. coast in winter, a Pine Grosbeak was at Sea I., Richmond, Jan. 24–31 (DTy, m.ob.). A similar pattern of Com. Redpoll influx in February was noted from both the Nakusp area in the W. Kootenays (GSD) and the s. Yukon (m.ob.). They were found in good numbers all period in the c. interior (m.ob.). A few Hoary Redpolls were reported from the s. Yukon by late February (v.o.). A ♀ House Sparrow at Whse., Dec. 24–30 (†CE, †HG) provided the first winter record for the Yukon. This is possibly the same bird seen in August, Yukon's first.

Addendum

A sub-ad. **Short-tailed Albatross** was photographed off the n.w. coast of the Q.C.I. by Russell Cameron, skipper of the fishing vessel Ocean Viking, Oct. 22, 1996 (p.v., ph.). This was the 2nd 1996 sighting in B.C. waters of this scarce species. Birders

on the Internet can point their web browser at the following URL to see the bird: <http://www.iphc.washington.edu:80/pages/iphc/staff/tracee/alby.htm>. Thanks to Tracee Geernaert for putting the picture up on her homepage and writing up the sighting.

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Oregon/ Washington Region

BILL TWEIT AND JIM JOHNSON

This was the second consecutive unusually wet winter, with unusual now meaning record-breaking and not just below average. The series of ice and snow storms that hit the Puget Trough south to Portland in late December resulted in tremendous tree damage, but no immediate avian effects were reported other than the usual appearance of Varied Thrush fleeing the higher elevations and crowding lowland feeders. Temperatures this winter season were quite mild for most of the region.

The most prominent feature of the season was the number of invasions, with the Snowy Owl flight the most memorable. Also appearing were Great Gray Owls, numerous corvids, and Mountain Chickadees. Only the winter finches declined to appear.

Abbreviations: F.R.R. (*Fern Ridge Res., Lane Co., OR*); O.S. (*Ocean Shores, Grays Harbor Co., WA*); Ridgefield (*Ridgefield N.W.R., Clark Co., WA*); Sauvie (*Sauvie I., Columbia Co., OR*).

Loons to Waterfowl

Up to three Red-throated Loons at Kirk Pond near F.R.R., Dec. 15–Feb. 14 (RH, HH, m.ob.) were unusual for the lower Willamette valley. All 3 freshwater Pacific Loon records were from w. Oregon: one near Medford, *Jackson*, Dec. 10 (C. Brumitt), one at Canby, *Clackamas*, Jan. 4 (E. Specht), and one at F.R.R., Feb. 15 (DH). The only Yellow-billed Loon report was one at Yaquina Bay, *Lincoln*, OR Dec. 9–Feb. 21 (m.ob., *fide RB*); this represents the lowest total since winter 1991–1992. An Eared Grebe in s.e. Oregon at Krumbo Res., *Harney*, Dec. 21 (G. Ivey) was

indicative of the mild interior conditions. In w. Oregon, eight were found in the Willamette valley (RH, DC) and six on the outer coast (JJ, JG, CR). They have become regular in recent winters in certain locales, but were generally unrecorded before 1987. Clark's Grebe reports totaled five, about average: one at Everett, WA Dec. 14 (SM), one at Cascade Locks, *Hood River*, OR Feb. 2 (PlSu), one at O.S., Feb. 24 (†G&WH), one at F.R.R., Jan. 16 (HH), and one at Yaquina Bay, *Lincoln*, OR Jan. 19 (*fide RB*).

The pelagic trip off Westport, WA Feb. 2 found five Black-footed and 13 Laysan albatross, 37 N. Fulmar, four **Mottled Petrels**, and one Sooty Shearwater (TW). The Feb. 15 pelagic trip off Depoe Bay, OR, found eight N. Fulmar (G. Gilson, M. Hunter). These were the 2nd Mottled Petrel records in as many winters. In inshore waters, a N. Fulmar and two Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel were at Rosario Beach, *Skagit*, WA Dec. 1 (*fide BK*). Unusual westside winter reports of Am. White Pelican were singles near Vancouver, *Clark*, WA, and adjacent Sauvie Jan. 4–12 (E. Anderson, M. Houck), and near F.R.R., Jan. 12+ (HH, m.ob.), the first *Lane* winter record. The four lingering Brown Pelicans reported from the Oregon coast were gone by January (RH, DM, *fide RB*).

Two Great Egrets along the Walla Walla R. in December, with one to Feb. 23 (MD, C. Rees, *fide JN*), provided a winter first for *Walla Walla*. The Cattle Egret reports validated the above-average fall

