

prairie provinces region



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Weather conditions were generally mild through much of the season with the exception of a cold period from mid-December to mid-January. Snowfall ranged from below average in southern Manitoba to above average in parts of Saskatchewan. Much open water in December resulted in record numbers of lingering waterfowl. A good assortment of "half-hardy" birds hung on to be tallied at Christmas Bird Counts; some individuals survived through the winter at feeders.

Abbreviations: L.M.L. (*Last Mountain L., Saskatchewan*).

LOONS THROUGH FALCONS

Each province had one noteworthy loon sighting: a Red-throated at L.M.L. Dec. 4 (RKR); a Pacific at Calgary, AB, until Dec. 6 (m.ob.); and a Common at Silver Falls, MB, until Dec. 14 (GG, DF). Five species of grebes were reported in the first half of December, including a Pied-billed at Taber, AB, Dec. 2 (LBe) and two on the Winnipeg R., MB, Dec. 14 (RKO); two Horned Dec. 13 at L. Wabamun, AB (J&MM); single Red-necked at L. Wabamun Dec. 13 (J&MM) and at Powerview, MB, to Dec. 14 (m.ob.); and six Eared and 15+ Westerns on L.M.L. Dec. 4 (RKR). Late Am. White Pelicans were at Milk River Ridge Res., AB, Dec. 3 (T&DD) and at Echo Valley P.P., SK, until about Dec. 20 (RH) while two Double-crested Cormorants remained through the winter at Calgary (m.ob.) and three were on the Winnipeg R. Dec. 14 (RKO).

A Greater White-fronted \times Canada Goose hybrid was at Wyndham-Carseland P.P., AB, Jan. 17 (MH), and another hybrid,

likely Canada \times Swan Goose, survived the winter with three Canada Geese at Winnipeg, MB (RKO). Similarly, a Snow Goose survived with Canadas at Wyndham-Carseland P.P. (MH, BE, RSs). There were several Tundra Swan sightings in Alberta; more unusual was one at Seven Sisters Falls, MB, Dec. 30 (G&SG), perhaps the same bird that had been at Pine Falls Dec. 13 (R&MZ). Indicative of the mild conditions were 18 species of ducks in Alberta and 14 in Manitoba. Highlights included single Gadwalls at Calgary Jan. 14 (BW) and at Minnedosa, MB, Jan. 17 (CC); lone Am. Wigeons at Winnipeg Dec. 11–20 (RKO) and at Calgary until Jan. 1 (AS); a Blue-winged Teal at Taber, Dec. 1 (LBe); and a female/imm. White-winged Scoter on the Red R. in Winnipeg Dec. 2 (RKO) and two similarly plumaged birds at L.M.L. Dec. 4 (RKR).

Oldsquaws were noted to mid-December at Calgary and L. Minnewanka, AB, and at Powerview (m.ob.). Two Hooded Mergansers were at Echo L., SK, Dec. 11 with one remaining Dec. 13 (Rkr, RM et al.), and singles were noted at Oak Hammock Marsh, MB, Dec. 25 (RKO); A.E. Campbell Dam, SK, Jan. 1 (WH); and Calgary to Jan. 3 (AS). Red-breasted Mergansers tarried longer than usual with sightings in Alberta and Manitoba to mid-December; two hardy ones in Calgary remained until at least Jan. 30 (MH et al.).

There were numerous reports of overwintering Bald Eagles, particularly from Alberta; 12 at Cardston, AB, Feb. 25 (T&DD) no doubt involved early migrants. Sharp-shinned Hawks also attracted attention; besides several sightings in s. Alberta in December and January, individuals were noted near Regina, SK, Dec. 20 (L&SBo); at Kleefeld, MB, Jan. 18 (DF); and at Lethbridge, AB, Feb. 14 (LS). A Cooper's Hawk near Craven, SK, Dec. 19 carried off a House Sparrow (Rkr, RM); 4 reports came from Calgary Dec. 25–Jan. 5 (m.ob.) and Taber had one Feb. 13 (LB). Northern Goshawks were generally scarce except in s. Alberta. Out-of-season Red-tailed Hawks included dark birds at Taber Feb. 9 (LBe) and in the Morley-Priddis, AB, area Jan. 23 and Feb. 13 (MB, BK, TK), plus a freshly dead immature at Stonewall, MB, Feb. 26 (RC, KG). In contrast to the low numbers of

Gyrfalcons reported elsewhere, the Ft. Saskatchewan, AB, area hosted up to eight different birds in early December (GC)! A Prairie Falcon near Niverville, MB, was a good find Dec. 22 (DF).

RAILS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

A Virginia Rail at the Cave and Basin Marsh in Banff N.P., AB, Dec. 6–Jan. 23 (J&MM) provided the 2nd winter record for the province; the first was at the same location in 1996. Lake Wabamun held 100 Am. Coots Dec. 13 (J&MM); smaller numbers were in s. Alberta until Jan. 16 (JP, MH et al.) while one at Medicine Hat, AB, Feb. 21 was an early spring arrival (BV). Several December Killdeer reports in Alberta were followed by three at the Cave and Basin Marsh Jan. 23 (MB, BK). The same marsh hosted a Com. Snipe Dec. 6 (J&MM); another was seen in the Qu'Appelle Valley, SK, mid-December (RH).

A Mew Gull lingered to Dec. 2 in Calgary, providing a first winter record for the city (JT et al.). Some 50 Ring-billed Gulls at Calgary Dec. 1 (CH) were followed by up to five near Lethbridge Dec. 6–17 (WG et al.), one at Regina until Dec. 18 (RE), and two at the Gardiner Dam, SK, Dec. 21 (WH). The only Thayer's Gull was in Calgary Dec. 1–2 (JT et al.). Two imm. Glaucous Gulls at Powerview Dec. 12 (RKO, GG) were replaced by an adult (rarely seen in the south) Dec. 13–14 (R&MZ et al.). Although not fully documented, the brief description in the *Globe and Mail* of an **Ivory Gull** seen at Innisfail Jan. 3 leaves little doubt about its authenticity; it provided only the 2nd report for Alberta (DWs, *vide* PW).

It was a poor winter for owl aficionados. Snowy Owls were scarce everywhere except in the Irricana–Strathmore, AB, area, and N. Hawk Owls went virtually unreported. Barred Owls at Onanole and the Brandon Hills, MB, brightened the winter for the observers (I&VW, T&RW), but Great Grays were conspicuous by their absence. A Long-eared Owl at Lethbridge Dec. 31 provided a first winter record for the area (FR). Only Short-eared Owls bucked the trend with 19 reports in s. Alberta, involving an unknown number of birds, while an unprecedented 14 were at Oak Hammock Marsh Feb. 20 (RKO).

Two Belted Kingfishers spent January in Calgary, but only one remained Feb. 12 (MH). A Red-bellied Woodpecker at Headingley, MB, lasted through the winter (KM et al.). A count of nine Three-toed Woodpeckers was made at Millarville, AB, Dec. 16 (JP).

PASSERINES

A roost in the Sheep R. Valley, AB, contained 325 Com. Ravens Dec. 4 (WS) while a dump at Calgary attracted 65 of these corvids Jan. 26 (JH, MP). After one **Chestnut-backed Chickadee** was found in Waterton N.P., AB, Jan. 31, subsequent visits revealed up to four in February (T&DD, F&JS, KV et al.); there are probably fewer than 10 records in the province. Late winter records of Brown Creepers in the boreal forest are scarce, so five in Whiteshell P.P., MB, Feb. 20 were noteworthy (LdM). Two E. Bluebirds feeding with a Mt. Bluebird and three Am. Robins on chokecherries in Lumsden, SK, from late December to Jan. 1 provided the province with a new winter species. Presumably the same birds had been seen nearby Dec. 4 (D&RP, CP). A Townsend's Solitaire briefly visited Winnipeg Feb. 2 (TS) while two Varied Thrushes near Winnipeg lasted the season (WB, DB et al.).

Locally rare at any season was a Brown Thrasher at Thompson in N. Manitoba, last seen Dec. 23 (R&ZI). Late warblers included a Yellow-rumped Warbler Dec. 14-19 and a Com. Yellowthroat Dec. 2, both at Calgary (TK, RW). A Song Sparrow was

SA The **Curve-billed Thrasher** at Barrhead, AB, first noted in the fall report, survived the season. It looked weak during the mid-winter cold spell and sported a damaged eye, but a diet of mealworms brought it back to health. It was seen through Mar. 16 (JU, m.ob.). In March the Manitoba birding community learned that a 2nd bird had frequented feeders in St. Claude since early November but had remained unidentified. Feeding on millet, sunflower seeds, and peanuts, it had remained active in all but the coldest weather and was still present Apr. 4. It showed most characteristics of the "*curvirostre*" race. These represent the first two confirmed sightings for Canada. What brought these birds so far out of range and how many others may have gone unidentified at n. feeders will remain unanswered questions (M&HD, R&LH et al.).

seen intermittently to Feb. 14 at Lethbridge (T&DD, LS) and Manitoba's 2nd winter Swamp Sparrow was in Winnipeg until early March (DWi et al.). Lapland Longspurs were much more prominent than normal in s. Manitoba in January. High counts included flocks of 300 near Kleefeld and 100-150 at Oak Hammock Marsh (DF, L&RJ, LdM et al.).

Winter finches were scarce throughout the Region: the largest flocks of Red Crossbills were 60 at Birds Hill P.P., MB, Dec. 13 and 30 at Brandon, MB, Dec. 28-31 (RSh, T&RW). Only redpolls were widely reported with flocks in the hundreds, e.g., 400 near Carseland Jan. 24 (TK). Many observers commented on the high proportion of Hoaries, particularly in s. Manitoba.

EXOTICS

A Black Swan, present in Calgary to Dec. 6, was a nice addition to the winter list, "countable" or not (TK).

Observers (subregional compilers in bold-face): D. Baldwin, **R. Barclay**, M. Beaucher, W. Belcher, L. Bennett (LBe), L&S Bonneville (L&SBo), **G. Booth**, R. Cameron, G. Court, C. Cuthbert, MH Dacquay, L. de March, T&D Dolman, B. Elder, R. Ewart, D. Fast, K. Gardner, W.

Gierulski, G. Grief, S. Grief, W. Harris, M. Harrison, R&L Hebert, C. Hitchon, J. Hollely, R. Hooper, L&R Jansson, R. Koes (Rko), B. Korol, T. Korolyk, **R. Kreba (RKR)**, R&Z Irvine, J&M McDonald, K Minish, R. Myers, D&R Phillips, J. Pilny, C. Pollock, M. Preston, F. Russell, T. Scott, A. Slater, F&J Smith, W. Smith, R. Staniforth (RSh), R. Storms (RSs), L. Saunders, J. Thompson, K. VanTighem, B. Velner, **L. Vogt**, B. Walker, R. Wershler, D. Wiebe (DWi), T&R Will, D. Williams (DWs), I&V Williams, R&M Zach.

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Place names that are frequently mentioned, but very long, may be abbreviated in a form such as "C.B.B.T." or "W.P.B.O." Such local abbreviations will be explained in a key at the beginning of the particular regional report in which they are used. Standard abbreviations that are used throughout *North American Birds* are keyed on page 138.



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