

# changing seasons

## Spring Migration

**Figure 1.** This adult Purple Gallinule at Montrose Harbor, Chicago, 8 May 1999, was part of an incursion staged throughout the Midwest and southern Atlantic Coast during spring 1999, with nearly 40 individuals north to Virginia and west to South Dakota. Photograph/Tadas Birutis

### CHRISTOPHER L. WOOD \*

Spring brings out more birds than any other season and this spring had enough to please everyone, providing, of course, you were in the right place at the right time. Among the highlights was an impressive movement of Purple Gallinules into the interior, rare seabirds on both coasts, a variety of western birds in the east and eastern birds in the west, continuing range expansions, and many first and second state and provincial records. Given our present knowledge of North American birds, many of these sightings are not terribly surprising. Frequent readers of *North American Birds* could have predicted that many of these sightings would occur sooner or later given past peregrinations for most of these species. Indeed, the increase in the number of regional rarities, in most cases, is not due to an increase in the number of birds, but rather a greater understanding of how to find unusual birds.

Consider Colorado, where birders found a total of 40 species of warblers this spring, including 10 Worm-eating, 10 Black-throated Green, and 33 Black-and-white warblers. By contrast, during the spring of 1979, when only 25 species of warbler were documented, only two Worm-eating, three Black-throated Green, and eight Black-and-whites were reported in the state (Kingery 1980). Whereas part of this apparent increase is influenced by a growing number of birders, I would argue that most is attributable to a better understanding of how to find and identify birds. Birders in Colorado now follow the model used in California to find vagrants: seek out isolated bits of habitat, so-called oases, in which migrants congregate, thus making vagrants relatively easy to find. The result gives the appearance that many bird populations are growing, when, in fact, birders are simply

becoming more knowledgeable. Careful reading of *North American Birds* will, therefore, not only describe what happened during spring 1999, but suggests the whats and wheres, in a general sense, of forthcoming spring seasons.

### THE WEATHER

Among the most important factors determining the birds we see in a season in a given region is the weather. Certainly there are other factors (e.g., genetics, how early trees leaf out in the spring, availability of habitat, how many days we can break away from school/work/family), but few would argue against weather being an extremely important variable. It is for this reason that each Regional Report usually begins with a synopsis of weather. Observers the length of the Pacific Coast commented on La Niña, which brought colder and windier conditions. As the Regional Editors for the Middle Pacific Coast noted, La Niña meant that "rough seas during much of the period restricted offshore birding, although these same conditions brought high numbers of typically pelagic species inshore." Meanwhile, Simon Perkins again lamented the north and northeasterly winds in New England, where "the unfavorable wind pattern that persisted during what should have been the peak period of migration made for a relatively slow spring." But aside for La Niña no weather pattern dominated across other regions.

Whereas weather plays an important role in what we see, it can also have a dramatic effect on bird populations. Remember spring 1998's invasion of Bristle-thighed Curlews to the Pacific Northwest, likely brought there by strong storms in the North Pacific (Patterson 1998)? Robert Pyle, in the Hawaiian Islands report, speculates that the lower numbers of wintering and summering Bristle-thighed Curlew in the Region "suggests the hypothesis that many perished last year, after departure from Midway, in the N. Pacific storms that occurred 4–8 May 1998."

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Date(s)	Location (State; Locale)	Number
28 March	Missouri; <i>Oktibbeha</i>	1 dead
24 April	Arkansas; <i>Lafayette</i>	3
29 April–20 May	Mississippi; <i>Tallahatchie/Quitman</i>	3
2 May	Georgia; Reed Bingham State Park	2
6 May	Tennessee; <i>Crockett</i>	1
7–10 May	Illinois; Montrose Harbor	1
8 May	Georgia; Arrowhead Fish Hatchery	1
8–? May	Indiana; West Lafayette	1
9 May	Tennessee; Shelby	1
10 May	North Carolina; Core Banks	1
11–17 May	Tennessee; Brainerd Levee	1
11–25 May	Illinois; Rockford	1
14–17 May	North Carolina; <i>Henderson</i>	1
14 May	North Carolina; Bodie Island	1 dead
15–18 May	Illinois; Carlyle Lake	2
20 May	Mississippi; <i>Noxubee</i>	1
12–13 May	Illinois; Renwick Marsh	1
22 May	Virginia; Chincoteague N.W.R	1
22 May	South Dakota; <i>Clark</i>	1
22–31 May	Ohio; Miami-Whitewater	1
26 May	Illinois; Barrington	1
28 May	Georgia; Ocmulgee W.M.A.	1
30 May	North Carolina; Caswell Beach	1

\*In addition to what appears in this table were 7 unspecified reports from Illinois and 2 such reports from Indiana.

### SPRING SEABIRDS

Pelagic trips and sea watches are now regular events on both coasts, especially when strong offshore winds have the potential of bringing pelagic species close to shore. Strong northwest winds were likely not only responsible for bringing in the Short-tailed Albatross off Monterey, California, but also impressive counts of other seabirds. Among them were 60 Black-footed Albatrosses from Pt. Pinos, California, 1 May; a Murphy's Petrel from Pt. Reyes, California, 8 May; tens of thousands of Black-legged Kittiwakes from the central California coast, including 7400 at Pigeon Point 20 March; and 300+ Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels off Boiler Bay, Oregon. Impressive numbers of migrating Pacific Loons were off Oregon in May; in half an hour 3000+ were seen from Heceta Head 2 May and 200+ an hour were off Boiler Bay 25 May. Large concentrations of food are believed to be responsible for other remarkable concentrations of birds, including 40,000–50,000 Long-tailed Ducks in the Heceta Strait, British Columbia.

The Pacific Northwest had its share of MEGA-quality seabirds. A Whiskered Auklet at Whidbey Island, Washington, 16–17 May was not only the first well-described sighting for the Lower 48, but the first well southeast of the Aleutian Islands! A Red-faced Cormorant in *Clallam*, Washington, 8 May, another first for the Lower 48, was the second well-described sighting south of Alaska. Add to these records four Parakeet Auklets and four Horned Puffins in the Lower 48 and large numbers of Black-legged Kittiwakes as far south as the Southern Pacific Coast and it may become tempting to speculate La Niña conditions in the Pacific may have played a role. By contrast, a partially decomposed Wedge-tailed Shearwater that washed ashore at Newport, Oregon, 26 March—the northernmost record of this species in the northeast Pacific—was almost certainly unrelated. This shearwater, along with low numbers of Northern Fulmars (another generally cold-water species) along the Pacific Coast, should encourage us to refrain from holding La Niña responsible until more data become available.

Meanwhile, in North Carolina we continue to learn more about seabird occurrence from regularly-scheduled pelagic trips. Fea's Petrel is proving to be regular, albeit rare, where one was found out of Oregon Inlet and one or two more were seen off Hatteras, all in late May. Boatloads of observers out of both ports also recorded 4–6 of the more numerous Herald Petrel. In the Gulf of Mexico, observations gathered by researchers on oil platforms participating in the Migrants Over the Gulf Project again revealed Masked Boobies to be regular at some offshore platforms. They also recorded a Brown Booby and seven of nine Audubon's Shearwaters offshore in the Central Southern Region.

### THE SHOCKER—PURPLE GALLINULE

The Purple Gallinule found in *Clark*, South Dakota, provided the state with its first record. Taken alone, this record would be an exciting one, but when viewed in the context of the massive movement of gallinules across half of the continental United States it becomes more explicable and, yet, more astonishing. The South Dakota bird was one of at least 38 extralimital reports of Purple Gallinules this spring, with birds also showing up as far north as Ohio and Virginia. Large numbers moved into the Middlewestern Prairie Region, with as many as 13 in Illinois (Fig. 1, Table 1). Considering the relatively secretive nature of this species, many others were probably not found.

Long-distance vagrancy in the Purple Gallinule is well documented. There are records from as far afield as California, Nevada, Wyoming, Minnesota, central Ontario, southern Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Labrador, Newfoundland, and even records from Iceland, Britain, Norway, Switzerland and South Africa (Finnegan 1996, AOU 1998). What amazes about this spring, however, are not the places they appeared but the quantity of sightings. Part of the reason may be faster communication among birders, especially through e-mail and the World Wide Web. After the first few birds were found, reported on bird alerts, sent via listservers, and posted on the web, other enterprising birders could have gone out specifically looking for others, or would have at least been mindful of it as a possibility. However one explains it, the Purple Gallinule movement was certainly remarkable.

### WARBLERS AND OTHER LANDBIRD MIGRANTS

Much of spring's excitement comes from large landbird movements. However, relatively few regions reported dramatic fallouts. Along the Gulf Coast, observers remarked on the lack of serious fronts to create large concentrations of birds. In the Middlewestern Prairie Region, Brock called warbler migration "clearly better than 1998, but perhaps average overall." "Average" or "below average" seemed to fit most of the continent, although there were local exceptions including a fallout at Cape Florida that had 1000s of Blackpoll Warblers 1 May.

Guy McCaskie's description from Southern Pacific Coast Region applies to much of the Pacific Coast and Southwest, where "observers commented on the late arrival of most summer visitors, but were overwhelmed by the numbers of migrants throughout the Region." Imagine 6000 migrants moving through Butterbred Springs 19 May! By contrast, movements in the Atlantic Provinces were one to two weeks early, once again revealing that single trends rarely dominate the entire continent.

It has become expected for western birds to be displaced to the East, eastern birds to show up in the West, and southern birds to wander farther north. It is, thus, surprising that many regions in the north commented on the lack of spring overshoots among wood-warblers, vireos, and tanagers. The exception was a large number of White-eyed Vireos, Hooded Warblers, and Summer Tanagers to

parts of the Upper Midwest, which all appeared in record or near-record numbers.

Eastern warblers, while regular in much of the West, still provide much of spring's excitement. In western Texas, Northern Parula, Black-throated Blue, Blackburnian, Prothonotary, Swainson's, and Hooded warblers were all noted in higher numbers than usual. Some of the higher-end rarities in other parts of the West included Cerulean, Cape May, three Yellow-throateds, and Canada warblers in Colorado, one or two Blue-winged, two Black-throated Blues, and a Black-throated Green warbler in Arizona, Louisiana Waterthrush and Golden-winged, Kentucky, and Mourning warblers in California, and Prothonotary and Magnolia warblers in Nevada. By contrast, western warblers are far more difficult to find east in spring. Thus, MacGillivray's and Black-throated Gray warblers in Ontario were both stellar finds. Hermit Warblers made two appearances in Louisiana, one at an offshore oil platform!

Southern flycatchers staged impressive wanderings to the north. Perhaps the surprise of the season was a Gray Kingbird found by Dan Kassebaum and Mike Seiffert in southern Illinois; you will have to wait until the summer season to see what other "MEGA" tyrannid was found in the same locale! Other high-quality flycatchers included the first record of Fork-tailed Flycatcher from Saskatchewan and additional Fork-tailed in Quebec and New Jersey. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers appeared in many places, including two in Minnesota, three in Illinois, one in Iowa, two in South Carolina, and two in California. One returned to Charleston, Tennessee, for the third consecutive year. Louisiana added its share of unusual tyrannids, including a Great Kiskadee and both a Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher and a Tropical/Couch's kingbird from offshore platforms. Texas had its first Buff-breasted Flycatcher, seven extralimital Great Kiskadees, a Sulphur-bellied and a Sulphur-bellied/Strreaked flycatcher, and a handful of Tropical Kingbirds, all away from the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

## RANGE EXPANSIONS

As noted, many species overshoot their breeding grounds. Some birds, however, represent actual range expansions, or could at least be seen as wandering "sentinels" of expanding species. A perusal of this group of species would suggest some of the most likely birds to show up in neighboring areas—the so-called "next additions" to various state and provincial lists. Black Vultures are still spreading in parts of the East. One spent nearly two weeks on Grand Manan Island in May, providing New Brunswick with its fourth or fifth record. Ontario reported five.

Mississippi Kites returned to summering locales in South Carolina, North Carolina, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Missouri, including a remarkable flock of 23 in late May in southeastern Illinois. In the East, Pennsylvania had three reports, including the first report from Hawk Mountain Sanctuary; New York and Connecticut each had one, and three or four were at Cape May, New Jersey. The Middle Atlantic Coast had at least 14 reports, Pt. Pelee hosted three, and Wisconsin had two. One at Corn Creek was only the fourth for Nevada. Perhaps the biggest surprise, however, were three circling over a brush fire outside Havana, providing the first record for both Cuba and the West Indies.

White-tailed Kites continue their impressive spread; they are now regular as far north as Puget Sound. Five were seen in British Columbia, 11+ in western Washington, and 31 in western Oregon. Two more were found along the Colorado River where they are rarely recorded. In southeastern Arizona, Rosenberg and Benesh comment that the species is seen sporadically there, with four found this spring. A nest at Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area was the first

to fledge young in central Florida. One reported 15 May in *Wayne* would provide Michigan with its first record if accepted by the state's records committee.

Reports of the Swallow-tailed Kite also come from farther north. Along the East Coast the farthest north was one at Greenwich, Connecticut, 12 May. A nest was found in *Horry*, South Carolina, likely the northernmost known nesting location for this species. One on Lower Sacatah Lake provided Minnesota with its first record in over two decades, while a bird in *Dane* was the sixth for Wisconsin. Two were in northern Texas, one at Grayson and the other at Clay. Also surprising were two reports from offshore platforms during the Migrants over the Gulf Project.

Black-necked Stilts returned to established breeding areas in Illinois and Kentucky. Forty-two (with nests) were in *Dunklin*, Missouri, 26 May; the species was first found nesting in Missouri in 1990 (Robbins and Easterla 1990). Outside of their normal range were two in Iowa and four in Wisconsin. Nine invaded southern British Columbia. Maryland and Virginia also had notable sightings and/or first county records.

Cave Swallows continue to be reported from new locations in the southern half of Texas. Meanwhile, "sentinel-type" birds included one in a flock of Cliff Swallows near Corona, California, the fourth California record, while one or two Cave Swallows at Cape May provided the second spring record for the Hudson-Delaware Region.

Corvids continue their expansions with Fish Crows again found nesting as far north as South Burlington, Vermont; two at Pt. Pelee provided the sixth record for Canada, all of which hail from Pt. Pelee. Birders in the Midwest would do well to pay attention to odd-sounding crows, especially along major rivers. Meanwhile in New England, Common Ravens were found as far south as Hamden, Connecticut, and Ashland, Massachusetts.

At least five Tricolored Blackbirds returned to *Grant*, the site of Washington's first record last year. One to three others were found in neighboring *Adams*, and *Owll Butte*, Oregon, produced a very impressive count of 400 Tricoloreds. Great-tailed Grackle continues to expand eastward and northward. First recorded in *Boone*, Missouri, a mere four years earlier, birders there found 376 this spring. By contrast, Great-tailed in Oregon, which arrived nearly two decades ago, are apparently confined to the southeastern corner of the state, where all five of this season's sightings occurred. A Great-tailed/Boat-tailed grackle from Wisconsin was almost certainly a Great-tailed, and the first record for Wisconsin.

## WHITE-WINGED DOVES—STEALING THUNDER

While Eurasian Collared-Doves continue to capture headlines to the point of nausea, White-winged Doves have rather quietly turned up at points farther north. This spring, they staged some impressive wanderings that at least relegated collared-doves a bit further down the column. Unlike their introduced cousins that often remain in a locale for weeks or even months, many White-wingeds remain for only a couple of days. An exception was the second state record for Indiana, which remained nearly a month in Evansville. More typical was the "one-day-wonder" found in Chicago, providing Illinois with its second record. Additional reports from the Middlewestern Prairie included two in Missouri and one in Iowa. One not far from Redmond 19 May, was Washington state's third. Other reports included one from New York, three in Georgia, and four in North Carolina. The regional editors of Texas describe that "a common pattern is for White-wingeds to jump to major metropolitan areas, build up a population base, and begin colonizing smaller urban and residential areas on the periphery of such areas"

Now for the nauseum: the bird David Muth (1998) aptly named "Euro-trash" continued its expansion to the north and west. Other reports of Eurasian Collared-Dove included birds from three locations in Missouri and Illinois, one in Iowa, and one in Kentucky. Five birds were seen in Minnesota. Other regions, where the species is less rare, also reported increases.

## REBOUNDED BIRDS

Rebounding populations of some threatened and endangered species have been in the news. While the de-listing of the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon received widespread media coverage, other species have been making quieter comebacks. Perhaps the result of population increases were exciting reports of threatened and endangered species from areas away from where they are most often seen. Brown Pelicans were noted as far up the East Coast as Nova Scotia, where one or more were found. In the interior, one in Kentucky provided the state with its first record. Two groups of Whooping Cranes, totaling nine birds, were found in western Iowa; when combined with the birds last fall in Iowa, these groups doubled the number of Iowa records for the 20th Century. Scott Terrill and Stephen Rottenborn speculate that the first Short-tailed Albatross seen from shore in Monterey (the fourth for the Middle Pacific Coast in 8 months) may be a harbinger of this species again becoming regular in the Eastern Pacific; that is, if their population continues to increase.

## THE PALEARCTIC PUSH

With apparently only one more spring of Attu birding many birders will be interested in Thede Tobish's account from Alaska, where the western Aleutians received fairly systematic coverage for the first time since the 1970s. Highlights included White-tailed Eagle, Reed Bunting, and the fifth western Aleutian spring record of Common Ringed Plover. Many of these reports came from Shemya, which will prove no easier in reaching than Attu. Gambell had one of the best shorebird flights in years, including Common Greenshank, Terek Sandpiper, Long-toed Stint, and six Common Ringed Plover. Probably the biggest news from the western Aleutians was the low-pressure system that brought an impressive small thrush and flycatcher flight in early June to the western Aleutians. Among the highlights were a Red-flanked Bluetail, three Siberian Flycatchers, three Red-breasted Flycatchers, 27 Gray-spotted Flycatchers, and 38 Siberian Rubythroats.

On the other side of the continent, a low-pressure system in the Atlantic brought strong winds from the east and an impressive variety of shorebirds to Newfoundland. Highlights included North America's second Eurasian Oystercatcher at Eastport and six European Golden-Plovers. Unrelated to the storm were a wintering Common Redshank at Happy Adventure that remained nearly two months, a Black-tailed Godwit at Prince Edward Island, the first Ruff for Saint Pierre et Miquelon, and the first spring record of Curlew Sandpiper for Nova Scotia.

## GULLS

While most birders spend spring searching woodlots and migrant traps for warblers, perhaps making occasional visits to wetlands for shorebirds, growing numbers of larophiles demonstrate that spring can be a fine time to visit landfills, sewage ponds, and other gulling locales. Little Gulls appeared in larger numbers throughout much of North America including ten in Wisconsin (the first in early March!), 5-6 along the Middle Pacific Coast, and one in Louisiana. Very surprising for a La Niña season was Monterey's first nesting Heermann's Gulls; turn to the Middle Pacific Coast region for Daniel Singer's

account. Another Heermann's was at the Ajo sewage plant in Arizona, where the species is casual. Sable Island hosted its Black-tailed Gull for the third spring/summer, but it seemed to spend most of its time at sea feeding. A 3rd-year Black-tailed Gull was found at Breezy Point, the second New York record, and Texas's first was rediscovered in March and remained at the Brownsville dump for nearly two weeks, while the bird at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel remained until mid-March. An Iceland Gull at Pueblo Reservoir may have been the same bird that provided the first Colorado record in January. A 2nd-summer Yellow-footed Gull at Lake Powell was simultaneously the first for Arizona and Utah. From the Aleutians come rare reports of *kamtschatschensis* Mew Gull, which is less than annual, and Ross's Gull, only the second for the chain. Lastly, observers in Cape May found a Sabine's Gull.

## SOME NEW TRENDS

There are many encouraging trends in the regional reports, including increased attention to subspecies and hybrids. In some cases, however, caution is warranted, as some subspecific and hybrid identification is tricky. As with reports of rare species, sightings of extralimital subspecies or rare hybrid combinations should be accompanied by detailed descriptions, illustrations, and video/photographs whenever possible. Also interesting are an increasing number of reports that include information on introduced and escaped, though "uncountable" species. Most of these reports hail from Texas and Florida. Indeed, Florida recorded its 181st, or so, exotic species—a Golden Pheasant. Observations of exotic species should be noted, to help determine which species are established and what affect, if any, they have on native species.

## MEGA-TICKS!

There was a remarkable number of reports of first and second state or provincial records, and rarities for North America, besides those already mentioned. A smattering of these highlights includes a Little Egret at Little Creek, Delaware, the first record for the Hudson-Delaware region, the first provincial record of Yellow-crowned Night-Heron for Alberta, and the first documented Garganey for Nova Scotia and second state records for Illinois, Iowa, and Maine. Pink-footed Geese continue to make news; this spring reports came from Pennsylvania and Quebec. A Smew from mid-March in Minnesota may have involved a captive bird, but there are accepted records for southern Ontario, Quebec, and the Niagra River (ABA 1996). South Dakota had reports of Arctic and Elegant terns, both of which would furnish first state records, while Indiana had its second Royal Tern and Hawaii recorded a Little Tern, later joined by three Least Terns. Florida had two-three Key West Quail-Doves. A Vaux's Swift was seen and heard in Colorado; several have been reported in the state, but none has been accepted. A Fork-tailed Swift was found dead in a hanger on Sand Island, the same locale from where the only other Hawaiian Island record hails. A Green-breasted Mango in Cameron, was the seventh for Texas. A Blue Mockingbird, a species expected at some point by Texas birders, was in Weslaco and would provide Texas with its first record, assuming it can escape the "origin unknown" label. Recordings were made of a Western Wood-Pewee in Michigan, the state's first, while Wisconsin recorded its second Say's Phoebe. Painted Bunting made surprise appearances in many states, with one in Saskatchewan providing the first provincial record. Finally, perhaps the best day of birding this spring occurred in the West Indies, where Purple Heron, Gray Heron, Little Egret, and Western-Reef Heron were all recorded between 5:00 and 8:00 a.m.!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## (Suggestions for Contributors—continued from page 246)

**Text.** Begin numbering as page 1. Follow the instructions above and use a format in the most recent issue of *North American Birds* as a guide. Do not repeat information provided on the title page. Typical main headings are (no heading for introduction), methods, results, discussion, acknowledgments (note spelling), and literature cited, but any other logical main heading can be used to subdivide the paper, but keep headers to a minimum. Up to two levels of headings can be used.

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### Papers and Monographs.

- Grinnell, J. 1928. A distributional summation of the ornithology of Lower California. *University of California Publications in Zoology* 32:1-300.
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**Tables.** Number this section continuously with the rest of the text. Each table must start on separate sheet and be double-spaced throughout (header, table body, footnotes). Table numbers should be an Arabic (not Roman) numeral followed by a period. Indicate footnotes by lowercase superscript letters (a, b, c, etc.). Do not use vertical lines in tables. Include horizontal lines above and below the caption and at the end of the table. Follow details of style used in *North American Birds*.

## STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REGIONAL REPORTS

### Abbreviations used in place names

In most regions, place names given in *italic* type are counties. Other abbreviations:

Cr.	Creek
Ft.	Fort
Hwy	Highway
I.	Island or Isle
Is.	Islands or Isles
Jct.	Junction
km	kilometer(s)
L.	Lake
mi	mile (s)
Mt.	Mountain or Mount
Mts.	Mountains
N.F.	National Forest
N.M.	National Monument
N.P.	National Park
N.W.R.	National Wildlife Refuge
P.P.	Provincial Park
Pen.	Peninsula
Pt.	Point (not Port)
R.	River
Ref.	Refuge
Res.	Reservoir (not Reservation)
S.P.	State Park
W.M.A.	Wildlife Management Area

### Abbreviations used in the names of birds:

Am.	American
Com.	Common
E.	Eastern
Eur.	Eurasian
Mt.	Mountain
N.	Northern
S.	Southern
W.	Western

### Other abbreviations

#### and symbols referring to birds:

ad.	adult
imm.	immature
juv.	juvinal or juvenile
sp.	species
v.t.	video-taped
†	written details were submitted for a sighting
*	a specimen was collected
CBC	Christmas Bird Count