

prairie provinces region



RUDOLF F. KOES and PETER TAYLOR

Conditions were generally cool and windy across much of the south, with copious amounts of rain in some parts, particularly in May. Accumulations up to four times normal were recorded in southeast Saskatchewan and southwest Manitoba, resulting in widespread and persistent flooding. The north was warmer and drier than usual, which led to early snow melt and ice break-up. Effects on bird populations should become clearer in months to come. Both raptor and waterfowl migration were uneventful, but large concentrations of shorebirds were found in parts of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Only Manitoba reported passerine waves, on 14–15 May and 19–22 May, during periods of inclement weather. A fine array of rarities spiced up the season.

Abbreviations: C.N.R. (*Condie Nature Ref., SK*); I.B.S. (*Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary, AB*); M.S.C. (*May Species Count, AB*); O.H.M. (*Oak Hammock Marsh Wildlife Management Area, MB*).

GREBES THROUGH FALCONS

Two Red-necked Grebes at O.H.M. 11 Apr were early (RKo). A Great Egret was near Briercrest, SK, 20 Apr (PG) and four were reported in Manitoba in May (LdM, JBe, AW, RKo). Much rarer was a Snowy Egret at Edmonton, AB, 14–15 May (SGo); possibly the same bird was at nearby Beaverhill L. 16–29 May (JP, RD, BR et al.). Five Cattle Egrets in s.w. Manitoba and three in s.e. Saskatchewan, all in May, came from the wettest part of the Region—coincidence? A Green Heron visited Wascana Cr., Regina,

SK, 12–14 May (JBi et al.). If accepted, an ad. **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** at Nanton 29–31 May, would provide Alberta with its first record (CK et al.). Eleven Ross's Geese at Windygates, MB, 28 Mar were early (RKo) and a rare blue-morph individual was near Kronau, SK, 22 Apr (RKr, DN). A pair of Richardson's Canada Geese nested successfully near Pierson, MB, believed to be a first for s. Manitoba (RWa, *vide* CCt). Five Trumpeter Swans at Churchill, MB, late May were far north (*vide* BCh). A **Whooper Swan** near Irricana, AB, 17–18 Apr was a first for the Region (TK et al.), but its origin is uncertain (perhaps from a small feral population in Montana?). Another dilemma is presented by regular reports of Bewick's Swans. Many may in fact involve Whistling Swans showing extreme amounts of yellow on the bill, one of which was noted s. of the Cypress Hills, SK, 24 Apr (TH).

Besides "numerous" reports of Eur. Wigeons in Alberta, there were 2 sightings in Saskatchewan: one near Dundurn 22–27 May (PB, PN, SS et al.) and two males at Cypress Res. 30 May (WH, JBi). In addition, a hybrid Eur. × Am. Wigeon was at Langdon Res., AB, 1 May (MH). Other hybrids reported were a male Mallard × N. Pintail at O.H.M. 28–31 May (RKo et al.), a Blue-winged × Cinnamon Teal at Strathmore,

AB, 25 Apr (AS, J&MM), and a Barrow's × Com. Goldeneye at Strathmore 2 Apr (TK).

A record-early Sharp-shinned Hawk passed the Windygates hawk watch 15 Mar (RKo) and a Red-shouldered Hawk at Winnipeg, MB, 17 May was a rarity (GHo, CCs). Ferruginous Hawks were down to 40 known pairs in s.w. Manitoba, vs. 49 in 1998 and 55 in 1997. A decline in the Richardson's Ground Squirrel population may be responsible (*vide* KD & CCt). The Mt. Lorette, AB, hawk watch recorded its 2nd lowest April Golden Eagle total (268 birds) since monitoring started in 1992, for a combined spring tally of 2816 (DA, GHa, PS, JS, BW). Two very late Gyrfalcons were reported in Saskatchewan, a grey individual at Mozart 20 May (BK, DS) and a dark bird at Weyburn 25 May (CB).

GROUSE THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Sage Grouse numbers continue to dwindle, with 27 found at Manyberries, AB, 11 Apr (MO) and seven at Govenlock, SK, 24 Apr (TH). Two Sandhill Cranes arrived early at Richer, MB, 24 Mar (SI), as did one near Calgary, AB, 27 Mar (TK). Large concentrations of shorebirds included up to 2200 Black-bellied Plovers at Brooks, AB, 19–23 May (MSC, m.ob.) and 500 at Lethbridge, AB, 23 May (PHo), up to 60 Black-necked

Even cement "rocks" will do for this Rock Wren north of its usual haunts at Condie Nature Refuge, Saskatchewan, 3 May 1999. Photograph/John Triffo



Stilts at Brooks 22–23 May (MSC) plus five at Chaplin Cr., SK, 26 May (JB, WH, DS et al.), a peak of 92 Hudsonian Godwits at Shepard, AB, 26 Apr (WW, MH), a maximum of 400 Red Knots at Scandia, AB, 22 May (MSC), 30,000 Sanderlings at Chaplin L., SK, 28–29 May (JBi), 3200 Semipalmated Sandpipers at Gooseberry L., AB, 22 May (MH), 357 Short-billed Dowitchers at Keoma, AB, 23 May (JS, SH), and 2800 Red-necked Phalaropes at Gooseberry L. 22 May (MH) plus 5000+ in the Chaplin/Reed L. area 25 May (RKr, JT). Much wetter s.e. Saskatchewan and Manitoba, in contrast, harbored few shorebirds, and then only in late May. Good finds included an Upland Sandpiper at Mt. Lorette 14 May, a first record at the site (PS), Saskatchewan's 2nd **Curlw Sandpiper**, at Chaplin L. 27 May (BH, MB et al.), and a Red Phalarope at Bow Valley P.P., AB, 29 May (BE, CS, MH).

A Parasitic Jaeger rested during inclement weather on a field near Calgary 29 May (TK) and two California Gulls at O.H.M. 21 May were e. of their usual range (KG). An ad. **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at I.B.S. 3–8 Apr, and possibly later, was rare (RB et al.). A 2nd sighting came from Ft. McMurray, AB, 17 May (D&NL). An unusual gull flying over Regina 7 May was identified as a 1st-year **Slaty-backed Gull** (RKr), the 2nd report of this species in Saskatchewan. Calgary had four Glaucous Gulls between 1 Apr–1 May (m.ob.) and one was in Saskatoon, SK, 8 May (PB, RJ). The last rare larid was a Sabine's Gull at Dalroy, AB, 21 May (TK).

A Band-tailed Pigeon, rare anywhere in the Region, was in Calgary 13–16 May (GT, GY). Two possible Com. Poorwills responded to tape at Ukalta Doons Nat. Area, AB, 28 May (BCl, BR et al.), an area well n. of its nearest known range, in the Cypress Hills. Locally rare were single Lewis's Woodpeckers at Mt. Lorette 1 May (PS), at Calgary 20 May (DG), and at Bow Valley P.P. 23 May (EPe). The female Red-bellied Woodpecker that wintered near St. Francois Xavier, MB, was joined by a male 16 May; they departed about a week later (KM). Another female briefly visited Kleefeld, MB, 17 May (*vide* DF).

PASSERINES

A male Scissor-tailed Flycatcher delighted many, including participants in the first Delta Birding Festival, at Portage la Prairie, MB, 12–16 May (Mr. Pollitt et al.). Seen briefly in front of a school bus was a **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** near Cedoux, SK, 27 May (CB). School could wait, the bus was

stopped, but this provincial first had vanished and was not found again. Another potential first for Saskatchewan, but unfortunately not documented, was a Pygmy Nuthatch at a Val Marie feeder 12 May (LP). A Rock Wren wandered N to C.N.R. 3 May (CP et al.), but even farther afield was a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** 23 May at I.B.S. (JC), location of the 2 previous provincial sightings in 1987 and 1988. An E. Bluebird at Tofield 22 Apr–30 May continued the trend of recent summer sightings in Alberta (EH et al.), while a W. Bluebird appeared in Spruce View, AB, 27 May (*vide* JR). The previously-reported **Curve-billed Thrasher** in Barrhead, AB, was rescued from a cat 12 Apr and taken to a vet; the 2nd bird, in St. Claude, MB, vacated its favorite feeders with the onset of milder weather in late March (m.ob.).

Good finds were a Black-throated Blue Warbler near Blumenort, MB, 20–21 May (VR et al.) and an early Black-throated Green Warbler at C.N.R. 3 May (CP et al.). Blackpoll Warblers were particularly prominent in Manitoba and s.e. Saskatchewan; e.g., 100+ were noted at C.N.R. 20 May (CP). A very early Ovenbird reached Winnipeg 30 Apr (LdM). Three Summer Tanagers were seen in s.e. Manitoba, with one at St. Adolphe 3 May (AC), a 2nd in Kleefeld mid-May (IP, FG), and the 3rd at St. Ambroise 14 May (GHo, Ccs). Western Tanagers were more common than usual in Calgary (TK) and several were reported in Saskatchewan in May. One reached Minnedosa, MB, 19 May (CCt).

A Lark Sparrow was a first for Mt. Lorette 20 May (JS). Lark Buntings were scarce due to the wet conditions, but singles were noted at Oak L., MB, 17 May (AW) and at O.H.M. 29 May (GHo, CCs, BC). A White-crowned Sparrow at Elma, MB, 3 Mar had no doubt wintered (GGf). Agricultural lands w.n.w. of Regina were inundated by 67,000+ Lapland Longspurs 15 May (RKr, RM). East of its normal range was a Black-headed Grosbeak at Woodnorth, MB, 16 May (GGn). Noteworthy were single Lazuli Buntings at Lethbridge 23 May (FM), at Mt. Lorette 26 May (PS) and at Winnipeg 26 May (HT et al.), the last bird with some Indigo Bunting genes. A stunner was the Region's first **Painted Bunting**, a male at a Kennedy, SK, feeder 1 May and again 10–13 May (P&GHe et al.). Possibly the same bird showed up at a feeder 240 km to the n.n.w. in Kelvington, SK, 16–18 May (D&RWi et al.). A Yellow-headed Blackbird 26 May, a Com. Grackle 9 May, and a Baltimore Oriole 30 May were all new

for the Mt. Lorette list (PS). Finally, a Brown-headed Cowbird at a Churchill feeder 14 May was rare, early, and not welcome (RMu).

Observers (subregional compilers in bold-face): D. Allan, S. Ayer, **R. Barclay**, M. Barr, J. Bell (JBe), J. Bilyk (JBi), C. Bjorklund, **G. Booth**, P. Bulman, B. Carey (BCy), B. Carroll (BCl), B. Chartier (BCh), J. Collyer, A. Courcelles, C. Curtis (CCs), C. Cuthbert (CCt), P. Daley, L. deMarch, K. DeSmet, R. Dickson, B. Elder, D. Fast, K. Gardner, P. Geraghty, D. Germyn, F. Giesbrecht, S. Gosche, G. Grief (GGf), G. Grierson (GGn), B. Harrington, W. Harris, M. Harrison, T. Hoffman, G. Halmazna (GHa), P.&G. Heebner (P&GHe), G. Holland (GHo), S. Holohan, P. Horch (PHo), E. Hubbard, S. Innes, R. Johanson, C. Kindt, R. Koes (RKO), B. Korol, T. Korolyk, **R. Kreba**, (RKr), D.&N. Lennie, J.& M. McDonald (J&MMc), F. Michna, K. Minish, R. Mumford, Jr. (RMu), R. Myers (RMy), D. Nadeau, P. Nelson, M. O'Shea, L. Perrault, E. Peterson, J. Pilny, I. Plett, C. Pollock, E. Pretty, V. Reimer, B. Ritchie, J. Rogers, P. Sargent, D. Sawatsky, C. Schialfa, S. Shadick, P. Sherrington, A. Slater, W. Smith, J. Steeves, G. Tomasson, H. Toom, J. Triffo, D. Vetter, **L. Vogt**, A. Walleyn, R. Wang (RWa), D.& R. Wickstrom (D&RWi), B. Wilson, G. Yaki, R. Zach.

Rudolf F. Koes, 135 Rossmere Cres., Winnipeg, MB R2K 0G1 and **Peter Taylor**, Box 597, Pinawa, MB R0E 1L0



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 251.