

# prairie provinces



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December was mild across the south of the region (Calgary experienced a December record of 20° C on the 27th!), and precipitation was light until late in the month. January was somewhat more normal, but February once again was relatively balmy. Northern areas were both colder and more snowy than the south. The final vestiges of snow in southern Manitoba disappeared during the last few days of the period, when strong southerly winds pushed the mercury to well above freezing. Early migrants, such as Canada Goose, Bald Eagle, Rough-legged Hawk, Killdeer, Short-eared Owl, Mountain Bluebird, American Tree Sparrow, and Western Meadowlark arrived in Manitoba, some of them two to three weeks ahead of schedule. With a few exceptions, records solely from Christmas Bird Counts are not included herein.

We dedicate this report to the memory of Bernie Gollop, former Prairie Provinces Regional Editor, who passed away suddenly on 26 May 2000. His contributions to natural history will be missed.

**Abbreviations:** CBC (*Christmas Bird Count*); O.H.M. (*Oak Hammock Marsh W.M.A., MB*).

## GREBES THROUGH DOVES

An Eared Grebe at L. McGregor, AB, 1 Dec (J&MMc) and a W. Grebe at Wabamun L., AB, 9 Jan (RP) were late. A lingering Am. White Pelican at Medicine Hat, AB, was found dead 16 Dec (DBo); the latest Double-crested Cormorant was at

Wabamun L. 9 Jan (RP). Twenty-six species of waterfowl were reported in Alberta, among them a white-morph Ross's Goose at Calgary (BR) and a blue-morph at Tyrrell L., both 3 Dec (D&TD). Canada Geese crossed the border regionwide in the last week of Feb, one to two weeks early (CC, ACs et al.). An ice-bound Tundra Swan at Taber, AB, 4 Jan was surrounded by several eagles (LB). Also of note were four Gadwall at Rafferty Res., SK, 5 Dec (GW), a N. Pintail at O.H.M., MB, 28 Jan (KG), four Green-winged Teal at Plum Cr., MB, 14 Dec (CC), plus a single at O.H.M. 28 Jan (KG). A Greater Scaup in Saskatoon, SK, 8–9 Jan provided probably the first mid-winter sighting in the city (WG, MW). Lone White-winged Scoters lingered at L. McGregor 1 Dec (J&MMc) and at Glenmore Res., AB, 5 Dec (JP). There were four Ruddy Duck reports in Alberta and three Red-breasted Mergansers were noted at Grand Beach, MB, 12 Dec (RK).

Bald Eagle migration lasted well into winter, e.g., 202 passed Sheep River Valley, AB, 2–18 Dec (RD, WS, RWe). An unprecedented number wintered in se. Manitoba, especially at a poultry farm near Whitemouth, where 27 were tallied 8 Jan (G,P,&SGf et al.). Three early migrants were at St. Adolphe, MB, 28 Feb (ACs). Northern Harriers usually depart s. Manitoba by early Nov, so a tally of ten at O.H.M. 11 Dec was exceptional (RK). A few wintered at Pierson, MB (RWa), as did several in s. Alberta (m.ob.). Similarly, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks are normally rare in winter, but Alberta had six of the former and Manitoba and Saskatchewan had three each, while there were five Cooper's in Alberta, three in Manitoba, and one in Saskatchewan. Rough-legged Hawks lingered, with counts of 34 at O.H.M. 5 Dec (RK) and 13 between Sidewood and Piapot, SK, 18 Jan (WH) being notable. Earliest Manitoban migrants were a single near Spruce Woods 26 Feb (AW) and nine at St. Adolphe 28 Feb (ACs). Two wintering imm. Golden Eagles hunted together at Windygates, MB, 6 Feb (RK). Eighteen migrants at the Mt. Lorette hawkwatch 29 Feb set a new record for the month (*vide PS*). A white Gyrfalcon near Randolph, MB, mid-Jan and again late Feb attracted much attention (WP, DF, ACs et al.).

Two Am. Coots at Plum Cr. 14 Dec were late (CC), while a Killdeer near Mt. Lorette

21 Feb was probably an early arrival (*vide PS*). A Com. Snipe at Calgary, 8 Dec was tardy (PB). A **jaeger** at Grand Beach 4 Dec was the first of any kind in winter in Manitoba (DBy et al.). Late gulls included a Ring-billed at Taber L. 31 Dec (LB), a California near Raymond, AB, 15 Dec (LB), and an incredibly hardy Glaucous at Churchill, MB, 14 Jan (BC)! One of two **Eurasian Collared-Doves** in Regina, SK, and both birds in Weyburn, SK, first reported in fall, survived the period (I&AT, JW et al.; *vide BL*). A *Streptopelia* dove photographed in Winnipeg 7 Jan (AP) may have been Manitoba's first of this species.

## OWLS THROUGH WRENS

Amazingly, three **Barn Owl** specimens were turned in to the Provincial Museum in Alberta and apparently a fourth bird was videotaped. One was found 17 Jan near Langdon (AB, ph. TK); we have no details on the others. These records are the first confirmed ones in the province. It was not a big Snowy Owl winter, but N. Hawk Owls were plentiful in n. Alberta, where 20 were in the High Level-La Crete area 7–9 Jan (*vide LT*). There were 35+ reports in Manitoba (J&PDu banded 10), and in Saskatchewan six ventured s. of the Mixed Wood/Boreal Forest region (TH, SS et al.). Only n. Alberta had high numbers of Great Gray Owls: 61 were at High Level-La Crete 7–9 Jan, including 40 spotted in one day (*vide LT*). Two Long-eared Owls on the Lyleton, MB, CBC 30 Dec (*vide KD*) were rare in winter.

An imm. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** survived the winter at Claresholm, AB, (J&Rat, J&MMc). Out-of-range woodpeckers included a Three-toed at Ranger L. Conifer Plantation, near Biggar, SK, 21 Feb (R&GW), a Black-backed at the same location 14 and 21 Feb (R&GW), and a Black-backed at Police Point Park, Medicine Hat, 6 Feb (BV). Northern Shrikes were prominent in ne. Manitoba, where 35+ were reported, with counts of up to four in a day (m.ob.). A Black-billed Magpie in Churchill since last summer was still there 26 Jan (BC). Red-breasted Nuthatches were fairly plentiful in s. Manitoba (CC) and s. Saskatchewan (*vide BL*). A Rock Wren at Lethbridge, 7–10 Jan was a first for winter in Alberta (G&PGe), as was a Winter Wren on the Fort Walsh CBC, 18 Dec, for Saskatchewan (GW).

## THRUSHES THROUGH FINCHES

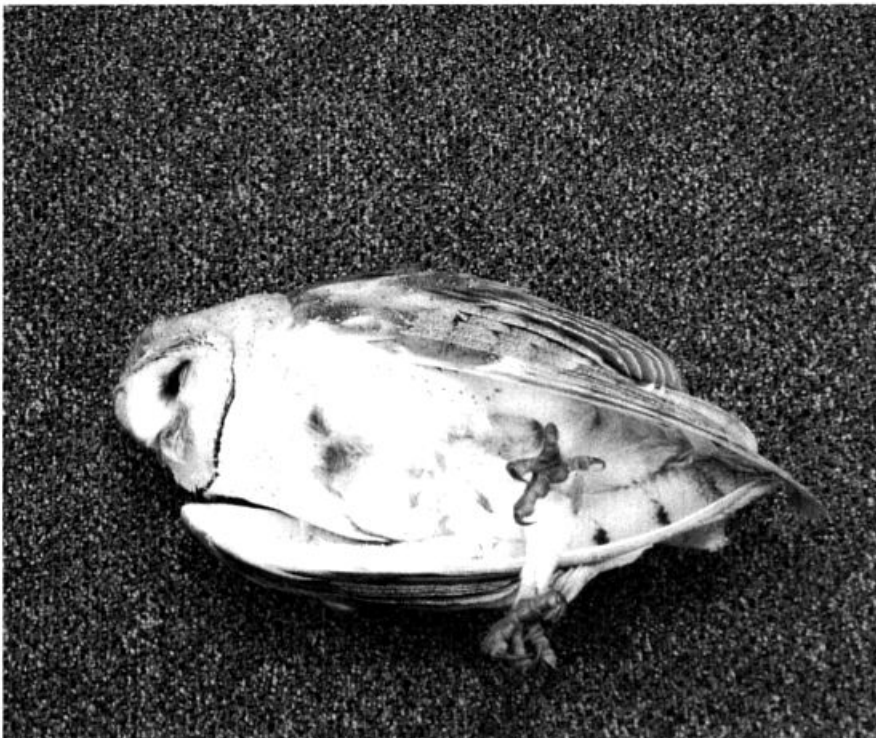
As there are no overwintering records for Mt. Bluebird in Alberta, a bird at Caroline 2 Feb was believed to be a very early migrant (DBr). A Townsend's Solitaire remained at Portage Cr., MB, until at least 13 Dec (TO et al.) and another visited Landmark, MB, 28 Dec (FG). A Hermit Thrush on the Thompson, MB, CBC 18 Dec was outstanding (*vide* WJ). A flock of 50 Am. Robins in Calgary 4 Jan (G. Yaki) had escaped detection on the CBC. Lone Brown Thrashers wintered at St. Albert and Exshaw, AB, (*vide* PDe, J&MMc). Bohemian Waxwing numbers varied. Alberta had some high CBC counts, there were good numbers around Minnedosa, MB (CC), and 500+ were at Yorkton, SK, 12 Feb (B&JAn), but elsewhere few were noted.

Providing first winter records for the Region were single male **Black-throated Blue Warblers** at Medicine Hat, found dead 3 Jan (J&LMa, m.ob.), and at Calgary, last seen 6 Jan (AH, LH, ph. TK), and single **Ovenbirds** at Estevan, SK, 5 Dec (G&SW et al.), at a Calgary conservatory 4–8 Dec (JMI et al.), and at St. Albert, AB, through winter, surviving on mealworms (*vide* SGo). A Spotted Towhee visited a Hartell, AB, feeder Oct–5 Feb (A. Moon, J&MMc, ph.). A Swamp Sparrow lingered to 4 Dec at Banff,

AB (J&MMc). An Am. Tree Sparrow arrived at St. Adolphe 29 Feb, a good two weeks ahead of schedule (ACs). Two Song Sparrows were present in Calgary 6–16 Jan (HG, ACn). Undocumented N. Cardinals were reported in Medicine Hat 30 Jan (BV) and at Rocky Mt. House, AB, 15 Feb (2 birds, GT); Manitoba had five across the south (m.ob.). There were eight W. Meadowlark reports from the Calgary area vs. the usual one or two (*vide* TK), and the first migrants reached Medicine Hat 29 Feb (BS, PH). A Yellow-headed Blackbird near Old Wives L., SK, 26 Feb wintered locally (YS). A **Brambling** near Prince Albert 30 Dec–2 Jan was perhaps the 4th for Saskatchewan (M&HB). Pine Grosbeaks, like Evening Grosbeaks, are becoming a thing of the past in cities across the s. of the region as rural feeding stations seem to intercept them (CC, BL et al.). In contrast, House Finches continue their march across the Prairies, with flocks of up to 20 noted in Regina (BL). Crossbills were scarce everywhere, except for White-wingeds in n. Alberta. Redpolls were common from w. Manitoba westward. They had a "great winter" in the Minnedosa area (CC) and were common in the Brandon Hills, MB (T&RWi), and in Alberta (TK). Between 5 Jan and 19 Feb, Mary Houston banded 1090

Common and 9 Hoary Redpolls in Saskatoon, with a recapture rate of <15%. Pine Siskin numbers were fair in s. Alberta, scarce to absent elsewhere.

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This Barn Owl, found dead at a home near Langdon 17 Jan 2000, was the first of its species to be documented in Alberta. Photograph by Terry Korolyk.

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