

northern great plains



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As noted by Palmer in South Dakota, the season might have been more appropriately called the late fall/early spring report. It was the third consecutive mild winter, and very little snow fell anywhere in the region. The snow that did come melted almost immediately. Only five inches of snow was recorded in northeastern South Dakota, and on nine days in February the temperature exceeded 50°. Only nine inches of snow fell at Mayville, North Dakota, and the average temperature for February was 10 degrees above average at Fargo. Grand Forks recorded its highest-ever temperature for the month of February: 67° on the 22nd.

There was an abundance of open water up to the CBCs, and Lake Sakakawea, North Dakota, froze on the record-late date of 16 January. The lake at Fort Peck, Montana, finally froze in mid-February, but opened up again three weeks later. Lake Bowdoin froze 10 December, a month later than average. Huge numbers of waterfowl wintered in the Pierre, South Dakota, area.

Many species, particularly waterbirds, lingered late and returned early. So many, in fact, that numerous late and early records could not be included in the report due to space limitations. Notable records included Painted Bunting in Montana, Eurasian Collared-Doves in North Dakota, and White Ibis, Iceland Gull, and Lesser Black-backed Gull in South Dakota.

Observations marked with a † are subject to review by the appropriate state records committee.

GREBES THROUGH WATERFOWL

Two W. Grebes in *Mercer*, ND, 8 Jan provided the second January record for the state (REM). In South Dakota, at least two W. Grebes spent the season in *Hughes*, where wintering is unusual (RDO). Among the nine Double-crested Cormorant reports was an individual that wintered at Fort Peck, MT, a first for the area (CC). Four Cattle Egrets in *Sargent* 13 Dec were the latest on record for North Dakota (DK). A **White Ibis** in *Charles Mix*, SD, 10 Dec furnished the fifth state record and a first in winter (WW†). The first winter records for White-faced Ibis were also tallied in the Dakotas, with the species still in Brown, SD, 1–14 Dec (SLS), two in *Sargent*, ND, 2 Dec (DB, RC), and a single in *Sargent* 17 Dec (DK).

Tundra Swans lingered in good numbers, with 150 in *Grand Forks*, ND, 4 Dec (EEF), and 242 in *Brown*, SD, 14 Dec (SLS). Six Tundra Swans were still at Freezeout, MT, in January (MS), and seven individuals at Fort Peck 21 Feb were very early (CC). A Whooper Swan with a clipped toe was picked up alive in *Foster*, ND, 27 Jan (PRS).

A new high for North Dakota CBCs, 710 Com. Goldeneyes were tallied at Garrison Dam 18 December. Casual in the Pierre area, two Barrow's Goldeneye were in *Hughes*, SD, 12 Dec (CM).

EAGLES THROUGH KILLDEER

Bald Eagles were unusually widespread in Montana and North Dakota. Noted on 12 CBCs in North Dakota, the total of 43 was a new high for the state. Northern Harrier numbers were the highest in many years. The total of 33 on 18 CBC counts in North Dakota was a new high (the species is not always recorded on the state's CBCs), rivaled only by the previous high of 11 birds on six counts in 1962. In Montana, the species was noted as abundant on the three CBCs in the Malta area (DP), and several wintering in the Fort Peck area were unusual (CC). Harris recorded the species three times in January in ne. South Dakota, his first in 34 years (BKH). Eight Cooper's Hawk reports in North Dakota was an unusually high number for a species that rarely winters in the state, and one was noted in January near Malta, MT, for the second consecutive year (DP).

A Red-shouldered Hawk first noted 29 Jan in *Day*, SD, remained through the period (RFS, JSP†), furnishing a 4th winter record for the state. Red-tailed Hawks were unusually common in North Dakota, with 27 on seven CBCs for a new high. A Ferruginous Hawk in *Stutsman*, ND, the week of 20 Feb was the earliest recorded for the state and the first February record (*vide* LI†). Rough-legged Hawks were also present in large numbers. Reporters in much of the Region noted the highest numbers they had ever seen in winter. All of the regular falcon species were noted in normal or higher than usual numbers. One to three Gyrfalcons per day were noted in the Pierre, SD, area (m.ob.), and six reports were tallied in Montana and two in North Dakota.

The Gray Partridge total of 72 from 18 CBCs in North Dakota was the lowest since 1952, when only five counts were run. At Medicine Lake, MT, the species was noted as increasing from the lows of past years. Wild Turkeys continue their meteoric rise and are now common in some areas of n. North Dakota. Seven Killdeer in *Minnehaha*, SD, 4 Dec was a large number for so late (RFS, JSP); early migrants of the species were widespread in S. Dakota by late Feb.

GULLS THROUGH LARKS

Late lingering gulls were everywhere. A species that rarely winters in the Region, Bonaparte's Gulls were in *Charles Mix*, SD, 12 Dec–3 Feb (RM). Four Ring-billed Gulls remained in Fargo, ND, until 3 Dec, the latest for the area by 12 days (GEN). The 600 Ring-billeds on the Garrison Dam, ND, CBC 18 Dec was a new high there, with the old high only 15 (DS). Herring and Thayer's Gulls remained at Garrison Dam, ND, until 15 Jan (REM), the latest on record. Extremely late away from the Missouri R., two Herring Gulls were in *Perkins*, SD, 16 Dec (DCG). A first-winter Iceland Gull at Garrison Dam, ND, 11 Dec–15 Jan furnished the state's 13th record (REM†). Another **Iceland Gull** in *Yankton* 18–30 Dec provided only the 2nd South Dakota record (DS†). South Dakota's third **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was documented in *Yankton* 26–27 Feb (RFS, JSP†).

A **Eurasian Collared-Dove** noted 4



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Dec in Grand Forks (AB, DOL†) and two in Minot 12 Dec (NS, REM†) provided the 3rd and 4th North Dakota records. The species was subsequently recorded on the CBCs in both cities, the first CBC records for the state. South Dakota's 8th record was that of a single in *Clay* 23 Dec (BH†). Snowy Owls were present in relatively small numbers this year. Seldom reported in the Region, a N. Pygmy-Owl was found 29 Dec near Choteau, MT, and remained for several weeks (JN). Long-eared Owls were present in unusually large numbers, with a peak of 10 on the Pierre CBC. Nine birds were noted in North Dakota in Dec and six were tallied in Montana. Short-eared Owls were also present in large numbers in the Dakotas. A N. Saw-whet Owl spent the winter at Pierre (RDO).

Two Belted Kingfishers were noted 17 Dec on the Jamestown, ND, CBC; one remained through the winter, providing a 4th wintering record for the state (SM, HM, LI). Another was unexpected on Nelson Res., MT, 7 Jan (DP). Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers 7 Dec in *Charles Mix* (RM) and 12 Dec–30 Jan in *Yankton*, SD (SVS), furnished the 6th and 7th winter records for South Dakota. A Loggerhead Shrike 22 Feb in *Kidder*, ND, furnished the first ND February record (NB†). Despite the open winter, Horned Larks were not present in unusual numbers. A Rock Wren 8 Feb in *Lawrence*, SD, provided only the second winter record for the state (RAS).

BLUEBIRDS THROUGH REDPOLLS

Four E. Bluebirds tallied on the Bismarck, ND, CBC 27 Dec provided the second CBC record for the state, with the first only last year. Early migrants were at Medicine L., MT, 28 Feb (RS), and s. of Bismarck in late Feb (DA). A Hermit Thrush in Fargo 18 Dec furnished the 5th CBC record for North Dakota. Good numbers of Am. Robins wintered in the region. Casual in winter, a N. Mockingbird was present in Jamestown, ND, from mid-Dec to early Feb (LI). Bohemian Waxwings were almost absent, but Cedar Waxwings were present in impressive numbers; 1298 on North Dakota CBCs was a new high. A Yellow-rumped Warbler in New Town, ND, 2–15 Dec was photographed for a 3rd winter record for the state (RS†). Casual in South Dakota in winter, Yellow-rumpeds were in Meade 29–30 Jan (RAS, JAA, REP) and in *Hughes* 2 Jan (KM).

A **Painted Bunting** in Billings, MT, 11–17 Dec provided the first record for the region (AS, HC†). Five Song Sparrows on the Tewaunkan, ND, CBC 17 Dec was an

unusually high count. Four White-crowned Sparrow reports from the Dakotas was unusual; generally none are reported. Lapland Longspurs wintered in large numbers in North Dakota, with a new peak of 35,000 in *McLean* 1 Jan (REM) Red-winged Blackbirds and W. Meadowlarks were recorded in unusual numbers this winter, and W. Meadowlarks were migrating early into North Dakota by late Feb. The first winter records for South Dakota, 18 Great-tailed Grackles were in *Sanborn* 4 Feb (RGR†); a single was in *Charles Mix* 26 Feb (RFS, JSP†). Casual in winter in the Dakotas, Brown-headed Cowbirds were in *Stark*, ND, 8 Jan (JH), in *Bon Homme*, SD, 13 Jan (SVS), and in *Hanson*, SD, 27 Feb (RGR). The only Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch report was from Zortman, MT, where 37 were seen 20 Dec (DP, TP). It was a good season for Purple Finches, with 232 on North Dakota CBCs. In South Dakota, Tallman banded more than in any other year at Aberdeen. No Red Crossbills were reported away from Ponderosa Pine areas, and only four reports of White-winged Crossbills were received, all of single birds. Common Redpolls were present in good numbers in Montana and North Dakota, with a few Hoaries noted in the flocks.

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