

# prairie provinces



## Rudolf F. Koes

135 Rossmere Crescent  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2K 0G1

## Peter Taylor

P.O. Box 597  
Pinawa, Manitoba ROE 1L0

**V**ery mild conditions during most of March gave way to cooler weather in April. Late April brought another warm spell, again followed by a cool period. The warm spells brought waves of exceptionally early migrants, mainly waterfowl and raptors at the beginning of the period and shorebirds and warblers later on. Precipitation was much below normal across the south—until welcome rains arrived in mid-May, while central and northern areas were cooler and damper throughout. In southern Manitoba passerine migration was generally well advanced but sparse. Alberta enjoyed a fine assortment of rarities, but few were found elsewhere.

**Abbreviations:** I.B.S. (Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary, AB); O.H.M. (Oak Hammock Marsh W.M.A., MB).

## LOONS THROUGH RAPTORS

Rare in spring were a Red-throated Loon 17 May (RLe) and a Pacific Loon 13 May (DK), both in the Calgary, AB, area. A Western Grebe at Delta, MB, 31 Mar (PG) was record-early. Single Clark's Grebes at Patricia Beach 29 Apr (PT, RKo), Natalie L. 6 May (PT et al.), and St. Ambrose 25 May (CCt et

al.) were e. of their normal Manitoba range. Eight American White Pelicans at Mt. Lorette, AB, 16 Apr were new for the site (PSh). Up to eight Gr. Egrets were at Whitewater L., MB, in late May (CCt, GH et al.), with singles at O.H.M. 3 May (PG, MKa et al.) and Last Mountain L., SK, 20–22 May (*fide* ASm). Rarer still was a Snowy Egret near Irricana, AB, 12–13 May (RT, JD, RD, TB, PR et al.). Only one Cattle Egret was noted, at Biggar, SK, 10–14 May (GW). White-faced Ibis numbers continue to increase in s. Alberta, as witnessed by 31 at Pakowki L. 18 May (RD, m.ob.) and 20 at Shepard 26 May (GK).

Exceptionally early were single Turkey Vultures at Tilley, AB, 11 Mar (BV) and Brandon Hills W.M.A., MB, 21 Mar (RWi). Similarly early were Greater White-fronted Geese at O.H.M. (JWi, PSu) and Tribune, SK, 5 Mar (CB), Snow Geese at Tribune 5 Mar (CB), and a Ross's Goose at O.H.M. 10 Mar (PG, AD). Canada Geese arrived in large numbers in early March; e.g., 5000+ passed St. Adolphe 5 Mar (m.ob.). Eight Brant at Vermilion, AB, 3 Apr were rare (CG, RH). A Whooper Swan frequenting the Irricana, AB, area was determined to be an escapee. There were at least 20 reports of Eurasian Wigeon in Alberta, including 5 near Irricana 22 Apr (TKk); one visited Killdeer, SK, 4 May (WH). Cinnamon Teal were sighted at Biggar, Weyburn, and Saskatoon, SK, 5 Apr–27 May (m.ob.). Early ducks included 4 Northern Shovelers at

Lockport, MB, 19 Mar (HT, LE) and 2 Green-winged Teal at Holmfield, MB, 24 Mar (CCt). Greater Scaup totalled 47—a high number for Saskatchewan—at Condie Res. and Regina Beach 15 Apr (BL). Rarities included a Black Scoter at Natalie L. 7–15 May (PT) and 5 Long-tailed Ducks 9 Apr–29 May, 4 of them in Saskatchewan and one in Manitoba (m.ob.).

Notably early were 14 Bald Eagles at Windygates, MB, 4 Mar (m.ob.), a Northern Harrier at Holland, MB, 1 Mar (AW), single Sharp-shinned Hawks at Brandon Hills 10 Mar (RWi, TW) and St. Adolphe 11 Mar (AC), and a Red-tailed Hawk at Windygates 4 Mar (RKo, AW). Over 50 Northern Harriers were hunting for larks and longspurs along roads between Carseland and Lethbridge, AB, 15 Apr, after a late blizzard (MH). Generally raptor numbers were low at traditional hawkwatch sites in s. Manitoba, but exceptions were 193 Sharp-shinned Hawks and 121 Broad-winged Hawks in 1.5 hr at Delta 4 May (PV). Eight Golden Eagles at Windygates 4 Mar and 7 on 19 Mar (RKo et al.), high counts for the e. prairies, were dwarfed, as usual, by the spring tally of 3434 at Mt. Lorette (PSh et al.).

## GROUSE THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Fifteen Willow Ptarmigan at Ft. McMurray 15 Mar were a remnant of a large winter incursion into n. Alberta (NL). Three Yellow Rails near Ashern, MB, 3 May were record-early (CCs, GH). A Common Moorhen was reported without details by a visiting birder near Whitewater L. 30 Apr (*fide* JWt). Two Whooping Cranes in flight near Ashern 11 Apr were a treat (CCs).

Noteworthy shorebird concentrations included 2000 Black-bellied Plovers near Brooks, AB, 19 May (JR, LV, RWe), 500+ Black-bellied Plovers at Reed and Francis Lakes, SK, 27 May (RKr, JC), 35 Black-necked Stilts around Shepard 23 Apr (RB, JP) and ≤5 near Herbert, SK, 17–27 May (KR, RLo et al.), 73 Whimbrels at Bassano, AB, 22 May (IH), 620 Red Knots at Beaverhill L., AB, 20 May (CW, RWe) and another 150 at Reed and Francis Lakes 27 May (RKr, JC), 4000 Semipalmated Sandpipers at Bassano 22 May (IH), 6500 Stilt Sandpipers at Beaverhill L. 20 May (CW, RWe) and 2500+ in the Francis L.–Morse Slough area 27 May (RKr, JC), 1000+ Long-billed Dowitchers at Chaplin and Old Wives Lakes, SK, 9 May (DV, PSa), and 1000+ Wilson's Phalaropes in the Chaplin L. area 9 May (DV, PSa).

Yet more early arrivals were a Black-

necked Stilt at Shepard 1 Apr (BCI, ET), 2 Ruddy Turnstones at O.H.M. 2 May (GH, RSh), Semipalmated, Least and White-rumped Sandpipers at Holland 26 Apr (AW), 2 Pectoral Sandpipers at O.H.M. 9 Apr (GG), and a Wilson's Phalarope near Weyburn 17 Apr (CB). A Herring Gull at Gimli, MB, 5 Mar was record-early (DA). Rare larids included an Iceland Gull at I.B.S. 25 Apr–12 May (BR, TT et al.) and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** in each province: 3–8 Apr in Regina (BL et al.), 13 Apr in Saskatoon (BK), 27 Apr at I.B.S. (JP et al.), and 15 May near Pinawa (PT, ST, R&MZ). A **Slaty-backed Gull** at Last Mountain L. 15–16 Apr was the 3rd reported in Saskatchewan (RKr, JC et al.). Additional gull rarities were a Glaucous-winged at I.B.S. 6–10 May (BE, RSs et al.), a Nelson's (Herring × Glaucous) at Shepard 24–28 Apr (TKk, J.P.), and 2 Sabine's at Luck L., SK, 22 May (SS et al.).

Wintering pairs of Eurasian Collared-Doves were reduced to single birds at Weyburn and Regina by 25 May (BL, CB). A Band-tailed Pigeon was rare at I.B.S. 27 May (RWe). Accidental in s. Saskatchewan was a Barn Owl near Val Marie 17 May (JWr). Nine Northern Hawk Owls were seen between Thompson and Ponton, MB, 1 Mar (BCh) and 15 were noted around La Crete, AB, 17 Mar (RC et al.). One at Shepard 4 Apr was in the same prairie area where one was seen last fall (KJ). Forty Great Gray Owls were in the La Crete area 17 Mar (RC et al.), while one at Stonewall 16 Apr (J&CB) was out of range. A *Chaetura* swift at Medicine Hat, AB, 25 May was rare (BV, RH), as was a Black-chinned Hummingbird in Calgary late May (DBe, m.ob.). A **Red-breasted Sapsucker** at Bottrell, AB, 14–16 Apr was accidental (OD, MPa, ph.).

#### PASSERINES

Two Olive-sided Flycatchers in Winnipeg (RKO) and an Eastern Wood-Pewee at Grosse Isle, MB (KG), all 5 May, were exceptionally early. A heavy fallout of Alder Flycatchers and Red-eyed Vireos was noted at Wascana Park, Regina, 27 May (BL). A Violet-green Swallow at Wabamun L., AB, 2 Apr was both early and beyond its normal range (Edmonton Bird Club). A Marsh Wren at St. Ambrose 23 Apr was also early (AW). Both Eastern and Mountain Bluebirds heralded spring in early Mar (m.ob.); both early and rare was a Western Bluebird near Longview, AB, 2 Apr (JM, m.ob.). Rare were lone Northern Mockingbirds at E. Wascana Marsh 6–9 Apr (SD et al.), Ashern 27 Apr (RB), and Altona,

MB, mid-May (ASc, MKr).

Warbler migration was well ahead of schedule, highlighted by Alberta's 2nd **Blue-winged Warbler** at Vegreville 28 May (CG, RH), a Northern Parula near Hodgeville, SK, 16 May (MPr), an Audubon's Warbler at Delta 6 May (PV, HdH), a Black-throated Gray Warbler at Calgary 28 May (NT), and an early Northern Waterthrush in Winnipeg 29 Apr (RN). Saskatchewan's 5th **Green-tailed Towhee** visited E. Wascana Marsh 15 May (DV et al.), while Alberta's 2nd was near Tilley 19 May (JR, LV, Rwe). Only se. Alberta had high numbers of Lark Buntings (*vide* DBa). A Grasshopper Sparrow near Ashern 3 May was exceptionally early (CCs, GH). A strong migration of Lapland Longspurs in Alberta included 5000+ at Delacour 22 Apr (TKk) and 10,000+ the next day at Kathryn (M&WB). A Northern Cardinal was a rarity at Medicine Hat 17 Mar (BE, JS); 4 were reported in s. Manitoba. Also rare were a Black-headed Grosbeak at Tyvan 18–20 May (TKp) and an Indigo Bunting at Canmore, AB, 19 May (JG).

An Eastern Meadowlark was found near Whitemouth, MB, 27 May (WC, MW, BCa, LdM), within 1 km of a 1998 sighting. Western Meadowlarks at O.H.M. 11 Mar (RKO) and Zelma, SK, 14 Mar (GW) were exceptionally early. Rusty Blackbird numbers were low during migration in s. Saskatchewan and s. Manitoba (BL et al.). Common Grackles increased in urban Regina (BL), whereas they were notably

scarce in Winnipeg (RKO). Common Redpolls remained numerous in s. Manitoba and Saskatchewan well into April; they suffered considerable mortality due to *Salmonella* infection at some feeders in all three provinces.

**Observers (provincial compilers in bold-face):** D. Arnason, R. Barclay, D. Baresco (DBa), D. Beers (DBe), C. Bjorklund, T. Boland, J.&C. Boyer, M.&W. Breiteneder, B. Carey (BCa), B. Chartier (BCh), W. Christianson, B. Clibbon (BCL), A. Courcelles, R. Cromie, J. Cummings, C. Curtis (CCs), C. Cuthbert (CCT), L. de March, H. den Haan, S. Dickenson, O. Droppo, J. Dunn, R. Dunn, A. Dyck, B. Edwards, L. Elliott, B. Frew, K. Gardner, J. Gilk, G. Grief, P. Grief, C. Grosfield, I. Halliday, W. Harris, **M. Harrison**, G. Holland, R. Horscheit, R. Hughes, K. Jones, M. Kading (MKa), D. Knapik, R. Koes (RKO), T. Kopp (TKp), B. Korol, T. Korolyk (TKK), R. Kreba (RKr), M. Krueger (MKr), G. Kurtz, R. Lein (RLe), N. Lennie, R. Loffler (RLo), **B. Luterbach**, J. McFaul, R. Nickel, M. Parker (MPa), J. Pilny, M. Priebe (MPr), J. Riddell, B. Ritchie, K. Roney, P. Roxborough, J. Sackman, P. Sargent (PSa), A. Schritt (ASc), D. Schritt, L. Scott, S. Shadick, P. Sherrington (PSh), A. Smith (ASm), R. Staniforth (RSh), R. Storms (RSs), P. Sullivan (PSu), P. Taylor, S. Taylor, R. Thomas, T. Thormin, H. Toom, N. Totino, E. Tull, B. Velner, D. Vetter, P. Viola, L. Vogt, M. Waldron, A. Walley, G. Wapple, J. Weier (JWr), C. Wershler, R. Wershler (RWe), J. Weshnowski (JWi), R. Will (RWi), T. Will, R.&M. Zach.



A harbinger of a late spring invasion was this adult White-faced Ibis at Shepard (not far east of Calgary) 14 May 2000. By the end of May at least 20 ibises were around Shepard and another 30 were elsewhere in southern Alberta. **Photograph by Terry Korolyk**