

In general, this was a difficult season in which to see patterns. There was good birding to be had, although some commented on a dearth of landbirds, particularly sparrows. Western and mountain species, particularly corvids, may have wandered eastward out of drought-stricken western areas. There were some major movements of waterfowl, particularly on the expected October and November fronts. The Plains at this time exhibit some of their former grandeur in central Oklahoma, with almost nightly passages of Greater White-fronted Geese during late October, followed by skeins of Snow Geese in early November. Western stretches of the Region probably receive a higher level of attention in this report, but it seems here that distributions of many species are poorly known, particularly during migrations. Here, too, is the excitement of being at the intermingling point of two avifaunas.

**Abbreviations:** Cheyenne Bottoms (Cheyenne Bottoms W.M.A., Barton, KS); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith, NE); Red Slough (Red Slough W.M.A., McCurtain, OK); Tenkiller (L. Tenkiller, Cherokee, OK).

### LOONS THROUGH DUCKS

Among the Region's avifaunal changes in recent years is the increasing frequency of loons of all species. This season, Red-throated Loons were reported in Lancaster, NE 26 Oct (JGJ), Miami, KS 9 Nov (NL, JS), Cowley, KS 27 Nov (MT, KG), and Tenkiller 27 & 29 Nov (JWA et al.). Pacific Loons were noted in Lancaster, NE 31 Oct (JGJ) and 11 Nov (LE), Scott, KS 1 Nov (T&SH), and Meade, KS 9 Nov (SP, CH), with one to 2 at Tenkiller beginning 28 Oct (JWA). Single Yellow-billed Loons, still very rare in the Region, were spotted in Clark, KS 10-19 Nov (SP, CH, m. ob.) and at Tenkiller 27 Nov (JWA). Very early was the Horned Grebe at Scotts Bluff, NE 24 Aug (WRS). Red-necked Grebes are also being reported more frequently, with singles in Lancaster, NE 30 Oct and 16 Nov (JGJ), Cowley, KS 12 Nov (SMo, MT), Tulsa 16-29 Nov (BC, TM, JWA), Chase, NE 18 Nov (DSt), and Knox/Cedar, NE 15-17 Nov (MB).

Spectacular post-breeding buildups of Western Grebes occur at McConaughy, with 30,000 the high number this season 22 Sep (WRS). Only a sprinkling of Westerns occurs across the rest of the Region, with about 25 reported from e. Nebraska (*fide* WRS), 17 from Kansas (*fide* LM), and only 2 from Oklahoma (*fide* JWA). Only 2 Clark's Grebe were reported from Nebraska, in Cherry 1 Sep (MB), with Kansas singles in Russell 11 Nov (MR, ER), Scott (CG, MG) and Sedgwick 23 Nov (CG, PJ). Surprises were the single Brown Pelicans in Pawnee/Osage, OK 15 Sep (SM) and 1 Oct (BG et al.), Alfalfa, OK 4-6 Oct (RS, SM, CP), and Marion, KS 23-31 Oct (TR, m. ob.). Away from se. Oklahoma, Neotropic Cormorants were reported from Sedgwick, KS 13 Oct (DV, FV) and Wagoner, OK 14 Oct (JWA).

Unexpected were single Least Bitterns in

# Southern Great Plains



Sarpy, NE 8 Sep (GS) and Lancaster, NE 7 Oct (\*UNSM 18154; TEL, ET). Among the more exceptional lingering ciconiids were a Great Egret in Lancaster, NE 15 Nov (LE) and a Green Heron in Johnson, KS 1 Nov (WCT). Up to 8 Roseate Spoonbills visited Red Slough through 19 Sep (DA, m. ob.). A spoonbill wandered n. to Creek, OK 10-13 Sep (JPe). The peak count of Wood Storks was 110 on 11 Aug at Red Slough (BH)—the only area hosting even one.

Two Trumpeter Swans wandered s. to Potawatomie, KS 24 Nov (CA), with 2 in Russell, KS 27 Nov (MR, ER). An imm. Tundra Swan in Saunders, NE 31 Oct (JGJ) was early. To estimate 180,000 Snow Geese—as in Jewell, KS 9 Nov (HA)—is both a task and a joy. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were reported from McCurtain, OK, with 2 ad. and 9 imm. birds present at one location 18 Sep—18 Nov (CS, BH et al.), and from Tillman, OK, where 25 were reported 21 Oct (KM). A Mottled Duck visited Red Slough 20 Aug—4 Sep (DA, BH et al.). American Black Ducks have become more often reported in recent times. Singles were noted in Osage, KS 9 Nov (BF, BAS), Mitchell, KS 9 Nov (HA), and Cedar, NE 16 Nov (JC). Likewise, Greater Scaup are being more frequently noted, this season as early as 30 Oct.

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Long-tailed Ducks were documented as exceptionally early as 28 Sep—5 Oct in Scotts Bluff, NE (KD, AK, PD, DD). The only others reported were in Knox, NE 15-17 Nov (JC, MB), Geary, KS 29 Nov (2 birds; CO), and again later in Scotts Bluff, NE 4-14 Nov (KD, AK). A "fantastic male" Barrow's Goldeneye was in Douglas, NE 15 Nov (JGJ).

### RAPTORS THROUGH TERNS

Casual westward, a Broad-winged Hawk was noted at Kimball, NE 5 Oct (JG), with 2 in Morton, KS 21 Sep (PJ, CG, KG). Merlin reports continue to maintain their high levels of recent years, while numbers of Peregrine Falcons seemed a bit lower this season, with only 8 reported from Nebraska—the first on 4 Aug in Harlan, NE (GH, WH)—and 5 seen in Kansas (*fide* LM), 4 in Oklahoma (*fide* JWA).

**SA** Scoters, still a "birder delicacy" in the Region, staged a respectable flight this season. An imm. Surf was shot in *Cherry*, NE 19 Oct (*fide* BM). Eight others were reported from *Nebraska* (*fide* WRS), at least 24 from *Kansas* beginning 22 Oct, and 4 from *Oklahoma*, the first 23 Oct (*fide* JWA). The rarer White-winged Scoter was reported from *Lancaster*, NE 31 Oct (2 birds; JGJ), *Gasper*, NE 2 Nov (LR, RH), *Oklahoma City* 4 Nov (MO, JAG), *Morton*, KS 5 Nov (L&RS), and *Douglas*, KS 16 Nov (GP). The rarest scoter, Black, provided a slightly better showing this season, with an imm. shot in *Cherry*, NE 19 Oct (*fide* BM), one in *Johnson*, KS 30 Oct (ML), one in *Noble*, OK 7 Nov (JWA), 3 in *Sarpy*, NE 16 Nov (JGJ), 2 in *Cedar*, NE 16 Nov (JC), and one in *Tulsa* 25 Nov (JWA).

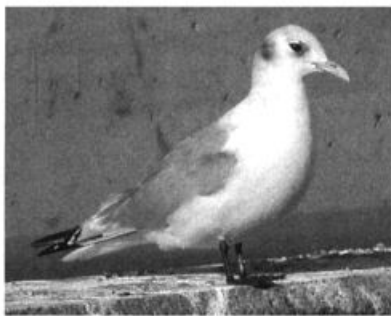
A Crested Caracara, the first documented for the Region, was present 4-7 Nov in *Noble*, OK (SSH, m. ob.). From the other corner of the continent, single Gyrfalcons were identified 6 Nov in *Rush*, KS (SS) and 9 Nov in *Osage*, KS (BF, BAS).

Nesting of Soras was confirmed in *Dakota*, NE 26 Sep when 2 ads. and a juv. were noted (BFH). The only reports of Yellow Rail came from *Red Slough*, with singles 22 Oct & 29 Nov (DA). A well-observed Black Rail at *Red Slough* 29 Aug (DA) provided a new locality in the Region for this elusive species. A single Purple Gallinule was noted at *Red Slough* through 20 Aug (BH et al.).

What may be dwindling reports of migrant Piping Plovers included only singles in *Douglas*, KS 2 Aug (GP), *Texas*, OK 15 Aug (JWA, JSt), and *Scotts Bluff*, NE 21-31 Aug (CW, MB); up to 2 were seen at *Red Slough* 19 Aug—4 Sep (BH, DA). However, at *McConaughy*, the breeding season for this species seemed better: from 69 nests and 232 eggs, there were 206 chicks, of which 132 fledged (GW, *fide* SJD).

Shorebirds can be highlights of the season, but fall water conditions tend to be ephemeral and unpredictable in the Plains. Among the more unusual species was a Red Knot 6 Oct at *Cheyenne Bottoms* (MG, WCT). Only 7 Western Sandpipers were reported from *Nebraska* (*fide* WRS), and fewer than 20 were noted among the "peep" at *Oklahoma City* lakes this fall (JAG).

A well-documented juv. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 18 Sep (CW) was the 3rd documented for *Nebraska* and the Region. Buff-breasted Sandpipers passed through the e. parts of the Region as late as 9 Sep (*fide* WRS, LM, JWA); the high count was 157 in *Sedgwick*, KS 7 Aug (JQ). Impressive was the count of 5,000 Long-billed Dowitchers at *Cheyenne Bottoms* 6 Oct (MR). Somewhat of a seasonal surprise was a Wilson's Snipe at *Red Slough* 7 Aug (DA, MS). The high counts of Red-necked Phalaropes this season were 24 in *Cimarron*, OK 12 Sep (SM), and 14 in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 24 Aug (WRS); up to 12 were at *Cheyenne Bottoms* 15 Sep (BF, GJ, CG). Much more unusual were single Red Phalaropes observed in *Seward*, KS 18 Sep (SP)



One of few adult Black-legged Kittiwakes ever recorded in the Southern Great Plains Region was this bird at *Gavin's Point Dam*, *Knox County*, *Nebraska* 3 November 2002. Photograph by *Terri Sohl*.

and in *Phelps*, NE 21 Sep (LR, RH).

Only one jaeger was reported from the Region this season, a Parasitic in *Meade*, KS 6 Oct (MT, m. ob.); reports have been fewer in recent autumns. Perhaps the Plains spectacle of the season was the 300,000 Franklin's Gulls and 100,000 Ring-billed Gulls estimated at *Calamus Res.*, *Loup/Garfield*, NE 29 Sep (LR, RH), with 50,000 to 100,000 Franklin's in *Geary*, KS 25 Sep (CO). Collectively, these may represent over 50% of the world population of Franklin's Gull. Vagrant Laughing Gulls wandered to *Cheyenne Bottoms* 13 Aug (ad.; CG) and 19 Aug & 15 Sep (first-year birds; MR, BF, GJ), with a second-winter bird in *Oklahoma City* 6 Sep (MO, JAG) and a single 16 & 27 Sep in *Osage*, OK (JWA). An ad. Mew Gull was photographed in *Cedar*, NE 6-8 Nov (JC, MB). Away from w. *Nebraska*, reports of California Gull included an ad. in *Lancaster*, NE 26 Oct (JGJ), at least one ad. in *Oklahoma City* 16 Aug—12 Sep (JWA, MO, JAG), another ad. in *Johnston*, OK 11 Oct (JWA, SM), and first-winter birds in *Reno*, KS 19 Sep (PJ, CG, KG), *Russell*, KS 13 Oct (MR), *Douglas*, KS 9 Nov (MG et al.), and *Oklahoma City* 9 Nov (JAG).

Only 2 Thayer's Gulls were reported, both from *Nebraska*: a first-winter bird in *Knox* 1 Nov (JC) and an ad. there 24 Nov (JC). Two Lesser Black-backed Gulls, also a lower number than in recent years, were reported, one at *McConaughy* 19 (CW) & 21 Sep (WRS), and one from *Cowley*, KS 19 Nov (GY). Only two reports of Sabine's Gull were received, one from *Scotts Bluff*, NE 18 Sep (CW) and a juv. in *Pierce*, NE 11 Oct (SB, *fide* MB). Only a few seasons ago, over 30 were reported! And our Where's-Waldo Black-legged Kittiwake was an ad. in *Knox*, NE 24 Oct (MB) through 8 Nov (JC). A small scattering of Common Terns spanned 18 Aug (in *Dixon*, NE; BFH) to 14 Oct

(in *Oklahoma City*; JAG). Tardy was a Black Tern in *Oklahoma City* 4 Oct (JAG).

## DOVES THROUGH FINCHES

A White-winged Dove was still surprisingly as far n. as *Kimball*, NE 26 Aug (CW), part of the continued expansion. Several groups have established themselves in *Lawton*, *Oklahoma City*, and *El Reno*, OK. Inca Doves are also scattered out over the s. parts of the Region, with a high count this season of 10 in *Stevens*, KS 22 Sep (SS, MR, DK). A Common Ground-Dove, quite the rarity, was in *Sedgwick*, KS 8 Oct (RG et al.). Single Snowy Owls were in *Burt*, NE 26 Nov (*fide* WRS) and *Holt*, NE 28 Nov (DSt), perhaps an echo of last year's invasion. Quite tardy was a Common Nighthawk 12 Nov (!) in *Osage*, KS (EW); any nighthawk this late should be checked for vagrant species.



The first documented Crested Caracara for the Southern Great Plains Region was this adult near *Perry*, *Noble County*, *Oklahoma* 4-7 November 2002. The species was found, potentially as genuine vagrants, from central *California* to *Iowa* to *New Brunswick*, *Canada* this season, almost all subadult or juvenile birds. Photograph by *Steve Metz*.

Curious was a major push of Western Wood-Pewees in *Kimball*, NE 12 Aug, when 34 were counted (KD). A topic that will likely maintain long-term debate because of the identification issues involved is the fall migration of *Empidonax* flycatchers through w. stretches of the Region. Hammond's Flycatcher is a regular fall migrant in the *Nebraska Panhandle* and is one of the easier empids to identify structurally and by plumage at that time of year, although discernment is required. Four were reported from the *Nebraska Panhandle* (*fide* WRS), including one well photographed in *Cheyenne* 19 Sep (CW). Three were reported from w. *Kansas* (*fide* LM). Possible Gray Flycatchers were noted in *Kimball*, NE 24 Aug (WRS) and 4 Sep (JF). Another possible Gray was reported in *Morton*, KS 21 Sep (PJ, CG, KG). Dusky Flycatchers were documented from *Kimball*, NE 24 (WRS) & 31 Aug (MB). In the ongoing debate on the Cordilleran/Pacific-slope Flycatcher issue, there is increasing concern that Pacific-slopes are potentially passing through the Region. A hatch-year "Western" Flycatcher was photographed in *Kimball*, NE 24-26 Aug (WRS, CW); no details were provided for 2 other *Nebraska* birds noted as late as 7 Sep (*fide* WRS). Possible Cordillerans were reported from *Finney*, KS 12 Aug (S&DS et al.) and *Morton*, KS 21 Sep (SS, MR, DK). "Westerns" also were identified in *Cimarron*, OK 28-30 Aug (JWA, JSt). Ad. and imm. Vermilion Flycatchers were present at several locations in *Cimarron*, OK 10 Aug (JAG) to 14 Sep (PS, JL, m. ob.). An Ash-throated Flycatcher in *Scott*, KS 14 Aug (T&SS) was a vagrant. Quite tardy was a carefully studied Western Kingbird in *Sherman*, NE 14 Oct (MB).

Northern Shrikes appeared to make a better-than-average showing, with 12 reported from *Nebraska* (*fide* WRS) and 8 from *Kansas* (*fide*

**SA** The western Kansas hummingbird phenomenon spread this season! Suffice it to say that both Ruby-throated and Black-chinned Hummingbirds were seen in small numbers in western Kansas. **Calliope Hummingbirds**, now so numerous that they are difficult to track, included up to 3 birds at three locations in *Cimarron*, OK 4 Aug—20 Sep (SM, JWA, m. ob.). One was photographed e. to *Custer*, OK 17 Aug (J&DR). Kansas signed in with up to 4 Calliopes at several feeders in *Finney*, KS 4 Aug—13 Sep (MOs, T&SS, m. ob.), while reports of one to 3 Calliopes came from *Sherman* (JP), *Sedgwick* (NC), *Haskell* (J&NC), and *Morton*, KS (BPe, PJ, m. ob.) as late as 20 Sep. Five or 6 were reported from Nebraska, the easternmost and only record outside the Nebraska Panhandle being in *Knax* 19 Aug—13 Sep (MB, BP, LP, m. ob.); others in the Panhandle spanned 24-31 Aug, including documented birds in *Scotts Bluff* 24 (KD) & 25 Aug (WRS), and *Kimball* 26-31 Aug (CW, MB).



Among the impressive showing of Calliope Hummingbirds, particularly in the southern Great Plains, was this bird, the second for Oklahoma in Cimarron County 4 August 2002. Photograph by Steve Metz.

In Nebraska, a Broad-tailed Hummingbird appeared surprisingly far e. in *Knax* 18-30 Aug (MB), with 5 reported from the Panhandle (*vide* WRS). Up to 3 Broad-tailed were noted at any one time in *Finney*, KS 1 Aug—14 Sep (MOs, T&SS, m. ob.), including at least one male 8 Aug. They were reported from five other Kansas counties (*Sedgwick*, *Elsworth*, *Haskell*, *Rush*, and *Morton*; *vide* LM). Although actually a tougher identification than is the Calliope, the number of reports still suggests that Broad-taileds migrate regularly through at least w. Kansas. Perhaps 12 Rufous Hummingbirds were reported from the Nebraska Panhandle through 20 Sep (*vide* WRS). High counts of 7+ occurred at individual feeders in *Pawnee*, KS 22 Aug (SS) and *Finney*, KS 13 Sep (T&SS), with 8 noted at several locations in *Cimarron*, OK 1 Sep (JWA, JAG).

With all these, one would expect at least one colossal find. It came: a male **Broad-billed Hummingbird**, first for the Region, that appeared in *Comanche*, OK in mid-Oct and remained through the end of the period (KM, m. ob.).



A Broad-billed Hummingbird, first for the Southern Great Plains Region, appeared in Lawton, Comanche County, Oklahoma in mid-October 2002 (here 21 October) and stayed through the period. Photograph by Kurt Meisenzahl.

LM). A Plumbeous Vireo was reported e. to *Grant*, NE 1 Sep (MB), for only the 2nd record outside the Nebraska Panhandle. Only one other was reported, from *Cimarron*, OK 12 Sep (SM). Curiously, the story of Cassin's Vireo continues to change, and it is difficult to reckon how birders' changing expectations might bias patterns of reporting; some birds reported could certainly be the easily-confused imm. female Blue-headed Vireos. Nonetheless, 4 Cassin's were reported from *Kimball*, NE 26 Aug—2 Sep (*vide* WRS), 3 from *Morton*, KS 31 Aug—22 Sep (*vide* LM), and one from *Cimarron*, OK 30 Aug (JWA, JSt). Only one Philadelphia Vireo was reported in the Region this fall, that in *Sarpy*, NE 31 Aug (CNK).

Among western corvids appearing on the Plains, the rarest, **Clark's Nutcracker**, made it to *Sioux*, NE 8 Nov (WM). Steller's Jays appeared at two locations in *Morton*, KS 22 Sep (SS et al.; GP et al.). Outstanding were the 60+ Western Scrub-Jays noted in *Morton*, KS 31 Aug—1 Sep (m. ob.), with another 20+ occurring through the season in adjacent counties e. to *Clark*, KS (PJ, CG, KG). And 6 Pinyon Jays were seen at two locations in *Morton*, KS 21 Sep, likely the same birds (PJ et al.; GP et al.).

Probably more regular, and now more looked-for, 2-3 Violet-green Swallows were located in *Cimarron*, OK 1 Sep (JWA), with 2 there 12 Sep (PS, JL) and one in *Morton*, KS 1 Sep (BPe, CW). Quite tardy was a Northern Rough-winged Swallow in *Linn*, KS 9 Nov (MG et al.). Quite early were Red-breasted Nuthatches 11 Aug and 1 Sep in *Cimarron*, OK (JAG). Straying e. from breeding areas was a Rock Wren in *Sedgwick*, KS 29 Nov (JB). Single Sage Thrashers were found in *Kimball*, NE 31 Aug (MB) and 4 Sep (JF), with 3 in *Morton*, KS 20 Sep (PJ, CG, KG). A Curve-billed Thrasher

wandered far n. to *Sioux*, NE 20 Oct (KD *vide* AK). Two Curve-billeds were e. to *Meade*, KS 13 Nov (TF).

Warblers fall into several categories. Among the more exceptionally tardy were a Northern Parula 13 Oct at Red Slough (DA, MD), a Yellow Warbler 30 Oct in *Pawnee*, KS (SS), and a Blackburnian Warbler 2 Nov in *Dixon*, NE (JJ). Quite early were an Orange-crowned Warbler carefully identified as the mountain race *orestera* 24 Aug in *Kimball*, NE (WRS), and an imm. Audubon's Warbler 1 Sep in *Cimarron*, OK (JAG). Western warblers edging onto the Plains included Virginia's in *Kimball*, NE 26 (CW) & 31 Aug (MB) and 4 Sep (JF), plus singles in *Morton*, KS (BPe, CW) and *Cimarron*, OK (JAG, JWA) 1 Sep. The rarer Black-throated Gray Warbler was observed in *Grant*, NE 1 Sep (MB), *Morton*, KS 1 Sep (TH, CG), and *Sedgwick*, KS 15 Sep (PJ). About 6 Townsend's Warblers were reported from the Nebraska Panhandle 21 Aug—4 Sep (*vide* WRS), with at least 4 in *Cimarron*, OK 30 Aug—12 Sep (m. ob.). Westerly was a Canada Warbler in *Morton*, KS 31 Aug (BPe, CW). Single westerly Pine Warblers were in *Cheyenne*, NE 19 Sep (CW) and *Sedgwick*, KS 7 (PJ) & 15 Sep (CG). Very rare was a Black-throated Blue Warbler in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 4 Oct (KD). Also far afield were a male Kentucky Warbler in *Sioux*, NE 20 Sep (HKH), the first Panhandle record, and a male Hooded Warbler in *Lancaster*, NE 21 Sep (LE).

Single Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows in *Lancaster*, NE 28 Sep and 19-20 Oct (LE) were good finds, as were up to 5 in *Douglas*, KS 12-21 Oct (AP, DKl et al.) and 2 at Red Slough 8 Oct (DA, BH). Surprisingly early were a Song Sparrow in *Cimarron*, OK 1 Sep (JAG, JWA) and a Harris's Sparrow in *Lancaster*, NE 22 Sep

(LE). An amazing count of 500 Bobolinks was made in *Dixon*, NE 7-15 Sep (JJ). Four Snow Buntings in *Jefferson*, KS 9 Nov (SP, CH) were the only ones reported for the season.

**Cited observers:** (area editors in boldface): **KANSAS:** Henry Arnknecht, Charles Anderson, James Barnes, Nick Clausen, Jack & Norma Conover, Tom Flowers, Bob Fisher, Matt Gearheart, Chet Gresham, Kevin Groeneweg, Rick Goodrick, Tyler Hicks, Chris Hobbs, Pete Janzen, Gary Johnson, Don Kazmaier, Dan Kluza (DKl), Mark Land, Nancy Leo, Lloyd Moore, Scott Morrill (SMo), Marie Osterbuhr (MOs), Chuck Otte, Galen Pittman, John Palmquist, Brandon Percival (BPe), Alexis Powell, Sebastian Patti, Jane Queal, Mike Rader, Ellen Rader, Traci Robb, Tom & Sara Shane, Diane Seltman, Scott Seltman, Jo Seamon, Lawrence & Ruth Smith, Max Thompson, Will Chatfield Taylor, Don Vannoy, Fran Vannoy, Chris Wood, Edge Wade, Gene Young. **NEBRASKA:** Mark Brogie, Scott Buss, Jay Carlisle, Kathy DeLara, Stephen J. Dinsmore, Dean Drawbaugh, Phyllis Drawbaugh, Larry Einemann, Joe Fontaine, Robin Harding, Helen K. Hughson, Bill F. Huser, Jan Johnson, Joel G. Jorgensen, Alice Kenitz, Clem N. Klaphake, Thomas E. Labeledz, Brad McKinney, Wayne Mollhoff, Babs Padelford, Loren Padelford, Larry Randolph, W. Ross Silcock, Dave Stage (DSt), Greg Stoiber, Emily Thaden, Gabe Wilson, Chris Wood. **OKLAHOMA:** Dave Arbour, James W. Arterburn, Bill Carrell, M. Dillon, Bob Germany, Joseph A. Grzybowski, Berlin Heck, Jo Loyd, Kurt Meisenzahl, Steve Metz, Terry Mitchell, Mitchell Oliphant, John Pennington (JPe), C. Puckett, Justin & Donna Roach, Pat Seibert, Steve Sheffert (SSH), Ron Shepperd, M. Smith, John Sterling (JSt), C. Stewart. 🐦