

February finally brought some relief to the Mountain West region, with abnormally moist to extremely moist conditions in the western two-thirds of Colorado and similar conditions in portions of eastern Wyoming. Yet this moisture was not enough to offset dry conditions in December and January, and the Region still received below-normal precipitation for the season as a whole. Temperatures were above average in the Region, and the lack of strong cold fronts in December and January helped produce one of the best early winters for many lingerers such as Hermit Thrush, Gray Catbird, and Brown Thrasher.

Despite mild conditions, many observers commented that this season was one of the worst ever for numbers of individuals, and many speculated that the drought conditions pushed birds out of the Region. Unfortunately, few observers keep detailed notes on the number of birds seen so, we are left with a feeling that birds were "present in low numbers" but have few data to support these impressions. We encourage observers to keep detailed notes that include numbers of individuals, location, time spent in the field, and other relevant variables that influence the number of birds seen. Cornell's eBird software ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)) provides a convenient way to store your records in a way in which they are usable to others (including these Regional editors). Interested readers are encouraged to peruse the results and summary for the Christmas Bird Counts for Colorado and Wyoming for some details on numbers of individuals on the 103rd Christmas Bird Count. All sightings below are from Colorado unless otherwise indicated.

### LOONS THROUGH RAPTORS

After a strong showing last fall, loons were relatively scarce this winter. A Red-throated Loon at Pueblo Res. 3 Dec (BKP) and a Pacific Loon there 7 Dec (BKP, AS, NP) were the only non-Commons reported in the Region. Single Red-necked Grebes were found at Pueblo Res. 3-14 Dec (BKP, m. ob.) and Valmont Res., Boulder 21 Dec (SS), and another wintered in Mesa (*fide* RL). A Western Grebe lingered at Glendo Res., Platte, WY 13 Dec (SJD). An impressive 15 American White Pelicans and 14 Double-crested Cormorants were reported in Colorado this season. A Great Egret wintered in Mesa (*fide* RL), the only location in the Region at which individuals occasionally attempt to overwinter.

A single Black Brant was seen in Greeley, Weld, 1-2 Jan (JH, RH); one is

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usually found wintering somewhere each year in ne. Colorado. Three Trumpeter Swans and 5 Tundra Swans were reported in Colorado this season. The male Eurasian Wigeon found in the fall wintered at Pueblo City Park. Other Eurasian Wigeon included single males in Larimer 19 Jan (NK) and Otero 22 Jan (SO). The earliest Cinnamon Teal was at Mesa 22 Jan (*fide* RL). This was a superb season for scoters: 3 Surf Scoters, 4-5 White-winged Scoters, and an amazing 7 Black Scoters, including a group of 4 at Cherry Creek Res. 13 Dec (GW). Eleven Long-tailed Ducks were in Colorado, which included up to 2 in Mesa 1-2 Jan (RL, MH), and singles were at Glendo Res. 13 Dec (SJD) and Grey Reef Res., Natrona 2 Jan (JSt, *fide* CEM), both in Wyoming. A wintering Northern Harrier in Teton, WY (BSm, SP) was unusual. A juv. gray-morph Gyrfalcon was observed in Fremont, WY, 13 Jan (BO).

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**SA** Several species considered to be primarily sedentary staged the most impressive movements ever recorded into the Region. A male **Red-bellied Woodpecker** was at Rawhide Wildlife Area, *Goshen*, WY 13 Dec (SJD), and up to 16 were reported from 11 locations in e. Colorado including *Boulder* and *Pueblo*. A *carolinensis* White-breasted Nuthatch [= *S. c. cookei*] was at Rawhide Wildlife Area, *Goshen*, WY 13 Dec (SJD), and others were found away from their breeding grounds in ne. Colorado in *Boulder*, *Bent*, and *Prowers*. Observers are encouraged to devote more attention to the status and distribution of this subspecies in the Region, particularly during the nonbreeding season. Northern Cardinals were also recorded in above-average numbers, with at least 8 birds at seven locations in Colorado east of the Front Range.

## RAILS THROUGH GULLS

Forty Virginia Rails and 4 Soras heard in marshes at John Martin Res., *Bent* 20 Dec



This White-winged Dove was found along St. Vrain Creek in Longmont, Boulder County, Colorado 25 January 2003. This species has been found in Colorado only in the last two winters, though this is the northernmost winter record for the state. Photograph by Bill Schmoker.

(BKP, TL, CLW) may represent high counts for the winter season for each species. Single Soras were also found at Pueblo 14 Dec (DSi) and Bonny Res., *Yuma* 22 Dec (BSc, JSr). While Virginia Rails winter regularly in the Colorado, Soras are generally quite rare at that season. For the 3rd consecutive winter, Sandhill Cranes (100-125) wintered in Delta (*fide* RL), and 120 were ne. of Silverton, *San Juan* 28 Dec (JBy)—odd for a high-mountain locale. A Greater Yellowlegs was in Pueblo 1 Dec (LL), and an impressive 7 were in *Bent* 20 Dec (HEK). A Pectoral Sandpiper with a Dunlin at L. Cheraw 19 Dec furnished the 2nd winter record for Colorado (TL, CLW). Other Dunlin reports were of 2 in

*Weld* 1 Dec (RO) and one in *Larimer* 19 Dec (NK).

A first-winter Mew Gull was seen in Pueblo 11 Dec—11 Jan (BKP, m. ob.), and an ad. was at Baseline Res., *Boulder* 6 Jan (TF). A California Gull was reported in *Teton*, WY 31 Dec (BJ), where this species is very rare in winter. Expected in Colorado during winter, both Thayer's and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were widely reported from e. Colorado: 5 Lesser Black-backed at John Martin Res. 20 Dec (CLW, RO, LS, TL) provided the high count for the winter season. Single ad. Great Black-backed Gulls were reported at Pueblo Res. 6 Dec—30 Jan (MA, m. ob.); at John Martin Res. 20 Dec (CLW et al.); and at Upper Queens Res., *Kiowa* 21 Dec (LS, CLW, TL). An ad. Glaucous Gull was at Cheyenne, WY 22 Jan (MI, DF), and 4 Glaucous reports came from Colorado, with an ad. at L. Cheraw 19 Dec (TL, CLW, m. ob.) being the southernmost this winter. Single Black-legged Kittiwakes were at Pueblo Res. 3 Dec (BKP) and at Union Res., *Weld* 5 Dec (CLW, BSc).



These four Black Scoters—a large flock for Colorado!—were at Cherry Creek Reservoir, Arapahoe County 13 December 2002. Photograph by Glenn Walbek.

## DOVES THROUGH WAXWINGS

Twenty Eurasian Collared-Doves were at Ft. Laramie, *Goshen*, WY all winter (B&DW, MI), 2 wintered at Buffalo, *Johnson*, WY (BSo, *fide* CEM), and the species was seen widely through much of Colorado. White-winged Doves continue their surge into Colorado, with individuals in Pueblo 7 Dec (RM), Longmont, *Boulder* 25 Jan (BSc, MBo, RTr), and Pueblo 8 Feb (LL). Up to 3 Inca Doves continued their stay in Rocky Ford, *Otero* 24 Dec—19 Jan (SO), and up to 5 were in Lamar, *Prowers* all season (JT, m. ob.). A Snowy Owl was just n. of Cheyenne, WY 21 Jan (MI). Burrowing Owl rarely winters successfully in the Region; one in e. *Broomfield* (PW, *fide* TL) was particularly surprising. Two Boreal Owls were reported in *Teton*, WY 11 (SW) & 13 Jan (SP), the latter a road-killed individual. Single Northern Saw-whet Owls were seen or heard in *Otero* 19 Dec (GR, SO, m. ob.), *Bent* 20 Dec (BKP, TL, CLW), and *Yuma* 22 Dec (LS).

An unexpected Common Poorwill, perhaps attempting to overwinter, was near Cañon City, *Fremont* 15 Dec (MP, BKP); the bird provides only the 2nd documented winter record for Colorado. The Broad-billed Hummingbird found in the fall stayed at Clifton, *Mesa* to 22 Dec (BMy). Three Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were reported from se. Colorado this season. A Blue Jay was seen in *Teton*, WY in Jan (DM). Four Steller's Jays were e. of usual in the Rocky Ford area 19 Dec—18 Feb (SO, m. ob.). Late Tree Swallows were found in Pueblo on 9 Dec (MA) and on the Weldona-Ft. Morgan C.B.C. 14 Dec. At least 6 Winter Wrens were found in e. Colorado this season, and 2 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were in Pueblo 14 Dec (CLW, PS-S, CS).

Eastern Bluebirds were found at eight locations in e. Colorado, and 5 Hermit Thrushes were reported in Colorado this season. A Varied Thrush was at Alcova,



This Le Conte's Sparrow was one of at least eight that wintered in the marshes east of Fort Lyon, Bent County, Colorado 20 December 2002 (here) through at least 27 February 2003. Photograph by Bill Maynard.

*Natrona*, WY 1 Jan (BR, *fide* CEM), with 4 reported in Colorado: a female in Pueblo City Park 27 Dec—15 Mar (DC, KT, m. ob.); a female in Fort Collins 1 Jan+ (CB); one in Beulah, Pueblo 5-10 Jan (*fide* VAT); and a male near Rush, El Paso/Elbert 1-22 Jan (*fide* LL). Six Gray Catbirds were reported in Colorado this season, including one near Eagle, at 2235 m elevation 23 Jan—1 Feb (JMe). A Northern Mockingbird was at Bates Hole, *Natrona*, WY 1 Jan (J&GL, *fide* CEM), and at least 6 other Northern Mockingbirds and 7 Brown Thrashers were found this winter in e. Colorado. The only Bohemian Waxwings reported were singles in Ft. Collins 1-3 Dec (RH, JMa) and Pueblo 5 Dec (BKP).

### WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Rare in winter, an Orange-crowned Warbler was along the South Platte R., Adams 1 Jan (GR). Two Western Palm Warblers were along St. Vrain Cr. in Longmont, Boulder 14-18 Dec (B&IP, m. ob.), and one was in that area 28 Feb (BK); most previous winter Palm Warbler records in Colorado are, interestingly, referable to the e. subspecies

*hypochrysea*, Yellow Palm Warbler. Late Wilson's Warblers included a male in Ft. Collins, Larimer 22 Nov—4 Dec (JMa, DAL) and one below John Martin Res. dam, Bent 27 Nov—22 Dec (DN, m. ob.).

Rare in winter, a Green-tailed Towhee was in Pueblo 14 Dec (MY). Perhaps the most unusual bird of the season in Colorado was a female Eastern Towhee in Bent 7 Dec—28 Feb+ (DN, m. ob.); there are fewer than 10 accepted records of this species in Colorado, mostly of fall migrants and wintering birds. Two Rufous-crowned Sparrows, one recently road-killed, were found in Pueblo 14 Dec (SLH, CLW). A Clay-colored Sparrow found in Otero 19 Dec (TL, CLW) provided only the 3rd winter report from Colorado. A brightly-colored Field Sparrow in Boulder 6-10 Dec (RTr, m. ob.)

appeared to be of the nomi-

nate subspecies *pusilla*; we are unaware of any specimens or previous photographs of this subspecies in Colorado. A Savannah Sparrow was at L. Cheraw, Otero 19 Dec (BKP, MP, MA). Up to 8 Le Conte's Sparrows wintered at Ft. Lyon, Bent this season (BKP, MP, BMa, m. ob.). Westerly *Zonotrichia* sparrows included single White-throated Sparrows at Loveland Ski Basin, Clear Creek 30 Dec (BSc, m. ob.), Grand Jct., Mesa 3 Jan (GG, MH), Kremmling, Grand 18 Jan (DB, m. ob.) & 9 Feb (FL), as well as single Harris's Sparrows at Kremmling 9 Feb (FL) and in Teton, WY 6 Dec (JL). A Golden-crowned Sparrow in Mesa 2 Jan (GG, MH) was the only one reported this season. A Snow Bunting was at Bonny Res., Yuma 22 Dec (LS, TL), and a male was enjoyed by many observers well to the south at

Pueblo Res. 29 Jan—15 Feb (RM, m. ob.). A female-plumaged Purple Finch was at Boulder 9 Dec (BSc, CLW).

**Observers:** Mymm Ackley, Jim Beatty (JBy), Chuck Bell, Maggie Boswell (MBo), David Bradford, David Chartier, Stephen J. Dinsmore, Doug Faulkner, Ted Floyd, Glenn Giroir, Stephanie L. Hanson, Mike Henwood, Joe Himmel, Rachel Hopper, Marshall Iliff, Bill Kaempfer, Hugh E. Kingery, Nick Komar, Brian Jones, Jim & Gloria Lawrence (J&GL), David A. Leatherman, Tony Leukering, Rich Levad, Lin Lilly, Forrest Luke, Joan Lucas, Joe Mammoser (JMa), Bill Maynard (BMA), Jack Merchant (JMe), Christian E. Michelson, Rich Miller, Dan Muscatel, Bob Myers, Duane Nelson, Bob Oakleaf, Ric Olson, Stan Oswald, Susan Patla, Brandon K. Percival, Mark Peterson, Nathan Pieplow, Bill & Inez Prather (B&IP), Betty Rickman, Gene Rutherford, Pearle Sandstrom-Smith, Bill Schmoker (BSc), Jim Schmoker (JSr), Joe Scott (JSt), Larry Semo, Scott Severs, David Silverman (DSi), Bruce Smith (BSm), Clif Smith, Bob South (BSo), Andrew Spencer, Kip Tarpley, Janeal Thompson, Richard Trinkner (RTr), Van A. Truan, Glenn Walbek, Bruce & Donna Walgren (B&DW), Pam Wanek, Sue Wolff, Christopher L. Wood, Mark Yaeger. ☺



This basic-plumaged male Snow Bunting was far south at Pueblo Reservoir, Pueblo County, Colorado 29 January through 15 February (here 1 February) 2003—not far from New Mexico! Photograph by Van Truan.