

British Columbia & Yukon



Donald G. Cecile

7995 Wilson-Jackson Road
Vernon, British Columbia V1B 3N5
(dcecile@sd22.bc.ca)

The Region experienced a winter similar to that of the previous year, with a mild December and February bookending a colder January. In fact, January was rather unsettled, with wild week-long swings between frigid Arctic and milder Pacific air. Seasonal precipitation was below normal except for the northern half of the Yukon and some parts of southern British Columbia. As a result, Christmas Bird Counts were heavily influenced by the local conditions: early counts fared well, but some were unlucky, such as Fort St. James, which endured the bone-chilling majesty of -40°C temperatures to start their count day. Needless to say, most talliers stayed in bed! The Yukon experienced a typical winter—a rather nasty cold spell in January (temperatures plunging to -50°C in some areas) and record-high snowfalls in the Dawson area.

Irruptive species were unremarkable this season. Northern Pygmy-Owls were the only owls really seen on the move. Winter finches were in very low numbers in most parts of

the Region, with only a token southward gesture by redpolls, but other finches were notably scarce. The rarity of the season was a Fieldfare that furnished a first record for the region.

Abbreviations: P.G. (Prince George), R.B.M.S. (Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner), R.P.B.O. (Rocky Point Bird Observatory, Victoria), Whse. (Whitehorse, Yukon).

LOONS THROUGH RAPTORS

An ad. Laysan Albatross was picked up in Coquitlum 26 Dec and later released w. of Victoria 1 Jan (*fide* RTo). Remarkably, this was the 2nd record for the Vancouver checklist area. The bands on the bird indicate that it was originally banded off the S.E. Farallon Islands (*fide* RTo). The crew of the *Queen of Prince Rupert* picked up a frigatebird 14 Jan between Bonilla I. and Sandspit (ph. TR). The bird was emaciated and sent to rehabilitation and later identified as a first-year female **Magnificent Frigatebird**. This constitutes the 5th confirmed record for the province and the first winter record.

Near the n. edge of their winter range, 2 so-called Gray-bellied Brant—rare but regular in British Columbia—were observed near Parksville 23 Jan (GLM). Only a few of the Skagit County, Washington wintering flock remain this far north. The bands on one of the birds identified it as a male banded on Melville I. in Aug 2002 (SB). Canvasbacks continue their decline on the w. coast, with one or 2 present in Tofino 6–30 Jan (AD). An ad. male King Eider was in Fanny Bay 10–14 Feb (JF); this species has appeared annually in the Comox area for the past three years. A female Barrow's Goldeneye, casual in winter in the Yukon, was seen on the Yukon R. in Whse. 26 Dec (JH et al.) and 15 Feb (HG). A pair of ad. Bald Eagles, rare in winter, was observed at their traditional winter location on McIntyre Cr. wetland in Whse. 26 Dec (CE) and 15 Feb (HG).

SHOREBIRDS THROUGH OWLS

Casual in winter along the s. coast, a Pacific Golden-Plover wintered at Boundary Bay 3 Dec–22 Feb (JAM, m. ob.). American Avocets wintered successfully once again along the Serpentine R., with 3 present Nov–29 Feb (JA, m. ob.); this species is casual in winter in the lower mainland. Also casual in winter along the s. coast in winter, a few Red Knots were late: one in Delta 2 Dec (JAM); 3 in Ladner 6 Dec (RTo et al.); and a single again in Delta 7 Dec (RTo). Iceland Gulls continue to make regular winter appear-

ances at a few reliable locations: there were 3 in the lower mainland 7 Dec–10 Feb (*fide* RTo) and 2 in Vernon 26 Jan–16 Feb (DGC et al.). A third-basic Lesser Black-backed Gull was discovered in Vernon 10–13 Dec (ph. DGC+) for a 3rd Okanagan record. This location has had 3 different individuals over the past three winters. Single Slaty-backed Gulls can be seen most winters in Delta, such as the ad. that remained Nov–14 Dec (ph. RTo); however, elsewhere in the province, they are casual visitors, such as the ad. that was relocated in Cumberland 6–7 Dec at the sewage lagoons (JF et al.).

The Yukon's only Rock Pigeon population, hunted by a Northern Goshawk through the winter (*fide* LC), was down to the 4 in Whse. by early Mar (LC; CE; HG). A Sora, casual in winter, was present at R.B.M.S. 31 Dec–18 Jan & 1–13 Feb (JI et al.). The tally of 3821 California Quail on the Oliver–Osoyoos C.B.C. furnished the highest Canadian count ever (*fide* RJC). This was not a winter for owls, aside from the prevalence of Northern Pygmy-Owls in the interior. Single Northern Hawk Owls were seen near Goundbirch 27 Feb (MP) and in Whse. 29 Feb (CE). Great Gray Owls made big news along the lower mainland, with at least 6 birds present, the most sought-after being the bird in Stanley Park 14–28 Dec (ph. JMC et al.); strangely, though, there were few reports elsewhere in the Region. A Short-eared Owl, casual in winter in the Yukon, was seen along the North Klondike Hwy. just n. of Whse. 21 Dec (MB, JS).

HUMMINGBIRDS THROUGH SWALLOWS

Rare on the outer coast, an Anna's Hummingbird visited a feeder in Tofino 29 Dec (PW). With only a handful of winter records for the s. coast, a Rufous Hummingbird was a very rare sight in Victoria 17 Dec (†AS). Single White-headed Woodpeckers were located in the s. Okanagan on 9 Dec at Anarchist Mt. e. of Osoyoos (*fide* RJC) and 17 Dec in Naramata (HB). The string of sightings in recent years is positive news for this scarce species. A few Northern Shrikes remained in the n., with singles ne. of Chetwynd 13 Feb (MP), in Whse. 6 (HG) & 26 Dec (JK), in the Jackfish Bay area all winter (AR et al.), and at Swan L., n. of Whse. 28 Feb (BD, HD).

A Steller's Jay, casual in the Yukon, spent all winter in Tagish (TF). Blue Jays were noteworthy by their relative absence this winter, which seems surprising following the flood of sightings in the past few years. The only individual of note was one in Rich-

mond 21 Dec+ (TP et al.). The Region's 6th **Western Scrub-Jay**, present since Oct, remained in Ladner to the end of period (DK, LJ et al.). Providing the Yukon's first true winter record was a ragged **Horned Lark** completely missing its tail at the Whse. landfill 14–15 Jan (DK, CE). The recent winter Barn Swallow phenomenon was again noted this winter; however, the numbers of birds involved were much reduced. At least 45 birds were seen either on Vancouver I. or the lower mainland from 14 Jan to end of the season. Amazingly, Barn Swallows ventured into the interior again this winter, with 2 at Hanceville, on the Chilcotin R. 12 Feb (ph. RMK) and a single bird crossed the 54th parallel to reach Giscome, 50 km ene. of P.G. 29 Feb (CA, MA)—likely the most northerly winter record of this species in North America. This latter bird was described as an ad. male and constitutes the first confirmation that ads. are at least occasionally involved in these winter movements. A Northern Rough-winged Swallow was along the outer coast of Vancouver I., seen from Cheewhat Beach 18 Jan (JE) and from Carmanah Light 21 Jan (JE). This is the earliest arrival on record.

CHICKADEES THROUGH FINCHES

Two Mountain Chickadees on the newly established Carcross C.B.C. on 2 Jan provided a new winter location for the species (compiler DK). The Yukon's first winter records for **Brown Creeper** were provided by singles at Haines Junction 18 Dec (WR) and along the Auriol Trail near there 20 Dec (JB, TS). The rarity of the season was a **Fieldfare**, discovered during the Port Coquitlam C.B.C. 28 Dec (ph. LC), a first provincial record. Fortunately, the bird was photographed; it was not subsequently relocated. Fieldfare has been recorded at least four times in Alaska, but it is more often recorded in the ne. North America, in the **Canadian Maritimes** and New England, where casual. Very rare in the interior in winter, a **Hermit Thrush** was found at William's L. 30 Dec (CK, PR). Very late holdovers from the fall, remarkably, 2 imm./female **Western Tanagers** remained at R.B.M.S through 11 Dec (JI et al.).

A **Palm Warbler** was very late in Tofino I & 14 Dec (AD). Arguably the best consistent winter locale for **Yellow-rumped Warblers** in the Region is Stubbs I., just n. of Tofino, where 26 birds were tallied 28 Dec (AD). Casual in winter, a **Black-and-white Warbler** was in Stanley Park 28–29 Dec (HD). An **American Tree Sparrow**, casual in winter in the Yukon, was noted during the first few days of Dec at Teslin (CAL, DH). One of few winter records of **Chipping Sparrow** for the Region involved a single bird in a field loaded with sparrows in Surrey 9–29 Feb (IR, VO et al.). Given the dates involved, it

is difficult to know if this represents a successful overwinterer or an exceptionally early spring migrant. As it remained at this location for such a length of time, it seems rather likely that it overwintered. Two **Savannah Sparrows** were very late on the outer coast at the Long Beach airport 26 Dec (GB). A single imm. **Harris's Sparrow** was in South Surrey 9–17 Dec (CG et al.). A few single **White-crowned Sparrows** remained n., with singles in Dawson Creek 3 Jan (MP) and Dawson City, the latter a holdover from the fall that remained through 24 Jan after which the temperature had dropped to -50°C for three successive nights (ML). Two **Dark-eyed Juncos**, casual in winter in the cen. Yukon, were recorded on the 29 Dec Mayo C.B.C. (compiler MOD).

A **Western Meadowlark** was well n. in downtown P.G. 15–22 Jan (RTe) and probably did not survive the cold snap that followed. Rare in winter, a male **Rusty Blackbird** was in Richmond 1–21 Jan (MTo). Accidental in winter, an imm. male **Baltimore Oriole** was in White Rock 31 Dec (†PSP). **Redpolls** were a bit late moving s. this winter but were nevertheless widespread by Jan. **Pine Siskins** were scarce, at least in the interior, but began to return in Feb. A sizeable flock of 50 **American Goldfinches** was well n. of usual summer range at Kersley in early Jan (*vide* PR). A male **Evening Grosbeak**, rare in s. Yukon, was observed at a feeder in Whse. 29 Feb and again on 6 Mar (JMI, MD). Elsewhere in the region, **Evening Grosbeaks** went missing and seemed to have departed the Region completely!

Contributors (subregional editors in bold-face): Carolyn Allen, John Anderson, Cathy Antoniazzi, Mary Antoniazzi, Scott Atkinson, Julie Bauer, Harold Baumbrough, Marten Berkman, Jack Bowling (Prince George, weather summary), Sean Boyd, George Brad, Linda Cameron, Richard J. Cannings, Chris Charlesworth (Kelowna), Larry Cowan, Mary Darkes, Henry Davis, Boris Dobrowolsky, Adrian Dorst (Tofino–Ucluelet), Cameron Eckert (Yukon), Jerry Etkorn, Ted Fairman, Jamie Fenneman, Carlo Giovannella, Helmut Grünberg (Yukon), Jim Hawkings, David Hett, John Ireland, Len Jellicoe, Jean Kapala, Dan Kemble, Cathy Koot, Maria Ledergerber, Jo Ann MacKenzie, Jeremy McCall, Judith McIntyre, Richard McKay, Guy L. Monty (c. Vancouver I.), Mark O'Donoghue, Vivka Omen, Mark Phinney (Peace River), Tom Plath, Phil Ranson (Cariboo), Ted Rayner, Wolf Riedl, Alf Roberts, Ian Robertson, Terry Skjonsberg, Gail Spittler (Kootenays), Prue Spittmann, Jennifer Staniforth, Andy Stewart, Ron Tetrault, Mike Toochin, Rick Toochin (Vancouver), Pam White. ☺



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