

Perhaps the most notable pattern of this winter season was the increasing number of half-hardies and what appear to be northward range extensions of many species. Whether Winter Wrens and Gray Catbirds, Least Sandpipers and Vesper Sparrows, or Sandhill Cranes and Soras—individuals of these species are clearly wintering farther north in recent years.

With this winter came a few irruptions—unexceptional except for their infrequency: the early 1970s saw the last winter with multiple records of Pine Grosbeak, while Bohemian Waxwings had not been seen in numbers since the early 1960s. Purple Finches were widespread, and local appearances of Clark's Nutcracker and Pygmy Nuthatch represented micro-irruptions, perhaps.

Abbreviations: Hackberry (Hackberry Flats W.M.A., Tillman, OK); Harlan (Harlan Res., Harlan, NE); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith, NE); Quivira (Quivira N.W.R., Stafford, KS); Rainwater Basin (playa wetlands of s.-cen. Nebraska); Red Slough (Red Slough W.M.A., McCurtain, OK); Tenkiller (L. Tenkiller, Sequoyah, OK).

LOONS THROUGH FALCONS

Quite rare away from ne. Oklahoma, single Pacific Loons in Murray and Carter 14 Jan (DT) were unexpected; the 2–5 at Tenkiller through the period (JWA, m.ob.) were merely rare. About as rare as Pacifics in Oklahoma, a Red-throated Loon was at Tenkiller 21 Jan (CC) through 5 Feb (JWA, m.ob.), with another in Tulsa, OK 4 Jan–6 Feb (CC, m.ob.). The rarest of the loons in the Region, a Yellow-billed at Tenkiller 21 & 26 Jan (JWA, m.ob.) continued a string of annual appearances there. With few state records, a Brown Pelican in Wagoner and Cherokee, OK 1–26 Dec (JWA, m.ob.) was cause for excitement. Lingering Oklahoma ardeids were an American Bittern in Woods 11 Dec (RG), single Great Egrets in Washington 18 Dec (DW, SB) and at Red Slough 6–13 Dec (DA), and single Cattle Egrets in Tillman 2 Dec (PW) and at Red Slough 4 Jan (DA); also lingering were 3 White-faced Ibis in Johnston, OK 19 Dec (CB).

Incredible numbers of Snow Geese appeared in Feb in cen. Nebraska, including a Corps of Engineers count of 1,161,608 at Harlan (*vide* G&WH), and estimates from the cen. Platte Valley and Rainwater Basin of 500,000–1,000,000 (LB, RE, LRB, PAJ). Brant, quite rare in Oklahoma, were found in Texas 2–28 Dec (BH, SW) and Caddo 11 Dec (TD), the latter taken by a hunter.

The provenance of Mute Swans in the Region is conjectural, and some individuals may be from the Great Lakes populations; one was in Alfalfa, OK 11 Jan–13 Feb (AW, BH). Trumpeter Swans continue to appear in good numbers in Nebraska, where 58 were

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reported; marked birds among them were mostly from Iowa and Minnesota. Rare southward, 5 Trumpeters were in Kansas during the period (*vide* LM), and 3–6 were in Alfalfa, OK 26 Dec–13 Feb (AW, PV). Tundra Swans, also a rare fall migrant in the Region, made a better-than-average showing, with 14 reported from Kansas and Oklahoma 3 Dec–8 Jan, including 5 on a Kansas farm pond in Douglas 8 Jan (RBe). Unexpected during winter were the 7 Wood Ducks in Scotts Bluff 1–17 Jan (KD). Regional rarities were an American Black Duck in Mitchell, KS 15 Dec (MR, SS, MT, RP) and a Mottled Duck at Red Slough 17 Jan–1 Feb (DA). Two Blue-winged Teal at Red Slough 11 Jan (DA, BS) may have wintered.

The 100 or so Greater Scaup reported in the Region included 40 in Douglas, KS 23 Dec (DG) and 36 at McConaughy 12 Feb (JGJ). There were 3 Surf Scoters reported, an imm. female 31 Dec in Johnson, KS (MM), one in Creek, OK 9 Jan (BC), and an ad. male in Johnson, KS 17 Feb (ML). Rather late were

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One of two Harris' Hawks wintering near Optima Reservoir, Texas County Oklahoma, this bird was photographed there 2 December 2004. Both birds were considerably beyond normal zones for winter dispersal. Photograph by Berlin Heck.

3 White-winged Scoters at McConaughy 19 Dec (*vide* SJD), one of which stayed through 31 Dec (B&JS), and another in Cedar, NE 3–8 Jan (MB, DH, JJ). Some 15–20 Long-tailed Ducks were reported, 11 in Kansas and the others in Oklahoma. A male hybrid Common Goldeneye × Hooded Merganser at McConaughy 12 (HA) & 31 Dec (B&JS) has wintered there for a few years now. Another was in *Scotts Bluff*, NE 17 Jan and 18 Feb (KD). Regular but rare in winter in Nebraska's North Platte Valley, 4 Barrow's Goldeneyes were reported: up to 3 in *Scotts Bluff* 11 Dec–18 Feb (KD) and one at McConaughy 19 Dec (*vide* SJD). The only other was a Kansas "zootie" in *Riley* 28 Feb (LJ). Impressive were the 16,000 Common Mergansers at *L. Waconda*, *Mitchell*, KS 15 Dec (MR, SS, MT, RP).

Osprey reports included moribund bird 18 Dec in *Hall*, NE (*vide* EV) and singles in *Oklahoma* 8 Jan (JW) and *Alfalfa* 17 Feb (GK). Bald Eagles had started nesting in *Thomas*, NE 15 Feb (RGr) and in *Nemaha*, NE 25 Feb (CCa). Of the 8 Northern Goshawks reported, 3 were in Nebraska and 5 in Kansas, the most southerly in *Barber*, KS 2 Jan (PJ). Harris's Hawk occasionally winters far n. of its usual range; this winter, 2 were in *Texas*, OK 2 Dec–12 Feb (BH, JM, m.ob.), the first for the Oklahoma Panhan-

dle. Golden Eagles were reported throughout the Region, indeed to its se. corner at *Red Slough* 16 Dec and 17 Feb (DA, BH, KM). Although fall migration for Peregrine Falcons normally ends by mid-Nov in Nebraska and spring migration starts in late Mar, nesting by residents in Omaha began early, with 3 eggs present 28 Feb (*vide* CNK). Similarly, 3 birds were noted around the State Capitol in *Lincoln*, NE 18 Feb (JCM). This, along with previous winter sightings in Omaha and *Lincoln*, suggests that breeding birds are resident in the vicinity.

GROUSE THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Good numbers of Greater Prairie-Chickens were noted in n.-cen. and se. Nebraska, including 100 at an irrigated corn-stubble field in sw. *Custer* 23 Jan (TJW) and 51 in *Johnson* 9 Dec (TEL). Yellow Rails, thought to be only migrants in the Region, were located at *Red Slough*, where an unprecedented 22 were flushed as late as 20 Dec, with one lingering until 28 Dec (DA). Rare was a very late King Rail there 7 Dec (DA). Virginia Rails may winter throughout the Region, as 4 birds were found at seeps in the Niobrara River Valley in *Cherry* in Dec and Feb (JED). Soras also seem to be extending their winter range northward, with one in *Blaine*, OK 28 Jan (DT) and 2 at *Red Slough* 7 Feb (TS).

Again at *Red Slough* (do they heat the water?) were as many as 6 Common Moorhens 6 Feb, with one there the next day (DA).

Adding to the list of lingering or wintering species, a Sandhill Crane was found in *Osage*, OK 18 Dec (SH, RPo, MP), with 2 at *Red Slough* 27 Dec (DA, MW, BH) and an amazing 2015 in *Barber*, KS 2 Jan (PJ). A Black-bellied Plover at *Hackberry* 4 Dec (LT) was late, but a pair of Killdeer with 2 downy young 15 Dec in *McCurtain*, OK (BHK) was tempting fate. Adding to the winter records of American Avocets for Oklahoma were one at *Red Slough* 6–7 Dec (DA, TS) and 1–3 at *Hackberry* 13–27 Feb (KM, LT, MTr). As many as 29 Greater Yellowlegs were still at *Quivira* 14 Dec (MR). The 50+ Greater Yellowlegs wintering at *Hackberry* 13–27 Feb (LT, MTr, JAG) were accompanied by 1–3 Lesser Yellowlegs 12–21 Feb, 14–15 Dunlin 12–21 Feb, and 17–29 Long-billed Dowitchers 12–27 Feb (JAG, DE, LT, MTr). An excellent count of late fall migrant Long-billed Dowitchers was the 140 at *Hackberry* 4 Dec (LT). A surprising 8 Spotted Sandpipers were found in Oklahoma 2–29 Dec (*vide* JWA); normally, few are reported after Oct.

Rare anywhere in the Region, a Laughing Gull was in *Sequoyah*, OK 21–23 Dec (SBe, DT). Also rare in winter away from McConaughy, single California Gulls were in *Douglas*, NE 4 Dec (JGJ), *Hitchcock*, NE 20 Dec (TJW), *Johnson*, KS 30 Dec (ML), *Douglas*, KS 16 Jan (DS, GP, MM, RA), and *Wagoner*, OK 27 Feb (JWA). Southernmost Thayer's Gulls were in Oklahoma, where the species is only casual; 1–2 were in *Oklahoma* 12–23 Feb (PV, JWA), with one in *Sequoyah* 4 Feb (BH). Somewhat rare in Kansas, 6 Thayer's were identified 15 Dec–16 Jan (*vide* LM). A gull in Oklahoma 22 Jan–12 Feb was carefully scrutinized and reported as a Thayer's/Kumlien's intergrade (JL, BH, PV, m.ob.), while a bird identified as a second-winter Iceland Gull was at McConaughy 12 Dec–2 Jan (HA, m.ob.), apparently the same bird that was there last year. Now regular, but still rare in the Region, no fewer than 8 Lesser Black-backed Gulls were reported, including 4 in *Oklahoma* 13 Feb (JWA). Regionally, 12 Glaucous were reported, with singles south to *Tulsa*, OK 18–26 Dec (DHo, TM) and *Mayes*, OK 1 Jan (JD). The only Great Black-backed Gull reported was the continuing imm. at McConaughy 19 Dec (*vide* SJD).

Nebraska's first mid-winter record of White-winged Dove was one in *Scotts Bluff* 9 Feb (ECT). Ten Inca Doves made a high count in *Johnston*, OK 19 Dec (CB), where it is still a rare species. Most unexpected were the 2 Common Ground-Doves wintering at *Red Slough* through 17 Feb (DA, MW, BH, m.ob.); this species is still only of casual oc-

currence in the Region. Another species creeping northward is Greater Roadrunner: one apparently wintering in Cowley, KS was exceptional (MT, *vide* LM). Of few Snowy Owls reported, 3 were in Kansas: one found dead 13 Dec in Hodgeman had apparently hit a tower support-wire (*vide* BSa); one was in Sumner 8–25 Jan (DS, m.ob.); and one was in Coffey 28 Feb (LF, RM). The only Northern Saw-whet Owl reported was in Chase, NE 20 Dec (SJD).

Unprecedented was a very late Common Nighthawk in Tulsa, OK 5 Dec (JC). Of 3 Rufous Hummingbirds braving Dec weather, one continued its stay in Johnson, KS from 27 Nov until 29 Dec (*vide* MM); the others were in more friendly climes in Tulsa, OK 4 Dec (P&JE, MK) and Oklahoma, OK 5–12 Dec (BHN). Lewis's Woodpeckers sometimes appear in winter far to the e. of their usual range; one such bird was in Cleveland, OK 27 Dec–17 Jan (PF, m.ob.). Far more than the usual number of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, about 21, were in se. Nebraska, n. to Dixon 8 Jan (BFH); one in Cimarron, OK 15 Dec (JAG) was a rare occurrence so far to the west.

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH WAXWINGS

A Regional "zootie" at any time, a Black Phoebe wintered at Red Slough 29 Dec–22 Feb (JS, BH, DA, m.ob.). Phoebes hanging north were an Eastern in Sedgwick, KS 18 Dec (PJ) and 2 Say's in Cimarron, OK 15 Dec (JAG). Clark's Nutcracker, noted several times out of range in fall 2004, appeared in nw. Nebraska in invasion numbers, with 40–50 in the Sowbelly Canyon area of Sioux 5 Feb (KD) and other counts in that area of up to 30 birds 21 Dec–25 Jan (EB, B&DW, HKH). The last such irruption was in 1996–1997. Normally early in spring, 3 Purple Martins in Cleveland, OK 21 Feb (SH) were pushing the envelope, but not as much as the 3 Tree Swallows in Washington, OK 27 Feb (DR, JL, BG).

Black-capped Chickadees continue to be very scarce in s.-cen. Nebraska e. to Lancaster (LE, JG). The only reports of Mountain Chickadee were of two widely-separated singles in Scotts Bluff, NE through the period (*vide* AK, P&DD). Bushtits staged a minor incursion into sw. Kansas and w. Oklahoma, with 5 as far n. as Wichita, KS 4–15 Dec (SS, DB, HA), as many as 34 in Morton, KS 1 Jan (SP, m.ob.) and 10–15 in Stevens, KS 5 Dec (HA); 3 were on the plains in Cimarron, OK 15 Dec (JAG). Good numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches, significantly more than usual, were reported in Nebraska and Kansas, with best being the C.B.C. count of an amazing 105 at Wichita 18 Dec (PJ). Three White-breasted Nuthatches in Sowbelly Canyon, Sioux, NE 21 Dec were of the expected resident subspecies *nelsoni*, but one



Described to science in 1883, *kumlieni* Iceland Gull has been a taxonomic puzzle almost ever since. This bird (photographed 12 February 2005 at Lake Hefner, Oklahoma City) has a rather flattened head and squared nape (more typical of Thayer's Gull), though the mostly unmarked pale tertials and overall paleness suggest Kumlien's. Photograph by Pat Velte.

in nearby Harrison was of the e. subspecies *cookei* (EB); the latter occurs during winter in areas of the state where the species does not breed. The extent of movement of *nelsoni* in winter in Nebraska is not well known. Pygmy Nuthatch numbers in the canyons of Sioux, NE were exceptional, described as "amazing" on 28 Dec (B&DW), and 75 were estimated in Monroe and Sowbelly Canyons 21 Dec (EB).

Winter Wrens apparently wintered n. to Cherry, NE, where 3 were found along the Niobrara River 15–18 Dec and another 19 Feb (JED). Winter Wrens also put on a surprising show at the w. edge of the winter range in nw. Oklahoma; one to 2 were found on various dates between 16 Dec and 24 Jan in Woods, Grant, Woodward, Ellis, and Dewey (DT). Unprecedented for the location and date were 2 Sedge Wrens at Quivira 8 Dec (SS). Another wren making an appearance outside its usual winter range was Marsh Wren, 4–5 of which were rather far n. along the Niobrara River in Cherry, NE 15–18 Dec and 18–19 Feb (JED). Rare as far nw. as w. Nebraska in Dec, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet in Scotts Bluff 18 Dec (*vide* AK), one at McConaughy 19 Dec (*vide* SJD), and another in Dundy 29 Dec (TJW) were unexpected. Also

very late were 2 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers in Johnston, OK 19 Dec (CB).

Townsend's Solitaires were widely reported e. to Lancaster, NE (*vide* JG), Geary, KS (RA, GP), Sedgwick, KS (PJ), and Cleveland, OK (JAG, CBy, B&SD). Another quite northerly half-hardy was a Hermit Thrush in Cherry, NE 15 Dec (JED). Remarkable numbers of American Robins occur in the extensive cedar areas of cen. Nebraska in late fall: 10,216 were tallied on the Calamus C.B.C. 1 Jan (*vide* DH) and "thousands" were in se. Lincoln cedar canyons 25 Jan (TJW). The only Varied Thrushes reported were in Kansas: singles in Sedgwick 18 Dec–18 Jan (PJ, m.ob.) and Pottawatomie 18–29 Jan (GR, m.ob.). Five Gray Catbirds lingered into winter; northernmost were singles in Nebraska at McConaughy 2 Jan (HA) and in Furnas 22 Jan (LO). A late Sage Thrasher was in Kiowa, OK 21 Dec (JAG), and Brown Thrashers tarried far to the n. in Lincoln, NE 10 Jan (*vide* TJW) and Morrill, NE 1 Feb (*vide* AK). A Sprague's Pipit was late in Kiowa, OK 21 Dec (JAG).

WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

Lingering warblers included an Orange-crowned in Riley, KS 14 Jan (DM), a Prairie

SA For the first time in many years, Bohemian Waxwings staged an invasion into the Region, although sightings were limited to the w. portions of the Region. The largest numbers were in Nebraska, where best C.B.C. totals were 237 at McConaughy 19 Dec (*vide* SJD) and 225 at Crawford 20 Dec (B&DW). Kansas reported a total of 10–15, with one e. to Sumner 18 Dec (TH). Some 4–5 Bohemians made it to Oklahoma, where extremely rare: 2–3 in Texas 2 Dec (DA, BH, KM, JS) and 2 e. as far as Carter 25 Dec (BF).



Furnishing a second Regional record in the Southern Great Plains was this Black Phoebe (here 31 December 2004) at Beaver's Bend State Park, McCurtain County, Oklahoma, where it apparently spent the winter. Photograph by Matt White.

Warbler in *Sedgwick*, KS 30 Oct–15 Dec (PG, m.ob.), and an American Redstart through 14 Dec in *Oklahoma*, OK (JSh). Also unexpected, despite their relative hardiness, were 3 Pine Warblers in Kansas in Jan: singles in *Sedgwick* 23 Dec–18 Jan (RB), *Harvey* 5–15 Jan (GF), and *Geary* 30 Jan (RA, GP); somewhat westerly were 2 in *Oklahoma/Lincoln*, OK 19 Dec (MH) and one in *Comanche*, OK 29 Dec (JAG, SG). A Summer Tanager present through the period in *Cherokee*, OK (BD, MWa) attended a feeding station.

Green-tailed Towhees occasionally winter e. of the usual range; one was in *Kingfisher*, OK 9–16 Jan (N&JV, PV, m.ob.), and a Canyon Towhee was a bit farther e. than expected in *Morton*, KS 1 Jan (SP). Nebraska's 4th documented winter Savannah Sparrow was in *Washington* 10 Jan (JT), and a Chipping Sparrow was a rare winter find in *Barber*, KS 2 Jan (PJ). Furnishing one of only about a dozen Regional records was a Golden-crowned Sparrow at a *Douglas*, KS feeder 18 Dec (GP). Southernmost Snow Buntings were one at *Quivira* 14 Dec (MR) and 9 in *Mitchell*, KS 15 Dec (MR, SS, MT, RP). Rusty Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds were more in evidence in midwinter than usual in se. Nebraska, and cowbirds arrived earlier than usual, with one in *Richardson* 15 Feb (CCa).

Other fringillids were not to be outdone in the Region this winter. Counts of Purple Finch were excellent this year, with many found into the cen. and w. stretches of the Region, including about 129 in *Scotts Bluff*, NE



Among the array of half-hardies braving potential catastrophe this season was a Green-tailed Towhee in *Kingfisher* County, Oklahoma, here photographed 5 January 2005. This represents one of few state records of this rather secretive species away from the Oklahoma Panhandle. Photograph by Pat Velte.

(fide AK), 62 in *Geary*, KS 19 Dec (CO, m.ob.), and 3 as far w. as *Rogers Mills* 11 Jan

(DGi). However, the only Cassin's Finches reported were 2 at *McConaughy* 19 Dec (fide SJD) and one in *Morton*, KS 1 Jan (SP). Good numbers of Red Crossbills were also reported throughout the Region, with the exception of s. Oklahoma. The only reports of White-winged Crossbill were of singles in *Platte*, NE 30 Jan (LR, RH) and *Rooks*, KS 31 Jan (MZ, MS). Common Redpolls were reported 4 Dec–7 Feb in low numbers, about 40 in all, s. to *Grant* (SS, DB, HA) and *Sedgwick* (TH) in Kansas. Pine Siskins were present in very good numbers, particularly westward.

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SA Perhaps the biggest event of the season was a limited influx of Pine Grosbeaks onto the w. Great Plains. This species has been essentially unrecorded from the Region for about 35 years. About 18 birds appeared in the Region this winter, most in Kansas, where one was in *Sedgwick* 6 Nov (RB), another was in *Morton* 13 Nov (SP, CH, MR, JSi), up to 6 were in *Grant* 4 Dec+ (SS, KH, m.ob.), 2 were in *Wichita* 4–11 Dec (SS, DB, HA), and 3 were in *Russell* 19 Dec (MR). Previously only hypothetical in Oklahoma, singles were found in *Cimarron* 11–12 Dec (JW, NH, MF, EBo) and 5 Jan (MT, MR) and in *Texas* 31 Dec–25 Jan (JW, NH, SM, BH). Singles were also in *Perkins*, NE 20 Dec (SJD) and far to the e. in *Lancaster*, NE 19 Dec (LE). The latter record and the *Sedgwick*, KS report may suggest that these birds were not all derived from the Rocky Mountain populations.