

British Columbia

Yet another mild winter passed, with the only icy winter interlude worth mentioning coming in the first two weeks of January. As in the past few winters, the transition to mild conditions was sudden; indeed, coastal regions received a record hosing for a week or so. Snowfall was light everywhere, and many valley bottom locations were snow-free by the end of the period, even in the far northeastern corner, where they experienced their warmest February in nearly 40 years!

LOONS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

Casual in winter, an imm. American White Pelican was in White Rock 2 & 5 Jan (ph. VO et al.); an astounding flock of 15 was seen flying low over nearshore waters into a strong headwind at the Iona Jetty 17 Jan (CCo, SA, †JT); and yet another group of 3 was seen along the Vancouver Waterfront 3 Feb (†EW). Following an impressive autumn invasion, a few Cattle Egrets lingered into winter, with 2 at Castlegar 5 Dec (GL) and a single at Creston 24 Dec (LVD). The latter location had a flock of 22 that had dwindled down, with several reported dead (*vide* GSD). Tundra Swans showed early signs of movement, with 10 appearing on the lake in front of Vernon Creek 28 Jan (DGC). Open water attracted 2 imm. Trumpeter Swans well n. to Dawson Creek 2 & 14 Feb (MP), and a few Mallards managed to remain n., with a male in Dawson Creek 2 Jan (MP) and a female 2 & 14 Feb on Swan L. (MP). Red-breasted Mergansers were early, with 3 at the mouth of Vernon Creek 6 Feb (CS). A single Ruddy Duck furnished a first winter record for the

Williams Lake area 19 Dec (PR).

Remarkably early were 6 Turkey Vultures feeding on after-birth of newborn calves in Salmon Arm 10 Feb (TH). A juvenile/first-winter eagle of undetermined species was found in the Goldstream estuary near Victoria 8 Dec (vt. DCo) and seen irregularly through at least 21 Dec (m.ob.). Numerous worldwide raptor experts who have viewed the videotape suggest that this may be a Steller's Sea-Eagle × Bald Eagle hybrid. Enough features of the bird are not right for either species, but its large size and bright yellow bill were striking and also perplexing. It is hoped that the bird may return in subsequent years for further study. Some have speculated that this bird may be the offspring of an Alaskan Steller's Sea-Eagle that has taken up with local Bald Eagles. Small numbers of Gyrfalcons were reported from scattered locations around the province, with the most noteworthy a dark-morph bird found dead near Tofino, for a 4th local record, 13 Dec (*vide* AD).

Wild Turkey is expanding in range and increasing in number. Well established in the East Kootenays, in Creston, and up the e. side of Kootenay L., birds are now moving farther westward, with reports from Pend Oreille Valley near Trail; the Slokan and Arrow Lakes valleys (*vide* GSD); Kaslo, with 6 on their C.B.C.; and the West Kootenay winter bird count, which recorded 78. Casual in



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winter along the s. coast, a Marbled Godwit was discovered during the Victoria C.B.C. 18 Dec (m.ob.)

GULLS THROUGH FINCHES

Rare in the province, an ad. Little Gull was seen from the tip of the Iona Island South Jetty 23 Dec (†RTo). A first-winter Heermann's Gull continued along the Victoria waterfront for the entire winter count period yet was strangely absent during the record-breaking Victoria C.B.C. 18 Dec. Iceland Gulls were found in the s. interior and from the Vancouver area, with singles in Delta 2 Jan & 6 Feb (†MT); Brunswick Point 10 Feb (†BS et al.); Iona 13-19 Feb (ph. TP); Vernon 3 Feb (DGC); and Shannon Lake, Westbank 7 Feb (MF). The ad. Lesser Black-backed Gull present in Vernon during Nov made an appearance at Shannon Lake, Westbank 10 Dec (†MF). An annual winter visitor to the Vancouver area, an ad. Slaty-backed Gull was in Delta 8 Jan (†RTo, CI). Great Gray Owls and Northern Hawk Owls were reported from widely scattered locations around the province, suggesting a widespread movement, although they were not present in large numbers. Northern Pygmy-Owls, on the other hand, were relatively scarce this winter. Boreal Owls made unprecedented movements into lowland locations, with



This *Plegadis* ibis, which appears to be an immature and is likely a White-faced Ibis, marks the first record of the genus for the Queen Charlotte Islands 13 (here)-14 October 2004. Photograph by Brian Charman.

singles at Reifel 1 Dec (ph. JI et. al.), at Johnson's Landing 17 Jan (GS), and at a Vernon tree farm 5 Dec (TF, RM, ph. DGC et al.).

An ad. Sky Lark (subspecies unknown) was discovered near the mouth of the Serpentine R., Surrey 10–13 Jan (ph. BS et al.) for a 2nd Vancouver record since 1975. Horned Larks were found in areas where they are very scarce in winter: a single was in Lardeau 21–26 Jan (MJ), and 4 were at Dawson Creek 2 Jan (MP). As has been the case in recent years, there was a late-winter influx of Barn Swallows. The vast majority are found along the s. coast, with very few finding their way into the s. interior. Very late were 2 birds in Kamloops 19 Dec (RH); other noteworthy interior records included 2 at Gellatly Bay, Westbank 20 Jan (BC et al.); a single at 100 Mile House 28 Jan (TG); 2 near Oliver 5 Feb (ED et al.); 2 in Penticton 17 Feb (FW); and 2 at Vaseux L. 26 Feb (TF, RM). By far this is the most widespread invasion the interior has ever seen during winter. Coastal areas furnished 118 records from late Jan into early Mar, with a high count of 18 on Sea I. 2 Feb (PC, MT).

Rarely found in winter, a Rock Wren was near Vernon 9 Jan (TF). A holdover from the fall, a single Cape May Warbler re-

mained at Williams Lake through 11 Dec (ph. AR) for a first provincial winter record. Lingered Yellow-rumped Warblers included singles in Nelson 8 Jan (JA) and Creston 27 Dec (m.ob.). Casual in winter, a Wilson's Warbler and a Western Tanager remained in the Fernwood area of Victoria 1 Dec–1 Jan (CSH); this represents the 5th winter record of Western Tanager for the province. An ad. male McKay's Bunting was periodically found along the Iona Island South Jetty 4–8 & 14–29 Dec (†KL et al.), furnishing a 2nd record for the province and the first Canadian C.B.C. record. This male was traveling with a small flock of Snow Buntings, one of them thought by many to be a female McKay's Bunting—which naturally produced much controversy and careful study. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are rare at anytime of year away from the Peace R. area; amazingly, 2 were found along the s. coast this winter: an ad. male in Coquitlam 20 Dec–1 Jan (SV et al.), for a first Vancouver winter record, and a second-year male in Tofino at a feeder 8 Feb (ph. LS, PL). There is only one previous winter record for the island.

Pine Grosbeaks were more prevalent this winter at lower elevations, and nowhere was this more evident than in Victoria, where a flock of 30 were on Jocelyn Hill 16 Dec

(MMG). Very rare in winter, a Chipping Sparrow was a first for Kelowna's C.B.C. 18–22 Dec (†DGC et al.). A Golden-crowned Sparrow furnished a first winter record for the West Kootenays in Castlegar 16 Feb (PMc). Casual in winter, 3 Yellow-headed Blackbirds were just n. of Vernon 2 Jan (JQ et al.).

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This first-winter eagle at Goldstream estuary near Victoria, British Columbia 8 December 2004 was large enough and showed such a large bill that observers were led to suspect a hybrid, possibly a Steller's Sea-Eagle × Bald Eagle. Photographs from videotape by Darren Copley.

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