

Prairie Provinces



Rudolf F. Koes

The winter of 2005–2006 was the mildest on record for Canada, with both Alberta and Saskatchewan registering 6° C above normal. It was so balmy in January that ground-squirrel activity was noted in Alberta. A few brief cold snaps occurred in December, with a somewhat longer spell in the second half of February. Snow cover ranged from above-average in southeastern Manitoba to almost non-existent in much of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Several species established first winter records, particularly in Manitoba. Winter finches were at their lowest levels in decades, whereas several owl species were locally common.

WATERFOWL THROUGH RAPTORS

A Cackling Goose at Winnipeg, MB 24 Nov–2 Jan provided the first provincial winter record (RN, JP, m.ob., ph.). Others were noted on C.B.C.s at Estevan, SK and Gardiner Dam, SK, and 5 were reported in Calgary 28 Jan (RW). A swan at Windygates, MB 28 Feb may well have been a Trumpeter, given the early date (*fide* AS). Two Northern Shovelers overwin-

tered at Frank L., AB (m.ob.). An imm. male King Eider at L. Minnewanka, Banff N.P. 17–26 Dec was found predated on the latter date (PP, RS, TF, JR, m.ob., ph.). It represented only the 2nd record for Alberta, the other being an 1894 specimen! A lone White-winged Scoter at Great Falls, MB 1–3 Dec (PT, m.ob.) and 2 at Cold L., AB 10 Dec (TH, m.ob.) were late. A Ruddy Duck overwintered at Frank L. (m.ob.). Wintering waterbirds at Wabamun L., AB included 15 Tundra Swans, a Trumpeter Swan, 10 Greater Scaup, a White-winged Scoter, 300 Common Mergansers, 2 Horned Grebes, a Red-necked Grebe, 7 Western Grebes, 2 Double-crested Cormorants, and 240 American Coots (*fide* MH).

A total of 14 Wild Turkeys on C.B.C.s at Broadview, Kyle and Leader, SK were found away from established populations and presumably resulted from recent releases. A tardy Pacific Loon was retrieved for rehabilitation just across the Saskatchewan border near Flin Flon, MB 4 Dec (*fide* KD). Great Blue Herons lingered at Chain Lakes P.P., AB until at least 2 Feb (J&MM) and at Elie, MB until 29 Dec (DS). One near Elkhorn, MB 27 Feb may well have been an early migrant (KE). An injured Turkey Vulture at New Bergthal, MB 9 Dec provided the first confirmed winter record for the province (*fide* AS). A Northern Harrier at Douglas, MB 27 Feb was probably an early migrant (ES). Continuing a trend of the past few years, Sharp-shinned Hawks wintered in numbers, with sightings at Brandon, Dauphin, Holland, Kleefeld and Winnipeg, all in Manitoba, and at Saskatoon, SK. Rough-legged Hawks lingered in numbers until early January, with a few remaining through the season. Six Gyrfalcons were reported in Manitoba,

while 4 visited Saskatchewan. Manitoba had two Prairie Falcons and Saskatchewan 6. Both species were well represented in s. Alberta.

SHOREBIRDS THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Two Wilson's Snipe wintered at Mt. Lorette, AB (PS). Few gulls lingered, but Cold L. harbored 10 Ring-billed, 22 Herring, one Thayer's, and one Glaucous 10 Dec (TH, m.ob.). Burgeoning numbers of Eurasian Collared-Doves were found in Saskatchewan, with up to 20 at Estevan (KH), 3 at Kyle 2 Jan (*fide* DZ), 30 at Moose Jaw 29 Dec (DC), 25 at Swift Current 31 Dec (*fide* RJ), and 4 at Weyburn 18 Dec (D&VT). Two were at Winkler, MB, a new location, 27 Feb+ (LBr). Up to 8 Mourning Doves frequented one Estevan location (KH).

The mild weather triggered one Winnipeg Great Horned Owl pair to lay eggs by mid-Jan, record-early by a month and a half, based on photographs of month-old young in mid-Mar (ph. DSw). Snowy Owls were present in good numbers across the s. part of all three provinces, with up to 8 in a day noted e. of Calgary (TK), while 10 were near Kronau, SK 20 Dec (SW) and 11 were spotted between Regina and Swift Current 25 Dec (GK). Great Gray Owls and Northern Hawk Owls were prominent in se. Manitoba, particularly the latter species, with a maximum count of 34 on 28 Feb (PT, RK). Elsewhere, these species were scarcer than in the past few years, although 7 hawk owls were found on the Squaw Rapids, SK C.B.C. 5 Jan (GW, MS). An amazing concentration of Short-eared Owls was present at Beaverhill L., AB. Up to 100 birds could be seen in one area; hundreds



This Cackling Goose, here with two Canada Geese, lingered on the Assiniboine River at Winnipeg, Manitoba until 2 January 2006 (here on the Winnipeg Christmas Bird Count, 18 December 2005). It provided the province with its first winter record of the species. Photograph by Christian Artuso.

SA A remarkable trio of wren species highlighted a list of unusual lingering passerines in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. A **Carolina Wren** first seen at Delta, MB in summer 2005 survived until 1 Feb (HD, m.ob., ph. CA), while another at Pinawa, MB was present mid-Nov-22 Jan (AD, LC et al., NB, ph.), furnishing the 2nd and 3rd winter records for the province and Region. Also at Delta, a **Winter Wren** 28 Feb (HD) was likely the same bird seen there 20–21 Nov 2005 (BC, LD), finally living up to its name with a first Manitoba winter record. Another provincial winter first was a **Marsh Wren** at Stalwart Marsh, SK 23 Jan (*vide* BL), as was an **Orange-crowned Warbler** at a Lorette, MB feeder Nov–16 Feb (MW, m.ob.). Almost as unusual was Saskatchewan's 2nd winter **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, observed at Coldwell Park 17 Dec (WR, JJ).

were likely present (LP, m.ob.). Gradual drying of the lake had apparently created ideal habitat for voles. A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Winnipeg 28 Dec–21 Mar provided Manitoba's first winter record (K&MK, m.ob., ph.).

PASSERINES

Horned Lark migration was noted as early as late Jan in Alberta (TK). Boreal Chickadees were outside their usual haunts at Pike L., SK 11 Dec (DN) and 6 Jan (FR), plus two Regina locations (BE et al.). A Pygmy Nuthatch visiting a feeder at Treherne, MB during Jan was well described but unfortunately not confirmed (*vide* LV).

An American Dipper at Eastend, SK 4–28 Dec was a good find (HJ, BG, m.ob.). Golden-crowned Kinglets remained in larger numbers than usual in s. Manitoba, with multiples noted at Brandon (CC), Grosse Isle (KG), Morden (LB), Pinawa (RZ), Seven Sisters Falls (m.ob.), Winnipeg (m.ob.), and elsewhere.

Varied Thrushes were prominent in Manitoba, with 7 birds reported, whereas only 2 were noted in Saskatchewan. For the 2nd year

widespread and in high numbers, e.g., 35,298 on the Edmonton, AB C.B.C. and 20,012 on the Calgary C.B.C., both on 18 Dec, and a flock of 2000+ at Saskatoon 18 Feb (m.ob.). A late Cape May Warbler was at Calgary 1 Dec (BJ); several others were reported without details in Alberta until mid-month.

An Eastern Towhee at Regina 26 Dec–3 Jan was out of range and a winter rarity (SW, BL, JC, m.ob.). The Fort Walsh, SK C.B.C. tallied 92 American Tree Sparrows, including a flock of 57 on 17 Dec (GW, JCI, BE). A Swamp Sparrow lingered at St. Norbert, MB until early Feb (AA, m.ob.), while a Song Sparrow was at Eden, MB 18 Dec (RD). Calgary had single White-crowned Sparrows 12 Dec–26 Feb (JG) and 24 Dec (A&DW). Snow Bunting numbers were poor in s. Alberta (TK).

A Northern Cardinal present since fall at Regina disappeared in mid-Feb; 4 were noted in s. Manitoba (m.ob.). Western Meadowlarks rarely survive through winter in Manitoba, but singles at Grosse Isle from fall until 24 Feb+ (J&JM, KG) and near Virden 18 Feb (CH) may well have done so. Icterids were

(TK).

Feeders in small towns across s. Manitoba attracted dozens of American Goldfinches, but otherwise winter finches were exceedingly scarce through the Region. Crossbills went almost unreported, and Common Redpolls were at their lowest in decades. Not one Hoary Redpoll was reported in the south.

Observers (provincial compilers in boldface) C. Artuso, A. Aug, L. Blanchette, L. Braun (LBr), N. Bremner, Brad Carey, J. Clarke, D. Cork, L. Crosthwaite, C. Cuthbert, L. de March, R. Demey, H. den Haan, K. De Smet, M. De Timmerman, A. Drabek, K. Elliott, B. Ewart, T. Fujimori, K. Gardner, B. Gebhardt, J. Goldsmith, M. Harrison, K. Hedegard, C. Hernandez, T. Hindmarch, J. Jensen, R. Jensen, B. Johner, H. Johnson, R. Koes, T. Korozyk, G. Krätzig, K. & M. Krieger, B. Luter-



Another winter first for Manitoba, this Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was found 28 December 2005 and survived until at least 21 March (here 6 February) 2006 at a suet feeder in downtown Winnipeg. The previous latest fall date was 29 October. Photograph by Christian Artuso.



This Pacific Loon was rescued just across the Saskatchewan border near Flin Flon, Manitoba on 4 December 2005 and sent for rehabilitation to Winnipeg, Manitoba. It gave the province its first winter record of the species. Photograph by Harvey Schmidt.

in a row, a Northern Mockingbird wintered in Alberta. Found 10 Dec at Nanton, it remained into Mar (KO, RR, m.ob., ph.). A Brown Thrasher at Fort Qu'Appelle 17 Dec furnished the 4th C.B.C. record of the species for Saskatchewan. Bohemian Waxwings were

generally scarce, but a feedlot near Strathmore, AB held a Red-winged Blackbird, 2 Rusty Blackbirds, 7 Brewer's Blackbirds, and a Brown-headed Cowbird 31 Dec (BW). Most of these birds, including the cowbird, a winter rarity, were still present at season's end

bach, J. & J. Minaker, J. & M. Macdonald, D. Neves, R. Nickel, K. Ottenbreit, J. Peters, P. Poole, L. Priestly, W. Renaud, J. Rogers, R. Rowell, F. Roy, E. Schmitz, A. Schmitt, P. Sherrington, R. Sommerhalder, D. Stepler, M. Stoffel, D. Swayze (DSw), P. Taylor, D. & V. Thomas, L. Veelma, G. Wapple, S. Weir, A. & D. Wieckowski, B. Wilson, M. Wojnowski, R. Worona, R. Zach, D. Zazelenchuk. 🐦

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