

# British Columbia



Donald G. Cecile

The season began and ended with cold snaps, but the bulk of the winter was yet another mild one. The most notable event was the month-long spate of rain in the South Coastal sections beginning mid-December. Valley snowfall was meager everywhere in the interior. It was a stormy season for the outer coast, with Solander Island off the northwestern side of Vancouver Island recording peak gusts exceeding 130 km/h on 14 days between 1 December and 4 February, topping out at a wild 172 km/h on 31 January. The generally mild weather allowed many species to remain farther north than usual. Most notable this winter, however, was the absence of finches.

## WATERFOWL THROUGH DOVES

Hanging out with both Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, an ad. Bewick's Swan was in Delta 20 Jan–21 Feb (ph. RTo et al.). A male Gadwall was late in Williams L. 2 Dec (PR). Northern Pintails remained unusually far n. and late this winter. A male was in Prince George 10 Dec (SL, CA), later joined by a female 7 Jan (SL, NK), a first winter checklist record; one was at the n. end of Kootenay L. 6 Jan (MJ); and 3 overwintered at Williams L. for the first time ever (PR). Long-tailed Ducks are rare in the s. interior, so a female was notable at Robson 16 Dec (MMc). Few scoters were reported from the interior this winter, one exception being a White-winged Scoter rather late in Williams L. 2 Dec (PR). Several Red-breasted Mergansers found in inland locations remained into Feb, such as one at Lardeau (MJ).

An imm. Yellow-billed Loon was on Woods Lake 14 Dec (CC, GW, CS), rare for the interior, particularly in the winter season. Clark's Grebes were more numerous along the coast this winter; one offshore from Es-

quimalt Lagoon furnished a first Victoria record in 20 years (*vide* DA), and yet another was at the Little Qualicum Estuary 13 Dec (GLM et al.); probably the same individual was seen at the mouth of the Englishman R. Estuary 4 Jan (GLM). Turkey Vultures returning to the interior tied last year's record-early date with a single bird in Naramata 10 Feb (JT). Gyrfalcons were more prevalent in the s. interior this winter than last, with at least 3 present, one just n. of Vernon 3 Dec (DGC). Dunlin is very rare in the interior in winter; one was found at Castlegar 30 Dec–3 Jan (MJ, JA). In a flooded corn stubble field near Parksville, a Ruff was discovered 23 Dec (†GLM); winter sightings of this species are rare, and this may represent the first winter record for the province. Winter coastal storms in mid-late Dec resulted in Red Phalaropes wrecking in coastal areas: at least 10 birds were found onshore at Carmanah Light Station 23 Dec (JE), and flocks of live birds reported included 54 at Jordan R. and 19 at Wifin Spit 30 Dec (GD et al.). This was a fine year for coastal Slaty-backed Gulls, with single ads. near Courtenay 4–5 Dec (JB, GLM) in Chilliwack 22 Jan (ph. GG); others were noted in early spring. Vernon's Lesser Black-backed Gull reappeared 2 Dec–14 Jan (ph. DGC) at the mouth of Vernon Cr; it later appeared along the Penticton waterfront 2–3 Feb (ph. LN) and was sporadically seen back in Vernon through the end of the period (DGC). The small Cawston resident population of Eurasian Collared-Doves was counted at a record-high 174 on 29 Dec (*vide* DB).

## OWLS THROUGH FINCHES

Snowy Owls had a good showing this winter throughout the interior and were particularly prevalent in the Boundary Bay area. Northern Hawk Owls were reported in singles from around the interior in average numbers, whereas Northern Pygmy-Owls were very scarce. Northern Saw-whet Owls were numerous, especially in the s. Okanagan, where a stunning 52 were tallied 27 Dec (RJC, RCa, CD, BS) during the Vaseux Lake C.B.C. While this doubles the previous Canadian C.B.C. record, it is just shy of the overall C.B.C. record of 61 (*vide* RJC). Anna's Hummingbirds wander as far n. as Prince George almost annually, but they rarely survive; one was in P.G. 16 Dec (*vide* EL). A Rufous Hummingbird was very late in Victoria 3 Dec (DA). A hybrid male Northern Flicker may not have survived the winter n. of Dawson Creek had it not learned to feed on suet (MD).

Two exceptionally late Say's Phoebes were found along the w. side of Osoyoos 1 Jan (DH). Indicating an increase in numbers in

the Kootenays, 9 Blue Jays were tallied on the Creston C.B.C. 29 Dec. American Crows rarely stay the winter in the Peace R. area, but 6 were still in Chetwynd 2 Dec (MP). Common Ravens tallied at a roost near Bessborough came to an astounding 2697 on 25 Feb (MP), by far the largest roost ever recorded in the province. Northern Rough-winged Swallows have occasionally participated in the late-winter swallow invasion, and this year 2 were found at the Carmanah Point Lightstation 15 Feb (JE). Two Barn Swallows were at Swan L., Victoria 23 Jan (CSa); 3 were along the S. Thompson Rd. e. of Kamloops 26 Jan (JBr); and a single endured -4° C weather in Fort St. James 12 Feb (RR). This winter's swallow invasion was modest compared to the past few winter seasons; whether this pertains to less reporting or an actual decrease in the number of birds involved is unknown.

Ruby-crowned Kinglets were present in unprecedented numbers in the s. interior, with a high count of 7 along Mission Cr., Kelowna 7 Jan (RyT). An American Robin that probably stayed the winter in Dawson Creek, where very rare, was found 22 Feb (MP). An exceptionally late Gray Catbird was hiding out in one of the oxbows just n. of Osoyoos 8 Dec (†LN). A rather stunning find was a Northern Mockingbird on the Merritt C.B.C. 3 Jan (ph. MoMc et al.), which had been in the area in late Dec feeding on Mountain Ash berries; yet another was in Cranbrook 7 Jan (GR). American Pipits are very rare in winter in the interior; 5 were along the Okanagan River Channel just n. of Osoyoos 8 Dec (LN), and one was along the Nechako R. 18 Dec (ph. DD, TH, HA), a first local winter record. A Cape May Warbler was a terrific winter find in Nakusp 2–27 Jan (CC, KS; ph. GSD). Also late in Nakusp was a Myrtle Warbler 2 Jan (CC, KS). The province's first Pine Warbler, found at the tail end of the fall season, was last seen at Lillooet 2 Dec (vt. IR). A Western Meadowlark spent mid-Dec–mid-Jan at Cluculz L. (ph. DW et al.), and another 5 wintered in Quesnel (*vide* PR), both sites rather far n. for wintering meadowlarks. Although Common Grackles are a relatively common sight in the Peace R. area in summer, they are extremely rare in winter; one spent 1–7 Jan in Arras (MP). Despite the lack of winter finches across the province, American Goldfinches were still found in relatively good numbers, e.g., 46 at Milburn L. 26 Feb (*vide* CA) and 5–6 at Buckhorn 11 Feb (ph. MK), the latter a first winter record for the Prince George area. Casual in the province, a Brambling was discovered in Duncan 28 Jan+ (DM).

Contributors (subregional editors in bold-face): David Allinson, Janice Arndy, Cathy

Antoniazzi (Prince George), Helen Antoniazzi, Jack Bowling (weather summary), Jan Bradshaw, John Brighton, Doug Brown, Richard J. Cannings, Russell Cannings, Chris Charlesworth, Chris Dale, Gabe David, Gary Davidson (Kootenays), Molly Donaldson, Dan Dunlop, Jerry Etkorn, Gordie

Gadsden, Todd Heakes, Donna Heard, Marlene Johnson, Elsie Lafreniere, Marilyn Kamp, Nancy Krueger, Steve Lawrence, Derrick Marven, Morva McMahon, Mike McMann, Guy L. Monty, Laure Neish, Mark Phinney (Peace River), Phil Ranson (Cariboo-Chilcotin), Randy Rawluk, Greg Ross,

Ian Routley, Bill Sampson, Chris Saunders, Chris Siddle, Kathy Smith, Rick Toochoin (Vancouver), Jim Turnbull, Dick Webster, Gwyneth Wilson. ☪

Donald G. Cecile, 7995 Wilson-Jackson Road, Vernon, British Columbia V1B 3N5, (dcecile@telus.net)

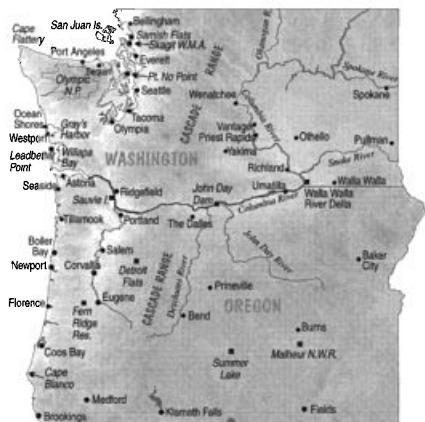
## Oregon & Washington

### WATERFOWL THROUGH RAILS

Emperor Geese "invaded" for the first time since 2001–2002, with 8 detected, all in w. Oregon, including 3 at Astoria 22 Feb (MP) and 2 at Eugene 12 Feb (C. Haskell). Prior to 1995, there were but two westside Blue Goose records, yet this year one was found again among the hordes of Snow Geese on Fir I., Skagit 12–25 Feb (CCx, SM, JB); these Snow Geese breed on Siberia's Wrangel I., and over the past decade, small numbers of Blue Geese have occurred annually at both Wrangel I. (K. Litvin) and that population's wintering areas in Skagit/Snohomish. As many as 10 peculiar geese, all of similar lineage, have appeared during late winter/early spring over the past few years in e. Washington's Columbia Basin (see N.A.B. 58: 423 and 59: 317). Careful study has revealed that these are hybrids, or backcrosses, between Snow (or Blue) and Canada Geese. This winter's birds appeared more like Blue Goose × Canada Goose hybrids than Snow × Canada: one near Moses L., Grant 16 Feb (ph. MB) and 2 at McNary N.W.R., Walla Walla 25 Feb (ph. SM, BF, M&MLD). Ross's Geese showed poorly away their normal se. Oregon haunts, with only 4 singles found, all on the westside; the Region has averaged 10 per winter over the past five years. Three interior westside Black Brant represented an average winter: Eugene, through the winter (S. Maulding), Shillapoo Bottoms, Clark 13 Jan (P&RS), and near Corvallis 31 Jan (M. Monroe). For the 2nd consecutive year, an apparent intergrade Brant, thought to be Black Brant × Dark-bellied Brant (*nigri-*

*cans* × *bernicla*), appeared in the Puget Trough, this one at Useless Bay, Island 31 Dec (ph. SM); in 1997, five mixed colonies of *bernicla* and *nigricans* were found in Siberia, and *nigricans* banded in Siberia have appeared in North America (Kear 2005, *Ducks, Geese, and Swans*; N.A.B. 59: 133). Two Greater White-fronted × Canada/Cackling Goose hybrids stopped near Moses L. 16 Feb (MB), while a Greater White-fronted Goose × Cackling Goose visited McNary N.W.R. 25 Feb (SM, BF); there is only one prior Regional record of this cross. Two Dusky Canada Geese (subspecies *occidentalis*) at Nisqually 15 Jan–7 Feb were in the P.T., where very rare during winter (T. Leukering, CCx, SM). Five *minima* Cackling Geese, rare in e. Washington, were at McNary N.W.R. 25 Feb (BF, SM, M&MLD), and 8 visited Moses L. 26 Feb (SM, DSc), these birds were likely migrants, and one wonders where they spent the winter.

Trumpeter Swans continue to thrive, with 1500 near Clear L., Skagit 12 Feb (B. Boyd) and an Oregon-record 62 at Airle, Polk 9 Jan (JG). It was a banner year for Bewick's Swans, with an ad. and an imm. near Mt. Vernon, Skagit 2 Jan (DD, ph. SM), a different ad. near Bow, Skagit 7 Jan (†SM, M. Axelson), an ad. on Fir I. 25 Feb (JB, †CCx), and an ad. near Centralia, Lewis 26 Feb (vt. BT); 4 or 5 birds were involved, adding to only three previous Washington records, the first of which was in 2002. This change appears real, not just a reflection of increased observer effort. A gathering of 300 Wood Ducks at Springfield, Lane 8 Feb was exceptional (LM). The male Falcatid



Steven Mlodinow | David Irons  
Bill Tweit

During December, most of the Region was 2–4° F below normal, except coastal regions, which were slightly warmer than average. The first few weeks were very dry (though in many places, very foggy), and then the rain began. From mid-December through January, the Region was drenched, Seattle having its third wettest January ever, while precipitation in Oregon was 86% above normal. February was a touch drier than typical and had near-normal temperatures, allowing birders to return to the field.

The season's main event went almost unnoticed. From Sora to Pacific Golden-Plover to Williamson's Sapsucker to Western Tanager, species considered mega-rarities during the winter season a decade ago are now almost greeted with yawns. The absence of northern species from this list, along with these overwintering birds, implies a real and climate-related phenomenon.

**Abbreviations:** FR.R. (Fern Ridge Res., Lane), N.S.C.B. (N. Spit Coos Bay, Coos); O.S. (Ocean Shores, Grays Harbor); P.T. (Puget Trough), W.V. (Willamette Valley), W.W.R.D. (Walla Walla R. delta, Walla Walla). "East-side" and "westside" indicate locations east and west of the Cascade crest, respectively.

**SA** In these pages, we've detailed the northward range expansion of many species, but one has escaped mention: Cackling Goose. Cackling Geese were rare winterers in our Region until the mid-1970s, when thousands (apparently mostly *B. h. taverneri*) suddenly appeared in the W.V. (B. Jarvis). In the late 1980s, these were joined by approximately 20,000 *B. h. minima* (almost the entire population at that time), which had abruptly shifted their wintering grounds from California to the W.V. and lower Columbia R., possibly due to drought in California (B. Jarvis). By the late 1990s this population had exploded to approximately 250,000 (*Birds of Oregon*, Marshall et al. 2003). In 1990, several hundred Cackling Geese started wintering about 160 km farther n. at Nisqually, with the flock increasing to about 1500 by the year 2000 (P&RS); this winter, the flock was approximately 60% *minima* and 40% *taverneri* (SM). About 800 Cacklings, with a similar mix, appeared 80 km farther n. in Kent, King this winter as well (SM, JB, CW), and a flock of 30 *taverneri* plus one *minima* was near the Canadian border at Ferndale, Whatcom 19 Feb (SM, JB, CCx). It seems likely that within a decade Cackling Geese will be wintering throughout the P.T.