

Northern Great Plains



Ron Martin

The operative word for the summer was "hot." Temperatures were well above average across the Region, and many areas suffered from serious drought. It was the third driest summer on record at Grand Forks, North Dakota. The most seriously affected drought areas were south-central North Dakota and central South Dakota, and those areas also suffered from the highest temperatures. Temperatures over 100° F were regular from Bismarck, North Dakota to Pierre, South Dakota. The all-time record for South Dakota was tied on July 15, when the temperature reached 120° F at Usta. In North Dakota, the temperature reached 114° in the south-central part of the state on July 30. The July temperature was 9.8° F above average in Glasgow, Montana. It was a good season for vagrants and rare breeding species. Dickcissel numbers were unprecedented in Montana.

GEESE THROUGH HAWKS

A Cackling Goose 14 Jun in *Burleigh*, ND provided the first summer record for this recently minted species (NC). Two Trumpeter Swans were at Kelly's Slough N.W.R., ND 14 Jun (EEF); breeding is expected soon for this species in North Dakota. A Ruddy Shelduck at the Grand Forks Lagoons 27 Jun-8 Jul (EEF) was almost certainly an escapee, although natural vagrancy (documented as near as Nunavut) in this wide-wandering species shows a clear peak at this season. A brood of Common Mergansers was on the Missouri R. near Cross Ranch S.P., ND 9 Jul (p.a., DNS). This furnished the first breeding record on the Missouri R. in North Dakota and the first confirmed breeding for the state since early in the 20th century. Ring-necked Pheasant numbers continued at very high levels in most of the Region. Greater Sage-Grouse broods were described as abundant in s. *Phillips*, MT during Jul (DP). A Common Loon with two chicks 14 Jun at Nelson Res., MT provided the first nesting for the area (KT). Confirmed breeding of 30 pairs of Red-necked Grebes in four ne. South Dakota counties was several times the number confirmed in the state in prior years. Colonial wa-

terbird surveys in South Dakota turned up 8000 Double-crested Cormorant nests (ND).

Great Egrets continue to expand northward and westward. A nest in *Grand Forks*, ND provided the first record for the county (EEF), and 17 were at Lord's L., *Bottineau*, ND 2 Jun (JPL). In Montana, singles were at *Freezeout L.* 4 Jun (BT) and near *Bowdoin N.W.R.* 6 Jun (DB). A Cattle Egret was far w. in *Butte*, SD 31 May (LDI).

Casual in South Dakota, a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was at Sand Lake N.W.R. 17 and 28 Jun (RDO, ND). A possible 3rd record for South Dakota, a Glossy Ibis was seen 17 Jun and 14 Jul in *Brown* (p.a., RDO, JSP, DS). Turkey Vultures continue to increase in n. North Dakota. Seven individuals at J. Clark



A third state record for Montana, this Curlew Sandpiper was at Freezeout Lake 17 July 2006. Photograph by Mike Schwitters.

Salyer N.W.R. 9 Jul led to speculation of nesting in the area (SDL). Young Broad-winged Hawks at *Waubay N.W.R.*, SD 21 Jul provided the first nesting record for *Day* (MO). A Rough-legged Hawk was late 4 Jun in *Fort Peck*, MT (EH, CC).

RAILS THROUGH GULLS

Yellow Rails were heard at seven locations in the *Sheyenne National Grassland* in *Richland* and *Ransom*, ND in late May and early Jun (DOL). A Virginia Rail at *Freezeout L.*, MT 3 Jul provided the first observation there in 10 years (MS). Casual in South Dakota, 3 Common Moorhens were in *Brown* 3-4 Jun (p.a., NS, ND).

Eight Long-billed Curlews near *McKenzie Slough*, *Burleigh*, ND 30 Jul-2 Aug provided the first sighting of multiple birds e. of the Missouri R. in North Dakota in decades (REM). A Red Knot 14 Jun at *McKenzie Slough*, *Burleigh* furnished the latest date for a spring migrant in North Dakota (NC). Casual in South Dakota, a Western Sandpiper was in *Sully* 28-30 Jul (p.a., RDO). Distant photographs of a possible Red-necked Stint

were taken at *Freezeout L.*, MT 8 Jul (p.a., MS). If accepted, these would provide the first record for Montana. Providing a 3rd record for Montana, a Curlew Sandpiper was photographed at *Freezeout L.* 17 Jul (p.a., MS). Early Buff-breasted Sandpipers were in *Ward*, ND 19 Jul (REM) and in *Sully*, SD 22 Jul (RDO). A new high count for the state, 202 Buff-breasted Sandpipers were in s.-cen. North Dakota 30 Jul, including 182 in a single field in *Burleigh* (REM).

The 16th report for North Dakota, a Little Gull was at *Devil's L.*, *Benson*, ND 1 Jun (p.a., PB). A juv. Bonaparte's Gull was seen on the early date of 18 Jul at the *Minot Lagoons*, *Ward*, ND (REM). The Glaucous Gull reported in the spring season in *Grand Forks*, ND remained through 2 Jun, providing the first summer record for the state (EEF). The 4th for North Dakota, a Great Black-backed Gull was videotaped at the *Grand Forks Lagoons* 30 Jun (p.a., EEF).

DOVES THROUGH THRASHERS

The 6th report for North Dakota, a White-winged Dove was in *Hettinger* 1-15 Jun (p.a., JS); and providing about the 8th report for Montana, another was photographed in *Ft. Peck* 27-28 Jun (p.a., JC). In South Dakota, a White-winged Dove 8 Jul in *Beadle* was thought to be the same individual seen there last summer (RDO). It was the best cuckoo season in many years in North Dakota and Montana. A new high count for North Dakota, 8 Yellow-billed Cuckoos were in the *Sheyenne National Grasslands* 12 Jun (REM, LEM). Eight Black-billed Cuckoos in the same area the same day tied the previous high count for North Dakota. Eight Black-billed Cuckoos were reported from e. Montana 4 Jun-15 Jul. Perhaps spurred by the drier weather in the Region, Burrowing Owls continued a bit of a comeback e. of the *Missouri R.* At least four pairs were noted in North Dakota, and the species was noted in four counties e. of the river in South Dakota. The 12th report for South Dakota, 3 Calliope Hummingbirds were in *Pennington* 30 Jul (p.a., JSP). Rare e. of the *Missouri R.* in the Region, a Western Wood-Pewee was singing 12 Jun in *Linton*, *Emmons*, ND (REM). A Cassin's Kingbird on the *Reedpoint*, MT B.B.S. 8 Jun provided the first record for *Latilong* 40 (EH). About the 12th report for Montana, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was in *Fallon* 5 Jun (p.a., LDI).

The largest number reported in North Dakota, 4 Bell's Vireos were in *Emmons* 8 Jul (CDE). Common Ravens feeding fledglings in *Bottineau*, ND in late Jun provided the long-expected first nesting confirmation for



This Blue Grosbeak southeast of Bridger, Montana 24 June 2006 was later joined by a female and the pair remained through July—only the fourth record for Montana. Photograph by Starr Stevens.

the Turtle Mts. (TG). Two Common Ravens 23 Jun at Lostwood N.W.R. were unusual (SDL). On the increase in the Region, a Carolina Wren was in *Faulk*, SD 5 Jul (MM). Two Ruby-crowned Kinglets were on territory in the Hettinger, ND Cemetery through the period (DAG). There are no confirmed breeding records for the state. Casual in Montana, four Northern Mockingbird reports 3-19 Jun were unusual (SD, JC). Eight Sage Thrashers in *Butte*, SD 25 Jun was a notable count for the state (SW).

PIPITS THROUGH FINCHES

Another indication of the drying out of the Region, a single Sprague's Pipit was in *Brown*, SD 24 Jul (CG). In North Dakota, the species was found 18 Jul in three locations in *Grand Forks* (DOL). Northern Waterthrushes feeding young 1 Jul in *Eddy*, ND provided the first record for the county and the southernmost breeding record for the state (p.a., CDE, REM). Casual in Montana, a Chestnut-sided Warbler was in *Carbon* 3 Jun (AS). In Montana, a Black-throated Blue Warbler was on territory 23 Jun-10 Jul in the Pryor Mts. (p.a., JR). There are fewer than 15 records for the state. A Spotted Towhee 3 Jul in *Pierce*, ND was e. of the species' known range (REM). Another dry weather bird, Lark Bunting made a small push into n.-cen. North Dakota. Henslow's Sparrows were reported 18 Jul in *Minnehaha*, SD (p.a., DC) and at J. Clark Salyer N.W.R., *McHenry*, ND 9 Jul (p.a., REM). A Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow singing in n. *Valley*, MT 24 Jun was w. of typical range (p.a., JC). Providing the first Jul record for South Dakota, a White-crowned Sparrow was in *Custer* 1-12 Jul (MM).

A 4th record for Montana, a pair of Blue Grosbeaks first seen 24 Jun in the Pryor Mts.

remained through late Jul (p.a., SS, JM). In North Dakota, a new high count was established for Blue Grosbeaks with 7 in *Emmons* 30 Jul (REM). It was the year of the Dickcissel in North Dakota and Montana. In North Dakota, daily counts exceeding 100 were not uncommon in some areas, and birds were seen as far n. as the Canadian border. Nesting was confirmed as far n. as J. Clark Salyer N.W.R. in *McHenry* (REM). In Montana, there existed only about 17 total reports previous to 2006. At least 37 individuals were reported. In addition, they were described as not uncommon in *Fallon* 3-5 Jun (LDI). Casual in North Dakota, Eastern Meadowlarks were in *McKenzie* 8 Jun (REM) and in *Morton* 12 Jul (HCT). About the 9th report for Montana, up to 3 male Lesser Goldfinches and at least one female were present in late Jun-Jul in *Billings* (p.a., GM, JM).

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