



Ron Martin

Continuing the trend from most of 2006, December and January were warmer and drier than average. However, February turned cold and wet. Overall, it was another very open winter in most of the Region, and many records of semi-hardy species were tallied. There were good numbers of straggling waterbirds, and raptors made another strong showing. Gallinaceous birds continued strong, and owl numbers were well above average. Straggling sparrows were notable, and redpolls were numerous. The Gray Jay invasion continued in North Dakota, and Montana had a state-first Inca Dove.

GEESE THROUGH CORMORANTS

Winter reports of Greater White-fronted Geese are becoming more regular in North Dakota. This season, a single was with Canada Geese at Garrison Dam 29 Dec (REM). Two spring migrant Greater White-fronted Geese were at Freezeout L., MT 25 Feb (MS). A flock of 2500 Cackling Geese was at Freezeout L., MT by 23 Feb (MS). Furnishing the first winter-season report for North Dakota, a Trumpeter Swan from the Carson area was brought to the Bismarck Zoo 4 Dec for rehabilitation (*vide* HCT). Casual in Jan in North Dakota, an American Black Duck was at Tewaukan N.W.R. 6 Jan (MAO). A Green-winged Teal wintered at Garrison Dam, ND, the 2nd for the state in winter (REM); 2 were at Great Falls, MT 16 Jan (DW). The earliest-ever spring migrants for North Dakota, 4 Hooded Mergansers were at Jamestown 26 Feb (LDI). Ring-necked Pheasant and Sharp-tailed Grouse numbers remain at high levels in North Dakota: peak counts were 1107 pheasants on the Garrison Dam C.B.C. 15 Dec and 498 grouse on the Arrowwood N.W.R. C.B.C. 18 Dec.

Providing the 7th record for Montana, a Yellow-billed Loon was discovered 4 Jan in Great Falls and remained for several days (DW). A Pied-billed Grebe near Bowdoin N.W.R. 12 Jan provided a first winter record for that area (DP, MT). The 2nd latest for the state, a Horned Grebe was at Garrison Dam,

ND 17 Dec (SDL). Casual in winter in South Dakota, a Western Grebe was at Pierre 15 Jan (RDO). Late American White Pelicans were singles 17 Dec at Garrison Dam, ND (REM) and 21 Dec at Pierre, SD (RDO). Tardy Double-crested Cormorants were in Oliver, ND (HCT) and Ft. Peck, MT 13 Dec (CC).

VULTURES THROUGH OWLS

Very unusual in the Region in winter, a single Turkey Vulture was in Yellowstone, MT 10 Dec (BH), and 2 were near the North Dakota border n. of Wibaux, MT 26 Jan (RL). It was another outstanding winter for raptors in the Region. Small numbers of Northern Harriers wintered widely in North Dakota, and 3 spent the season in Grand Forks (EEF, DOL). For the 2nd consecutive year, Ferruginous Hawks wintered in North Dakota, with 6 noted in sw. North Dakota 10 Feb (SM). Rough-legged Hawks peaked at 80 in Grand Forks, ND 23 Jan (EEF). Gyrfalcon reports were widespread. A Virginia Rail 10 Feb in Yankton, SD provided the 3rd winter record for the state away from the Black Hills (p.a., DS).

Accidental in winter, a Franklin's Gull was at Yankton, SD 5 Jan (p.a., BH). Mew Gulls were at Ft. Peck, MT 11-29 Dec (p.a., CC, GS) and in Pierre, SD 16 Dec-16 Jan (p.a., RDO, KM, JSP). The 2 Iceland Gulls reported in the fall season at Garrison Dam, ND remained through 17 Dec (REM). A possible 6th record for South Dakota, an Iceland Gull was at Pierre 15 Jan (p.a., RDO, KM). The first record for Montana, an Inca Dove came to a feeder in Terry 2 Dec (SC); the bird was found dead 4 Dec. Casual in North Dakota, a Northern Hawk Owl was photographed in Grand Forks 4-5 Dec (p.a., EEF). Three undocumented Great Gray Owl reports came from North Dakota, two in Dec and one in Feb. An amazing 141 Short-eared Owls were tallied in Grand Forks, ND 8 Dec (EEF, DOL).

KINGFISHERS THROUGH BLUEBIRDS

An unusual number for North Dakota, single Belted Kingfishers wintered in three counties. Casual in winter in North Dakota, 2 Red-headed Woodpeckers were noted on the Bismarck-Mandan C.B.C. 17 Dec. Yellow-bellied

Sapsuckers were late 9 Dec in Union (BH) and 17 Dec in Yankton, SD (DS). Good numbers of Red-bellied Woodpeckers were again reported in North Dakota w. of usual areas. Of nine reports, five were from the Bismarck-Mandan area. The Gray Jay invasion first reported in the fall season continued into the winter in North Dakota. At least 15 were thought to be in Grand Forks, ND (DOL), and 3 were noted at Icelandic S.P. Common Raven numbers continue to increase in North Dakota. Peaks this winter included 35 at J. Clark Salyer N.W.R. 10 Dec (GAE) and 40 on the Christmas count at Icelandic S.P. 19 Dec.

Accidental in winter, a Rock Wren was near Great Falls, MT 2 Dec (p.a., BM). The 5th record for North Dakota, and the 3rd in winter, a Carolina Wren was in Cass 22 Dec-4 Feb (p.a., LG, JG). In South Dakota, a Carolina Wren was in Minnehaha 16 Dec (MS). A Ruby-crowned Kinglet was in Jamestown, ND 15 Dec (p.a., LDI); the species is accidental in winter in the state. Very rare in South Dakota, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet was in Rapid City 20 Dec-24 Jan (MM, JLB). Now not so

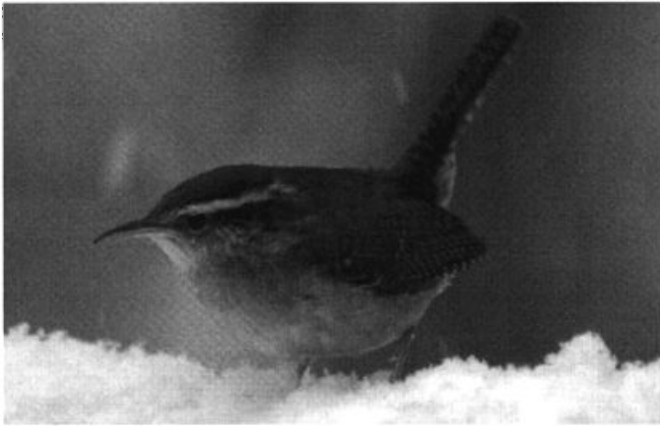


This Inca Dove appeared at a feeder in Terry, Montana 2-4 (here 4) December 2006 but perished on the latter date; it was the first of its species recorded in the state. Photograph by Scott Carlton.

unexpected in winter, an Eastern Bluebird was in Morton, ND 17 Dec (CDE); in South Dakota, one seen 10 Feb at Pierre may have been an early migrant (RDO).

THRASHERS THROUGH REDPOLLS

The Curved-billed Thrasher reported in the fall season from the Bull Mts., MT remained through the season (WH, LH). A Gray Catbird 21 Feb in Rapid City, SD provided the first Feb record for the state (p.a., MM). The only Yellow-rumped Warbler reported was from Yankton, SD 17 Dec (DS). With the open winter, sparrows made a good showing. Continuing a recent trend in North Dakota, a Chipping Sparrow remained on the NDSU



Only the fifth for North Dakota, but the third winter record, this Carolina Wren was in Cass County 22 (here 29) December 2006 through 4 February 2007. Photograph by Joe Gregg.



Well to the east of the species' usual haunts in the North Dakota Badlands, this Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch of the Hepburn's subspecies was present in Barnes County 19 (here 20) December 2006 through the end of the period. Photograph by Dean Riemer.

campus in Fargo until 30 Jan (p.a., DPW). Very rare in South Dakota in winter, a Field Sparrow was in Yankton 17 Dec (p.a., DS). Accidental in winter in South Dakota, Swamp Sparrows were in Yankton 17 Dec (p.a., DS) and in Fall River 28 Dec (p.a., JSP). Furnishing the first winter report for South Dakota, a Black-headed Grosbeak was in Pennington 2-4 Dec (p.a., TBW). Casual in winter in the Dakotas, Brown-headed Cowbirds were in Jamestown, ND 15 Dec and 27 Jan-10 Feb in Lake, SD (JSP).

A Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch of the Hepburn's subspecies was at a feeder in Barnes, ND 19 Dec+ (p.a., PRS, DWR). Pine Gros-

beaks made a very good showing, with seven reports in North Dakota and one each from South Dakota and Montana. The Red Crossbill peak in North Dakota was a flock of 70 at the Minot Country Club 23 Dec (REM). Small numbers of Hoary Redpolls were widely reported in North Dakota. A single was in Sully, SD 6 Jan (RDO). In Montana, a single was seen intermittently at Ft. Peck (CC), and one was in Choteau 6 Jan (JN).

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Southern Great Plains



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It was a relatively quiet winter in the Region for rarities. Of note are the increasingly larger numbers of waterfowl, cranes, and icterids lingering or wintering increasingly farther north. Shorebird and waterfowl migration seemed to jump-start early, particularly in southwestern Oklahoma. However, also of note was the paucity of some species such as Yellow-rumped Warblers and Spotted Towhees in central Oklahoma, or some corvids in western Nebraska. Some observers have speculated that West Nile virus or drought may be culprits in these situations, but no connections are clear.

Abbreviations: Hackberry (Hackberry Flat W.M.A., Tillman, OK); Harlan (Harlan County Res, NE); McConaughy (L. McConaughy, Keith, NE); Quivira (N.W.R., Stafford, KS);

Rainwater Basin (playa wetlands s.-cen. Nebraska); Red Slough (W.M.A., McCurtain, OK); Sandhills (large area of native grassland in n.-cen. Nebraska); Tenkiller (L. Tenkiller; Sequoyah, OK).

GEESE THROUGH FALCONS

A spectacular estimate of 307,000 geese, including the five expected species, came from Quivira 14 Dec (fide LM). Unexpectedly late were 5 Greater White-fronted Geese at Desoto N.W.R., Washington, NE 3 Jan (BB). A find in its own right was a dark-morph Ross's Goose photographed at Harvard Marsh, Clay, NE 26 Feb (PD). A survey of traditional Trumpeter Swan wintering areas in the Sandhills located 166 on 2 Jan (Nebraska Game and Parks, fide JGJ). Wintering Trumpeters southward in the Region were widely reported, as is becoming the norm, including 14 in Kansas (fide LM) and as many as 19 in Oklahoma (fide JL). Now