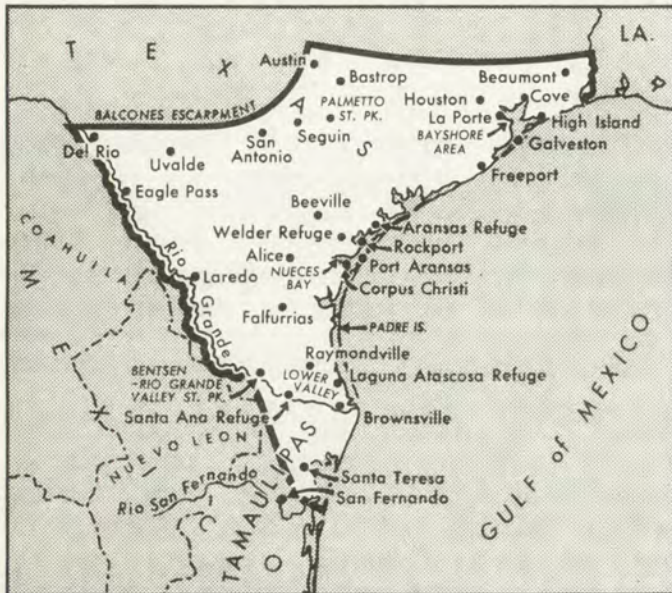


## SOUTH TEXAS REGION

/ Fred S. Webster, Jr.

For the Region as a whole, no rains of any consequence fell during the entire winter, and showers were infrequent and inadequate. Shifflett reported Santa Ana Nat'l Wildlife Refuge "in a dried and cured state. The only greenery on the Refuge for most of the period was along the



lake shores and water ditches." The upper coast area, where heavier rainfall can be expected, fared better than the remainder of the Region, but even here residents declared themselves in a drought situation. High winds quickly dried up surface moisture and slowly depleted reservoirs. The aftermath of heavy rains in September—and in October on the upper coast—in the form of fall seed crops, in addition to good berry crops set earlier in the year, staved off disaster for bird life. Winter seed crops were predictably poor, and growth of spring plants was retarded by continued lack of rainfall. The unusual mildness of the winter was an aid to insect-eating birds. Cold weather was always of short duration, and with each warm-up some insect populations appeared and many of the smaller deciduous plants and shrubs, especially in well-watered residential sections, started budding.

**LOONS, GREBES**—Common Loon numbers were far below normal for the second year in the Rockport area (DNM). The Texas City Dike, which reaches into Galveston Bay, is becoming the mecca of loon-watchers. An **Arctic Loon** and several **Red-throated Loons** were seen from the dike by many observers from early January to early April. On at least one occasion, Jan. 26, all three loon species were seen together (MA, JR & LS). The presence of an Arctic Loon recalls unpublished reports of 3 individuals of this species in Galveston Bay on Jan. 15, 18 and March 21, 1969 (LS), and 1 at the dike from late February to March 9 of the same year (MA, TBF, EM, SGW, et al.). The scarce

Horned Grebe was seen on several occasions at Anahuac Nat'l Wildlife Refuge in mid-winter (fide RWC). Small numbers of Least Grebes wintered on fresh water ponds from the central coast southward. One observed at Anahuac Refuge on Feb. 10 was a first Refuge record (fide RWC). Four **Western Grebes** were present at Laguna Atascosa Nat'l Wildlife Refuge during the winter (fide Refuge personnel). One was seen on San Antonio's Braunig L. on Dec. 30 (JAL, WS & DW).

**PELICANS, CORMORANTS**—A sharp decline in White Pelican numbers was noted at Rockport (DNM). At least 2 Brown Pelicans were seen at Texas City Dike on Dec. 19 (DHH, LS, et al.), and 1 as late as Jan. 2 (NCO & BRi). Olivaceous Cormorants made a good showing at some inland localities, especially on the upper coast and in the Rio Grande Delta. Double-crested Cormorants were common, at least early in the season, as indicated by Christmas Bird Counts (infra "CBCs"). McKay reported about 2,500 in the Cove area east of Houston on Jan. 1, but later counts were of under 100 birds.

**HERONS, IBISES**—A Green Heron was observed at San Antonio on Jan. 2 (HGL). Cattle Egrets were abundant throughout the Rio Grande Delta (WAS). White Ibis counts were low in most areas.

**WATERFOWL**—Waterfowl numbers were about normal, despite drought conditions and the mild winter. A Whistling Swan was seen between Brownsville and Port Isabel on Dec. 28 (MBR); this was the only swan reported, in contrast to recent years when this species seemed to be increasing. At Aransas Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, geese numbers reached a 10-year record peak of 17,095 by the second week of November, of which total 13,050 were Canada Geese (LBM); however, only 1602 Canadas were reported on the CBC on Dec. 30. Similarly, Canada Geese had disappeared from the Rio Grande Delta by mid-January (CEH, et al.). A **Barnacle Goose** was seen with Snow and Blue Geese in e. Chambers Co. on Mar. 14 (AH & GBH). Peak numbers of Snow (10,520) and Blue Geese (5100) were down from last winter's count at Brazoria Nat'l Wildlife Refuge (RJF). A few Ross' Geese were reported on the upper coast and in the Eagle L., Colorado Co., area during the winter. Realization on the part of birders that Ross' Goose may be found in this Region, especially if one has the patience to sift through great flocks of Snow Geese, has greatly increased the number of reports. Cinnamon Teal had a good season on the upper coast; that is to say, several birds could be found in a single day (DHH, et al.). This species wintered in good numbers at Santa Ana Refuge; on one occasion 15 ♂♂ were seen (WAS). Wood Ducks showed well at San Antonio, where 82 were counted at one pond on Feb. 14 (AH & GBH). Redheads dropped to about 28,000 at Laguna Atascosa Refuge in December and were



absent from the refuge thereafter. Canvasbacks made little use of Anahuac Refuge, although 600 were noted there on Dec. 23 (RWC). Very few Lesser Scaup could be found on the upper coast where this species was formerly abundant in winter. Bufflehead numbers were good along the coast and at such inland localities as Austin and San Antonio; for this species, the writer considers a one-day count of 50 or more "good." As many as 3 **Oldsquaws** were seen in the Texas City area by many observers. Most reports were in January, but a pair was reported at Texas City Dike on Mar. 6 (WDA, JK, JRS). Ruddy Ducks accounted for about 45,000 of the 170,000 ducks present at Laguna Atascosa Refuge in December; numbers of this species declined as the total duck population dropped sharply after the first of the year. A count of 926 at Braunig L. on Feb. 28 was exceptional (HGL). Three Masked Ducks were seen at Welder Wildlife Refuge in Mid-December (CC), and a ♀ was seen at Laguna Atascosa Refuge in March (fide Refuge personnel). Hooded Mergansers were present in fair numbers for this uncommon species; about 25 wintered at Laguna Atascosa Refuge, and 13 were counted at Sheldon Reservoir n.e. of Houston on Jan. 13 (BH & JH). A **Common Merganser** was seen in Galveston Bay on several occasions during the season (LS). A very high count of 400 Red-breasted Mergansers was reported at Anahuac Refuge on March 18 (fide RWC). Twelve at San Antonio's Mitchell L. on Feb. 15 (JAM & MP) were very good for that locality.

**HAWKS**—Reports of White-tailed Kites continue to increase from upper coast localities as far e. as the Cove area, although greater numbers are still to be found in the Rio Grande Delta. One seen near Poteet, about 28 miles s. of San Antonio (JB), may represent a new locality record. Most areas reported good Buteo populations which, except in the range of Harris' Hawk, means mostly Red-tailed Hawks. Red-tails enjoyed an exceptional season in the Rio Grande Delta (CEH, WAS). Several reports of Harlan's Hawk came from the upper coast (DHH, LS, et al.), and 1 was seen at Sinton on Dec. 22 (CDF & DNM). A **Zone-tailed Hawk** was seen at Santa Ana Refuge on March 18 (WAS) and 30 (RWS & WAS). Two Gray Hawks were seen occasionally at Santa Ana Refuge; an adult was found dead on March 15 (WAS). A **Golden Eagle** was seen at Anahuac Refuge on Feb. 10 (fide RWC) and an adult was seen near Falfurrias on Feb. 12 (OCB). Bald Eagles were reported a number of times from the upper coast. Most observations were made in w. Harris Co., of which a count of 2 adults and 4 immatures on Jan. 10 (DHH) is outstanding.

**CRANES, RAILS, COOTS**—The 57 wild Whooping Cranes, including 6 young of the year, "seem to have fared the mild winter in top condition" (RCB). Also at Aransas Refuge, Sandhill Crane numbers were above normal in early winter; the

population reached a peak in mid-November of 6100, nearly double last year's count (LBM). A flock under observation for the past three years near La Pryor, 20 miles s. of Uvalde, seemed larger than usual: 1585 were counted, with probably several hundred more out of view (LWM). High counts of Yellow Rails were 12 at Anahuac Refuge on March 12 (RWC) and 9 at San Bernard Nat'l Wildlife Refuge on Apr. 7 (RJF). The **Black Rail** was occasionally seen on the "rail tours" at Anahuac Refuge (RWC). About 220,000 Am. Coots were present on Laguna Atascosa Refuge in December; the number dropped to 34,250 in February (fide Refuge personnel).

**SHOREBIRDS**—Eighteen Am. Oystercatchers were seen on a boat trip along the Intracoastal Waterway between Port Aransas and Aransas Refuge on Feb. 28 (S.A.A.S.). Six were seen on the sand flats near Galveston's E. Jetty on Mar. 6 (JK). **Am. Golden Plover** were observed at Texas City Dike on at least 3 occasions between Dec. 14 and Jan. 26 (DHH; FH & LS; et al.). The Long-billed Curlew population was far below normal in the Rockport area (DNM), and only low counts were reported on the upper coast. Several reports of the Whimbrel, usually a non-wintering species, were received from the upper coast. One was seen on South Padre I. on Dec. 26, and 1 between Brownsville and Port Isabel on Jan. 1 (MBR). What was thought to be a **Curlew Sandpiper** was studied with Dunlins near Rockport on Dec. 28 (NE & CDF). Fisher is familiar with both species. Details of this observation are available from the writer. Four Stilt Sandpipers at Corpus Christi on Feb. 7 (GWB & MP) seem too early to be spring migrants. An unusual concentration of Marbled Godwits—up to 100 birds—could be seen on mud flats near Texas City in December and January (JRS). A flock of about 250 Am. Avocets wintered at Brazoria Refuge (RJF).

**GULLS, TERNS**—For the third consecutive year a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** wintered at Texas City Dike; it was present from late October into April and was seen by many observers. An unusual number of Bonaparte's Gulls—up to 29 birds—were noted at Braunig L. Dec. 29-31 (AH, JAL, WS & DW). A **Roseate Tern** was reported off Aransas Refuge on Feb. 28 (CRB, ERB, AH, et al.).

**DOVES, HUMMINGBIRDS**—A ♂ **Ruddy Ground Dove** was observed frequently and by many observers at Santa Ana Refuge between Jan. 28 and Mar. 18; when last seen, "the bird was high in the air and flying in the direction of Mexico" (WAS). The only previous comparable record was that of a bird which was seen for several weeks near San Benito, Cameron Co., in Dec. 1950 and Jan. 1951. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird was present at Baytown through Jan. 13 (NB). A sub-adult male **Anna's Hummingbird** appeared at



Mrs. Snyder's feeders at La Porte, a few miles south of Baytown, on Dec. 12. It was observed also by Mrs. Hames on Dec. 17, and disappeared on the following day (LS). In Austin, a ♂ **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** was observed at a feeder from Sept. 5 to Mar. 19 (BRi, EK, JWW, et al.). Before its departure, this bird had developed adult plumage and was making the distinctive wing sounds of the male of the species. A bird at Baytown Jan. 19-27 was thought to be a ♀ or immature Broad-tail (NB); there was opportunity to compare it with a ♀ Rufous Hummingbird. A Rufous Hummingbird was a frequent visitor to Mrs. Geiselbrecht's yard in Beeville between Nov. 11 and March 26. A ♂ **Allen's Hummingbird** visited Mrs. Busby's feeders at Baytown Nov. 26-March 7; by the latter date this bird had attained adult plumage. It was viewed by many birders, a number of whom saw the narrow, pointed outer tail feathers when the bird preened. It now seems in order to mention an unpublished report of a similar case at La Porte where, from Nov. 1968 to April 16, 1969, Mrs. Snyder had an immature ♂ Allen's Hummingbird at her feeders. By departure time, this bird had developed adult plumage, and the outer tail feathers were described as narrow and pointed. An Allen's-type hummingbird in adult ♂ plumage appeared at Mrs. Snyder's feeders on Oct. 10-11, 1969. Details of these observations are available from the writer. The occurrence of and (sight) confirmation of these western hummingbird species seem to revive the credibility of some reports of recent years which the writer did not pass along for lack of complete details and the absence of the species from the official Texas list. With more feeders being maintained during the winter months, and more observers alert to the possibilities, one can anticipate further interesting developments.

**WOODPECKERS, FLYCATCHERS**—Four Yellow-shafted Flickers, a species rare in the Rio Grande Delta, were seen along the river at Santa Ana Refuge on March 5 (WAS). A few Tropical Kingbirds wintered on Santa Ana Refuge (WAS). One was seen at Falfurrias on Dec. 18 (OCB). Vermilion Flycatchers were comparatively scarce this winter, even in the Rio Grande Delta.

**NUTHATCHES, CREEPERS, WRENS**—No reports of Red-breasted Nuthatches came to the attention of the writer. Brown Creeper numbers were only fair. House Wrens were in short supply in most areas.

**CATBIRDS, THRUSHES, ROBINS**—Catbirds were reported at several localities on the upper coast, which is not unexpected in winter. Apparently more unusual was one wintering at Rockport (DNM), and 1 seen near Tivoli, Refugio Co., on Jan. 9 (JHP). A Curve-billed Thrasher was found at Indianola, Calhoun Co., on Jan. 2 (JPH), a location rather far east for this arid brush-country species. Robins were less common than

usual in most areas, and flocks apparently failed to reach deep into South Texas. There was no scarcity of Robins in the hills w. of a line between Austin and San Antonio where several roosting areas were crowded with many thousands of birds, and where good crops of juniper berries and other native foods were available.

**PIPITS, WAXWINGS**—"Unusually large" numbers of Sprague's Pipits wintered in a field near Santa Ana Refuge (WAS). This species appeared at Rockport after an absence of several years (DNM). Cedar Waxwings were reported much fewer in number than usual in most areas. There appeared to be good numbers in the hills n.w. of San Antonio, but large flocks did not repeat last year's invasion of the city (CRB).

**VIREOS, WARBLERS, ORIOLES**—A **Yellow-throated Vireo** was observed in San Antonio on Jan. 27 (JAL & LM). Wintering populations of Orange-crowned and Myrtle Warblers were generally below normal. An Ovenbird was seen at Brownsville on Dec. 31 (MBR). A Hooded Oriole was present in San Antonio Jan. 11-Feb. 20 (JAL, et al.).

**FRINGILLIDS**—Single Black-headed Grosbeaks were present at San Antonio Jan. 24-27 (BRo) and at Kountze, Hardin Co., from Feb. 21 into April (EWM). Purple Finches and Pine Siskins were all but absent this winter. A Rufous-sided Towhee (w. race) was found at Santa Ana Refuge on March 5 (WAS); this species is rarely seen in the Rio Grande Delta. Most sparrow species were reported below normal in most areas. The reason for this is not apparent, as drought conditions did not become acute until mid-winter. Nor was there indication of a mild winter until December, before which time most winter residents would have entered the Region. On the other hand, some species did very well in some areas and not in others. This is not an unusual situation in theory; whether there are unusual aspects in this particular application can not be determined for lack of more comprehensive coverage. In making out with what information provided us, we find glaring inconsistencies which, lacking fuller data, we must accept at face value. For example, Savannah Sparrows did well in the Galveston Bayshore area (LS) and exceptionally well in the Freeport C B C circle, but very poorly at Rockport (DNM). Vesper Sparrows were low in numbers on the upper coast but common in the Austin and San Antonio areas. Chipping Sparrows were relatively scarce in most places except Austin. White-crowned Sparrows, generally, paralleled the Vesper in areas of abundance. One may compensate for the discrepancies somewhat by correlating numbers with suitable habitat, but this is only a partial answer to the inconsistencies of distribution. Lincoln Sparrows were abundant at Rockport (DNM), which could not be said for other sparrow species. Song Sparrows were "above average" at San Antonio (CRB). By the time the



analyst probes into the Rio Grande Delta a general scarcity of all sparrows is discernible, a conclusion which Hudson affirms for his San Benito area.

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## NORTHERN ROCKY MOUNTAIN-INTERMOUNTAIN REGION

/ Thomas H. Rogers

Most of the Region's wintry weather came in December, s. interior British Columbia excepted. Temperatures for that month were subnormal but not severe at many localities. Indications



were that in the United States portion of the Region more snow fell in December than in any succeeding month. January, w. of the Continental Divide at least, was remarkably warm, almost springlike. At Spokane, Wash. temperatures aver-

aged 6.5° F. above normal and nearby Turnbull Nat'l Wildlife Refuge at Cheney posted a record high of +58°. Precipitation was somewhat deficient in many areas, contributing to lack of snow cover in the valleys. British Columbia had more snow and freezing rain than usual. February continued warmer than normal but at Spokane, at least, gave the impression of coldness after so mild a January. Precipitation was even more deficient, except for British Columbia, where snowfall exceeded the normal. March turned abnormally cold, being only slightly warmer than February and decidedly wetter, with precipitation well above normal. Ponds in the vicinity of Ninepipe Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, Charlo, Mont. froze again.

In summary, the winter, in the valleys at least, was generally mild and open, except in British Columbia. Ponds in central Washington were unfrozen most of the winter. Several reports noted the winter as decidedly windy. Spokane had the highest wind velocity ever recorded there, up to 65 m.p.h. on Mar. 26. Birds wintered in good numbers and variety. Food supplies appeared adequate and in some instances encouraged spectacular invasions. Some northern species were scarce, perhaps detained in Canada or at higher elevations by good food supplies. The cold, wet March slowed vegetation but the extra moisture it brought promised good growing conditions after a dry winter.

**LOONS AND GREBES**—Small numbers of Com. Loon were present on the Columbia R. in the Tri-cities (Pasco-Richland-Kennewick) area of Washington from late December at least through the first week of March. Two Red-throated Loons were seen at Okanagan Landing, B.C. on Dec. 26 (KG). Horned Grebes wintered on Okanagan and Kalamalka Lakes, B.C. Eared and W. Grebes remained during the winter in the Tri-cities area and a few of the latter wintered in the Okanagan Valley. The usual small numbers of Pied-billed Grebes were noted in the w. part of the Region. One seen at Livingston, Mont. on Jan. 16 probably wintered.

**PELICANS AND HERONS**—A group of 20 White Pelicans was observed on Dec. 5 on the Yakima R. near the Tri-cities (EM). A flock of 20 was seen near Cataldo Mission, w. of Kellogg, Ida. on Mar. 26 (JHR) and a flock was noted at Canyon Ferry e. of Helena, Mont. on Mar. 31 (LM). Great Blue Herons were not noted as wintering in s. interior British Columbia or in the Helena area but appeared in normal numbers in many other localities. An estimated 60 wintered in and around Ninepipe Refuge (RLB). Black-crowned Night Herons were noted in small numbers in the Tri-cities area.

**WATERFOWL**—Two Whistling Swans at Okanagan Landing, Jan. 14 and 6 at Kelowna, B.C., Dec. 20, quite possibly wintered. More evidence of the birds wintering in n.e. Washington has