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First record of a Brambling for Nebraska

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On 14 April 1999, an unusual bird was reported visiting the feeders of Phyllis and Dean Drawbaugh in Scottsbluff, Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska. The bird apparently arrived on 13 April immediately after the passage of a cold front with strong northwest winds. On 18 April, the Drawbaughs identified the bird as a female Brambling, and local birders Alice Kenitz and Helen Hughsen confirmed the sighting later that day. On 19 April, I made the trip to Scottsbluff and studied the bird from 7:51-8:55 a.m. in the company of the Drawbaughs, David Ely and Rachel Kolokoff, both of Fort Collins, Colorado. We arrived at the Drawbaughs' house at approximately 7:30 a.m.

After a short wait, a "different" bird appeared at the feeders with House Finches and American Goldfinches. The bird was slightly larger than a House Finch. The general appearance was of a small, plump bird with a short tail. The finch-like bill was fairly long, conical, and appeared dark with some yellow color at the base. The face pattern was very distinctive. The background color of the head was light gray. There was a broad, black malar stripe. Viewing the bird from above, I noted two narrow black bars along the sides of the crown and another black mark on the nape that was V-shaped with the open end of the V opening posteriorly. The eye was dark. The underparts were white with a buffy or orange wash on the upper chest and along the flanks. The tail appeared dark-colored and was notched. The wing pattern was also distinctive: the wings were dark with two pale wingbars; the upper wingbar was white and the lower wingbar was buffy. There was also a small white spot below the wingbars. The bird did not vocalize. Field notes from two other observers filled in some other features. including a white rump, a patterned mantle with orange scapulars, and the observation that the bird walked, rather than hopped, when on the ground. Based on the plumage, we concluded the bird was a female Brambling.

This sighting represents the first record of a Brambling for Nebraska. This species is a rare vagrant in the Great Plains with scattered records from most states. Records are especially concentrated along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains in Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado. The winter of 1998-99 brought an unprecedented invasion of Bramblings to western North America (see Shepard 1999). There were at least 15 records, most (10) from British Columbia but also from as far southeast as Idaho, South Dakota, and Nebraska.

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Shepard, M. G. 1999. Brambling irruption in British Columbia and the western USA (1998-1999). http://www.visionfoundation.org.

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WINTER FIELD REPORT, DECEMBER 1999 to FEBRUARY 2000

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INTRODUCTION

This rather mild season stood out for its wintering waterfowl, most obviously at Keystone L, where Stephen Dinsmore counted an amazing 22 species of waterfowl on 29 January. Check the species accounts for the incredible wintering numbers; species were topped by Nebraska's first Tufted Duck, and assorted other goodies, such as 5 Barrow's Goldeneyes. Waterfowl, loons, and grebes also rewrote the midwinter record book, including no fewer than 3 Red-necked Grebes. Some interesting wintering birds also appeared at Harlan Co Res.

Other interesting winter records, some no doubt due to the mild fall, included Greater Yellowlegs at two locations, Franklin's Gull and an adult Black-legged Kittiwake at Harlan Co Res, wintering Hermit Thrush at L Ogallala, a January Gray Catbird in the northwest, a male Dickcissel at Alma, and Orange-crowned and Northern Parula warblers in December, the latter at Keystone L! Sparrows which generally winter only very rarely in NE were well-represented, although poorly-documented, including a Smith's Longspur in Cass Co.

Present in good numbers were Northern Shrike and Purple Finch, the latter welcome after some low years, and Townsend's Solitaire appeared in low numbers. The Eurasian Collared-Dove continued its expansion in the state, even breeding during the winter period! Westerly reports involved a Red-bellied Woodpecker in Scotts Bluff Co, Carolina Wrens pushing westward, and Winter Wrens wintering in the L McConaughy area.

This winter produced some outstanding rarities also. Hiding among the numerous scaup,a Tufted Duck at Keystone L proved a frustrating dip-twitch for many, while a Pomarine Jaeger and Mew Gull were well seen only by one Stephen Dinsmore (who also found, and refound many times for others, the Tufted Duck). Possibly most frustrating was what would likely have been a first state record Slaty-backed Gull at Harlan Co Res, which could not be refound despite a two-day search. A tantalizing record was of Golden-crowned Sparrows in Cherry Co in early December, the 2nd winter in a row for this