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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 Ogalalla, 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
species. A Dark-eyed (Gray-headed) Junco was spotted in Papillion, and a couple of White-winged Crossbills were found.

CORRECTIONS TO PREVIOUS REPORTS

Normally I prefer to place corrections communicated to me in the appropriate season's report. This practice is convenient for researchers looking for information on certain species at certain seasons. Thus you will note some additions sent by Glen and Wanda Hoge for winter 1998-99 in the accounts below. If you have sightings that extend the information published here, feel free to send them in, as they are better brought to light a year late than not at all!

ABBREVIATIONS

AD.E.: Arbor Day Farm, Nebraska City;  
BQL: Branched Oak L, Lancaster Co;  
CBC: Christmas Bird Count;  
CCM: Clear Creek Marshes, Keith and Garden Cos;  
County;  
FE: Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co;  
FL: Funk Lagoon, Phelps Co;  
HCR: Harlan Co Res, Harlan Co;  
L: Lake;  
LM: L McConaughy, Keith Co;  
NC: Nature Center;  
NPNWR: North Platte NWR, Scotts Bluff Co;  
NWR: National Wildlife Refuge;  
Res: Reservoir;  
SHP: State Historical Park;  
SL: Sewage Lagoon(s);  
SP: State Park.

GAZETTEER

Ash Hollow SHP: Garden Co;  
Buckskin Hills: WMA, Dixon Co;  
Carter L: Omaha;  
Chappell: Chappell;  
Cunningham L: Omaha;  
DeSoto NWR: Washington Co;  
Facus Springs: WMA, Morrill Co;  
Gavin's Point Dam:  
Cedar and Knox Cos;  
James Ranch: part of Fort Robinson SP, Sioux Co;  
Johnson L: SRA, Gosper and Dawson Cos;  
Keystone Dam: forms Keystone L, Keith Co;  
Keystone L: Keith Co;  
Kingsley Dam: forms LM, Keith Co;  
Kiowa Springs: WMA, Scotts Bluff Co;  
Lewis and Clark L: Knox Co;  
Maloney: SRA, Lincoln Co;  
Minatare: SRA, Scotts Bluff Co;  
Neale Woods: Douglas and Washington Cos;  
Ogallala: Keith Co;  
Stateline Island: WMA, Scotts Bluff Co;  
Sutherland Res: SRA, Lincoln Co;  
Wehrspann L: Omaha;  
Wildcat Hills: Scotts Bluff Co;  
Winters Creek L: part of NPNWR, Scotts Bluff Co;  
Wolf L: Saunders Co.

OBSERVERS

Alice Kenitz (AK), Gering;  
Birdline (B);  
Bill F. Huser (BFH), South Sioux City;  
Babs Padelford (BP), Bellevue;  
Bill Clemente (BC), Peru, Nemaha Co;  
Clyde E. Johnson (CEJ), Omaha;  
Carol Falk (CF), Nebraska City;  
Clem N. Klaphake (CNK), Bellevue;  
David L. Swanson (DLS), Vermillion, SD;  
Don Paseka (DP), Ames;  
Glen Hoge (GH), Alma;  
Gertrude Wood (GW), Elmwood;  
Helen K. Hughson (HKH), Scottsbluff;  
John Brenneman (JB), Omaha;  
Jim
Ducey (Jd), Lincoln; Joe Gubanyi (JG), Seward; Joel G. Jorgensen (JGJ), Blair; Jan Johnson (JJ), Wakefield; Jan Paseka (JP), Ames; John Sullivan (JS), Lincoln; Jeffrey S. Palmer (JSP), Madison, SD; Jerry Toll (JT), Omaha; John W. Hall (JWH), Omaha; Kevin Poague (KP), Lincoln; Laurel Badura (LB), Kearney; Larry Einemann (LE), Lincoln; Laurence Falk (LF), Nebraska City; Loren Padelford (LP), Bellevue; Lanny Randolph (LR), Gibbon; Linda R. Brown (LRB), Lincoln; Mark Brogie (MB), Creighton; Mark Orsag (MO), Crete; Mindy Sheets (MS), Missouri Valley, IA; Mark Urwiller (MU), Kearney; Moni Usasz (MUs), Lincoln; Merlin Wright (MW), Brownville; Neva Pruess (NP), Lincoln; Neal Ratzlaff (NR), Omaha; Paul Kaufman (PK), Seward; Phil Swanson (PS), Papillion; Randall D. Williams (RDW), Sioux City, IA; Robin Harding (RH), Gibbon; Susan Herrick (SH), Lincoln; Stephen J. Dinsmore (SJD), Fort Collins, CO; Sandy Lemmon (SL), Crawford; Thomas E. Labedz (TEL), Lincoln; Thomas Hoffman (TH), Omaha; Todd Jensen (TJ), Rapid City, SD: Wanda Hoge (WH), Alma; Wayne Mollhoff (WM), Lincoln; W. Ross Silcock (WRS), Tabor, IA; Zee Uridil (ZU), Chadron.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

**Common Loon:** Rather late were singles noted at HCR on 19 December 1998 (GH, WH) and on 17 December on the HCR CBC (fide JGJ). Apparently wintering were a basic adult and a 1st basic immature seen at LM; these sightings were recorded on the LM CBC (WRS, LR, RH); the adult was noted again on 5 February (SJD) and the immature on 26 February (SJD). This identification represents only the 4th midwinter report for this species.

**Pied-billed Grebe:** Late birds were sighted at DeSoto NWR during CBC week on 19 December (fide MS) and at HCR on 15 December (GH, WH). Apparently wintering were 4 at LM seen on the CBC on 2 January and through at least 19 February (SJD). Probably very early migrants were the 2 birds found at CCM on 19 February (SJD), and rather early in the east was one spotted at Cunningham L on 29 February (JGJ).

**Horned Grebe:** Only casual in midwinter, the 2 birds seen at LM on 1 January and on 15 February (SJD) apparently wintered. Last in fall were the 12 birds discovered at Pawnee L on 4 December (JGJ).

**Red-necked Grebe:** As many as 3 (2 adults and an immature, the latter present since 6 November) wintered at L Ogallala and at LM (SJD, BFH); this report represents the first record of overwintering in Nebraska.

**Eared Grebe:** The only report was of one found in Cass Co on 7 December (GW), rather late.

**Western Grebe:** Overwintering at LM has become routine in recent mild winters, but numbers decline markedly as time passes, a fact well-documented this winter by Stephen Dinsmore: 656 were present on 2 December; 349 on 2 January; 239 on 5 February; and 155 on 19 February. One was still found at HCR as late as 1 January (GH, WH).
Clark's Grebe: The one spotted at L Minatare on 2 December (SJD) was rather late. Overwintering occurred at LM for only the 3rd time: as many as 7 were still present on 29 January, but apparently only one made it until 26 February (SJD, LR, RH).

American White Pelican: As has become normal in recent years, 4 apparently wintered at Sutherland Res, with one developing a full bill plate by 29 January (SJD). Less usual were the 3 to 4 that wintered at HCR (GH, WH); the first migrants appeared there on 21 February, 10 birds (GH, WH).

Double-crested Cormorant: One or two may have made it through the winter at HCR; and as many as 41 were counted on the HCR CBC on 17 December (fide JGJ); 5 were still there on 22 January (JGJ); 2 were seen on 25 January (GH, WH), and one was reported on 5 February (JGJ). An injured bird spotted at LM may also have survived; it was last seen on 29 January (SJD). These reports mark the first records of overwintering away from Sutherland Res. A single, in addition, was noted on 16 January 1999 at HCR (GH, WH), and another was seen at Cunningham L on 29 January (JGJ). These reports represent only the 3rd and 4th midwinter records (not overwintering) away from Sutherland Res. The first spring arrivals in 1999 were recorded early, although perhaps not too surprising at such a southerly breeding site as Alma, Harlan Co: 15 birds arrived on 15 February (GH, WH).

Great Blue Heron: An excellent count at an usual winter location was the 15 tallied around Keystone L on 29 January (SJD). Midwinter records away from the Platte River Valley are few; the single bird spotted at Wolf L on 6 February (TH) may have been an early migrant.

Turkey Vulture: Very early was one seen 5 miles east of Kearney on 27 February (LB). Early spring dates occur at the end of February but are not well-documented.

Greater White-fronted Goose: A small flock, possibly 6 survivors, wintered at HCR; 30 were seen there on 26 December (GH, WH); 14 were present on 22 January (JGJ); 6 remained on 5 February (JGJ); and the first spring arrivals were noted on 20 February, 60 birds (GH, WH). The only other midwinter reports were of singles seen at L Minatare on 16 January (SJD) and at L Chappell on 29 January (SJD). This species is rare in the Panhandle, and so the 2 discovered at LM on 5 February (SJD) were of interest; they were also rather early. Indeed, spring arrivals were very early, both this year and last: 8 were found at HCR on 6 February 1999, the first noted (GH, WH), and this year 12 were spotted at Grandpa's Pond near Kearney on 6 February (MU). Fifty had arrived at FL by 13 February (LR, RH).

Snow Goose: A few apparently wintered at HCR (GH, WH, JGJ), Carter L (JB, B), BOL (LE), and possibly at L Minatare, where 9 were counted on 16 January (SJD). These locations usually freeze in midwinter. The best counts were the 20,000 seen flying southwest over Gibbon on 20 February (LR, RH) and the 4000 noted flying over Lincoln on 22 February (SH).
1500 were counted at FL as early as 13 February (LR, RH), and 1169 still remained at BOL for the CBC on 17 December (fide JG).

**Ross's Goose:** A single adult was discovered with the 9 Snow Geese found at L Minatare on 16 January (SJD) and may have wintered. Singles apparently did winter with the small Snow Goose flocks at HCR (JGJ, GH, WH) and Carter L (JB, BP, LP). These sightings represent the first records of overwintering. Singles seen at LM on 5 February (SJD) and at Grandpa's Pond, Kearney, on 6 February (MU) were probably early arrivals. The best count totaled 14 in the L Minatare area on 4 December (SJD); there are few fall reports from the Panhandle.

**Canada Goose:** The largest wintering flock reported reached 8350 at LM on 5 February (SJD). As many as 10,000 flew over FL on 13 February (LR, RH); 5240 had arrived at Kiowa Springs by 20 February (SJD), and 5000 showed up at Alma the same day (GH, WH).

**Trumpeter Swan:** Several were scattered about the state, some clearly from re-establishing populations: 3 of which hung around Scribner, Dodge Co, between 30 December and 22 January—one had a green neck-band and another had an orange left patagial tag #277 (DP, C, JJ); and of the 5-6 reported at Carter L from 31 January until 19 February, one had an orange patagial tag #279 (BP, LP, JB). These birds (277 and 279) are apparently from Minnesota (Ron Andrews fide BP). The three found near Elkhorn on 6 February (B) may have been the Scribner birds. One of the Carter L group was much smaller than the others, but its identity was uncertain. The best count in the Keystone area, a regular wintering location, totaled 17 on 24 December (JS, LJ). Other sightings from interesting locations included 4 spotted on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 19 December (fide MS) and immatures found in Cottonwood Canyon, Lincoln Co, on 4 January (BP, LP). As the population increases, such sightings are becoming more commonplace.

**Tundra Swan:** The two immatures sighted at Wehrspann L on 12 December (B) may have moved to Carter L, where the 2 birds seen on 12 January had been present for "several weeks" (B). By 26 January, however, 6 swans were reported at Carter L, only one a small bird, the others apparently Trumpeter Swans (JB, BP, LP). Another immature was noted at Niobrara SP on the Missouri River on 30 January (MB). There are very few midwinter records for the state.

**Wood Duck:** Rather early were one spotted at BOL on 19 February (LE), 6 seen at L Minatare on 20 February (SJD), and a pair found in suitable breeding habitat at ADF on 21 February (CF, LF).

**Gadwall:** A large number wintered on Keystone L; 600 were gathered there as late as 2 January, and 373 remained until 29 January (SJD). Rather early were 22 spotted at Gavin's Point Dam on 7 February (JJ). Wintering is expected where open water occurs, although the 62 counted at CCM on 16 January (SJD) was a large number for that date and location.

**American Wigeon:** Amazing numbers wintered at Keystone L: 286 were found there on 29 January (SJD). This bird is only a casual wintering species, and so the 1-3 sighted at HCR throughout the period (GH, WH) and
the 22 noted at Kiowa Springs on 16 January (SJD) were noteworthy. Very late was a single reported at BOL on 13 January (B); it may have wintered, as one was there on 6 February (MO), possibly a very early migrant in this open winter. At HCR the first migrants were the 5 found there on 5 February (GH, WH, LR, RH).

American Black Duck: All reports originated from Lancaster Co. As many as 3 wintered with Mallards at BOL (JB, JS), and one was seen with a Blue-winged Teal and Mallards at the Chet Ager NC in Lincoln on 18 December (KP, fide LRB).

Mallard: The largest wintering flock reported totaled 40,000 at HCR on 6 February (GH, WH, LR, RH). This number represents a very high winter count that may have included early migrants.

Blue-winged Teal: Very late, and one of the very few documented December records, were the 2 found at Chet Ager NC, Lincoln, on 18 December (KP, fide LRB), but extraordinary was an "apparently healthy" immature male, aged by its wing coverts, spotted at Keystone L on 29 January; it was probably the same bird as was reported there on 16 December (SJD). This sighting marks only the 2nd documented winter record.

Northern Shoveler: As many as 19 wintered on Keystone L (SJD), where wintering is somewhat regular, and as many as 17 likewise wintered in the Alma area (JGJ, GH, WH), where it is unexpected. Other midwinter records, adding to the few to date, included an immature male and a female found at Pioneer Park NC, Lincoln, on 15 January (MO) and 7 spotted in Sioux and Dawes Cos on 17 January. A good December count reached 1700 at North Platte SL on 8 December (WRS). Migrants had arrived by 5 February at Alma, when 76 appeared at the Alma SL (JGJ, GH, WH).

Northern Pintail: Strangely, few if any overwintered at Keystone L; the 15 sighted there on 5 February were thought to be early migrants (SJD). A good midwinter count totaled 62 at Kiowa Springs on 16 January (SJD).

Green-winged Teal: Many wintered at Keystone L; the peak count reached 268 on 29 January (SJD). A good midwinter count was 56 tallied at Kiowa Springs on 16 January (SJD).

Canvasback: As many as 87, the count on 15 January, wintered at Keystone L (SJD), a record wintering total, and up to 5 wintered on the Alma SL (GH, WH, JGJ). There are few midwinter records. Rather late was one seen at Gering SL on 5 January (AK), and early was one found at Grandpa's Pond, Kearney, on 6 February (MU).

Redhead: This species also wintered in excellent numbers at Keystone L, with 209 birds present on 29 January, the number increasing to 397 on 5 February (SJD) and to 500 on 26 February (LR, RH) as migrants arrived. About 16 wintered at HCR (JGJ, GH, WH). One was spotted rather late at Gering SL on 5 January (AK), and rather early were migrants discovered at Keystone L on 5 February (see above) and at Grandpa's Pond, Kearney, on 6 February (MU).

Ring-necked Duck: Many wintered at Keystone L; the low count was 94 on 29 January (SJD), but 235 were present as early as 5 February (SJD). Six
wintered at HCR (GH, WH). Rather late were the 8-10 birds sighted at Gering SL on 5 January (AK).

**Tufted Duck:** Nebraska's first of this species wintered throughout the period at Keystone L, after first being found by Stephen Dinsmore on 3 December (SJD, m.ob.) When discovered, it had an obvious tuft, which later disappeared, but became prominent again by 5 February (SJD). **Greater Scaup:** This species also wintered in excellent numbers at Keystone L; as many as 74 were present (SJD). Up to 4 also wintered on the Alma SL (JGJ, GH, WH, LR, RH). Numbers had not increased by period's end, and no migrants were detected elsewhere. These sightings represent only the 2nd and 3rd midwinter records. Rather late were 2 spotted at Gering SL on 5 January (AK).

**Lesser Scaup:** As many as 328 wintered at Keystone L (SJD); no wonder the Tufted Duck could be hard to find at times! Up to 16 wintered at Alma SL (JGJ, GH, WH).

**Surf Scoter:** Four (3 females and an immature male) were seen at Keystone L on 4 December (SJD), and one bird was noted there (a female) through 20 January (SJD, DCE, JS, LJ). January 20 is the latest ever for Nebraska.

**White-winged Scoter:** Two were reported, single females noted at Keystone L on 16 December (SJD) and at Alma SL on 19 December (GH, WH). These dates are very late; they represent, in fact, two of the 4 latest ever: December 16, 18, 19, and 19-20.

**Black Scoter:** A female and an immature male were sighted at Keystone L on 2 December (SJD) and remained until 15 January (SJD, WRS); 3 were reported there on 5 December (B). The late date of 15 January is the latest ever.

**Oldsquaw:** As many as 6 were present at Keystone L throughout the period, an adult female, 3 immature males, and 2 immature females (SJD, m.ob.). There are few wintering records. The only reports elsewhere included a female spotted at Wehrspann L on 12 December (B) and 3 seen at the Lewis and Clark L Marina on 19 December (DLS); the latter were questionably in Nebraska, but close!

**Bufflehead:** Yet another species with amazing numbers wintering at Keystone L; the low count there for the period registered a record 184 for wintering birds on 29 January (SJD). The two spotted at HCR on 22 January (JGJ) may have wintered; this report denotes only the 3rd midwinter record away from Keith Co.

**Common Goldeneye:** A regular in winter on Keystone L, the peak wintering count totaled 2096 on 29 January (SJD).

**Barrow's Goldeneye:** Also regular in winter among the Commons on Keystone L, as many as 5, a record count, were present this year: 3 males and 2 females, all adults, sighted on 5 February (SJD). At least one was found throughout the period (m.ob.).

**Hooded Merganser:** Wintering is not unexpected when open water is present; the best count at locations where birds were seen most of the period...
totaied 13 at Winters Creek L on 16 January (SJD). A few wintered at HCR (JGJ, GH, WH) and at Keystone L (SJD). Two birds identified on Johnson L on 22 January (JGJ) may have wintered, as may have a single noted at CCM on 16 January and 5 spotted there on 29 January (SJD). The first migrants were 10 birds reported at Wehrspann L on 21 February (JWH). A male appeared to be courting a female Common at Alma SL on 28 February (GH, WH); hybrids with this parentage have been reported a few times in Nebraska.

**Common Merganser:** This bird was one of the few waterfowl species whose occurrence was "normal" this winter! The best wintering count reached 32,000 at HCR on 22 January, but the lake had almost iced over by February, when only 3000 were present (JGJ). Keystone L had 4000 on 5 February (SJD) and Sutherland Res registered 3000 on 29 January (SJD).

**Red-breasted Merganser:** In recent years, wintering has been noted on Keystone L; 27 birds wintered this year (SJD). Midwinter records elsewhere are few, but this year the one discovered at BOL on 13 January (B) may have wintered, as did at least two at HCR (JGJ, GH, WH). Probably an early returner was the one found at Johnson L on 5 February (JGJ).

**Ruddy Duck:** Up to 11, 2 males and 9 females, wintered at Keystone L (SJD), only the 2nd record of overwintering in the state. No others were reported in January and early February.

**Bald Eagle:** Few concentrations were noted, presumably because of widespread open water. The best count totaled 164 at Johnson L on 22 January (JGJ). Migration was underway by 19 February, when 49 flew over Neale Woods (B), and nesting was underway for about the 8th year at NPNWR (AK).

**Northern Harrier:** Routine reports.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk:** Routine reports.

**Cooper's Hawk:** Routine reports.

**Northern Goshawk:** Few were noted; the only reports included an adult found near Crane Meadows NC, Hall Co, on 9 December (B), another (the same?) sighted near Fort Kearny, Buffalo Co, 24 January (GL), and an immature seen near Grant, Perkins Co (JSe).

**Red-shouldered Hawk:** Midwinter reports are rare, especially away from the southeast, and so the one identified at Wolf L on 23 January (TH) was noteworthy. An adult was still at FF between 15 and 25 December (BP, LP), and a single was found in southeastern Otoe Co on 21 December (LF, CF).

**Red-tailed Hawk:** The most unexpected report was of none included on the Scottsbluff CBC (fide AK). The DeSoto NWR CBC, however, reported 77, including 3 "Harlan's Hawks" (fide MS).

**Ferruginous Hawk:** A total of 12 were recorded in western Nebraska for the season (SJD).

**Rough-legged Hawk:** Fewer than usual were reported this winter, possibly because conditions allowed them to stay to the north. Only 34 were found for the season in western Nebraska (SJD).
Golden Eagle: Easterly were immatures discovered at Homer and in Thurston Co on 5 February (BFH).

American Kestrel: As expected, most reports specified males; these winter farther north than the females.

Merlin: Widely reported, as has become the norm. A good easterly count totaled 3 on the Bol CBC on 17 December (fide JG).

Prairie Falcon: A good count for this usually solitary species was 3 seen near the landfill in Perkins Co on 17 January (LR, RH).

Gray Partridge: The only report was of 6 flushed from a corn stalk field near Ames on 19 February (DP). There are few reports from this area of the state.

Ring-necked Pheasant: Routine reports.

Sharp-tailed Grouse: A good CBC count was 41 at LM on 2 January (fide SJD).

Greater Prairie-Chicken: A good CBC count totaled 48 at LM on 2 January (fide SJD).

Wild Turkey: Yet another good CBC count registered 91 at Scottsbluff on 18 December (fide AK).

Northern Bobwhite: These birds are well-established in the western North Platte Valley; 12 were counted on the Scottsbluff CBC on 18 December (fide AK), and 12 were totaled at Stateline Island on 5 January (BM).

Virginia Rail: That this species winters in surprising numbers at warm springs and seeps into the North Platte Valley has been well-documented in recent years by Steve Dinsmore. Counts this winter peaked at 13 at CCM, 7 at Keystone L, 5 at Facus Springs, and 7 at Kiowa Springs on 20 February, a new location (all SJD).

American Coot: At least 1100 wintered at Keystone L, the LM CBC total on 2 January (fide SJD), although 1316 were counted on 5 February (SJD). (Who else would count every coot when there are Tufted Ducks to see?) Overwintering is rare; the 63 counted at HCR on 8 January disappeared and none was seen until 31 showed up on 28 February (GH, WH). As many as 137 were seen at Winters Creek L on 4 December (SJD), but only 2 were found there on 16 January and one on 20 February (SJD). Unexpected, as was the open water present, were several found at Boystown L, Omaha, on 22 January (MO), two spotted at Carter L on 22 January (B), and 4 identified at CCM on 29 January (SJD).

Sandhill Crane: As usual in recent years, the first migrants appeared in January: 3 were seen east of Rowe Sanctuary, Buffalo Co, on 16 January (fide LR, RH), a record early date for presumed migrants, as we received no wintering reports. The first large group was 826 counted at CCM on 19 February (SJD) and 5000-10,000 were seen south of Kearney by 26 February (JJ, LB). Rather late for fall and unusual at the location was a single sighted at Crystal Cove L, Dakota Co, on 17 December (BFH). There are surprisingly few December records.

Killdeer: At least 11 overwintered in the Keystone L area (SJD), a regular wintering location; 20 remained there as late as 30 December (B). Three
were spotted at Stateline Island on 18 December and as late as 5 January (fide AK). Migrants were first noted on 1 February at Ames, Dodge Co, (DP) and at Alma (GH, WH).

**Greater Yellowlegs**: Marking only the 4th midwinter record, and the latest January record, a single was spotted at Keystone L on 15 January (SJD). A yellowlegs unidentified to species at Stateline Island on 5 January (BM, fide AK) was most likely a Greater; there are no documented records of Lesser Yellowlegs after November.

**Common Snipe**: At least 4 wintered around Keystone L (SJD), apparently a routine occurrence nowadays.

**Pomarine Jaeger**: A dark morph juvenile sighted at LM on 3 December (SJD) was only the 8th for the state, all in fall (June-December), and the 2nd latest ever. Late jaegers tend to be Pomarines.

**Franklin's Gull**: Since 1988, there have been 10 winter reports of Franklin's Gulls in alternate plumage; the one spotted at HCR on 17 December on the CBC (JGJ, SJD) provided the 11th. Apparently the same bird was still present between 22 and 25 January (JGJ, GH, WH).

**Bonaparte's Gull**: Rather late were 25 seen at Gavin's Point Dam on 1 January (JJ).

**Mew Gull**: Only the 2nd fall record (10th in all) was a basic adult discovered at L Maloney on 16 December (SJD). Most records occur in spring between February and March.

**Ring-billed Gull**: This species was more in evidence this winter than usual, with as many as 7000 counted at LM on 2 January (fide SJD) and 1400 tallied at Keystone L on 29 January (SJD); 1200 were seen at Johnson L on 17 January (LR, RH) and 1800 at HCR on 22 January (JGJ), with at least 200 wintering there (GH, WH). A few even wintered at BOL (LE), which is usually frozen in midwinter.

**California Gull**: All reports came from LM (m.ob.), where as many as 41 wintered (SJD).

**Herring Gull**: Excellent counts were the 800 found at HCR on 22 January (JGJ) and 350 seen at Johnson L on 22 January (JGJ). A few wintered at BOL (LE), an unusual overwintering location.

**Thayer's Gull**: Now regular in fall anywhere in the state and overwintering regularly at LM, at least 4 were spotted at LM during the period (2 adults, 1st basic, 3rd basic) (SJD, TJ). As many as 5 were identified at Sutherland Res, with 4 adults and a 1st basic seen on 29 January (SJD). Midwinter records elsewhere are still unusual, however, and so the two spotted at Johnson L on 22 January (JGJ) and the 4 reported at HCR, including at least 2 adults, the same day (JGJ) were noteworthy.

**Iceland Gull**: The only report was of a 3rd basic bird spotted at Lewis and Clark L on 19 December (DLS). This report represents the 3rd fall record (not remaining into winter); interestingly, all derive from the Gavin's Point Dam area.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull**: Two different birds were noted at Johnson L: a 2nd basic on 1 January (JGJ) and a 3rd basic on 22 January (JGJ) and 30
January (LR, RH). Another was identified at Lewis and Clark L on 26 February (JSP).

**Slaty-backed Gull:** A convincing report (to me, at least, but of course the Records Committee will decide) was received of a basic adult seen at HCR on 22 January (JGJ). Photographs were obtained, and all features visible in the photos and noted in the observer’s description fit this species. Unfortunately, however, a single key field mark, the pattern of the underprimaries, was not seen, for the bird flushed with the other gulls present and could not be refound either that day or the next. This sighting would be (have been?) a first state record. Interestingly, a basic adult Slaty-backed Gull appeared on 6 March near Loveland, Colorado, also a state first, and is still present at this writing (31 March).

**Glaucous Gull:** About 10 were reported at various locations around the state, about normal for recent winters. The best counts totaled 3 (adult, two 1st basic) seen at HCR on 22 January (JGJ) and 3 found (2 adults, one juvenile) at Lewis and Clark L on 19 December (DLS).

**Black-legged Kittiwake:** A surprise was an adult found at HCR on the CBC on 17 December and seen again there the next day (SJD, JGJ, GH, WH, LR, RH). Even more unusual was another adult identified in the tailrace at Kingsley Dam on 29 January (SJD). These sightings represent only the 2nd and 3rd records of adults; and the Kingsley Dam record is the first for midwinter.

**Eurasian Collared-Dove:** This soon-to-be-ubiquitous bird appeared at 3 new locations this winter, for a total of 9 locations to date, from Ogallala eastward. The five birds seen at 1101 East 4th St in Ogallala on 22 January had been in the area since September (B). Four had been present several weeks prior to 23 January in the 400 block of South 17th St in Dakota City, Dakota Co, (BFH, RDW, JJ). And the two birds spotted at Elmwood, Cass Co, on 21 February had been present at a feeder “all winter”; by late February, they were mating and carrying nesting material into a tall pine (GW).

**Mourning Dove:** Considered casual in the Keith Co area in midwinter by Rosche, 11 were found on the LM CBC on 2 January (JSe, WRS). Also unexpected was one discovered at Scottsbluff on 2 February (AK). A good wintering count for the location was 61 seen near Ames (DP, JP). The first migrants were noted at Alma on 18 February (GH, WH) and Dakota Co on 20 February (BFH).

**Eastern Screech-Owl:** Routine reports.

**Great Horned Owl:** Two nests with sitting adults were found near Alma, Harlan Co, by 21 February, and 4 by the end of the period (GH, WH).

**Barred Owl:** Reports away from Missouri River Valley counties included singles found at Hormel Park, Fremont, Dodge Co., on 1 January (DP, JP), and 3 identified on the BOL CBC on 17 December (fide JG).

**Long-eared Owl:** The best count was of at least 10 flushed from cedars near Keystone L on 26 February (SJD, LR, RH).

**Short-eared Owl:** The best count totaled 5 at Buckskin Hills on 12 February (BFH).
Belted Kingfisher: Routine reports.

Red-headed Woodpecker: Unusual in midwinter at the location was a juvenile which molted into adult plumage while wintering in southwest Dixon Co (JJ).

Red-bellied Woodpecker: The individual which appeared at Mitchell in November (see Fall Report) remained until at least 25 February (Kathy Larsen fide AK). It became the first ever on a Scottsbluff CBC (fide AK). Now regular in winter as far west as Keith Co in the Platte Valleys, 3 were counted on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: As expected, midwinter singles appeared in the southeast: ADF on 4 January (LF, CF), and Peru State College, Nemaha Co, on 16 January (BC).

Downy Woodpecker: Routine reports.

Northern Flicker: A "red-shafted flicker" was recorded on the Lincoln CBC on 18 December, the 6th time in the last 10 counts (LRB).

Pileated Woodpecker: Presumably one of the resident birds was found in FF on the Omaha CBC on 18 December (BP).

Northern Shrike: Many reports of good numbers were received statewide. As many as 45 were tallied in western Nebraska for the period (SJD), and an excellent 11 were counted as far southeast as the BOL CBC on 17 December (fide JG). It has been recorded on 7 of the last 10 Lincoln CBCs (LRB).

Loggerhead Shrike: Winter reports are usually confined to the extreme southeast, where, for example, it has been recorded on 7 of the last 10 Lincoln CBCs (LRB), the same as the Northern Shrike. The 3 reported on the Grand Island CBC, however, appeared at the western edge of the early winter range.

Blue Jay: It seems most leave the high northwest in winter, as only 2 appeared at a feeder in Chadron all winter (ZU). On the other hand, a good count of 17 was made on the Scottsbluff CBC on 18 December (fide AK).

Pinyon Jay: A flock was spotted south of Crawford, Dawes Co, on 3 January (B), and a few attended the James Ranch feeders throughout the period (SL). There were no other reports.

Black-billed Magpie: Reports came from the slowly-expanding southeastern edge of the range were as many as 6 were found on the BOL CBC on 18 December (fide JG); 3 appeared in the Crete, Saline Co, area on 6 February (MO); one was identified at Wolf L on 16 January (TH); and 2 were seen south of Scribner, Dodge Co., on 21 January (DP, JP).

American Crow: Routine reports.

Horned Lark: The best count reached 3460 in Perkins Co on 1 January (LR, RH).

Black-capped Chickadee: Routine reports.

Tufted Titmouse: Routine reports.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Many reports were received, but none from west of Kearney (LR, RH). The best count totaled 11 at BOL on 30 January (LE),
and, on CBCs, 28 at BOL on 17 December (fide JG). In general, numbers were about normal.

**White-breasted Nuthatch:** In Scotts Bluff Co, where it is a winter visitor, 3 were spotted at Wildcat Hills NC on 18 December (AK). Observers in the west should try to hear the calls as both eastern and western subspecies probably occur in winter. The western birds (high-pitched yank, yank, sounds more like a chip) sound very different from the eastern (lower-pitched nasal yank, yank).

**Pygmy Nuthatch:** An excellent count was 38 tallied in Sioux Co and 13 in Dawes Co on 17 January (SJD).

**Brown Creeper:** Generally rarer westward, up to 9 wintered in the Keystone L area (SJD), and one spotted was at CCM on 19 February (SJD). The best count reached 10 at BOL on 16 January (JS), and the HCR CBC on 17 December registered a good total of 22 (fide JGJ).

**Carolina Wren:** The summer range is in the southeast, but Carolina Wrens tend to occur outside this range in winter on a casual basis as a prelude to range expansion if they survive the winter. The most western outpost is at HCR, where 3 were counted on the CBC on 17 December (fide JGJ) and 1-2 birds were noted at different spots around HCR during the period (GH, WH, LR, RH). Birds were seen at HCR in December 1998 also, but were not reported during the summer of 1999. Also westerly were singles sighted at Crane Meadows NC, Hall Co, 4 January (B) and on the Doane College campus at Crete, Saline Co, on 22 January (LE).

**Winter Wren:** There were more reports than usual in the usual winter haunts in the Missouri River valley, mostly of singles, but a surprising number of westerly reports were received. As many as 3 were found on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD); and 2 were at spotted Ash Hollow SHP on 19 and 26 February (SJD). Interestingly, one of the latter was of the western subspecies pacificus, distinguishable from the eastern birds by call notes (SJD). The birds at Keystone L were easterns (hiemalis) (SJD), as was one discovered at HCR on the CBC on 17 December (SJD). In Lincoln, Winter Wrens have been found on 3 of the last 10 CBCs (LRB), and one was spotted at BOL on 16 January (JS).

**Marsh Wren:** Wintering birds appeared at several western locations, found to be the norm in recent years along the North Platte Valley: one at Kiowa Springs, 2 at Facus Springs, 6 at CCM, and 3 at Keystone L (SJD). A rather late find at a northerly location was one identified on the Calamus CBC on 28 December (LR, RH).

**Golden-crowned Kinglet:** Good numbers were reported throughout the period, especially in the west, where wintering is uncommon. As many as 56 were found on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD); 2 were discovered at Ash Hollow SHP on 19 February (SJD); 7 were seen there on 26 February (LR, RH); and 5 were spotted at CCM on 19 February (SJD).

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** The only report was of a very late bird seen in Lincoln on 30 December (LE). This species is a rare but regular winter visitor in the extreme southeast.
Eastern Bluebird: As is usual, small numbers were reported in midwinter west to Ash Hollow SHP and north to Niobrara, Knox Co. Six were found at Niobrara on 22 January (B) and 7 were seen at Ash Hollow SHP on 19 February (SJD). At HCR, none was found between 8 January and 21 February (GH, WH), exemplifying the tendency for most Eastern Bluebirds to move out in midwinter.

Mountain Bluebird: Unexpectedly far east were the 3 birds that wintered in Seward Co, at least until 4 February (PK, JG). This sighting is the 14th record for eastern Nebraska. Confirming the cedar canyons in southeastern Lincoln Co as a regular wintering site, 400 were found in Cottonwood and Boxelder Canyons on 2 January(B). Can we call the movement from the summer range in northwestern Nebraska to Lincoln Co an altitudinal migration? More than usual, as many as 81, wintered below Keystone Dam (SJD).

Townsend’s Solitaire: Almost as amazing as the absence of Red-tailed Hawks from the Scottsbluff CBC was the absence of this species also (AK). Solitaires were very scarce in the west this winter (SJD), and only 14 were counted on the LM CBC (fide SJD). A belated report identifies one wintering at HCR 1998-99 (GH, WH), rather far south and east.

Hermit Thrush: At least one wintered in the Keystone L area (SJD, DCE); it was of the eastern subspecies faxoni (SJD). This sighting is only the 2nd record of overwintering for the state; and the following records are only the 12th and 13th for midwinter: two were seen at Neale Woods (Krimlofski Tract) as late as 2 January (B), and another was spotted at Bassway Strip, Buffalo Co, on 13 February (LB). The latter and the Keystone L bird denote only the 2nd and 3rd midwinter records away from the east.

American Robin: The best count of wintering birds totaled 465 at ADF on 21 January (LF, CF), and best count overall was 1200 migrants at Wolf L on 27 February (TH). The first for spring in the northwest were 8-10 spotted at a Chadron feeder on 8 February (ZU), while the last in fall were 2 reported there on 7 December (ZU).

Gray Catbird: Only the 2nd January record for the state, the other in Buffalo Co, one was identified at James Ranch on 3 January (SL). No others were reported.

Northern Mockingbird: Westerly for midwinter were singles sighted on the LM CBC on 2 January (JSe, WRS) and at CCM on 15 January and 26 February (SJD, LR, RH). There are very few February reports for this species.

Brown Thrasher: Overwintering is rare, but one made it at the Neale Woods feeders (JB). Another which probably wintered was seen southwest of Elkhorn, Douglas Co., on 1 February (B). One was also recorded on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD) but was not subsequently reported.

European Starling: A high count of 16746 was made on the HCR CBC on 17 December (fide JGJ).
Cedar Waxwing: Numbers were low this winter; the best count reached only 115, at Wolf L on 16 January (TH). Last winter, 1999-99, 800+ were counted at Alma on 1 January (GH, WH).

Orange-crowned Warbler: Very late was one seen on the Lincoln CBC on 18 December (LE), the 3rd December record for the state.

Northern Parula: An amazing record was an immature male photographed at Keystone L on 4 December (SJD), by far the latest ever in fall.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: A surprising 18 were still at HCR on 1 January (GH, WH); 10 wintered there 1998-99 for probably the only overwintering report for the state. Rather late for the location was a female "myrtle" found below Kingsley Dam 15 January (SJD), one of few January records that far west. Two Yellow-rumped Warblers were found on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD).

Spotted Towhee: Routine reports.

American Tree Sparrow: Very good CBC counts were made in the east: 1367 tallied at BOL on 17 December (fide JG) and 1114 counted at DeSoto NWR on 19 December (fide MS). At Scottsbluff, however, the 10 birds tallied was the lowest count ever (AK).

Field Sparrow: The only reports, neither with details, but both at likely locations, were of singles found on the Lincoln CBC on 18 December, where it has been reported 4 of the last 10 counts (LRB), and at DeSoto NWR CBC on 19 December (fide MS).

Savannah Sparrow: No details were provided for one discovered at Nebraska City on 27 February (LF, CF); this bird would be a very early migrant (arrival is usually in late March) or possibly a nearby winterer, and the first February record for Nebraska.

Fox Sparrow: The only midwinter record was of one seen in northern Lancaster Co on 16 January (LE). A good total of 4 was reported on the BOL CBC on 17 December (fide JG).

Song Sparrow: Rare in midwinter in the northwest, one appeared at a Chadron feeder from 2 to 3 February (ZU). First singing was heard near Ames, Dodge Co, on 21 February (DP, JP).

Lincoln's Sparrow: Wintering is casual at best for this species, although there are a few January records but none in February except for a belated report of 1 to 2 wintering at HCR 1998-99; one was still present on 25 January and on 17 February; and details were provided. This winter, one in the observers' yard near Gibbon between 29 and 30 January (LR, RH), details provided, may have been wintering nearby. Late and westerly was one identified on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD).

Swamp Sparrow: Although wintering is rare, especially as far west as Kiowa Springs, where 2 were found on 20 February (SJD), singles were spotted at Wehrspann L on 22 January (MO) and Niobrara Marsh near Niobrara, Knox Co, the same day (B). A good count was 9 at Nathan's L, Washington Co, on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 19 February (fide MS).

White-throated Sparrow: As expected, a few wintered in the extreme southeast, at Lincoln (LE), Nebraska City, Otoe Co, (LF, CF), and Bellevue,
Sarpy Co, (BP, LP), and reports occurred west to Kearney (LR, RH) and the HCR (JGJ) area. Unexpected was one seen on the LM CBC on 2 January (SJD); the species is rare that far west at any time of year.

**Golden-crowned Sparrow:** Several were seen feeding together 9 miles southwest of Brownlee, Cherry Co, on 3 December; their "colorful yellow crowns" were seen well (JD). This report represents the 7th record for the state, the 4th in fall.

**White-crowned Sparrow:** Generally, low numbers overwinter in the state, especially in the east, and so the 32 birds seen near Keystone on 29 January (SJD) was a good count. All White-crowns identified to race belonged to the pale-lobed subspecies *gambelii* (SJD, LR, RH).

**Harris's Sparrow:** Wintering birds are fewest westward, although regularly found in the North Platte Valley; one was noted at a Scottsbluff feeder throughout the period (fide AK) and at least one wintered at Keystone L (SJD). More unusual were a few discovered at the James Ranch feeders near Crawford, Dawes Co, throughout the period (Sl). The best count reached 190 on the BOL CBC on 18 December (fide JG).

**Dark-eyed Junco:** The biggest surprise was the presence of a "grey-headed" junco in a Papillion, Sarpy Co, yard between 16 January and 14 February; it was beautifully documented (PS). Pure individuals of this taxon are rarely reported; this sighting is only the 6th documented record for the state, despite many reports without details. Many "pink-sided" juncos can have reddish backs, but pure "grey-headed" juncos are fairly large, have no pinkish-brown flank wash, are evenly grey except for the back, and are usually unaccompanied by other juncos. The only "white-winged" junco was one identified at the James Ranch feeders on 14 February (SL); a few winter within the summer range. "Oregon" juncos are scarce in the east; a fairly typical ratio was found on the Lincoln CBC on 18 December: 8 "oregons" and 231 "slate-coloreds" (LRB).

**Lapland Longspur:** The best count tallied an excellent 9050 in 4 flocks in Deuel Co on 5 February (SJD).

**Smith's Longspur:** A report was received without details of one located at Buccaneer Bay, Cass Co, on 18 December (B). In a mild winter, such an occurrence is not unexpected, but there are few documented records. There are two prior December reports, both on Lincoln CBCs.

**Snow Bunting:** There were 3 reports: the 7 seen on the BOL CBC on 18 December were the first count record (fide JG, LE); 20 were found in Cass Co on 24 December (GW); and 10 were located at a LM parking area on 5 and 19 February (SJD).

**Northern Cardinal:** Routine reports.

**Dickcissel:** A male in "bright breeding plumage" was spotted at Alma, Harlan Co, on 1 January (GH, WH). This sighting is the 6th winter record.

**Red-winged Blackbird:** The best fall count was 15,000 near Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, on 4 December (SJD); but the 20,706 tallied (counted 'em all) at CCM on 29 January (SJD) may have been an early migrant flock, for wintering flocks of that size are rare. More the norm, although still unusual
at the location, was a wintering flock of 200 spotted near Ames, Dodge Co, (DP, JP). The earliest migrants are usually males, as was a flock located near Crete, Salene Co, on 6 February (MO). The earliest females were in a mixed flock found near Gibbon, Buffalo Co, on 20 February (LR, RH).

**Eastern Meadowlark:** The first songs were heard in northern Lancaster Co on 27 February (LE) and at ADF on 29 February (LF, CF).

**Western Meadowlark:** The first songs were heard in southeastern Otoe Co (LF, CF) and at Spring Creek Prairie near Denton (KP) on 17 February. As far west as Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, the first song occurred about the same time, on 19 February (AK).

**Yellow-headed Blackbird:** A single male may have wintered at Kiowa Springs 1997-98, but this year none was noted there between 4 December, when a male and female were present, and 20 February, when a single male was seen (SJD). Additional early single males were spotted at Keystone L on 19 February (SJD) and east of Gering on 20 February (SJD).

**Rusty Blackbird:** Singles or small groups winter occasionally in the east; the singles seen at Niobrara Marsh on 22 January (B) and near Ames on 2 February (DP, JP) were probably in this category. Essentially an eastern species, reports were received west to Alma, Harlan Co, 16 found on 1 January (GH, WH), and Crane Meadows NC, Hall Co, 22 sighted on 1 December (B).

**Brewer’s Blackbird:** A good count of fall migrants was 55 at Nebraska City, Otoe Co, on 6 December (LF, CF), and early migrants were the 3 spotted at Wolf L on 23 February (TH).

**Common Grackle:** A good CBC count totaled 34 at Lincoln on 18 December (fide LRB); this bird has been recorded there on 2 of the last 10 counts. Probably attempting to winter were 2 located in Crawford, Dawes Co, on 17 January (SJD). Midwinter reports from the northwest are rare. The one seen east of Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, on 20 January (SJD) and as many as 19 at Lewellen, Garden Co, on 29 January (SJD) were also unexpected. Early migrants were the 6 spotted in Dixon Co on 29 February (JJ).

**Great-tailed Grackle:** Westerly reports for winter are increasing; the 10 found at CCM on 15 January (SJD) may have been some of the 13 seen there on 2 December (SJD). As many as 200 had returned to FL by 13 February (LR, RH). No wintering birds were reported in the east.

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** Midwinter records are few, especially of numbers and away from the southeast. A feedlot near Alma, Harlan Co, hosted 10 on 20 January 1999 and 20 on 8 January this year (GH, WH).

**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch:** Flocks were found at the usual locations in southwestern Sioux Co; up to 15 were seen along the road north of Henry between 3 January and 20 February (SJD), and about 50 were wintering in buttes on the Hughson Ranch in southern Sioux Co (HKH).

**Purple Finch:** The many reports were encouraging after a few low years, although few were found in Cass Co, where a long decline has been noted (GW). The best counts were recorded on CBCs: 61 at DeSoto NWR on 19 December (fide MS) and 34 at BOL on 18 December (fide JG). Rare westward, an adult
male was seen at Keystone L on 2 January (SJD); a female was found at a
feeder near Gibbon, Buffalo Co, on 17 January (LR, RH), and 2 were located
at Crane Meadows NC feeders in Hall Co 9 Dec (B).

**House Finch:** Where do summering birds go in winter? Near Ames, Dodge
Co, none was around until 21 February (DP, JP).

**Red Crossbill:** Routine reports.

**White-winged Crossbill:** Only two singles were reported: an immature
spotted at the Tekamah Cem, Burt Co on 5 December (JGJ), and one bird at
the Lutheran Cem, Norfolk, Madison Co, on 15 January (B). These, after a
single male in the fall, were the sum for the winter!

**Common Redpoll:** Only singles were reported, from all parts of the state.
It is rare as far southeast as Bellevue, Sarpy Co, and Nebraska City, Otoe Co,
where one was reported at Bellevue on 18 December (B) and another at a
Nebraska City feeder on 19 February (LF, CF). Other singles were noted at a
feeder near Seward, Seward Co, on 5 February (JG), at Crane Meadows NC,
Hall Co, on 4 January (B), and at Scottsbluff on 12 December (AK).

**Pine Siskin:** Numbers were generally low; the best count was 81 on the
Scottsbluff CBC on 18 December (fide AK).

**American Goldfinch:** Routine reports.

**Evening Grosbeak:** None reported.

**House Sparrow:** Routine reports.