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Winter Field Report, Dec 1998-Feb 1999

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WINTER FIELD REPORT, DEC 1998-FEB 1999

Compiled by

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INTRODUCTION

First we want to correct a rather obvious error in the Summer Field Report. We reported 3 pairs of Cordilleran Flycatchers at Neale Woods at the eastern edge of the state, which would be a remarkable range expansion. These birds were actually in Monroe Canyon, Sioux Co, where they were supposed to be. Another error involved 5 Brewer's Sparrows we said were in Sioux Co; these were actually Brewer's Blackbirds.

Several contributors now report to us by email. We urge observers to forward their email addresses; if we have questions on their reports, communication would be easy! Reports and comments can be submitted to Ross Silcock by email at silcock@sidney.heartland.net. We should note here that this Seasonal Report contains a few unverified observations as well as documented observations; we have generally indicated that reports are unverified if the report is of some significance. We submit documentation we receive to the Records Committee; observers are urged to provide details on unusual birds along with their reports.

Read on and enjoy. (If you don't enjoy, please forward your constructive criticism!)

THE BIRDS

This winter was a pretty quiet birdwise, notably among the "winter" finches, which were essentially absent. Because the winter was very mild throughout, there was significant lingering of "half-hardy" species, those which test their genetic fitness by staying around and trying to get an early spring jump on their reproductive competition; the test usually ends when a severe storm or cold snap chases them out or causes their demise. This phenomenon was most noticeable among waterbirds such as loons and grebes, which continue to set new January to February records, and also among sparrows and blackbirds. Certain sparrow species may be found in midwinter in mild conditions, but few apparently survive until late February, usually the beginning of spring in Nebraska. Blackbirds are a little more hardy, with overwintering, usually of single males at feeders, not unusual in southeastern Nebraska.

There were, however, a few significant rarities. Foremost was the state's first confirmed Hepatic Tanager at West Point, and close behind a very late Black-crowned Night-Heron at L Ogallala, White-winged Dove still present at Kearney, 2nd latest ever Orange-crowned Warbler at HCR, an immature Golden-crowned Sparrow at HCR, and an immature male Indigo Bunting remaining into January in Dixon Co. A variety of rare gulls continues to be reported, although these are becoming less and less in the rarity category.

Intriguing but not accompanied by documentation were reports of a Lewis's Woodpecker at Verdigre, a Mountain Chickadee at Harrison, and a Scarlet Tanager in northeastern Nebraska.

ABBREVIATIONS

= documentation provided; ad(s): adult(s); ADF: Arbor Day Farm; BOL: Branched Oak L; BSC: Boy Scout Camp; Cem: cemetery; CLNWR: Crescent L NWR; Co(s): County (ies); FF: Fontenelle Forest; FL: Funk Lagoon; HCR: Harlan Co Res; ICSP: Indian Cave SP; imm(s): immature(s); juv(s): juvenile(s); L: Lake; LM: L McConaughy; m. ob.: many observers; NC: Nature Center; NE: Nebraska; NM: National Monument; NNF: Nebraska National Forest; NOURC: Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee; NPNWR: North Platte NWR; NWR: National Wildlife Refuge; PL: Pawnee L; Res: Reservoir; RWB: Rainwater Basin; SL: Sewage Lagoon(s); SP: State Park; sp: species; SRA: State Recreation Area; WHNC: Wildcat Hills NC; WMA: (State) Wildlife Management Area; WPA: (Federal) Waterfowl Production Area.

GAZETTEER

Arbor Day Farm: Nebraska City; Branched Oak L: SRA, Lancaster Co; Calamus Res: SRA, Garfield-Loup Cos; Carter Canyon: Scotts Bluff Co; Chadron SP: Dawes Co; Clear Creek Marshes: WMA, Keith-Garden Cos; Crescent L NWR: Garden Co; Crystal Cove L: South Sioux City; Cunningham L: Omaha, Douglas Co; DeSoto NWR: Washington Co; Facus Springs: WMA, Morrill Co; Fontenelle Forest: Bellevue, Sarpy Co; Funk Lagoon: WPA, Phelps Co; Gavin's Point Dam: forms Lewis and Clark L, Knox-Cedar Cos; Grove L: WMA, Antelope Co; Harlan Co Res: SRA, Harlan Co; Harvard Lagoon: (formerly Inland Lagoon) WPA, Clay Co; Holmes L: Lincoln, Lancaster Co; Jack Sinn Marsh: WMA, Lancaster-Saunders Cos; Johnson Res: SRA, Dawson-Gosper Cos; Keystone L: adjoins L Ogallala, Keith Co; Kingsley Dam: forms L McConaughy; Krimlofski Tract: extreme southeastern Washington Co; L Alice: part of NPNWR, Scotts Bluff Co; L Babcock: Platte Co; L McConaughy: Keith Co; L North: Platte Co; L Minatare: SRA, Scotts Bluff Co; L Ogallala: below Kingsley Dam, Keith Co; Monroe Canyon: Sioux Co; Neale Woods: Douglas Co; North Platte NWR: Scotts Bluff Co; Offutt (Air Force) Base L: Sarpy Co; Olive Creek L: SRA, Lancaster Co; Oliver Res: SRA, Kimball Co; Pawnee L: SRA, Lancaster Co; Rainwater Basin: region of natural wetlands in south central NE; (Lillian Annette) Rowe Sanctuary: Kearney Co; Sacramento-Wilcox: WMA, Phelps Co; Sandhills: native grassland region in northcentral NE; Sowbelly Canyon: Sioux Co; Stagecoach L: SRA, Lancaster Co; Standing Bear L: Omaha; Summit Res: SRA, Burt Co; Sutherland Res: SRA, WMA, Lincoln Co; Wehrspann L: Omaha, Sarpy Co; Wildcat Hills NC: Wildcat Hills SRA, Scotts Bluff Co; Willow Creek L: SRA, Pierce Co; Winter's Creek L: part of NPNWR, Scotts Bluff Co; Wolf L: Dodge-Saunders Cos; Wood Duck: WMA, Stanton Co; Yankee Hill L: SRA, Lancaster Co; Zorinsky L: Omaha, Douglas Co.

OBSERVERS

Laurel Badura (LB), Kearney; Norma Brockmoller (NB), Winside; Stephen J. Dinsmore (SJD), Fort Collins, CO; David C. Ely (DCE), Fort Collins, CO; Larry Einemann (LE), Lincoln; Carol Falk (CF), Nebraska City; Laurence Falk (LF), Nebraska City; Joseph Gubanyi (JG), Seward; Robin Harding (RH), Gibbon; Thomas Hoffman (TH), Omaha; Glen Hoge (GH), Alma; Wanda Hoge (WH), Alma; Helen K. Hughson (HKH), Mitchell; Bill F. Huser (BFH), South Sioux City; Jan Johnson (JJ), Wakefield; Joel G. Jorgensen (JGJ), Blair; Alice Kenitz (AK), Gering; Jim Kovanda (JK), Omaha; Sandy Kovanda (SK), Omaha; David A. Leatherman (DAL), Fort Collins, CO; Wayne Mollhoff (WM), Lincoln; Mark Orsag (MO), Crete; Babs Padelford (BP), Bellevue; Loren Padelford (LP), Bellevue; Don Paseka (DP), Ames; Janis Paseka (JP), Ames; Lanny Randolph (LR), Gibbon; Kathleen Crawford-Rose (KCR), Bellevue; Lona Shafer (LS), Verdigre; W. Ross Silcock (WRS), Tabor, IA; John Sullivan (JS), Lincoln; David L. Swanson (DLS), Vermillion, SD; Zee Uridil (ZU), Chadron; Gertrude Wood (GW), Elmwood.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Pacific Loon: Numerous birds of several species lingered later than usual in early winter, including a few vagrants. One such, a first-winter Pacific Loon at LM spotted on 9 January (SJD*), was surprisingly late, and is the 2nd January report for the species. The first report was recorded also at LM between 2 and 15 January, 1998.

Common Loon: Singles were noted at Sutherland Res and LM on 5 December (SJD). At HCR, 2 were present on 8 December (JGJ), and 3 were found on the CBC there on 18 December (JGJ).

Pied-billed Grebe: Late birds included a single reported at HCR on 18 December (JGJ); 5 in Douglas Co on 20 December (JGJ); 1 at Kiwanis Park, Omaha, on 26 December (BP, LP); and a single at LM on 2 January (SJD, DCE). The 5 seen at Grove L on 7 February (MB) were probably too early to be considered migrants and thus may have overwintered.

Horned Grebe: The single at LM spotted on 5 December (SJD) would normally qualify for the latest reported, but singles were also found at HCR on 19 December (JGJ), Cunningham L on 20 December (JGJ); and 2 were seen at LM between 31 December and 1 January (SJD).

Red-necked Grebe: An adult was at LM on 1 January (SJD*). This report is the second for January to February.

Eared Grebe: Late birds included 4 at Sutherland Res on 5 December (SJD) and 2 at L Ogallala/Keystone L between 12 and 14 December (DCE, SJD). Apparently, the same birds stayed long enough to set a record late date of 2 January (SJD*).

Western Grebe: Late birds in the east included a single reported at Wehrspann L on 1 December; 3 at PL on 6 December (JS); and a single at Holmes L, Lincoln, on 19 December (LE). At Sutherland Res, 18 were found on 17 December (SJD), and a single lingered from 31 December to 9 January (SJD). At LM (all SJD), 365 were present on 1 January; 53 on 10 January; 18 on 23 January; 3 on 6 February, and 1 on 19 February. Dinsmore speculates that this pattern is typical at LM: birds

disappear as winter progresses, and actual overwintering is very rare. The numbers do speak for themselves; and if this species was going to winter successfully at LM in any numbers at all, this winter would have been an excellent one in which to do so, due to the mild conditions. The obvious question is, therefore, what happens to the birds that "disappear"? Death may be the simplest answer, but could it be possible that these birds migrate in mid-winter?

Clark's Grebe: The 3 sighted at LM on 1 January (SJD) dropped to 1 on 9 and 10 January (SJD). A single was reported at L Minatare on 17 December (SJD).

American White Pelican: The number of lingering birds in December was surprising low. Only 3 remained at Sutherland Res between 31 December and 9 January (SJD). Other "late" birds included singles seen at Calamus Res on 27 December (NB) and at HCR on 31 December (SJD). The 48 spotted at HCR on 17 February were very early spring migrants (GH, WH); 200 were reported there on 28 February (GH, WH, LR, RH).

Double-crested Cormorant: The 60 noted at HCR on 8 December (JGJ) dropped to 34 by 18 December (JGJ). A single was found on the BOL-Seward CBC on 18 December (JG). The only midwinter report was a single at Sutherland Res on 9 January (SJD), where the "hot pool" soothed its non-migratory joints.

Great Blue Heron: Several birds were found at expected locales, primarily the Platte R area and points to the south. The only report from the north was of a single found on the Beaver Valley CBC on 19 December (WM).

Black-crowned Night-Heron: A first-year bird seen on the LM CBC on 2 January (SJD*, DCE) was a surprise. The previous late date was 17 November (!).

Greater White-fronted Goose: Large numbers lingered into the middle of December, and numerous small flocks were noted at many locales. As many as 5000+ were still present in the east RWB on 17 December (JGJ). Mid-winter reports included 5 at Johnson Res on 17 January (LR, RH) and a loner at L Chappell, Deuel Co, on 23 January, (SJD), the latter rather far west.

Snow Goose: Large numbers were found in the east in December. The numbers increased substantially beginning in very early February, with up to 100,000 present in Buffalo Co on 14 February (LR, RH).

Ross's Goose: The high count was an excellent 33 at HCR CBC on 18 December (SJD).

Canada Goose: Routine reports.

Tundra Swan: Two were spotted with a neck-banded Trumpeter Swan at Curtis Acres Sandpit, western Douglas Co, from 5 to 7 February (NR); apparently, the group had been present for about 2 weeks (fide NR).

Trumpeter Swan: Varying numbers were found from January to February at L Ogallala, where wintering is regular, peaking at 21 on 23 January (SJD). Neck-banded birds found in the east included the single (mentioned above) with 2 Tundra Swans at Curtis Acres Sandpit, western Douglas Co, between 5 and 7 February (NR) and another at Thomas L on 13 February (JS, NR).

Wood Duck: A few lingering birds were found in the east and south in December. Notable was a single at the Calamus CBC spotted on 27 December (NB). The first arrival was a pair reported at Cunningham L on 28 February (JGJ).

Gadwall: December high counts included 165 at L Ogallala on 5 December (SJD) and 61 at Wehrspann L on 20 December (JGJ). Up to 30 also overwintered at L Ogallala/LM (SJD), and the 13 seen at HCR on 23 January (GH, WH) may have overwintered as well.

American Wigeon: Good December counts included 31 spotted at Offutt Base L on 23 December (BP, LP) and 133 reported at the Scottsbluff SL on 19 December (SJD). Up to 30 overwintered at L Ogallala/LM (SJD).

American Black Duck: This species was well reported this winter, and observers provided good identification details. In the west, a drake was spotted at HCR on 30 December (SJD). A single was seen at BOL on 6 February (JS), and a pair was found there on 13 February (JS). Finally, a single was reported at Niobrara Marsh on 28 February (MB). In addition, a well-described bird presumed to be a Mallard-Black Duck hybrid was seen at BOL on 14 February (JS).

Mallard: Routine reports.

Blue-winged Teal: Early was a male reported at HCR on 28 February (GH, WH). There are no documented winter records for this species in the period between 19 November and 28 February, although there are some 50 reports over the years! Observers with information to the contrary are urged to send it to us!

Northern Shoveler: The 56 seen at HCR CBC on 18 December was a good December count. The pair reported at HCR on 6 February (GH, WH) were the first arrivals.

Northern Pintail: An early spring migrant, 200 arrived at FL on 5 February (LB).

Green-winged Teal: The high counts of 750 at Keystone L on 12 December (DCE), 731 at HCR CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ), and 250 at L North/L Babcock on 13 December (WRS, JS) were no doubt made possible by the mild December. Up to 60 were noted at HCR on 25 January (GH, WH), and 130 were found in southwestern Sioux Co on 3 January (SJD).

Canvasback: A few singles were found at various locations in December, but the 29 that overwintered at L Ogallala/LM (SJD) were significant. The first arrivals were 14 found at BOL on 5 February (JS).

Redhead: Several lingering birds were reported in December. January reports included 2 at the Scottsbluff SL on 3 January (SJD) and 92 at LM on 10 January (SJD). Spring migrants began to appear in early Feb, with 10 spotted at BOL on 4 February (JS). The high counts were 600 at L Ogallala on 20 February (SJD) and 400 at HCR on 21 February (GH, WH).

Ring-necked Duck: The 16 seen at Wehrspann L on 20 December (JGJ) comprised the last flock in the east; but 46 and 66 made up the respective counts on 10 and 24 January at LM (SJD). The first spring migrants in the east were probably the 8 reported at BOL on 4 February (JS).

Greater Scaup: Up to 12 were seen at LM on 9 January (SJD). However, SJD noted that few overwintered at LM this year. Other reports away from LM included: a single at Gavin's Point Dam on 16 December (DLS); a single at the Scottsbluff SL on 17 December (SJD); 4 at Wehrspann L on 20 December (JGJ), and 3 at Niobrara SL on 27 February (MB).

Lesser Scaup: The late fall high counts included 188 at L Ogallala on 5 December (SJD) and 103 at Wehrspann L on 20 December (JGJ). At least 72 overwintered at L Ogallala/LM this winter (SJD).

White-winged Scoter: The female immature spotted at L Ogallala/Keystone L on 5 December (SJD) is a rather late winter report.

Black Scoter: As was the case this fall, an unusually high number of this normally rare species was reported. The 4 reported at L Ogallala/Keystone L between 5 and 12 Dec (SJD, DCE, DAL) fell to 2 by 19 Dec (SJD) and then to

1 on 1 January (SJD). A single was found below Gavin's Point Dam from 1 to 16 December (DLS). The female immature spotted at Bluestem L on 25 February (MO) was probably a spring migrant.

Oldsquaw: Up to 9, an excellent count, were noted at L Ogallala/Keystone L from 5 December to 2 January (SJD, DCE, DAL). Other Dec reports included singles seen at Red Cloud SL on 17 December (JGJ; Alma SL on 18 December (SJD); Sutherland Res on 31 December (SJD), and L Ogallala on 20 February (SJD).

Bufflehead: As many as 27 overwintered at L Ogallala/LM, about normal for recent years; counts there have risen to as high as 100 (Richard Rosche).

Common Goldeneye: An excellent high count was 3,800 at Sutherland Res on 17 December (SJD).

Common Goldeneye X Hooded Merganser: Perhaps a species account of its own is appropriate since 2 different birds of this hybrid combination were reported. The first was a male spotted at L Ogallala on both 23 January and 6 February (SJD). The other bird reported was also a male, at Cunningham L on 28 February (JGJ); the observer believes that this was the same bird photographed at this location in March 1997.

Barrow's Goldeneye: A total of three birds was reported: An adult male at Gering SL on 17 December (SJD), a female at L Ogallala on 1 January (SJD), and an immature male at LM on 9 January (SJD)

Hooded Merganser: The only January birds were the 4 that overwintered at L Ogallala/LM (SJD). The high count was 35 at Niobrara Marsh on 28 February (MB).

Red-breasted Merganser: Many were reported this winter. A flock of 21 was seen at Sutherland Res on 5 December (SJD), but only 1 remained there by 9 January (SJD). Only 1 to 3 were spotted at LM/L Ogallala between 1 and 10 January, although 24 were found there on 6 February (SJD), and 22 were seen there on 20 February (SJD). SJD believes that several overwinter at this location along with the large numbers of Common Mergansers.

Common Merganser: The high count was 35,000 at HCR between 30 and 31 December (SJD); this species has an affinity for this location.

Ruddy Duck: The 55 seen at Wehrspann L on 20 December (JGJ) were rather late for a large number of this species. However, at least 9 were reported at LM/L Ogallala between 9 and 10 January (SJD), and 6 were found there on 24 January (SJD).

Bald Eagle: High counts were 191 on 31 December at HCR (SJD); 72 at LM on 20 February (SJD), 63 at HCR CBC on 18 December (JGJ); and 52 at Sutherland Res on 9 January (SJD).

Northern Harrier: The high count was 17 at HCR CBC on 18 December (JGJ).

Sharp-shinned Hawk: The 8 tallied at HCR CBC on 18 December (JGJ) is a good concentration.

Cooper's Hawk: Routine reports.

Northern Goshawk: A single bird was seen at close range in southwestern Greeley Co on 29 January (JP, DP).

Red-shouldered Hawk: A single was spotted in FF on 16 January (LP, BP). The single reported in Otoe Co on 5 January (LF, CF) denotes a rare find away from FF.

Red-tailed Hawk: Routine reports.

Ferruginous Hawk: No details were provided for a report of a bird seen in Cass Co on 5 January; such an easterly record would be significant. No others were

reported farther east than the singles found at the Calamus CBC on 27 December (NB) and near Orleans on 20 January (GH,WH).

Rough-legged Hawk: The high counts were unimpressive this year with 13 found at Niobrara Marsh on (MB) and 10 on the Calamus CBC (NB) on 27 February.

Golden Eagle: Routine reports.

American Kestrel: Routine reports.

Merlin: The majority of reports came from the west, where as many as 4 were found in the Panhandle on 24 January (SJD).

Prairie Falcon: Farthest east were a single spotted in Clay Co on 8 December (JGJ), another found one mile south of Creighton on 16 January (MB), and 2 reported in Clay Co on 21 February (JGJ, WRS).

Gray Partridge: None reported.

Ring-necked Pheasant: Routine reports.

Greater Prairie-Chicken: The high count was 47 on the Calamus CBC on 27 December (NB).

Sharp-tailed Grouse: The high count was 9 on the Calamus CBC on 27 December (NB).

Wild Turkey: The high count was 112 on the Calamus CBC on 27 December (NB).

Northern Bobwhite: A single reported at the Calamus CBC on 27 December (NB) was from an area where the species density is probably rather low.

Virginia Rail: Up to 4 were found at Clear Creek Marshes on 5 December (SJD), and 2 were seen there on 3 January (SJD). At a seep near L Ogallala, 1 to 4 were present between 9 January and 20 February (SJD, BP, LP). Finally, an amazing 16 were noted at Facus Springs on 10 January (SJD). Clearly, this species winters regularly at seeps in the North Platte Valley!

American Coot: An excellent January count was 586 at L Ogallala on 23 January (SJD).

Sandhill Crane: This species had returned to the central Platte Valley area by 18 January (fide LB). A single spotted at BOL on 7 February (JS) was a little off-track.

Killdeer: Several were found lingering somewhat later than usual, such as the 8 at Sutherland Res on 5 December (SJD), 4 at HCR between 8 and 18 December (JGJ), and the 2 at BOL CBC on 18 December (LE). The 6 found at the traditional wintering site below Keystone Dam on 10 January (SJD) were supplemented by migrants on 20 February when 16 were counted (SJD).

American Avocet: Amazingly late and possibly injured was the single reported at LM on 5 December (SJD).

Greater Yellowlegs: A pair was found at LM on 5 December (SJD). About 30 November reports arrived, but this one is only the fourth report during the December through February period.

Least Sandpiper: Very late were the 2 seen at LM on 19 December (SJD). The previous late date was 23 November.

Baird's Sandpiper: The late dates for this long distance migrant are 21 November and 23 December. Add to the mix now a single at Sutherland Res reported on 5 December (SJD) and another spotted at LM 19 December (SJD).

Long-billed Dowitcher: The record late sighting was a single at BOL between 12 and 18 December (LE).

Common Snipe: Numerous reports arrived. The January reports include a single on the Scottsbluff CBC on 2 January (AK); 5 near the Ft Calhoun wastewater

treatment plant on 2 January (NR); and a single spotted northwest of Fremont between 5 and 24 January (JP, DP). In addition, up to 8 overwintered below the Keystone Diversion Dam (SJD).

Bonaparte's Gull: Lingering groups reported in December included 193 at Sutherland Res on 5 December (SJD) and 100 at HCR on 8 December (JGJ). The latter concentration dropped to 26 by 18 December (JGJ). None was reported in either January or February.

Mew Gull: The only report was of an adult at Johnson Res on 21 February (JGJ, WRS), the 8th spring record.

Ring-billed Gull: An excellent high count was 5103 on the HCR CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ).

California Gull: The numbers reported at LM were as follows: 38 on 5 December (SJD); 10 on 24 January (SJD), and 18 on 6 Feb (SJD). Elsewhere, a single was seen at Sutherland Res on 31 December and on 9 January (SJD), and another gull was spotted at Johnson Res on 21 February (JGJ, WRS).

Herring Gull: Excellent high counts included 630 at Sutherland Res on 31 December (SJD); 1100 at LM/L Ogallala on 6 February (SJD); and 900 at Johnson Res on 21 February (WRS, JGJ).

Thayer's Gull: Too many sightings arrived to list them all. The high counts included 5 at Sutherland Res on 31 December (SJD); 4 at L Ogallala on 24 January (SJD); 6 at L Ogallala between 23 and 24 January (SJD); 10 at L Ogallala on 6 February (SJD); 3 at L Maloney on 20 February (WRS, JGJ), and 3 at Johnson Res on 21 February (JGJ, WRS).

Iceland Gull: The only reports were of a first-winter bird at LM on 10 January (SJD*) and a second-winter gull at L Ogallala on 6 February (SJD*).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: None reported.

Glaucous Gull: Only one, a first-winter at Sutherland Res spotted on 17 December (SJD), was reported prior to 31 December. Normally, the first birds are found by the end of November. Up to 5 were seen at Sutherland Res from 31 December to 9 January (SJD); up to 4 were spotted at LM on 24 January (SJD), and 3 were reported at Johnson Res on 21 February (WRS, JGJ).

Great Black-backed Gull: The only report was of a first-winter bird at Johnson Res on 21 February (JGJ, WRS).

Black-legged Kittiwake: Up to 3 lingered below Gavin's Point Dam on 1 December (DLS), and 2 remained until at least from 13 to 16 December (WRS, JS).

Arctic Tern: A first-winter bird, with a minimal description, was reported (via e-mail) below Gavin's Point Dam on 6 December (DLS), a rather late date. This sighting would be a first state record and a major record for the region. Unless a better description is submitted, however, the report carries little weight.

Rock Dove: Routine reports.

Eurasian Collared-Dove: The colony at Kearney continued, with a maximum count of 8 (Roger Newcomb, fide LR, RH). A pair even attempted to nest in December, but the eggs apparently froze (LR, RH).

White-winged Dove: The single that first appeared among the Eurasian Collared-Doves in Kearney last summer was still present at the end of the period (Roger Newcomb, fide LR, RH, LB).

Mourning Dove: The farthest west were 4 spotted on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD), while in the east, 3 to 7 wintered in Dodge Co (DP, JP). Wintering

away from the southeast and the Platte Valley is unusual. Probable early migrants were the 50 seen in Dodge Co on 4 February (DP, JP).

Eastern Screech-Owl: the calling reported at Creighton on 2 February is considered early (MB) as most nesting occurs in March. Females join calling males in the breeding territories to begin the season; pairing is for a single season only.

Great Horned Owl: Routine reports.

Snowy Owl: None reported.

Barred Owl: Reports arrived from the expected range in the Missouri Valley (LE, MO, BFH), as far west as BOL, where 3 were counted on 18 December (JS). Seward Co marks the western edge of the range, which corresponds with the extent of mature upland forest in NE.

Long-eared Owl: At least 10 were seen in cedars at Niobrara SP on 6 January (MB), the period's best count.

Short-eared Owl: One or two were widely reported, including a CBC first at Branched Oak-Seward (fide JG). This species is probably nomadic rather than truly migratory, at least in NE.

Belted Kingfisher: Routine reports.

Lewis's Woodpecker: One was reported at Verdigre from 26 November to 10 December (LS). Most birds depart by late September, but the records include 9 prior reports between November and February, most undocumented.

Red-headed Woodpecker: Unusual northwest of Lincoln and Omaha by December, one was seen near Overton on 30 December (LR, RH), and another was reported at Verdigre on 13 December (JJ, WRS, JS). The latter was molting from juvenile to alternate plumage (WRS, JS).

Red-bellied Woodpecker: The singles spotted on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD) and at Ash Hollow SHP on 3 January (SJD) appeared at the western edge of their winter range.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Three were reported, including one as far north and west as the Calamus-Loup CBC circle on 27 December (fide WM), a rather late date for that location. Another wintered at Bellevue (KCR), and the third was an immature seen at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, on 19 December (LE).

Northern Flicker: Fairly high proportions of "Red-shafted" flickers were reported on the HCR CBC, 5 of 9 identified to form (fide JGJ), and at the Loup City CBC, 3 of 8 to form (fide WM)--but only 1 of the 11 spotted on the Beaver Valley CBC on 19 December was identified to form (fide WM).

Pileated Woodpecker: One was seen briefly at Mormon Hollow in FF on 16 January (JK, SK), but it could not be relocated. Most recent reports come from FF in winter, but this species is only casual in occurrence in NE.

Loggerhead Shrike: One lingered until 13 December at Wolf Creek (TH), rather far north for that date; and another reported on 18 December at HCR was somewhat westerly for the date (WRS). Most wintering birds are found south and east of Grand Island and Omaha, but even there few overwinter.

Northern Shrike: Excellent numbers were reported, including record CBC totals of 15 at Scottsbluff on 2 January (fide AK) and 12 at Calamus-Loup on 27 December (fide NB). The most southeastern report was of one seen in Cass Co on 8 January (GW).

Blue Jay: The best count was 39 in Lancaster Co on 7 February (LE).

Pinyon Jay: None reported.

Black-billed Magpie: Birds reported at the eastern limit of the range included 2 spotted west of Yankee Hill Res on 19 December (JS) and singles located at Willis on 23 January (BFH) and in northern Dodge Co on 17 January--the latter only the observers' 2nd sighting in Dodge Co (DP, JP).

American Crow: Routine reports.

Horned Lark: The best count was a moderate 2000 in eastern Phelps Co on 10 January (LR, RH).

Black-capped Chickadee: Routine reports.

Mountain Chickadee: At least one was reported in Harrison, but no details were provided (fide HKH).

Tufted Titmouse: Routine reports.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Few were reported away from the breeding range; the bird at BOL on 16 January (LE) was this active observer's only sighting for the season. The best count was 7 at Johnson Res on 17 January (LR,RH).

White-breasted Nuthatch: Routine reports.

Pygmy Nuthatch: Routine reports.

Brown Creeper: The best count was 4 wintering at L Ogallala (SJD).

Carolina Wren: The single bird spotted on the BOL-Seward CBC on 18 December (fide JG) and the 2 reported at HCR on 18 December (LR, RH) appeared at the northwestern limit of this species' range.

Winter Wren: The Keith Co area seems to be preferred by Winter Wrens, despite its western location. There have been no fewer than 4 records between December and February, and this winter the 2 reported near Keystone Dam on 12 December (DCE, DAL) provided a 5th. An excellent count was 6 on the Omaha CBC on 19 December (fide BP, LP), tying the previous high there; and one was seen at the BOL-Seward CBC on 18 December (fide JG), an unusual sighting away from the Missouri Valley for that time of the year.

Marsh Wren: At known western wintering locations were the 4 spotted on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD) and the 6 reported at Facus Springs on 10 January (SJD). Marsh Wrens are now known to winter at seeps throughout at least the western North Platte Valley.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: This species was widely reported in the southeastern half of the state, including good CBC totals of 9 at LM on 2 January (fide SJD) and 13 at Calamus-Loup on 27 December (fide NB). Unusual were as many as 10 wintering at L Ogallala (DAL, DCE, SJD) and 9 at Johnson Res on 14 February (LR, RH). Most midwinter reports come from southeast NE.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: This species is rare in NE by late Dec, when most reports arrive from the southeast. This year, however, stragglers were seen as far north and west as L Ogallala, where 3 were found on 5 December (SJD) and another on 12 December (DAL, DCE); at HCR, 4 were found on the CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ); and at BOL, one was identified on 18 December (JS).

Eastern Bluebird: Unusual away from the southeast in midwinter, one was spotted at Grove L, Antelope Co, on 7 February (MB), and 2 were wintering at Willis (BFH).

Mountain Bluebird: A migrating pair was identified at Wind Springs Ranch on 20 February (HKH), about on schedule for spring arrivals.

Townsend's Solitaire: Numbers were not great this winter; the 22 counted on the LM CBC on 2 January were fewer than in recent years. None was noted east of HCR, where one was found on 8 December (JGJ).

American Robin: Some large concentrations were found on CBCs, led by 2633 on the HCR count on 18 December (fide JGJ) and 1558 at Calamus-Loup on 27 December (fide NB). The "countless thousands" at North Bend on 5 February (JP) was a high midwinter count, while a count of 1650 at Wolf L on 27 February (TH) probably involved returning migrants, although good numbers were reported in the vicinity all winter (TH).

Brown Thrasher: Only one was reported, in Washington Co for the DeSoto NWR CBC on 2 January (NR). This species is only casual in winter.

European Starling: Routine reports.

Bohemian Waxwing: The only reports were of some birds sighted in Sowbelly Canyon in late Dec (JJ) and another of 16 spotted at Bushnell on 24 January (SJD). This winter and the last have been the first in a few years for this species to appear in NE.

Cedar Waxwing: The best counts were 420 at Wolf L on 27 February (TH) and 373 on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD).

Orange-crowned Warbler: Very late, in fact the 2nd latest on record, was one on the HCR CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ). The only later record was one in Lincoln on 21 December, 1996, although it has been described between 1979 and 1980 as "wintering as far north as Omaha" (American Birds 34:287).

Yellow-rumped Warbler: A good count was 17 on the HCR CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ). Unusual were the singles reported as far north as Wolf L on 27 February (TH) and as far west as Clear Creek marshes, Keith Co., on 6 February (a "Myrtle," SJD) and Johnson Res on 17 January (LR, RH). Four remained at Johnson Res on 14 February (LR, RH). The February reports from Johnson Res and Wolf L are only the 6th, 7th and 8th ever for this month. Even January reports as far west as central NE. are unusual.

Hepatic Tanager: Considered by one reporter (JP) "a desperate conspiracy by three misguided individuals to add a bird to their Nebraska lists," and "a hoax, the photos and videotape clever forgeries," the presence of a single male at the feeders of Dr. and Mrs. David Minarik in West Point on 6 January was indeed documented for a first state record (BP, LP, WRS). The bird had been present since about 18 December (fide David Minarik), but mysteriously disappeared overnight sometime between 6 and 7 January, disappointing observers who looked for it the next day. As one of the observers (WRS), I must add in our defense that the bird was happily (apparently) gorging itself at a feeder when we departed. The only other suggestion of this species' occurrence in NE was a report of a "red bird" seen at Scottsbluff on 13 January, 1983, which appeared to have dark mandibles, suggestive of Hepatic Tanager; but the light conditions were apparently rather poor and a positive identification was not made (NBR 51:78). The photos and videotape of the West Point bird eliminate the possibility of the southwestern race of Summer Tanager (*cooperi*), which may have a dark bill and darkish wings. The only other record of Hepatic Tanager northeast of its normal range occurred in western Illinois on 23 November, 1981.

Scarlet Tanager: What? Two tanagers? A single of this species--actually less likely to occur in winter than a Summer Tanager--was reported in northeastern NE on 26 December (fide NB); no details were provided, other than that it was in immature or female plumage.

Spotted Towhee: A rare winter visitor in the south, the 13 at HCR CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ) was a good count. The single bird spotted as far north as the Calamus-Loup CBC as late as 27 December was a count first (fide NB), and another was in Washington Co on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 2 January (NR).

Eastern Towhee: Generally rarer in winter than the Spotted Towhee and restricted to extreme southeast NE, reports were true to form. Only three were reported, as far north as Washington Co on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 2 January (NR), another west of Elmwood at a feeder between 4 January and 14 February (JS), and possibly the same bird reported from Cass Co on 22 February (GW).

American Tree Sparrow: The best counts were an amazing 4290 in Kearney and Phelps Cos on 31 January (LR, RH) and 2000 in eastern Phelps Co on 10 January (LR, RH).

Field Sparrow: One was reported on the BOL-Seward CBC on 18 December (JS, fide JG). There are numerous CBC reports, including counts as high as 23 birds, and even several January to February reports, but few of these reports are documented. That Field Sparrows may indeed occasionally occur in winter in NE, however, is documented by one identified in Antelope Co on 11 January, 1986 (NBR 54:62).

Savannah Sparrow: This species has been reported to winter in NE, but no documented midwinter records exist. Two were documented this winter, one south of LM spotted on 2 January (SJD, DCE), and another reported at a feeder in Nebraska City on 20 February (LF, CF). While none may have overwintered, the L Ogallala bird represents the 4th and first documented for January; and the Nebraska City bird was the first ever for February.

Fox Sparrow: Overwintering has been documented on 3 occasions in NE, and December reports from southeast NE are not unexpected. The 3 reports this winter were all from CBCs in the south and east: 6 were found at HCR on 18 December (fide JGJ), one was identified at BOL-Seward on 18 December (fide JG), and 2 were spotted at Omaha on 19 December (fide BP, LP).

Song Sparrow: Definitely regular as a wintering bird in NE, the best count was 47 on the HCR CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ).

Lincoln's Sparrow: This is another sparrow for which overwintering has not been documented in NE, although there are about 20 CBC reports, a few early January reports, but none in February. This winter 3 reports arrived: 2 sparrows were found on the HCR CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ), one appeared in the observers' yard near Gibbon on 20 December (LR, RH), and as many as 5 were found on the Omaha CBC on 19 December (fide BP, LP). The best CBC count recorded was 5, also at Omaha, in 1972.

Swamp Sparrow: As with some of the preceding sparrow species, Swamp Sparrow may overwinter rarely in southeast NE, as several January to February reports from Douglas and Sarpy Cos suggest; however, December reports, mostly on CBCs, are not unusual. This year there were 2 December reports: 2 birds were at BOL on 18 December (JS) and one was found on the Omaha CBC on 19 December (fide BP, LP).

White-throated Sparrow: This species is another that may overwinter rarely in southeast NE and is not unusual on CBCs. Some 25 birds were reported in December, the latest 2 rather far to the north and west on the Loup City CBC on 27 December (fide NB). The best count was 17 in Lincoln on 19 December (LE). The

only report after December was of one bird at Swanson Park, Omaha, on 20 February (NR), possibly a wintering bird, given the location.

Harris's Sparrow: The best count was 183 on the HCR CBC on 18 December (JGJ) in a part of the state where wintering is regular and on a date when this species is still numerous. Numbers decline markedly north of the Platte Valley and in the west in midwinter; of interest, therefore, were the 7 listed on the Loup City CBC on 27 December (fide NB). The "last to leave" the locality included a single at South Sioux City on 1 January (BFH), a single at Sutherland Res on both 12 December (DCE) and 9 January (SJD), and 4 at L Ogallala on 24 January (SJD). Good counts of wintering birds were 80 in Phelps Co on 7 February (LR, RH) and 46 in northern Lancaster Co on 9 January (LE).

White-crowned Sparrow: As with Harris' Sparrow, numbers are lowest in midwinter, especially in the north. Few were reported this winter. An immature spotted at Creighton on 12 and 13 January was the "earliest" for Knox Co (MB); indeed, this is the first midwinter record for the species in northeastern NE. The best count was 38 on the HCR CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ); all but one were pale-lored, the northwestern race *gambelii*, usually more common in NE than the dark-lored eastern race *leucophrys*, which is rare away from eastern NE. Interestingly, there are black-lored birds breeding in the Rocky Mountains, race *oriantha*, and it is conceivable that a dark-lored bird with *gambelii* in central NE may be *oriantha* rather than *leucophrys*. There are no documented records of *oriantha* for NE.

Golden-crowned Sparrow: An immature found on the HCR CBC on 18 December (JGJ) and seen again later that day (SJD) represents the 6th NE report and only the 3rd documented sighting. A cold snap that night cleared out the *Zonotrichia* sparrows--mostly Harris' and a few White-crowned--with which it mixed. There are 3 spring reports, none documented, but all likely correct, in the period between 16 April and 14 May. There are 3 fall reports, 2 documented, between 25 and 26 November, and this record along with an undocumented report on 7 October, 1966. Flocks of White-crowned Sparrows in western NE should be carefully checked for immature Golden-crowned Sparrows, which are rather dark, including the bill, and may show little or no yellow in the crown.

Dark-eyed Junco: This species was "unusually abundant" (NR) this winter, with the best count registering 436 birds in Washington Co on 2 January (NR). As far west as HCR, "Slate-colored" juncos predominate; of the 366 reported on the HCR CBC for 18 December (fide JGJ), only 7 were "Oregons" and 3 "Pink-sided."

Lapland Longspur: Very large numbers were noted this winter, including an amazing 50,000 "moving north" in Dodge Co on 16 January (JP, DP). The best counts elsewhere were 2,132 in west Banner Co 2 on 4 January (SJD), and 2129 on the LM CBC on 2 January (fide SJD).

Snow Bunting: The only reports were of one listed on the Calamus-Loup CBC on 27 December (fide NB) and of 6 spotted at Creighton on 3 January (MB).

Northern Cardinal: Scattered reports came in from the Panhandle; at Scottsbluff, a small group of three was listed in the CBC on 2 January (fide AK), and a male was "roaming around" Scottsbluff during the winter (AK). A female also appeared at a feeder south of Walgren L from November through at least February (fide ZU). And a belated report arrived of a male at a Chadron feeder from late November, 1997, through April, 1998 (fide ZU). Cardinals are usually noted north

and west of their usual summer range prior to their establishment in new areas, often for several years, as was the case at Scottsbluff.

Indigo Bunting: One of the more surprising records this winter was an immature male that appeared at a feeder in southwestern Dixon Co on 19 December and survived until the evening of 2 January, when the windchill registered 47 below (JJ). This is by far the latest NE record, the prior latest being 22 October, 1984, in Douglas-Sarpy Cos. The latest record for Kansas is 16 October (Thompson and Ely, *Birds in Kansas*); but there are 2 January records for Missouri (Robbins and Easterla, *Birds of Missouri*).

Red-winged Blackbird: There were unusually high numbers present at unexpected locations in midwinter, such as 3000 west of Oshkosh on 3 January (SJD); 600 in Washington Co on 2 January (NR); 200 in Dodge Co on 1 and 16 January (DP, JP); 50 at FL on 5 February (LB), and 48 on 16 January apparently wintering in South Sioux City (BFH). Small flocks of migrants were widespread in the Panhandle as early as 6 February (SJD).

Eastern Meadowlark: The report of 7 birds of this species "vocalizing" at Standing Bear L on 13 February (NR) is interesting. A few possibly move north this early in southeast NE, or they may even overwinter; unless they call, however, identification is difficult if not impossible.

Western Meadowlark: Calling birds were noted in Knox Co as early as 14 February (MB).

Yellow-headed Blackbird: One of the few midwinter reports identified an adult male at Oak L, Lincoln, on 9 February (JS). Late fall birds included one in Washington Co on the DeSoto CBC on 2 January (NR) and a male and an immature with Red-winged Blackbirds in the observers' yard near Gibbon between 19 and 31 December (LR, RH).

Rusty Blackbird: Good numbers were reported through 30 December, when 19 appeared near Elm Creek (LR, RH). The best count was also somewhat westerly, 68 on the HCR CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ). This species is only casual as far west as the Panhandle. The 9 counted on the Calamus-Loup CBC on 27 December were a count first (fide NB) and were also rather far northwest for the date. Twenty showed up in the observers' yard in Dodge Co on 31 December, apparently wintering, but only 2 remained by 11 February (DP, JP). Likely early migrants were the 20 reported at Niobrara on 27 February (MB).

Brewer's Blackbird: The only report was of 2 in southwestern Lancaster Co on 20 February (LE). This is an early spring date for this species, a rare migrant in the east.

Common Grackle: The only midwinter reports were of 6 seen at South Sioux City on 10 January, described as "last" to leave (BFH), 1 to 2 spotted in the observers' yard near Gibbon all winter (LR, RH), and one identified in Cass Co on 12 January (GW), the latter not unusual for the location. Most midwinter reports are from the south and the east. The 100 reported at FL on 5 February (LB) was a surprising number for the date; and the "first" for spring were 12 seen at South Sioux City on 14 February (BFH), an early date for spring migrants.

Great-tailed Grackle: Late and still unusual for the location was a flock of 49 to 52 birds located at the Niobrara marshes from 13 to 16 December; the flock consisted of 65% males (JS, JJ, WRS). Also at an unusual location and date was the bird listed on the Beaver Valley CBC on 19 December (fide WM). Apparently a

avored wintering site, Oak Park L in Lincoln had 14 birds on 9 February (JS); as many as 32 wintered there from 1995 to 1996.

Brown-headed Cowbird: Rather late for the locations and dates were 25 on the Beaver Valley CBC on 19 December (fide WM) and a male at South Sioux City between 9 and 13 January (BFH). A single in Cass Co on 12 January (GW) also was unexpected in midwinter, even at that southeastern location.

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch: The two reports originated from known roost locations: 50 were reported wintering at the Wind Springs Ranch in southern Sioux Co (HKH) and 250+ were seen at the southwestern Sioux Co roost escarpment on the Henry Road on 3 Jan (SJD). To see these birds, observers should arrive at the roost site in early afternoon, as the birds disappear into holes or Cliff Swallow nests by about 3 p.m.

Purple Finch: In recent winters, this species has been noticeably scarce. This winter, a notably quiet one for "winter" finches overall, only two reports, involving a total of only 2 birds, arrived. Singles were found on the HCR CBC on 18 December (SJD) and in Nebraska City from 30 December to 5 January (LF, CF).

Cassin's Finch: None reported.

House Finch: Numbers noted in larger towns may not be as large as they were in the first few years after colonization; the best counts were only 20 in Lincoln on 9 January (LE) and 13 in Omaha on 22 January (NR).

Red Crossbill: The only report away from the summer range was of 12 on the Beaver Valley CBC on 19 December (WM).

Common Redpoll: Only one was reported, at CCM on 20 February (SJD).

Pine Siskin: The numbers reported were significantly lower than in recent years. The best counts were 200 west of Lisco on 17 December (SJD), 40 south of Gering on 1 December (AK), and 40 on the HCR CBC on 18 December (fide JGJ). All other reports were in single digits.

American Goldfinch: The best count was about 450 at the observer's feeder on 29 December (CH).

Evening Grosbeak: None reported.

House Sparrow: The best count was 65 in the vicinity of the observers' yard near Gibbon on 26 December; the number seen was directly proportional to the number of cattle in the fields around the observers' home (LR, RH).