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Winter Field Report, December 2000 to February 2001

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WINTER FIELD REPORT, December 2000 to February 2001

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INTRODUCTION

What a difference a year makes! After all sorts of unusual midwinter reports last winter, this winter seemed more normal, as entire species actually left the state for a while. Although not extremely cold, the cool temperatures were persistent in November and December, flushing out many of the semi-hardy species and freezing most bodies of water.

There were, nevertheless, some notable tardies: a first Panhandle winter Wood Duck; a Spotted Sandpiper in December at Harlan Co Res; a first December Eastern Phoebe; a third January Gray Catbird; a second December Pine Warbler; a 3rd overwintering Yellow-headed Blackbird; and the farthest northwestward wintering Brewer's Blackbirds.

Rarities were topped by first state record Black Rosy-Finches; first state record "Hepburn's" Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches; a second state Glaucous-winged Gull; a second state Tufted Duck (probably the same bird which wintered last year); 3rd and 4th fall-winter Mew Gulls; a 4th fall Iceland Gull; and a Gyrfalcon--and that's just a list of what Steve Dinsmore found! Other rarities included the 7th documented "Gray-headed" Junco; the first Pine Grosbeak since 1988; the 5th Varied Thrush since 1991; and the 4th Seward Co Tufted Titmouse in 18 years.

Amazing single-observer, single-day counts were 150,000 Mallards seen at Harlan Co Res; 818 Buffleheads tallied at L Ogallala; 53 Rough-legged Hawks found in the Panhandle; and 11 Thayer's Gulls spotted at L McConaughy.

Expanding ranges included that of the Eurasian Collared-Dove, now reported from 16 locations, and of Northern Cardinals in the Panhandle section of the North Platte Valley. Perhaps in this category are Trumpeter Swans apparently moving east-west. Last, and probably least, were tantalizing reports, not substantiated, of Garganey and Bushtit. Oh well, we'll just keep looking!

ABBREVIATIONS

ADE: Arbor Day Farm, Otoe Co; **BOL**: Branched Oak L, Lancaster Co; **CBC**: Christmas Bird Count; **CCM**: Clear Creek Marshes, Keith/Garden Cos; **FF**: Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co; **HCR**: Harlan Co Res, Harlan Co; **LM**: L McConaughy, Keith Co; **LO**: L Ogallala, including Keystone L, Keith Co; **NC**: Nature Center; **NM**: National Monument; **NOURC**: Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee; **NWR**: National Wildlife

Refuge; PL: Pawnee L, Lancaster Co; Res: Reservoir; SHP: State Historical Park; SL: Sewage Lagoons; SP: State Park.

GAZETTEER

Calamus Res: Loup/Garfield Cos; DeSoto NWR: Washington Co; Facus Springs: Morrill Co; Gavin's Point Dam: Cedar Co; Johnson L: Gosper/Phelps Cos; Keystone Dam: Keith Co (forms L Ogallala); Kiowa Springs: Scotts Bluff Co; L Alice: Scotts Bluff Co; L Minatare: Scotts Bluff Co; Sutherland Res: Lincoln Co; Winters Creek L: Scotts Bluff Co.

OBSERVERS

Aaron Brees (AB), Indianola, IA; Alice Heckman (AH), Kearney; Alice Kenitz (AK), Gering; Alan Risor (AR), Wisner; Nebraska Birdline (B), Bill F. Huser (BFH), South Sioux City; Betty Grenon (BG), Bellevue; BW, Carol Falk (CF), Nebraska City; Carolyn Hall (CH), Bassett; Colleen Noecker (CN), Albion; Clem Klaphake (CNK), Bellevue; Duane Bright (DB), Bellevue; Dean Drawbaugh (DD), Scottsbluff; Don Noecker (DN), Albion; Don Paseka (DP), Ames; Elizabeth Allen (EA), Omaha; Glen Hoge (GH), Alma; Gertrude Wood (GW), Elmwood; Helen K. Hughson (HKH), Scottsbluff; John Brennehan (JB), Omaha; Joe Fontaine (JF), Fort Collins, CO; Joe Gubanyi (JG), Seward; Joel Jorgensen (JGJ), Blair; Jan Johnson (JJ), Wakefield; Jan Paseka (JP), Ames; Jerry Toll (JT), Omaha; Kathy Larson (KL), Mitchell; Kevin Poague (KP), Lincoln; Lorraine A. Lienemann (LAL), Bellevue; Larry Einemann (LE), Lincoln; Laurence Falk (LF), Nebraska City; Lanny Randolph (LR), Gibbon; Mark Brogie (MB), Creighton; Neal Ratzlaff (NR), Omaha; Phyllis Drawbaugh (PD), Scottsbluff; Paul Kaufman (PK), Seward; Ruth Green (RG), Bellevue; Robin Harding (RH), Gibbon; Stephen J. Dinsmore (SJD), Fort Collins, CO; Sandy Lemmon (SL), Crawford; Steve McIlree (SM), Omaha; Steve Van Sickle (SV), Yankton, SD; Thomas Hoffman (TH), Omaha; Wanda Hoge (WH), Alma; W. Ross Silcock (WRS), Tabor, IA; Zee Uridil (ZU), Chadron.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Pacific Loon: The only report was of a juvenile spotted at LM on 3 December (SJD), a rather late date.

Common Loon: Also the only report was of a juvenile identified at LM on 3 December (SJD), a rather late date.

Pied-billed Grebe: The last reported was one found at LO on 13 December (SJD, JF), a little tardy.

Horned Grebe: The last was one found at LM on 14 December (SJD, JF), also a little tardy.

Red-necked Grebe: A good count of 3--2 adults and a juvenile--was made at LM on 3 December (SJD). Although this report denotes only the 17th documented record for the species (there are 10 additional reports), it may be regular in fall at LM.

Eared Grebe: The last were singles identified at LM and at LO on 13 December (SJD, JF). This date is very late, with the only later date being 14 December 1998 at LO.

Western Grebe: For the first time in a few years, none wintered at LM (SJD); the last sighting was a single found on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD). The best count at LM reached 482 on 3 December, dwindling to 172 on 14 December (SJD, JF). Three were spotted at Sutherland Res as late as 14 December (SJD, JF).

Clark's Grebe: The last was one seen at LM on 14 December (SJD), the latest date for a non-wintering bird. The only wintering has taken place at LM, in recent mild winters.

American White Pelican: The only report was of one noted at Carter L, Omaha, between 4 and 5 December (SM, B).

Double-crested Cormorant: The last were singles found in Cedar Co on 8 December (SV) and on the HCR CBC on 15 December--the latter was an immature (SJD) and a rather late date.

Great Blue Heron: A few winter regularly in the Platte Valley and lower Missouri Valley, such as the 9 spotted in the LO area on 3 February (SJD); but there are few midwinter reports elsewhere. One was identified at HCR on 3 February (GH, WH).

Black-crowned Night-Heron: An immature found at LO on 8 December (Rodger Knaggs fide SJD) was the second latest ever and the first for December.

Greater White-fronted Goose: There are fewer than 10 Panhandle records; thus the 6 spotted at CCM and the 3 found at Cabela's, Sidney, on 3 February (SJD) were unexpected. One identified at North Platte on 28 December (SJD) was rather far west for the late date. None was reported between 28 December and 3 February.

Snow Goose: Mid-winter records from the west are few; singles were seen at LO on 14 January (SJD); L Minatare on 27 January (SJD); L Alice the same day (SJD); and, rather far north in midwinter, at Calamus Res on 3 February (WRS). The last big group was the 700 tallied at HCR for the CBC on 14 December (JGJ).

Ross's Goose: Until recently, midwinter reports had been non-existent, but such reports can be expected whenever Snow Geese are present. There are fewer than 10 January records in all; thus the 3 reports this winter were significant: of 5 seen on the HCR CBC on 14 December (JGJ), one remained until 1 January (GH, WH), a rather late fall date; 2 adults were identified at Sutherland Res on 14 January (SJD); and an immature spotted at LO the same day was probably one of a group of 7 found there as late as 14 December and the same bird that remained for the LM CBC on 30 December (SJD).

Canada Goose: The best counts were rather large: 19,423 on the Scottsbluff CBC on 23 December (fide AK); 18,000 at L Minatare on 3 December (SJD); and 13,579 on the LM CBC on 30 December (SJD).

Trumpeter Swan: A large group wintered in the LM area; the peak count totaled 54 on 3 February, of which 43 were found at LO (SJD). The 3 adults seen in a field 2 miles southwest of Big Springs, Deuel Co, on 22 January were unexpected--one had a green neck collar R17 (Bill Prather fide SJD). These birds were likely from Iowa; Iowa birds have previously migrated to Colorado and back to Minnesota (Ron Andrews). The only other report was of one found with a red wing marker near Fremont, Dodge Co, on 20 December; it was from Minnesota (Ron Andrews fide Omaha World Herald).

Tundra Swan: The only report was of an adult found with the Trumpeter Swans at LO on 3 February (SJD, details). There are about 10 midwinter records.

Wood Duck: A surprising 7 birds noted at Winters Creek L on 27 January (SJD) provided the first Panhandle winter record; the few previous midwinter records came from the south and east. No others were reported after a single was seen below Keystone Dam on the LM CBC on 30 December (WRS).

Gadwall: There are fewer than 20 midwinter records, suggesting that overwintering is unusual. Of interest, therefore, were the 35 tallied at CCM on 14 January (SJD) and the (at least) 26 which wintered at LO (SJD). A small group, maximum 10, wintered at L Yankton, Cedar Co (JJ, SV).

American Wigeon: Rather late were singles identified at Johnson L on 7 January (LR, RH) and at Gering SL on 9 January (AK). The three found at Johnson L on 28 January (LR, RH) may have been there all winter hidden among the 4,000 Mallards there; these birds, along with the one found at CCM on 14 January (SJD) and the 16 which wintered at LO (SJD) were among fewer than 25 midwinter records.

American Black Duck: The only report was of one seen at BOL on 3 December (JGJ); it is rare but regular in winter in the east.

Mallard: the best count reached a record 150,000 on the HCR CBC (fide JGJ); another very large flock was 70,000 tallied near Burwell, Garfield Co, on 24 December (LR, RH). The best count for midwinter was 4,400 at Kiowa Springs on 21 January (SJD).

Northern Shoveler: Only casual in midwinter away from the Platte Valley, the 1 to 4 birds found at Alma SL, Harlan Co, between 1 and 15 January (GH, WH) were unexpected. One was seen at HCR on 15 January on "open water" (LR, RH).

Northern Pintail: Routine reports.

Garganey: One was reported on 30 December on the LM CBC as seen very briefly but having the field marks of a male; the sighting seems doubtful, however, as male Garganeys are in alternate plumage only from early Mar to midsummer.

Green-winged Teal: The best midwinter tally totaled 68 at LO on 3 February (SJD). Wintering is unexpected north of the Platte Valley and away from the east; the 12 spotted at Calamus Res between 3 and 4 February (WRS) were thus unexpected.

Canvasback: The only reports between 9 December and 27 February were of 6 to 8 birds which wintered at LO (SJD). This report represents only the 3rd record of overwintering; there are an additional 6 midwinter records.

Redhead: As with Canvasback, the only midwinter report was of 28 spotted at LO on 3 February; 40 were identified there on 14 January (SJD). The four found in Lincoln Co on 30 December (NR) was the only report elsewhere.

Ring-necked Duck: Another diving duck found in midwinter this year only at LO, where 46 was the low count, on 14 Jan (SJD).

Tufted Duck: An adult male, presumably the same bird which wintered last year, was noted at LO from 3 to 13 December (SJD; photos).

Greater Scaup: Apart from a single at L Minatare 3 Dec (SJD), the only reports were of 68 at LO 3 Dec, dwindling to a midwinter low of 21 on 3 Feb (SJD).

Lesser Scaup: The only ones reported in midwinter were at least 8 found wintering at LO--down from an excellent count of 764 on 3 December (SJD)--and 3 at Scottsbluff SL 27 January (SJD). There are fewer than 10 midwinter records away from the LM area.

Surf Scoter: None reported.

White-winged Scoter: Three female/immature types were identified at LO on 3 December, dwindling to one through 16 December (SJD, JF), a rather late date. No others were reported.

Black Scoter: None reported.

Long-tailed Duck: All reports came from LO, where 2 were present on 3 December (SJD), 3 on 14 December (SJD), and 2 adults on 16 December (JF).

Bufflehead: An amazing 818 were counted at LO on 3 December (SJD), dwindling to 53 on 3 February (SJD), which were wintering. The only other reports were from Gavin's Point Dam on 6 December (SV) and of a single seen in Lancaster Co on 17 December (LE).

Common Goldeneye: A male hybrid with Hooded Merganser was wintering at LO for the 3rd year (SJD). At least 323 wintered as usual on LO, with a peak count there of 1,145 made on 13 December (SJD). A surprising number for the location and date was the 159 tallied at Scottsbluff SL on 27 January (SJD). Other midwinter reports were of 7 seen at Gavin's Point Dam on 7 January (JJ), and 5 found at Buckskin Hills, Dixon Co, on 3 February (BFH); the latter birds must have been migrants.

Barrow's Goldeneye: The birds that arrived in November continued at LO, with up to 4, 3 adult males and an adult female, wintering (SJD). This area is a regular wintering location for this species.

Hooded Merganser: Midwinter reports all came from the west; 2 were spotted below Keystone Dam on 14 January (SJD); 3 were identified at L Alice on 27 January (SJD); and 5 were found at CCM on 3 February (SJD).

Common Merganser: The peak count at LM reached 32,000 on 13 December (SJD), and about 3,300 wintered in the area (SJD). A good count at a smaller reservoir totaled 9,000 at Johnson L on 3 December (LR, RH). Somewhat unusual were 7 noted at Winters Creek L on 27 January (SJD), and singles spotted near Lincoln on 28 January (LE) and in Hooker Co on 28 January (SJD).

Red-breasted Merganser: This species is being found amongst wintering flocks of Common Mergansers in small numbers in winter; it is still only a casual winter visitor, however. This winter, 2 males were seen at Johnson L on 7 January (LR, RH); 6 at LO on 14 January (SJD); and 2 at HCR on 21 January (GH, WH).

Ruddy Duck: The only reports of this usually cold-sensitive species came from LO, where 24 were present on 3 December, dwindling to the last sighting of a single on 14 December (SJD).

Bald Eagle: The best counts totaled 184 on the HCR CBC on 15 December (fide JGJ); 152 in Keith and Lincoln Cos on 14 January (SJD); and 124 at Johnson L on 7 January (LR, RH). An apparent pair which had been present on the Elkhorn River south of Wisner, Cuming Co, for about a month may have been preparing to nest (AR).

Northern Harrier: The best counts included 16 in the south Panhandle on 3 February (SJD) and 14 on the HCR CBC (fide JGJ).

Sharp-shinned Hawk: One wintering at a feeder in Nebraska City, Otoe Co, killed at least 2 starlings (LF, CF); a candidate for cloning? Another, which was in adult plumage, puzzled the observers because it had golden eyes, supposedly a sign of immaturity (LR, RH). On occasion, however, 2- or 3-year-old sharpies can retain golden eyes, according to Palmer (Handbook of North American Birds).

Cooper's Hawk: Routine reports.

Northern Goshawk: After the large numbers seen migrating south in fall past Hitchcock Nature Center (Iowa) by Mark Orsag and his crew, this winter looked to be a good one. The number of sightings was a bit disappointing, though, with only 5 birds reported. One was spotted on the Grand Island CBC on 17 December (fide B); an adult was noted just west of Omaha on 24 December (B); one was spotted near Wynot, Cedar Co, on 26 December (BFH); an adult was found at Merritt Res, Cherry Co, 28 December (SJD); and an immature was identified at Buckskin Hills, Dixon Co, 3 February (BFH).

Red-shouldered Hawk: None reported.

Red-tailed Hawk: Routine reports.

Ferruginous Hawk: A total of 13 were counted in the Panhandle for the period, including one dark morph (SJD). Easterly reports included one found on the Grand Island CBC on 17 December (fide B), and singles

sighted near Alma, Harlan Co, on 15 January (GH, WH, LR, RH), near Oxford, Furnas Co, on 5 January (GH, WH), and in northeaster Buffalo Co on 11 February (LR, RH).

Rough-legged Hawk: This species was much in evidence in the Panhandle. The best count reached 53 on 10 February, including 43 light morphs and one dark morph; the light morphs consisted of 12 adult males, 12 adult females, 16 juveniles, and 5 female/immatures (SJD, JF, AB). Other excellent counts included 41 on 21 February in Sioux Co (SJD), and 35 on the Henry Road, Sioux Co (HKH). Other dark morphs were seen in southeastern Washington Co 24 December (JT), and, likely the same bird, near Boyer Chute NWR, Washington Co, on 5 January (CNK).

Golden Eagle: Easterly were singles sighted near Center, Knox Co, on 28 January (B) and in Seward Co (PK); Golden Eagles are only casual in the east. A total of 21 were counted in the Panhandle for the period (SJD).

American Kestrel: The best count was 23 tallied in Scottsbluff Co on 27 January (SJD).

Merlin: About 18 were reported statewide; birds identified to subspecies included a male *richardsoni* spotted at Ponca SP, Dixon Co, on 1 January (BFH) and an immature male *richardsoni* found at Dakota City, Dakota Co, on 17 February (BFH). One wintering in a Scottsbluff yard killed a starling and a House Sparrow (DD, PD).

Prairie Falcon: A total of 17 were found in the Panhandle during the period (SJD), and an additional 16 or so were reported elsewhere. The farthest east were one sighted hover-hunting northeast of Ames, Dodge Co, on 15 February (DP, JP), and another identified near PL on 13 December (JG).

Peregrine Falcon: The only report was of one identified on the Grand Island CBC on 17 December (B). This species is rare between December and February, with most of the 45 or so records occurring in December.

Gyr Falcon: This species almost certainly occurs in Nebraska every winter, probably mostly in difficult to access northern and western grassland areas. However, an adult gray morph made itself obvious below Keystone Dam on 1 January when it killed and ate a Common Goldeneye in front of the lucky observers; the bird had not been seen in the area on the LM CBC on 30 December (SJD, AB; details).

Gray Partridge: None reported.

Ring-necked Pheasant: An excellent total of 340 was reported on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 17 December (B). The record high there is 565, recorded in 1983-84.

Sharp-tailed Grouse: This species is "getting harder to find" in Knox Co (MB), which is probably true at the eastern edge of its range in general. The best counts reached 32 in Sioux Co on 10 February (SJD) and 23 on the resurrected Crawford CBC on 31 December (BW).

Greater Prairie-Chicken: An amazing flock of 108 was seen south of Walnut in southwestern Knox Co on 10 December (MB); this species is

obviously doing better than its sharp-tailed congener there. The best count elsewhere totaled 44 on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD).

Wild Turkey: This species is numerous statewide. The best count was the 253 totalled on the Scottsbluff CBC on 23 December; they were originally stocked in Carter Canyon, Scotts Bluff Co, in 1961 (fide AK). A record for the Omaha CBC was the 144 spotted on 23 December (fide BG); 137 were seen east of the Keystone-Roscoe bridge, Keith Co, on 29 December (SJD).

Northern Bobwhite: The best count was the 30 tallied at BOL on 15 December (LE). Excellent for the west was the count of 20 recorded west of Scottsbluff on 23 December (AK).

Virginia Rail: Wintering birds were noted at LO, Facus Springs, and CCM (SJD) as has been the norm in recent years.

American Coot: Some 272 wintered at LO; these were the survivors from about 290 reported there in late December (SJD). Unexpected was one sighted at Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, on 23 December (AK) and 7 spotted at Sutherland Res on 28 December (SJD). Wintering occurs on occasion if open water persists.

Sandhill Crane: In contrast to recent springs, the only January report was of a single seen with about 40 Canada Geese flying over Gibbon, Buffalo Co, on 6 January (LR, RH). It is likely that this bird wintered in the area. The first migrants were the 40 noted flying over Alma, Harlan Co, on 19 February (GH, WH). Somewhat westerly were 40 located at LO on 25 February (Rodger Knaggs fide SJD); a population of about 40,000 has used the CCM area in recent years.

Killdeer: The only wintering birds were 1 to 4 found below Keystone Dam; at least 2 still remained there on 3 February (SJD). Elsewhere, the last to leave was one seen in Lancaster Co on 17 December (LE).

Spotted Sandpiper: Rather amazing was a basic adult identified between 14 and 15 December at HCR (JGJ, SJD, JF; photos). This sighting represents the latest ever for Nebraska.

Common Snipe: Surprisingly, none was reported in midwinter; one was spotted below HCR Dam on 1 January (GH, WH), and 2 were seen at Scottsbluff on 23 December (AK).

Franklin's Gull: In recent years, single adults of this species in alternate plumage have appeared at a time when they should be in South America and in basic plumage. An example this year was one identified at Gavin's Point Dam from 6 to 9 December (SV, MB); it even had pink underparts (MB). Unexpected, however, was an adult in basic plumage found at L Minatare on 13 December (SJD).

Bonaparte's Gull: None was reported; late migrants are usually found into December.

Mew Gull: An adult was sighted at LO between 14 and 30 December, and 2 were found there on 14 January (SJD, JF; details). These denote only the 3rd and 4th fall records; the January record represents the 1st for that month.

Ring-billed Gull: A few were present in midwinter at HCR (GH, WH), at LO, and at LM (SJD). The best count reached 2,000 at Johnson L on 3 December (LR, RH); but 542 were tallied at LO as late as 14 January (SJD).

California Gull: Uncommon in midwinter, up to 4 wintered at LO (SJD). No others were reported.

Herring Gull: The only midwinter reports came from HCR, Sutherland Res, and LM; as many as 794 were counted at LM on 14 January (SJD), an excellent midwinter count--but there were only 62 seen at Sutherland Res on 14 January (SJD) and up to 5 at HCR through the period (GH, WH). A good count was 700 at Johnson L on 3 December (LR, RH).

Thayer's Gull: This species has become fairly common in Nebraska, especially at LM. This year some 18 were reported, including a peak count of 11 recorded at LO on 14 January (SJD). As many as 5 were seen at Sutherland Res on 14 December (SJD). Elsewhere, a "small, but text-book" 1st winter bird was spotted at PL on 3 December (JGJ); and a single was located on the HCR CBC on 15 December (JGJ, SJD).

Iceland Gull: The only report was of a 2nd basic bird found at LO on 14 December (SJD, JF; details). This sighting is the 4th fall (birds which did not stay into winter) record; the other 3 records occurred at Gavin's Point Dam.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: A 4th basic bird was spotted at Sutherland Res on 14 December (SJD) and may have moved to LO, where a similar bird was seen on 16 December (JF). An adult was identified at LM on 28 December (SJD), the 3rd-latest for fall (the latest is 1 January).

Glaucous-winged Gull: What would be Nebraska's second record if accepted by the NOURC was a 1st basic bird located at LO on 13 December (SJD; details). The first was another 1st basic bird seen there on 12 April 1995.

Glaucous Gull: Along with Thayer's Gull, this species has become fairly common in recent years. All reports came from LM, Sutherland Res, and HCR, with birds present throughout the period. Test best count totaled 9 on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD); and at least 6 wintered there, including 3 1st basic, 2 adults, and a 3rd basic spotted on 14 January (SJD, JF). An immature was noted at HCR on 3 and on 19 December, and an adult was found there on 18 January (GH, WH).

Rock Dove: Routine reports.

Eurasian Collared-Dove: This species is rapidly becoming ubiquitous in Nebraska; reports came from Dakota City, Elmwood, Spalding, Ogallala, Kimball, and Mitchell. Of these, Spalding, Greeley Co, and Mitchell, Scotts Bluff Co, represent new locations, for a total of 16 locations for the species. The largest colony now seems to be in the area of the Bess Streeter Aldrich historical home in Elmwood, Cass Co, where as many as 12 were counted at one time in December; the birds formed a flock in winter, breaking into groups of 2 to 3 birds in late February; and mating was observed in February and in March (GW). The best count to date

from Ogallala, Keith Co, is 7 tallied on the LM CBC on 30 December (SJD). Spalding was a newly-reported location; as many as 8 have been present west of the park and swimming pool for the "past several years"; 5 were noted there on 21 January (CN, DN). The previously-reported colony in Dakota City, Dakota Co, continues to expand, with 5 present there on 20 February, although a Merlin there may have instituted some population control (BFH). At Mitchell, at least 3 were present most of February, "hanging around" near the water tower (KL, DD, PD, AK).

Mourning Dove: Midwinter reports came from the south and east, where wintering occurs in milder years, but perhaps was unexpected this year; the best counts reached 20 at the observer's Omaha feeders on 3 February (NR) and 10+ in northwestern Phelps Co on 28 January (LR, RH).

Eastern Screech-Owl: Routine reports.

Great Horned Owl: Routine reports.

Snowy Owl: None was reported, despite some early indications of southward movement to the north of Nebraska.

Barred Owl: Reports from the edge of the range were of one found at Ponca SP, Dixon Co, on 3 February (BFH), and at least one identified on the Seward-Branched Oak CBC on 15 December (fide JG), possibly at BOL, where one was noted on 17 February (LE).

Long-eared Owl: The best count totaled 6 on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD), and cool yard birds were singles found in southwestern Dixon Co on 29 December (JJ) and near Gibbon, Buffalo Co, on 9 February (LR, RH). The only other report was of a single noted in southwestern Washington Co on 2 February (JT).

Short-eared Owl: This species is noted more often in winter; it is probably nomadic rather than migratory. Evidence of winter nomads was provided by 2 birds wintering near Ames, Dodge Co, (DP, JP), and 3 birds located in southeastern Washington Co on 2 February (JT).

Northern Saw-whet Owl: This winter, 1 to 2 birds were located in the LO area (SJD), and one was found on the south side of LM on 15 December (Jack Pollack fide SJD). Diligent searching of isolated cedars in the area may yield these owls with some regularity.

Belted Kingfisher: Routine reports.

Red-headed Woodpecker: The only report away from the southeastern corner of the state, where a few occur most winters, was of 4 birds spotted in Cedar Co on 26 December (BFH); reports in midwinter in this area are few.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Westerly reports included a single located at McGrew, Scotts Bluff Co, on 12 January (AK)--apparently the same (lonely?) bird that appeared there in June--and 4 found on the LM CBC, about the west edge of the expected winter range.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Only 4 were reported, all in December except for an immature seen at Crete, Saline Co, on 20 January (LE); midwinter records are few away from the lower Missouri Valley. An

immature identified in Seward, Seward Co, between 8 and 19 December (JG) was a bit westerly also.

Downy Woodpecker: Routine reports.

Hairy Woodpecker: Routine reports.

Northern Flicker: Easterly red-shafted birds were found both in northeastern Wayne Co on 11 December (JJ) and in southwestern Dixon Co on 27 February (JJ). Of an amazing 127 flickers tallied on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 17 December, 4 were red-shafted (fide B). Perhaps surprising in this seemingly cool winter were the 3 birds spotted as far north as Jackson, Dakota Co, on 20 January (BFH).

Pileated Woodpecker: The only report from FF was of one sighted on 9 January (B).

Eastern Phoebe: A surprise was a very late bird located at Neale Woods, Douglas-Washington Cos, on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 17 December (JB). This sighting represents the first December record for the state; there are 3 November records. What was it eating?

Northern Shrike: This species was widely reported, with the best count reaching 7 on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD); 3 in a day were reported from BOL on 7 January (LE) and in Banner Co on 27 January (SJD). A total of 14 was found in Banner Co for the period (SJD). This species is rare in the extreme southeast, and so of interest was one identified in Cass Co on 8 January (GW).

Loggerhead Shrike: Somewhat surprisingly considering the winter conditions, two were reported: one was seen near BOL on 12 January (DP, JP; details) and the other was spotted at Wolf L, Saunders Co, on 3 February (TH; details). This species is rare in midwinter away from the extreme southeast.

Blue Jay: An excellent westerly count totalled 51 on the Scottsbluff CBC on 23 December (fide AK).

Pinyon Jay: The large flock that frequented Crawford, Dawes Co, totaled 37 for the Crawford CBC on 31 December (BW) and was estimated at 40 on 21 January (SJD, JF). Other reports included 37 found in eastern Sioux Co on 10 February (SJD); and throughout the period, 1-5 were seen in Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, (AK). Some were also found at the James Ranch, Sioux Co, feeders (SL).

Black-billed Magpie: Excellent counts included 97 tallied on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD)--the 2nd highest CBC total ever behind Scottsbluff's 98 in 1977-78--and 92 totalled on the Scottsbluff CBC on 23 December (fide AK). Southeasterly were one seen at Winnebago, Thurston Co, on 13 January (BFH) and at least one identified on the Seward-Branched Oak CBC on 15 December (fide JG).

American Crow: A surprising 910 were counted in a single flock at mile marker 190 on Interstate 80 on 29 December (WRS); and 635 were counted on the HCR CBC on 15 December (fide JGJ).

Horned Lark: The best count reached 3,260 in Sioux Co on 10 February (SJD).

Black-capped Chickadee: Routine reports.

Tufted Titmouse: Only the 4th Seward Co record for the observer in 18 years was a single observed at a feeder in Seward between 8 and 19 December (JG).

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Numbers were merely average, although reports were statewide; the best counts totalled only 11 on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD) and 6 on the Scottsbluff CBC on 23 December (fide AK).

White-breasted Nuthatch: One of the western subspecies *nelsoni* was spotted at LO on 14 December (SJD), an easterly location for this summer resident of the Ponderosa Pine woodlands.

Pygmy Nuthatch: The only reports were of up to 5 found at the Wildcat Hills NC, Scotts Bluff Co, feeders (SJD, JF, AK).

Brown Creeper: Although generally considered less numerous westward, up to 7 wintered at LO (SJD), and 13 were counted on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD).

Carolina Wren: The colder-than-recently winter may have had an effect on this species at the edge of its range: none was found at Wilderness Park, Lincoln, on 25 February (LE), although one was still at it near Alma, Harlan Co, on 6 January (GH, WH). One spotted at Towle Park, Omaha, on 19 February had clearly survived (NR). Spring observations will be of interest this year.

Winter Wren: The only reports were of one seen on the HCR CBC on 15 December (JGJ), rather westerly, and another, identified as of the western subspecies (*salebrosus?*), identified at Monroe Canyon, Sioux Co, on 21 January (SJD, JF). Winter Wrens are only casual in winter at both locations.

Marsh Wren: As is the norm lately, a few wintered at CCM and Facus Springs (SJD). Elsewhere, 4 were found on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD), also a known wintering area; but the one located below the dam at L Alice on 27 January (SJD) was a bit of a surprise.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: Wintering birds were not widely noted; the best count for the period in Lancaster Co totaled 6 both at Wyuka Cem on 17 December (LE) and on the University of Nebraska-Kearney campus on 16 February (LR, RH). Although a good wintering count for a westerly location reached 7 at LO, 19 were found there on 3 December (SJD).

Eastern Bluebird: Reports were mostly from the southeast as expected, although 4 were spotted in Keya Paha Co on 21 February (CH); possibly early migrants, 2 were seen at Ponca SP on 3 February (BFH), and as many as 17 remained at HCR until 15 January (LR, RH). Away from the southeast, this species is only casual in midwinter.

Mountain Bluebird: The only reports were of 9 spotted at CCM on 1 January (SJD) and of 11 found below Keystone Dam on 14 January (SJD), expected wintering locations.

Townsend's Solitaire: The farthest east were the 2 discovered on the HCR CBC on 15 December (fide JGJ) and the 2 identified on the Grand

Island CBC on 17 December (fide B). The LM CBC on 30 December reported a good total of 58 (fide SJD).

American Robin: The best CBC count was the 1,984 tallied at HCR on 15 December (fide JGJ), while elsewhere 820 were noted in the cedar park land of Cottonwood Canyon, Lincoln Co, on 29 December (WRS). The species was absent, however, in Dakota Co during the period (BFH).

Varied Thrush: The single report, about par for a Nebraska winter, although only the 5th since 1991, was of one observed in a Lincoln yard for a few days prior to 12 December (Sue Samson fide KP).

Gray Catbird: A surprise was one found freshly dead at ADF on 8 January; it was very thin and likely died of starvation (LF, CF). This report represents only the 3rd January record for Nebraska.

Brown Thrasher: The only report was of one seen at a Waterloo, Douglas Co, feeder on 21 December (B). December records are fairly numerous.

European Starling: Routine reports.

Bushtit: Tantalizing was a report of "a different bird" in a Scottsbluff yard near Riverside Zoo on 27 January that was said to have matched this species in a field guide; unfortunately, it could not be checked out before it departed (fide AK). This species regularly appears in the eastern Colorado foothills north to the Wyoming border, and there is a record from Weld Co about 45 miles from the southwestern corner of Nebraska (Andrews and Righter, Birds of Colorado, 1992). There is also a record of 4 netted in Ellis Co, Kansas (Thompson and Ely, Birds in Kansas, 1992), some 80 miles south of Harlan Co, Nebraska.

Bohemian Waxwing: The only report came surprisingly from the east; one was identified with 15 Cedar Waxwings at Twin Lakes, Seward Co, on 13 December (JG).

Cedar Waxwing: The best counts totaled 300 at Niobrara SP on 9 December (MB) and 150 near Raymond, Lancaster Co, on 28 January (LE).

Yellow-rumped Warbler: A few were reported in December, all in the south and east as expected. The one spotted at Niobrara SP, Knox Co, on 29 January (B), however, was unusual for midwinter at that location. There are fewer than 10 February records for the state.

Pine Warbler: This species has a propensity for appearing at feeders in late fall; the one observed at a Bellevue suet feeder between 14 and 16 December (B) denotes the 2nd Nebraska record for December.

Spotted Towhee: Farthest north and west were singles found at Scotts Bluff NM, Scotts Bluff Co, on 23 December (AK) and at Homer, Dakota Co, on 13 January (BFH). Wintering birds are scarce and mostly confined to the south and east, although there are a few reports from the North Platte Valley in winter.

American Tree Sparrow: The best counts were from CBCs: an excellent 2,281 at HCR on 15 December (fide JGJ) and 737 at DeSoto

NWR on 17 December (fide B). The best single-observer count was 221 tallied at BOL on 15 December (LE).

Chipping Sparrow: One was reported without details on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 17 December. There is only one documented record for 15 December to 15 February.

Fox Sparrow: One was reported without details on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 17 December. While a little more likely in December than the Chipping Sparrow, there are few documented reports.

Song Sparrow: The best count was 39 recorded on the HCR CBC on 15 December (fide JGJ).

Swamp Sparrow: The only report was of two seen on the LM CBC on 30 December (WRS). There are few westerly reports late December-February, but most are from the North Platte Valley.

White-throated Sparrow: Wintering is rare, even in the southeast; after a few December reports, the only midwinter sightings were of 1 to 2 wintering birds found at Nebraska City, Otoe Co (LF, CF), and another which probably wintered in Omaha, with appearances at the observer's feeders on 19 January and again on 3 February (NR).

White-crowned Sparrow: The only midwinter reports were of 1 to 2 at BOL throughout the period (LE). The other reports occurred in December, all from the south, including 9 spotted on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD).

Harris's Sparrow: This species is rare in the Panhandle, although a few winter in the North Platte Valley; one was found at Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co, on 31 December (HKH).

Dark-eyed Junco: The most unusual junco reported was a "Gray-headed" Junco seen at Riverside Park Zoo, Scottsbluff, on 2 February (KL; photographed). This sighting represents only the 7th documented record for the state. "White-winged" Juncos wintered at James Ranch, Sioux Co (SL), and were also noted in Scottsbluff (KL). A few winter in Nebraska each year. "Oregon" Juncos are rare in eastern Nebraska; one was identified at a Nebraska City, Otoe Co, feeder on 28 February (LF, CF); another was spotted at Jackson, Dakota Co, on 20 January (BFH); and 3 were found at Wakefield, Dixon Co, on 29 January (JJ). "Pink-sided" Juncos, *J. hyemalis mearnsi*, are rarely reported in the east, and to date undocumented, and so a surprise was the 4 seen (along with 855 other juncos) reported on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 17 December.

Lapland Longspur: The best count reached the "thousands" in a 12-mile stretch of road near North Bend, Dodge Co, on 25 January; they were gone by the end of January and none was present in February (DP, JP). The species was widely reported this winter.

Snow Bunting: This winter was good for this species, with numbers as far south as Elmwood, Cass Co, where an excellent total of 500 were seen on 14 December (GW). Other good counts included 50 seen near Ames, Dodge Co, between 20 and 25 January (DP, JP) and 13 tallied in Dixon Co on 26 December (JJ).

Northern Cardinal: There are now "definitely little groups of cardinals along the [North Platte] river and they are moving west" (AK). Reports included 2 spotted east of McGrew, Scotts Bluff Co, on 13 January (AK); 5 birds spotted a mile east of Bridgeport, Morrill Co (fide AK); and 5 found in a Bridgeport yard (fide AK).

Dickcissel: Unexpected was one located in a Bellevue yard on 11 December, seen at close range to have a "yellow breast" (LAL). This report is the 7th record for December-February; 4 of these occurred in December, and all from the south and east.

Red-winged Blackbird: Large numbers for midwinter were the 4,500 counted east of Gering SL on 27 January (SJD), possibly migrants, and the 250 totalled in northwestern Phelps Co on 7 January (LR, RH). A single wintered at Chadron, Dawes Co (ZU), where such occurrences are rare. Rather late were the 4,000 found in northern Lancaster Co on 1 January (LE).

Western Meadowlark: Unusual in midwinter were the 45 birds, some singing, located at Rowe Sanctuary, Buffalo Co, on 21 January (LR, RH). None was noted between 26 December and 3 February in Dakota Co (BFH).

Yellow-headed Blackbird: The 2 males and a female discovered with other blackbirds at a feedlot east of Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, (SJD, PD, DD) denote only the 3rd record of overwintering. At the other end of the state, another adult male seen in Knox Co on 28 January (B) represents only the 4th midwinter record.

Rusty Blackbird: Only casual in the north and west, especially in midwinter, 2 were spotted below Keystone Dam on 14 January (SJD). A few birds have been counted in recent years at HCR, about as far west as the species can be expected; this year as many as 62 were included on the HCR CBC on 15 December (fide JGJ). Some 40 still remained there on 15 January (GH, WH). Small numbers, 1 to 3, were reported at several locations in the southeast through 14 January (JG, LE), although as many as 20 were spotted in Lancaster Co on 20 January (LE). This species is rare in midwinter in the southeast, but it overwinters on occasion.

Brewer's Blackbird: As many as 41 were counted on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD); and 23 were still present below Keystone Dam from 14 January to 3 February (SJD). This sighting represents the only documented record of wintering that far west and north. The only other report was one found on the Grand Island CBC on 17 December (B; no details).

Common Grackle: The only midwinter records included 4 to 8 which wintered at feeders as far north as Wakefield, Dixon Co (JJ), and a single spotted at a saleyard in Columbus, Platte Co, on 17 January (DP, JP). The first migrant appeared at Dakota City, Dakota Co, on 15 February (BFH).

Great-tailed Grackle: In recent winters, this species has become casual in occurrence in winter. Only 6 birds were reported: one was seen at Niobrara Marsh, Knox Co, on 9 December (MB); one was found during

the LM CBC count week (fide SJD); and 2 males and 2 females were seen in Ogallala, Keith Co, on 1 January (SJD).

Brown-headed Cowbird: A few midwinter reports were received, all from the south and east, where overwintering occurs on occasion: as many as 45 were found at a feedlot near Alma, Harlan Co, on 15 January (GH, WH, LR, RH); 3 were located near Republican City, Harlan Co, on 18 January (GH, WH); and singles were spotted in northwestern Phelps Co on 28 January (LR, RH) and at a feeder in South Sioux City, Dakota Co, the same day (BFH). The latter denotes only the 4th midwinter record from the northeast.

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch: Thanks to the dogged efforts of Stephen J. Dinsmore, some rather amazing *Leucosticte* records were made this winter. Not only was a new species added to the state list (see Black Rosy-Finch), but an additional taxon, the Alaskan "Hepburn's" Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, *L. tephrocotis littoralis*, was found also, not to mention large numbers of regular old interior mundane Gray-crowns, *L. t. tephrocotis*. These birds tend to winter in an area near their favored roost site; Dinsmore has located at least 3 of these sites. The largest flock totalled 300+ at the Wind Springs Ranch, southern Sioux Co, roosting at an escarpment near the ranch house; this flock contained at least 6 "Hepburn's" (HKH, SJD, m.ob.). Another large flock of 200+ was found along Henry Road, roosting at the large escarpment a few miles north of Henry in Sioux Co; this flock contained at least 5 "Hepburn's" (SJD). Another flock of 120 was located at Agate Fossil Beds SHP, Sioux Co; this flock contained 2 "Hepburn's" (SJD, JF, AB). A single "Hepburn's" was seen in a Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, yard throughout the period (Rod Smith, fide AK). Additional Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches (without "Hepburn's") included 6 spotted at a new roost in southwestern Cheyenne Co on 3 February (SJD), and 13 identified in Harrison, Sioux Co, on 10 February (SJD, JF). The Cheyenne Co record represents only the 9th away from Sioux and Scotts Bluff Cos.

Black Rosy-Finch: Along with "Hepburn's" Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, this taxon was new to the state list this winter. Dinsmore and Helen Hughson located and photographed at least 4 in the Wind Springs Ranch flock of Gray-crowns (HKH, SJD, JF, m.ob), and others spotted included at least 6 in the Henry Road flock (SID, JF) and one in the Agate Fossil Beds SHP flock (SJD, JF, AB). These sightings represent the easternmost North American records for the species, except for a single Ohio record.

Pine Grosbeak: This species has not been reported in the state since 1988, and so a male identified with a flock of House Finches, American Goldfinches, and Eastern Bluebirds in Cottonwood Canyon, Lincoln Co, on 29 December was a surprise (WRS; details and a cool drawing).

Purple Finch: Few were reported. The best count, surprisingly, as far west as Keith Co, was the 25 tallied on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD). Other westerly reports included singles spotted south of Gering,

Scotts Bluff Co, on 2 January (AK) and at LO, a male, on 3 February (SJD). The rest of the reports involved a total of about 16 birds, all in the southeast.

House Finch: The best count reached 191 on the LM CBC on 30 December (fide SJD). An albino, with eyes and legs orange, was located at an Elmwood, Cass Co, feeder with other House Finches for several weeks (GW, photographs).

Red Crossbill: Small groups visiting feeders were noted statewide. The farthest east were a few found at feeders in Tekamah, Burt Co, throughout the period (Joan Benson fide RG); between 5 and 10 were observed at the Neale Woods feeders in northern Douglas Co throughout the period (B); 2 were seen at a feeder in Bellevue on 10 December (DB); and 2 were spotted at feeders in Nebraska City, Otoe Co, on 17 February (LF, CF). Red Crossbills are generally rare in the southeast.

Common Redpoll: The only report was from the Seward-Branched Oak CBC on 15 December; a number was not given (JG).

Pine Siskin: This year was about average overall for this species; the best counts included 100+ at a Chadron, Dawes Co, feeder on 28 January (ZU), and 86 on the HCR CBC on 15 December (fide JGJ).

American Goldfinch: An average year for this species also; the best count totalled 718 on the DeSoto NWR CBC on 17 December (B).

Evening Grosbeak: The only report was of small numbers located at Wildcat Hills NC, Scotts Bluff Co, and in Gering, Scotts Bluff Co, throughout the period (AK), about as expected.

House Sparrow: Routine reports.