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Winter Field Report, Dec 1997 to Feb 1998

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WINTER FIELD REPORT, DEC 1997 to FEB 1998

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Introduction

As one observer (DH) noted, this was a "weird" winter. January and February were more like March, producing winter reports of species with few such previous reports; the species involved come from all parts of the taxonomic list, from loons to icterids. Almost certainly, a first (in recorded history) was a slam of all the Nebraska grebe species in January, even Red-

necked and Clark's! Also in January, a Pacific Loon was reported. As shown in the species' accounts below, the list of rare midwinter species is long.

Another significant, related finding involved early-arriving spring migrants, also a long list. In some cases it cannot be determined whether these were wintering nearby or indeed were very early migrants. The February weather certainly was conducive to early arrival of "opportunistic-type" migrants, such as waterfowl and blackbirds.

Rarities were not earth shattering, but a nice list nevertheless. Included were an "Eastern" Brant, Black Scoter, Barrow's Goldeneye, a Merlin of the blackish subspecies *Falco columbarius suckleyi*, three Mew Gulls, two Iceland Gulls, and a Black-throated Sparrow. All are discussed below.

I urge observers to give me their e-mail addresses; if I have questions on their reports, communication would be easy! By the way, reports and comments can be submitted to me by e-mail at silcock@sidney.heartland.net.

Correction

Last winter we reported a Ruddy Duck at Wood Duck Area 2 Feb 1997; this date should have been 28 Feb 1997.

Abbreviations

Initials in parentheses refer to the observers, listed below. * = documentation provided; **ad(s)**: adult(s); **ADF**: Arbor Day Farm; **BOL**: Branched Oak L; **CBC**: Christmas Bird Count; **Cem**: cemetery; **CLNWR**: Crescent L NWR; **Co(s)**: County(ies); **FF**: Fontenelle Forest; **FL**: Funk Lagoon; **HCR**: Harlan Co Res; **imm(s)**: immature(s); **juv(s)**: juvenile(s); **L**: Lake; **LM**: L McConaughy; **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; **OPPD**: Omaha Public Power Division; **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, Otoe Co; **Branched Oak L**: SRA, Lancaster Co; **Buffalo Creek**: WMA, Banner-Scotts Bluff Cos; **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; **Cunningham L**: Omaha, Douglas Co; **Dead Timber**: SRA, Dodge Co; **DeSoto NWR**: Washington Co; **Enders Res**: SRA, Chase 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; **Grandpa's Steakhouse L**: behind Grandpa's Steakhouse, Kearney, Buffalo Co; **Hansen Lagoon**: WPA, Clay 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 Lagoon**: WPA, Phelps Co; **Johnson Res**: SRA, Dawson-Gosper Cos; **Keystone L**: adjoins L Ogallala, Keith Co; **Kingsley Dam**: forms L McConaughy; **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; **Louisville Lakes**: SRA, Cass 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; **OPPD Wetlands**: Otoe Co; **Pawnee L**: SRA, Lancaster Co;

(Lillian Annette) **Pintail Marsh**: WMA, Hamilton Co; **Rainwater Basin**: region of natural wetlands in south-central NE; **Rowe Sanctuary**: Kearney Co; **Sandhills**: native grassland region in north-central NE; **Schramm SP**: Sarpy Co; **Scotts Bluff NM**: Scotts Bluff Co; **Sinninger Lagoon**: WPA, York Co; **Sowbelly Canyon**: Sioux Co; **Spikerush Basin**: WMA, York Co; **Stagecoach L**: SRA, Lancaster Co; **Summit Res**: SRA, Burt Co; **Sutherland Res**: SRA, WMA, Lincoln Co; **Swan Creek Res**: Saline 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

Jim Alt (**JA**), Bellevue; Nebraska Birdline (**B**); John Brenneman (**JB**), Omaha; Norma Brockmoller (**NB**), Winside; Ellen Brogie (**EB**), Creighton; Mark Brogie (**MB**), Creighton; John Dinan (**JD**), Lincoln; Stephen J. Dinsmore (**SJD**), Fort Collins, CO; Larry Einemann (**LE**), Lincoln; Dave C. Ely (**DCE**), Fort Collins, CO; Carol Falk (**CF**), Nebraska City; Laurence Falk (**LF**), Nebraska City; Marlin French (**MF**), Ellsworth; Ruth Green (**RG**), Bellevue; Betsy Hancock (**BH**), Elmwood; Robin Harding (**RH**), Gibbon; David Heidt (**DH**), Norfolk; Thomas Hoffman (**TH**), Omaha; Erin Huebschmann (**EH**), Omaha; Jeff Huebschmann (**JH**), Omaha; Helen K. Hughson (**HKH**), Mitchell; Bill F. Huser (**BFH**), South Sioux City; Jan Johnson (**JJ**), Wakefield; Gerry Jorgensen (**GJ**), Blair; Joel G. Jorgensen (**JGJ**), Blair; Alice Kenitz (**AK**), Gering; Lucy Koenig (**LK**), Scottsbluff; Nick Komar (**NK**), Fort Collins, CO; Sandy Lemmon (**SL**), Crawford; Babs Padelford (**BP**), Bellevue; Loren Padelford (**LP**), Bellevue; Don Paseka (**DP**), Ames; Janice Paseka (**JP**), Ames; Larry Randolph (**LR**), Gibbon; Neal Ratzlaff (**NR**), Omaha; David Rintoul (**DR**), Manhattan, KS; Kathleen Crawford-Rose (**KCR**), Bellevue; W. Ross Silcock (**WRS**), Tabor, IA; John Sullivan (**JS**), Lincoln; Zee Uridil (**ZU**), Chadron; Gertrude Wood (**GW**), Elmwood.

Species Accounts

Pacific Loon: A 1st-basic bird at Swanson Res 6 Dec (SJD) was the 2nd latest in fall ever, the latest 9 Dec 1986 at L North (*Amer. Birds* 41:297). Unprecedented for Jan, and the only record for the period 10 Dec to 9 Jun, was a 1st-basic bird apparently wintering at LM; it was seen from 2-15 Jan (*SJD, mob).

Common Loon: The only report was from Enders Res 6 Dec (SJD). There are four later reports, 6, 25, and 28 Dec, and 1 Jan 1952, the last at LM (NBR 11:10).

Pied-billed Grebe: Rather late in the east was one at Offutt Base L 25 Dec (BP, LP); there are four later reports through 1 Jan. Very early was one at Boystown L 15 Feb (B); no details were received, however. Earliest in the east is 27 Feb. Rare, but not unprecedented, was one wintering below Kingsley Dam, seen there 13 Jan through the period (SJD, mob).

Horned Grebe: There are few late Dec reports, and so unexpected was one at Sutherland Res 18 Dec (SJD). Even more unusual was one at LM 15 Jan (SJD), only about the 3rd Jan record. There are two late Feb reports, presumably early migrants.

Red-necked Grebe: Unprecedented was the presence of two birds at LM 3 to 4 Jan (*SJD, mob). There are no other reports from Jan thru Mar. At least one was noted at LM 7 and 18 Dec (SJD); presumably one of the two at least attempted to winter. The only prior Dec record is one at LM 21 Dec 1995, also found by Dinsmore.

Eared Grebe: Establishing a new late date for the state were two at Sutherland Res 18 Dec (SJD); as many as 14 were still there 6 Dec (SJD), and one was on Keystone L 7 Dec (SJD), the 4th latest ever.

Western Grebe: Overwintering was documented for the first time, with reports from both LM and Sutherland Res. A previous report of two at L Ogallala 5 Feb 1995 may have been overwintering individuals. This year, as many as 342 were still present at LM 3 Jan, declining to 71 on 15 Jan, 12 on 14 Feb, and 14 on 22 Feb (SJD, BP, LP). The latest ever away from Sutherland Res and LM were two at NPNWR 12 Dec (LK).

Clark's Grebe: Yes, even this species wintered, which also is unprecedented; one to three were at LM through the period (JS), with one there 14 Jan (SJD). The previous latest was 6 Dec 1986 at Gavin's Point Dam.

American White Pelican: As has been the case recently, one wintered at Sutherland Res (SJD, BP, LP, DH). Possibly a very early spring migrant or a nearby wintering bird was one along I-80 at Mile Marker 162 in Lincoln Co, only about 4 mi from Sutherland Res, 15 Feb (BP, LP); there are four other late Feb reports, 15 to 28 Feb. Rather late was one at Clear Creek Marshes, 18 Dec (SJD), 3rd latest ever away from Sutherland Res, and six at Branched Oak L 6 Dec (BP, LP, JS).

Double-crested Cormorant: Only about the 5th Jan record ever was one or two individuals that remained at BOL as late as 8 Jan (LE), and about the 3rd early Feb record, indicative of wintering, was one at NPNWR 3 Feb (LK).

Great Blue Heron: Wintering birds occur along entire Platte River Valley and at other locations in the east. Somewhat unusual were four birds wintering at fish ponds in Dry Spotted Tail Creek in southern Sioux Co (HKH), one northwest of Fremont 22 Jan, later a roadkill (DP), and two at BOL as late as 2 Jan (LE).

Turkey Vulture: There were two reports, both flyovers at Kearney, 9 and 12 Dec (Stanley Longfellow fide LR, RH). While probably correct, these reports were undocumented, as are all of several Dec reports of this species.

Tundra Swan: Only about the 6th winter record was one of up to three immatures below Keystone Diversion Dam 14 to 15 Jan through at last 7 Feb (*SJD, mob). These birds were with some Trumpeter Swans, allowing direct comparison, notably of size. Likely an early migrant, indeed tied for earliest ever in spring, was an immature at Crystal Cove L 25 to 28 Feb (*BFH).

Trumpeter Swan: Wintering at Keystone L and below the Diversion Dam there is expected; up to 18 were present this winter, with the peak count on 14 to 15 Jan (SJD). The only other report was of an unmarked immature that appeared at Kiwanis Park in Omaha 7 Feb and remained to the end of the period (BP, LP).

Greater White-fronted Goose: Rare in midwinter, especially westward, apparently the 1st such Panhandle report was one at Scottsbluff SL 19 Jan (SJD). Still unexpected as late, one was at Crystal Cove L 20 Dec to 1 Jan (BFH, SJD), and two were at BOL 2 Jan (LE). Migrants appeared very early, with "many" at Funk Lagoon 7 Feb (LR, RH), one at BOL 6 Feb (LE), and six at L Ogallala the same day, increasing to 34 there on 22 Feb (SJD). This species is very rare in spring in the west.

Swan Goose: Also known as Chinese Goose, a free-flying individual was at Crystal Cove L 26 Feb (BFH). There are no known reports of wild vagrants; five were killed by hunters in Keith Co 8 Dec 1984, the only other report in Nebraska of free-flying birds.

Snow Goose: The only midwinter reports were of one in the LM area wintering with Canada Geese (SJD, mob), and one at BOL 20 Jan (LE). Spring migrants arrived in mid-Feb, with 200,000 in Phelps Co 12 Feb (B).

Ross' Goose: Only the 2nd record of the rare blue morph was one at Wood Duck Area with Snow Geese and two white-morph Ross' Geese 26 Feb (DH). The first was one not far away at Pierce 19 Mar 1994; as rare as this morph is, these may have been the same bird. Earliest record of white morphs was two at Grandpa's Steakhouse Pond 7 Feb (B). Ten others arrived in late

Feb, as expected, although two at Big Springs (SJD) and three in Kearney Co (LR, RH) 22 Feb became the 3rd earliest ever.

Brant: A single individual of the eastern subspecies, *Branta bernicla bernicla*, was in Kearney Co 22 Feb (*LR, RH). It was with Canada Geese. There are two other documented, spring records, also of *B. b. bernicla*, from previous years: Phelps Co 21 Mar 1988 and 22 Apr 1990. There are several additional undocumented reports.

Canada Goose: Best midwinter counts were 10,000 in northeast Phelps Co 18 Jan (LR, RH), 6,000 at LM 14 Jan (SJD), and 5680 at NPNWR 5 Jan (LK).

Ruddy Shelduck: A tame individual was at Kearney L, Buffalo Co, 24 Feb (DR, B).

Wood Duck: Last was one on the North Platte River in Scotts Bluff Co 20 Dec (AK). First in spring was one at Clear Creek Marshes 22 Feb (SJD), tied for 2nd earliest ever, and three at Standing Bear L 23 Feb (NR).

Green-winged Teal: Midwinter reports, not unexpected at open-water locations, included as many as 87 in southern Sioux Co 19 Mar (SJD) and 73 below the Keystone Diversion Dam 15 Mar (SJD). No major spring influx was noted.

American Black Duck: Not often reported these days, singles were found at BOL 25 Dec (JS) and at Offutt Base L 15 Dec (BP, LP).

Mallard: High counts were impressive: 64,300 at NPNWR 5 Jan (LK) and 60,000 at Sutherland Res 1 Jan (SJD), and peak in the central was 25,000 at Johnson Res 31 Dec (LR, RH). Numbers apparently declined through winter, as only (!) 8,387 were counted at NPNWR 17 Feb (LK). Spring peaks are usually reached in Mar.

Northern Pintail: Best midwinter counts were 22 at L Minatare 19 Jan (SJD) and 20 at BOL 20 Jan (BP, LP). A few small flocks of migrants had appeared by period's end, such as 50 at BOL 21 Feb (BP, LP) and 50 near Wood Duck Area 22 Feb (DH).

Blue-winged Teal: Rather early were three near Nebraska City 28 Feb (LF, CF), the only report. Normally, the first birds appear mid- to late Mar.

Cinnamon Teal: A single was reported from CLNWR on 11 Sep (MF).

Northern Shoveler: As many as 11 lingered as late as 1 Jan at Nebraska City (LF, CF). Only casual in midwinter, there were two reports of apparently wintering birds: as many as 13 were at L Ogallala 14 to 15 Jan (SJD), and one was at L Minatare 14 Jan (SJD). First for spring were six near Wood Duck Area 26 Feb (DH) and four at Standing Bear L the same day (NR).

Gadwall: Rare in midwinter, there were two reports: 16 were in the LM area 15 Jan (SJD) and six at the Scottsbluff SL 19 Jan (SJD). No large spring concentrations were noted; best was 50 near Wood Duck Area 26 Feb (DH).

American Wigeon: In midwinter, 9 Jan to 9 Feb for this species, there had been only 15 reports in all, but this winter there were five more: eight were below the Keystone Diversion Dam 15 Jan (SJD), one in southern Sioux Co 19 Jan (SJD), two at the Gering SL 19 Jan (SJD), four west of Scottsbluff 20 Jan (AK), and four near Wood Duck Area 1 Jan (DH). Spring arrivals were 50 at NPNWR 17 Feb (LK) and 30 near Wood Duck Area 26 Feb (DH).

Canvasback: Last for fall were two at Fremont 1 Jan, tied for 2nd latest ever. First in spring were five at Kiwanis Park, Omaha, 19 Feb (NR). No large numbers were noted, and, surprising this year, none were noted in midwinter.

Redhead: Last in fall were three on the Omaha CBC 3 Jan (B). One at Crystal Cove L 7 Dec lingered very late until 17 Jan (BFH), for one of very few midwinter records away from the Platte River Valley. Probable early migrants, or wintering not too far away, were six at Boystown 8 Feb (B) and three below the Keystone Diversion Dam 7 Feb (SJD); the latter were not noted on earlier visits, and these reports are the earliest ever apparent spring migrants. Numbers had arrived by mid-Feb; 510 were at NPNWR 17 Feb (LK).

Ring-necked Duck: Surprisingly, none were detected in Dec, although there were three reports for midwinter. Most unexpected were two at Little Salt Creek, Lancaster Co, 20 Jan (LE). At more expected locations, but still rare in midwinter, was one at L Ogallala 14 to 15 Jan (SJD) and six at the Scottsbluff SL 19 Jan (SJD). First in spring were two at Boystown 8 Feb (B), earliest ever. By late Feb, as many as 91 were noted at Wood Duck Area 26 Feb (DH).

Greater Scaup: Normally a regular winter location, the only birds at LM this year were four on L Ogallala 7 Dec (SJD). However as many as three were at Scottsbluff SL; three were there 15 Jan and two on 19 Jan (SJD); they were not noted in Feb, however.

Lesser Scaup: A new record late date was set by one at BOL 8 Jan (LE), and a record early date was set by three at Boystown 8 Feb (B). Away from the Platte Valley reservoirs there, is only one record in the period 9 Jan to 6 Feb, that of 1 Feb 1989 in Douglas-Sarpy Cos.

Oldsquaw: An immature male was at L Minatare 7 to 18 Dec (SJD), the latest ever away from Keith or Lincoln Cos. Wintering birds have occurred only at LM or Sutherland Res. One was at the latter 1 Jan (SJD), and one to two were at LM 14 Jan to 7 Feb (SJD, mob).

Black Scoter: Only the 6th Dec record was provided by two birds on L Ogallala 7 to 18 Dec, one lingering until 4 Jan (SJD, mob) to provide only the 2nd ever Jan record. The other was 16 Jan 1927 on the Missouri River in Sarpy Co.

Common Goldeneye: A record fall count was 3000 at Sutherland Res 18 Dec (SJD). Best midwinter counts were from regular wintering locations and were larger than normal: 1,300 were at Sutherland Res 14 Jan (SJD), and 900 were below Kingsley Dam 14 Jan (SJD). Also a good midwinter count was 233 at Scottsbluff SL 19 Jan (SJD).

Barrow's Goldeneye: Probably regular in midwinter amongst the wintering goldeneye flock below Kingsley Dam, there have been about ten records at this location. Patience is needed to find the Barrow's, however. This year, two pair were present 6 to 7 Feb, and may have been there 3 Jan, although only one female was detected (SJD). The 2nd winter record from Sutherland Res was a pair there 18 Dec (SJD). Perhaps the pair from Sutherland moved to LM in late Dec!

Bufflehead: Probably the only regular wintering site for this usually cold-sensitive species is the L Ogallala area; this year 30 were below the Keystone Diversion Dam 14 to 15 Jan (SJD). Last in fall were in Cass Co 26 Dec (GW) and first in spring were two at BOL 21 Feb (BP, LP).

Hooded Merganser: Latest ever in fall away from wintering locations at Sutherland Res and LM was one at Clear Creek Marshes 4 Jan (BP, LP). Unusual in midwinter away from Sutherland Res and LM were three along the Platte River in northwest Phelps Co 18 Jan (LR, RH). An excellent midwinter count was 26 at Sutherland Res 14 Jan; 38 were there 18 Dec (SJD). There are fewer than 20 midwinter reports in all, including known wintering locations. First in spring were two tying the earliest ever at BOL 1 Feb (BP, LP).

Common Merganser: A record-high fall count was 48,000 at Harlan Co Res 14 Dec on the "preCBC" (JGJ), and an almost-record-high midwinter count was 12000 at LM 15 Jan (SJD). Midwinter peak at Sutherland Res was 5,000 on 14 Jan (SJD).

Red-breasted Merganser: Midwinter reports are few; following probable wintering by a female below Kingsley Dam 1996-97, two there 3 to 15 Jan were joined by two more on 7 Feb, followed by 19 migrants on 22 Feb (SJD).

Ruddy Duck: Rather late, 3rd latest ever, was one at Nebraska City 26 Dec (LF, CF). Only the 6th report of wintering was six birds at L Ogallala 2 Jan (SJD), which declined to a single 6 Feb (SJD). First migrants were 16 at BOL 28 Feb (LE).

Osprey: One was reported from the Missouri River in Otoe Co 28 Feb (LF, CF), although no details were provided. Although there are a few Feb reports, none are documented. The earliest documented reports are in late Mar.

Bald Eagle: Best single counts were 50 around Harlan Co Res 15 Feb (LR, RH) and 39 along

the Missouri River at Nebraska City 26 Dec (LF, CF). Data from the 1997 Midwinter Eagle Survey showed a total of 1,030 Bald Eagles in the state; 28% were immatures (JD).

Northern Harrier: A few were reported in midwinter, not unusual in such a mild year.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: A few of these also were reported statewide in midwinter, as is usual.

Cooper's Hawk: Cooper's are less tolerant of midwinter conditions than Sharp-shins and are rare at this time. The only midwinter report was one at Wildcat Hills 19 Jan (SJD).

Northern Goshawk: None were reported.

Red-shouldered Hawk: The only reports were from Fontenelle Forest 2 Jan and 26 Feb (B).

Red-tailed Hawk: Best counts were 14 in southeast Otoe Co 14 Dec (LF, CF) and 14 at Harlan Co Res 15 Feb (LR, RH).

Ferruginous Hawk: Easternmost were singles in Phelps Co 18 Jan (LR, RH) and at Harlan Co Res 15 Feb (LR, RH).

Rough-legged Hawk: Reports were statewide, although numbers were not large. Best counts were about ten wintering in southern Sioux Co (HKH) and seven around Calamus Res 27 Dec (LR, RH).

Golden Eagle: Two were found at the edge of the state: an immature was at Willis 22 Feb (BFH), and another immature, picked up in Richardson Co 7 Feb and transferred to the Raptor Recovery Center near Elmwood, was suffering from pesticide and lead poisoning (JS).

American Kestrel: A good midwinter count was 12 in southeast Otoe Co 10 Jan (LF, CF).

Merlin: At least 16 were reported, statewide, about the norm in recent years. Few reporters noted subspecies, but a female or immature in Banner Co 15 Jan was identified as the dark subspecies *Falco columbarius suckleyi* (SJD); this appears to be the 1st report of this race in Nebraska. *F. c. suckleyi* is resident in the Pacific northwest, but, in winter, a few move southward as far as New Mexico. It has occurred as far east as Wisconsin. It has been reported a few times in Colorado, but there are no specimens from there.

Prairie Falcon: At least 15 were reported, but none east of Kearney Co, where singles were noted 11 Jan (LR, RH) and 13 Feb (BP, LP).

Gray Partridge: None were reported.

Ring-necked Pheasant: Reports were routine.

Greater Prairie-Chicken: Reports of 30 on the Calamus Res CBC 27 Dec (LR, RH) and 18 near Halsey 7 Feb (DP) were from the breeding range, but 12 on the Norfolk CBC 20 Dec (B) were somewhat eastward, indicating movement out of the breeding range, a normal phenomenon for this species in inclement conditions.

Sharp-tailed Grouse: Reports were routine.

Wild Turkey: Best count was 78 at Brooky Bottoms in Cedar Co 18 Jan (JJ).

Northern Bobwhite: Not unexpected, but at a location where numbers are not great, five were near Sutherland Res 2 Jan (BP, LP). Best count was 15 near Gibbon 7 Dec (LR, RH).

Virginia Rail: Wintering apparently is regular in the North Platte Valley, notably at Clear Creek Marshes; ten were there 2 Feb (SJD). Apparently wintering were two at Facus Springs 2 Jan (SJD). Very late, apparently attempting to winter, was one near Petersburg 19 Dec on the Boone Co CBC (DH).

American Coot: Rather late were 14 at Enders Res 4 Jan (LR, RH); as many as 167 were there as late as 6 Dec (SJD). Prior to this winter, there were only about none midwinter reports (10 Jan to 19 Feb). This year, there were no fewer than four separate reports. As many as 17 individuals wintered below Kingsley Dam (LR, RH, SJD), two were at Crystal Cove L 21 Dec-17 Jan (BFH), seven remained at Nebraska City until 19 Jan (LF, CF), and two at Kiwanis Park, Omaha, 7 Feb (BP, LP) may have wintered nearby. No large groups had arrived by period's end.

Sandhill Crane: Most depart in fall in Nov; Dec reports are few, in fact only the 10th ever was

an immature at Swanson Res 6 Dec (SJD). There are fewer than 20 reports in the period 27 Nov-23 Jan. Sandhills arrive very early in spring, not uncommonly at the end of Jan. As many as 59 were at Rowe Sanctuary as early as 25 Jan (B), and 50,000 were present by 6 Feb between Grand Island and Kearney (B).

Whooping Crane: One appeared at an extremely early date for this species just west of Doniphan 15 Feb (B) and was still being seen there as of this writing, 31 Mar. This may have been the bird that wintered in Oklahoma last year (US Fish and Wildlife Service fide DR) and appeared in Nebraska 10 Feb 1995 but retreated southward as weather worsened. Earliest arrivals are usually during the first week of Mar.

Killdeer: Probably the only regular wintering location is on the North Platte River below Keystone Diversion Dam, where 9 to 10 wintered this year (SJD, BP, LP). Two were reported as wintering on Dry Spotted Tail Creek in Sioux Co (HKH), and three at NPNWR 19 Jan may also have wintered. Wintering may be regular at the latter location. First in spring were seven at Indian Cave SP 15 Feb (JS).

Dunlin: Amazing was the presence of a basic-plumaged individual at Snyder's Bend 28 Feb (BFH). The Dunlin is a hardy species, and this bird may have wintered there or nearby; there is a record from 6 to 23 Jan 1981 at NPNWR. Normally the earliest spring migrants arrive in early Apr.

Common Snipe: A regular wintering location, although apparently not much longer as it is being bulldozed, is the seep marsh below Kingsley Dam. As many as six were there 3 Jan (SJD). Elsewhere, lingering into Dec is not uncommon; late were a single at Calamus Res 27 Dec (B), two in Boone Co 19 Dec (DH), and one at Scottsbluff 20 Dec (AK). Either a very early migrant or an individual wintering nearby was one at Arbor Day Farm 20 Feb (LF, CF). Spring migrants arrive in late Mar.

American Woodcock: Normally arriving early, the first were noted north of Cunningham L 22 Feb (B), the earliest ever. Previous earliest was 27 Feb.

Bonaparte's Gull: Only the 2nd and 3rd Jan records ever were provided by as many as 34 still at Sutherland Res 2 Jan (SJD) and 2 to 3 at LM as late as 3 Jan (SJD). As many as 91 were at Sutherland Res as late as 18 Dec (SJD). Spring arrivals usually appear after mid-Mar, and so record early were four at Niobrara 22 Feb (JJ).

Mew Gull: At LM 7 Feb, two adults and a 1st basic bird were found (SJD, WRS, JS), with the adult remaining until 22 Feb (SJD, DCE). This is the 5th Nebraska record, involving a total of eight birds. Four of the records are from LM in the period 7 Feb to 11 May.

Ring-billed Gull: Best count was 4000 at LM 7 to 8 Feb (SJD), apparently indicative of an early influx, as 1300 were present 14 to 15 Jan (SJD). Best count elsewhere was 1000 at Johnson Res 24 Feb (LR, RH). At BOL, 290 were counted 8 Jan, but none were there until 45 appeared 30 Jan (LE). Movements in midwinter depend on open water.

California Gull: Rare away from LM in late fall, one was at Sutherland Res 18 Dec (SJD). Regular in winter in recent years at LM, this year 78 were counted 1 Jan and 34 on 7 Feb (SJD). They may have departed briefly, as none were counted there 14 to 15 Jan (SJD).

Herring Gull: By far the best midwinter count ever was 1500 at LM 14 Jan (SJD). Numbers there dropped to 200 on 7 to 8 Feb and increased to 1000 on 22 Feb (SJD).

Thayer's Gull: Fast becoming a western Great Plains winter Mecca for this species, LM hosted at least 20 different individuals; Steve Dinsmore counted 18 on 7 Feb, including six adults, one 3rd basic, and 11 1st basic (1st winter), and 17 on 2 Feb, including eight adults, one 3rd basic, and eight 1st basic. On 14 to 15 Jan, seven 1st basic birds were counted (SJD). In addition, single 1st winter birds were at BOL 3 Dec (JS) and Harlan Co Res 14 Dec (JGJ), and two birds were at Sutherland Res 6 Dec (SJD).

Iceland Gull: A 1st winter bird was at LM 7 and 22 Feb (SJD, WRS, JS) and was joined by an adult 22 Feb (SJD, DCE). Both were "Kumlien's" types, as expected. The best characteristics for separation from Thayer's Gulls are structural, such as bill shape and size, head shape, and primary extension. Plumage characters are less reliable in many cases.

Lesser Black-backed Gull: An amazing six adults were at LM 7 Feb (SJD, WRS, JS); one adult was there 14 Jan (SJD), and three were still present 22 Feb (SJD). The group of six adults present 7 Feb were aged by Dinsmore as two adults, two 4th basic, and two 3rd basic. While several adults have appeared at LM in recent years, immatures are not noted. Perhaps they stay in the east, where two were present at BOL 3 to 20 Dec (JS, BP, LP). These birds were aged as a 1st winter and a 2nd winter, the latter present only 3 to 6 Dec (BP, LP, JS).

Glaucous Gull: A 1st basic bird was at LM 18 Dec (SJD), three were there along with an adult 14 to 15 Jan (SJD), and numbers peaked 7 Feb, with 12 present, two adults and ten 1st basic (SJD, JS, WRS). By 22 Feb, eight remained, including two adults and six 1st basic birds (SJD, DCE). Elsewhere, a 1st basic was at Sutherland Res 14 Jan (SJD), a single unaged bird was at Calamus Res 2 Dec (B), and three unaged birds were at Harlan Co Res 14 Dec (JGJ).

Rock Dove: Reports were routine.

Eurasian Collared-Dove: A single that appeared at a feeder in Shelton 29 Nov was still present at this writing, 31 Mar (LR, RH). A ruling by the NOURC on its status as a wild bird, and thus its acceptability to the State List, is awaited.

Ringed Turtle-Dove: An individual reported as this species was at 108th and Grover in Omaha 22 Feb (B), but the possibility it was a Eurasian Collared-Dove was not ruled out (LP, fide WRS).

Mourning Dove: No wintering birds were noted north and west of Lancaster and Dodge Cos, about normal for most winters; best midwinter counts were 54 in Lincoln 3 Jan (LE) and 15 in Dodge Co 15 Jan (DP).

Great Horned Owl: Nesting was underway at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 13 Feb (LE).

Snowy Owl: The only report was of an injured bird picked up 17 Dec near Tekamah and placed in the Raptor Recovery Center near Elmwood (JS).

Barred Owl: Reports are indicating that this species may be fairly widespread in northeast Nebraska away from the Missouri Valley. One was at Niobrara 7 Jan (B); there are previous reports from Bohemia Prairie and the Vedigre area in Knox Co. As many as three were noted along the Elkhorn River southeast of Norfolk 20 Dec (DH); this also is at the western edge of the known range.

Long-eared Owl: Reports were routine.

Short-eared Owl: The only midwinter report was north of Ogallala 6 Feb (SJD).

Belted Kingfisher: Reports were routine.

Red-headed Woodpecker: Birds present in the period Nov thru Mar are probably wintering; all such reports were from the extreme southeast, north and west to Lancaster and Sarpy Cos. Best count was 30 at Indian Cave SP 15 Feb (JS), a favored winter location.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Reports were routine.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: Three apparently wintering birds were reported from the extreme southeast, as is normal, but a female/immature was rather far north and west for a late date at Taylor 27 Dec (LR, RH).

Downy Woodpecker: Reports were routine.

Hairy Woodpecker: Reports were routine.

Northern Flicker: A few were reported in midwinter as far north and west as Antelope and McPherson Cos (DH), within the usual winter range, although numbers are usually low in these areas. "Red-shafted" Flickers were reported statewide. Best counts were 17 around Calamus Res

27 Dec (LR, RH) and 13 in Dodge Co 1 Jan (DH), the latter all "Yellow-shafted".

Horned Lark: Best counts were 4000 in northern Phelps Co 18 Jan (LR, RH) and 2000 in Saunders Co 30 Jan (BP, LP).

Blue Jay: Best midwinter count was 30 in Lincoln 3 Jan (LE).

Pinyon Jay: The only report was of one at the James Ranch feeder through the period (SL). No influx was detected.

Black-billed Magpie: This species appears to be gradually filling in the state; it is resident at Willis in the northeast (BFH) and also appears regularly in Dixon Co (JJ). Rather easterly was one 3 miles north of Bennington 2 Dec (B), and two were north of Twin Lakes, Lancaster Co, 20 Dec (JH). Post-breeding wanderers account for southeasterly records.

American Crow: Best midwinter counts were rather modest: 700 at Wolf L 7 Feb (TH) and 400 in Phelps Co 25 Jan (LR, RH). No large roosts were reported.

Black-capped Chickadee: Best count was an impressive 95 around Harlan Co Res 14 Dec (LR, RH).

Mountain Chickadee: One was reported north of Harrison during the winter, but without date or details (HKH). No others were reported.

Tufted Titmouse: Reports were routine.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Ones and twos appeared at feeders statewide. There was no indication of any abnormal influx.

White-breasted Nuthatch: Reports were routine.

Pygmy Nuthatch: Few were reported; this in sharp contrast to the numbers seen last winter.

Brown Creeper: The few reports were from the extreme southeast, as expected in midwinter.

Carolina Wren: A few were reported from the lower Missouri Valley, north only to Sarpy Co. This species appears to have retreated somewhat recently in range and numbers.

Winter Wren: Singles (same bird?) were at Fontenelle Forest 2 Jan and 26 Feb (B), about the northern edge of expected wintering in the Missouri Valley. Unexpected, however, was one at Willis 1 Feb, where none were found in Jan and no others until 22 Feb (BFH).

Marsh Wren: Regular wintering occurs in the North Platte Valley; this year individuals were found below Kingsley Dam, at Clear Creek Marshes, and at Facus Springs (SJD).

Golden-crowned Kinglet: A few winter in the southeast, with occasional midwinter reports elsewhere. Records farthest to the northwest this year were two at Calamus Res 27 Dec (LR, RH), and three near the Keystone Diversion Dam on 2 and 15 Jan (SJD, WRS, JS).

Eastern Bluebird: Yet another species that overwinters rarely in the southeast. Northeast were five at Ponca SP 3 Jan (BFH). West were eight near Keystone 15 Jan (SJD). These were also the best counts.

Mountain Bluebird: The only report was from within the usual winter range: six were at LM on the CBC 3 Jan (LR, RH).

Townsend's Solitaire: Regular in winter in small numbers east to northeast Nebraska, one was at Willis 3 Jan (BFH). Few others were reported, none from the east.

Hermit Thrush: Rare in Dec and especially midwinter, one was counted on the Branched Oak CBC 20 Dec (B).

American Robin: Large numbers wander around in the cedar areas of north-central Nebraska most winters; best counts were "thousands" at Niobrara SP 7 Jan (B), 1000 between Albion and Halsey 7 Feb (DP), and 465 at Calamus Res 27 Dec (LR, RH). No such numbers were noted elsewhere.

Northern Mockingbird: Least common in winter, the only report was of one on the Branched Oak CBC 20 Dec (B).

Cedar Waxwing: Small flocks were widely noted, but numbers were generally modest. Best

count was 52 at BOL 23 Jan (LE).

Northern Shrike: At least 21 were reported, about a normal year, including six in Chase Co 6 Nov (SJD). One made it as far southeast as Peru, 7 Dec (B).

Loggerhead Shrike: None were reported in midwinter, but one was rather far to the west as late as 13 Dec at Sutherland Res (*JS), and another was a little less of a surprise at BOL 12 Dec (LE). Probably wintering was one in Cass Co 22 Feb (GW).

European Starling: Reports were routine.

Yellow-rumped Warbler: Westerly in midwinter were six at Keystone Dam on 2 Jan, all "Myrtles"; a single at Enders Dam 6 Dec was also a "Myrtle" (SJD). There are no Nov or later reports for "Audubon's" Warbler, but winter birds in the west may be of the subspecies *Dendroica coronata hooveri*, a western population within "Myrtle" Warbler. One was at Calamus Res as late as 27 Dec (LR, RH). Jan and Feb reports are few, even in the southeast; two at Indian Cave SP 15 Feb (JS) was only the 5th Feb record ever. One was counted on the Omaha CBC 3 Jan (B).

Northern Cardinal: Reports were routine.

Eastern Towhee: Two laggards were northwest of Fort Calhoun for the DeSoto CBC (NR) and one was at Branched Oak L for the CBC there 20 Dec (JS). A few overwinter in the southeast.

Spotted Towhee: Wintering birds were noted east in small numbers to Omaha (NR) and Lancaster Co (LE, JS), as is normal. Interestingly, one at a Gibbon feeder throughout the period was last seen as early as 8 Feb (LR, RH). However one was at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 22 Feb (JS). Latest spring dates in the southeast are in very early May.

American Tree Sparrow: Extremely large numbers were in central Nebraska; 3000 were estimated in northern Phelps Co 18 Jan (LR, RH), and 2000 southeast of Norman in Kearney Co 11 Jan (LR, RH).

Chipping Sparrow: An adult was reported without date or other details at a feeder near Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, which was attracting an interesting mix of species (LE). Of about 20 winter reports for the state, only one is documented, a single at a feeder in Omaha 29 Dec 1982 to 31 Jan 1983.

Field Sparrow: The only report was of two arrivals at ADF 24 Feb (LF, CF). If migrants, this is the earliest on record, but it may have wintered nearby; there are a few Jan reports, including a documented report from Antelope Co 11 Jan 1986.

Vesper Sparrow: One was documented in southwest Antelope Co 4 Jan (*DH). This is the only documented Jan report, although there are three non-documented reports 2 to 7 Jan.

Black-throated Sparrow: Nebraska's 3rd winter record, 6th in all, was one attending a feeder in Omaha from early Dec at least into Jan (JS, RG).

Fox Sparrow: One at FF 26 Feb (B) may have been a record early migrant, or may have wintered nearby. Wintering seems likely, as another was at a feeder near Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, throughout the period, and two were there 23 Jan (LE). There are only two other midwinter reports.

Song Sparrow: Midwinter reports were widespread, north to Dodge Co (DP), as is usual.

White-throated Sparrow: Wintering is rare and occurs only in the southeast. There were three reports of birds surviving the winter, north and west to Omaha and Lincoln. One wintered in an Omaha yard (NR), at least one was present at a feeder in Lincoln through the period, with a high count of eight on 3 Jan (LE), and one was at Nebraska City 4 and 19 Jan and 2 Feb (LF, CF).

White-crowned Sparrow: Few were reported in midwinter, when numbers are normally lowest. No large counts were reported.

Harris' Sparrow: Numbers were moderate; best midwinter count was 35 at a Gibbon area feeder (LR, RH).

Dark-eyed Junco: Best counts unspecified to subspecies in midwinter was 140 in Lincoln 3 Jan (LE). Numbers were not large. "White-winged" Juncos wintered at the James Ranch feeders (SL), normal for this subspecies, as many winter within the breeding range. None were reported elsewhere. "Oregon" Juncos, rare in the east, were reported from two locations, two birds at Nebraska City 24 Dec (LF, CF) and a single in Dodge Co 27 Jan (DP). "Pink-sided" juncos, like "Oregons", are far more common in the west; reports were east to Buffalo Co (LR, RH).

Lapland Longspur: Best count was an impressive 2000 in Saunders Co 30 Jan (BP, LP), and 380 were in Stanton Co 31 Jan (DH).

Snow Bunting: There were only two reports: six were in Sarpy Co 24 Jan (B), and one was with Horned Larks in Cass Co 26 Jan (GW).

Red-winged Blackbird: An excellent midwinter count, somewhat further north than is usual, was 700 at Wood Duck Area 24 Jan (DH). As many as 5838 were counted on the Scottsbluff CBC (AK).

Western Meadowlark: Birds were heard calling and thus identified as this species at Wood Duck Area 31 Jan (DH). Wintering is normal in the east, but midwinter confirmation of species is not easy as most birds are silent.

Yellow-headed Blackbird: Dec reports are few, but not unexpected; one was with Red-winged Blackbirds at a Madison Co feedlot 20 Dec (DH). Possibly wintering in the area, one was with Red-winged Blackbirds at Funk Lagoon 22 Feb (LR, RH), a record early arrival date for a migrant. Migrants would be expected in flocks of Yellow-headed Blackbirds, not with redwings.

Rusty Blackbird: This species winters on occasion, but only rarely. An excellent midwinter count was 75 at Dead Timber Area on 1 Feb (DP). Wintering birds are generally restricted to the southeast, but two were at Funk Lagoon 16 Feb (B).

Brewer's Blackbird: There are few midwinter records from previous years, usually from the southeast. It is rare elsewhere. One of few documented midwinter records, from this year, was 33 at Wolf L 1 Jan. Only one remained until 10 Jan (*TH). Another documented record was two at Gering 15 Jan (*SJD); this is only the 3rd midwinter report for the Panhandle. Another was at a Superior feeder 19 to 26 Feb (B).

Great-tailed Grackle: Dec and even winter reports from the southeast are now usual; 12 were at Nebraska City 18 Dec (LF, CF), and at least one was near the Lincoln airport 27 Jan (B). Far more unusual, however, were ten in Knox Co 25 Jan (MB, JS); there had been no winter reports north of Lancaster Co.

Common Grackle: Midwinter reports are not unusual, mostly singles at feeders, although seven were wintering in South Sioux City (BFH). Probably early migrants, however, were 125 at Nebraska City 6 Feb, increasing to 600 on 15 Feb (LF, CF).

Brown-headed Cowbird: Unusual in midwinter as far north as Dodge Co, two were there 4 Jan (DP). A male at Pawnee L 13 Feb (LE) may have been an early migrant, as "vagrant" single males are usually the first to appear in spring among blackbird species.

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch: Flocks were reported in Sioux Co: 60 were at the Hughson Ranch through the period (HKH), and 61 north of Henry 4 Jan (SJD). This is the 2nd consecutive winter these birds have been noted, after a few years of absence.

Purple Finch: There was an encouraging number of reports, all from the southeast, including a good count of 10 to 20 wintering at the Neale Woods feeders (B) and 12 at Branched Oak L 13 Jan (LE), with single female(s) west to Gibbon 13 Dec and 10 Jan (LR, RH). Few have been reported in recent years.

Cassin's Finch: Although one was reported in fall, none were reported during the winter.

House Finch: Best count was 105 on the Scottsbluff CBC 20 Dec (AK). Summering birds may leave and go elsewhere for winter; some evidence for this was the absence of House Finches for

2 months at one location in South Sioux City; they returned 21 Feb (BFH). None were found in Dodge Co during the period (DP).

Red Crossbill: Following the few reports in fall, few were reported during winter also, none east of the Panhandle.

White-winged Crossbill: The birds that appeared at a Norfolk cemetery in Nov remained through the period; the best count was seven on 22 Feb, including four females (DH). The only reports elsewhere were a female at a Bellevue feeder 7 to 10 Dec (BP, LP) and two at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 3 Jan (LE).

Common Redpoll: These birds were fairly widespread, with reports south as far as Superior, where one attended a feeder throughout Feb (B). Best counts were 50 west of Blair 8 Jan (B) and 14 at L Minatare 7 Dec (SJD). Up to six were at a southwest Omaha feeder 18 to 24 Jan (JS, B).

Pine Siskin: Numbers were average and reports widespread. Best counts were 125 at WHNC 19 Jan (SJD) and 50 to 75 through the period at a Bellevue feeder (BP, LP).

American Goldfinch: Best count was 200 at a Gibbon feeder 25 Jan (LR, RH).

Evening Grosbeak: None were reported.

House Sparrow: Reports were routine.