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## Winter Field Report, December 1996-February 1997

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WINTER FIELD REPORT, DECEMBER 1996-FEBRUARY 1997

Compiled by

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INTRODUCTION

First, we wish to thank Larry Malone (LKM) for his excellent and detailed reports over the last 3 years or so. The reporting from western Nebraska has been greatly enhanced through Larry's efforts. Larry has retired from his position as Superintendent of NPNWR and CLNWR and we wish him luck.

Interesting features of this winter report include a few rarities such as Barrow's Goldeneye, Greater Yellowlegs, Mew Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Inca Dove, a "montane invasion" of such species as Steller's Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Mountain Chickadee, Bohemian Waxwing, Gray-crowned Rosy-finch, and Cassin's Finch, birds rare in midwinter such as Red-breasted Merganser and Orange-crowned Warbler, unusually good numbers of regular winterers such as Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting, and a continuation of the ever-more-complex gull identification situation at LM, which is looking more like the west coast each winter.

ABBREVIATIONS

Initials in parentheses refer to the observers, listed at the end of this report. \* = documentation submitted and passed to NOU Records Committee. Please refer to Nebraska Bird Review 54:74 for information about writing documentations, and the Official List of Birds of Nebraska (NBR 65: 3-16, this issue) for birds which should be documented. It is also important to document birds which are out-of-season. The best current source of early and late occurrence dates is Dr. Paul Johnsgard's "The Birds of Nebraska and Adjacent Plains States" reprinted in 1997 and available from the author at UNL.

ad = adult; ADF = Arbor Day Farm, Otoe Co; BOL = Branched Oak L SRA, Lancaster Co; CBC = Christmas Bird Count; Cem = Cemetery; CLNWR = Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Garden Co; Co(s) = County(ies); FFNC = Fontenelle Forest Nature Center; HCR = Harlan Co Res, Harlan Co; imm = immature; juv = juvenile; L = Lake; LM = L McConaughy, Keith Co; mob = many observers; NBR = Nebraska Bird Review; NC = Nature Center; NE = Nebraska; NNF = Nebraska National Forest; NOURC = Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Records Committee; NPNWR = North Platte NWR, Scotts Bluff Co; R = River; Res = Reservoir; RWB = Rainwater Basin, an area of Federal, State, and private basins and wetlands mainly in Phelps, Kearney, Clay, Fillmore, Hamilton, and York Cos; SHP = State Historical Park; SL = Sewage Lagoons; SP = State Park; SRA = State Recreation Area; UNL = University of Nebraska-Lincoln; UNSM = University of Nebraska State Museum; WMA = Wildlife Management Area (State); WPA = Waterfowl Production Area (Federal).

GAZETTEER

Arbor Lodge: SHP, Otoe Co; Blue Creek: Garden Co; Carter Canyon: Scotts Bluff Co; Clear Creek Marsh: SRA/WMA, Garden/Keith Cos; Ft. Kearny: SHP, Kearney Co; Funk Lagoon: WPA, Phelps Co; Grandpa's Steakhouse L: Buffalo Co; Holmes L: Lincoln, Lancaster Co; Indian Cave SP: Nemaha/Richardson Cos; James Ranch: Fort Robinson SP, Sioux Co; Johnson L: SRA, Gosper/Dawson Cos; Keystone Diversion

**Dam:** L Ogallala, Keith Co; **Kingsley Dam:** LM, Keith Co; **L Alice:** NPNWR, Scotts Bluff Co; **L Ogallala:** Keith Co; **Monroe Canyon:** Sioux Co; **Offutt Base L:** Sarpy Co; **Pawnee L:** SRA, Lancaster Co; **Pawnee Prairie:** SRA, Pawnee Co; **Peterson WPA:** Gosper Co; **Pine Ridge:** escarpment of ponderosa pine in extreme nw NE; **Stateline Island:** WMA, Scotts Bluff Co; **Sutherland Res:** Lincoln Co; **Valentine NWR:** Cherry Co; **Wildcat Hills NC:** Scotts Bluff Co; **Wild Rose Ranch:** Hall Co; **Wolf L:** Saunders Co.

**Pied-billed Grebe:** A single bird at Offutt Base L 1-4 Dec was the only individual to be recorded during the period.

**Western Grebe:** Rare away from LM during the period, a pair lingered at Offutt Base L. until 13 Dec (BP,LP). At LM, 4 were found on 28 Dec (SJD,JS). This is a rather low count compared to previous years, likely due to a cold Dec.

**American White Pelican:** The cooling lake at Sutherland Res. is the only locale in the state where voluntary overwintering is attempted and has been successful. This year 4 birds were found there on 26 Dec (SJD,WRS) and all made it through the worst part of winter, as they were observed again on 15 Feb (JGJ,WRS). Curious was a single at HCR on 2 Feb (RH,LR). This bird was not present earlier in the season as this lake was well-covered on 13-16 Dec for the local CBC.

**Double-crested Cormorant:** A good early Dec tally was 20 at HCR on 1 Dec (RH,LR). Only 1 was there on 13 Dec (JGJ) and none on the HCR CBC 16 Dec. Other lingering birds include 2 at Offutt Base L. 1-4 Dec (BP,LP), 2 at Johnson L. on 14 Dec (LR,RH), and a single at Sutherland Res. on 26 Dec (SJD,WRS). None were found in Jan or Feb.

**Great Blue Heron:** Overall, fewer birds may have overwintered and all reports were from the Platte R valley south. The species went unrecorded at Wolf L for the first time in 20 years (TH). Mid-winter reports include 1 at BOL on 2 Jan (LE), 1 at Stateline Island on 8 Jan (LKM), 2-3 at NPNWR on 16-29 Jan (LKM,LK), and 2 at LM on 1 Feb (LKM).

**Trumpeter Swan:** Reports from the west are as follows: a pair was in the North Platte R, below Kingsley Dam on 28 Dec (SJD,JS), up to 8 were at L. Ogallala on 1-15 Feb (LKM,JGJ,WRS), and 9 were noted in Blue Creek on 30 Jan (LKM). Unexpected in the east, 2 birds with neck collars were at Wolf L. 18 Jan-16 Feb (TH). According to TH, who looked into the matter, these birds were released at Storm Lake, Iowa, in the fall.

**Greater White-fronted Goose:** Latest southbound migrants were 30 at Grandpa's Steakhouse L. on 7 Dec (LR,RH). No others were reported until 16 Feb, when 100 flew over Buffalo Co. (RH,LR).

**Snow Goose:** Small numbers were noted at several locales during Dec. Jan reports include 538 recorded on the Omaha CBC and 1 on 30 Jan in Garden Co. Spring migrants were detected in late Feb: two observers (LR,RH) were able to watch "wave after wave" arrive at Funk Lagoon on 22 Feb, totalling an estimated 200,000 birds.

**Ross' Goose:** The only reports were from Grandpa's Steakhouse L., where 11 were found on 7 Dec (LR,RH) and 1 was found on 4 Jan (LR,RH).

**Canada Goose:** Large numbers winter in the Platte valley from about Kearney west. Good counts include 30,575 at NPNWR on 16 Dec (LK), 15,000 at Sutherland Res on 16 Dec (SJD,WRS), and 36,900 on the Kearney CBC on 21 Dec (LR,RH). In the east, a few thousand were noted in Lancaster Co. during the period (LE) and 617 were tallied on the Omaha CBC.

**Wood Duck:** Rather far north was a female in sw Dixon Co. on 8 Dec (JJ). A good count was 8 on the Omaha CBC on 4 Jan. Other reports include 1 in Sarpy Co 26 Jan (DS), 1 at Holmes L. on 12 Feb (LE),

and 1 at HCR on 2 Feb (LR,RH).

**Green-winged Teal:** A few were found statewide during Dec and the species returned in late Feb. There were no Jan reports and the only mid-winter report was of 6 in Scotts Bluff Co. on 8 Feb (LKM,LR,RH).

**American Black Duck:** No reports were received.

**Mallard:** Good counts include 9,009 on the HCR CBC on 15 Dec (JGJ), 52,636 at NPNWR on 16 Dec (LK), 10,000 on the Scottsbluff CBC on 21 Dec (AK), 20,000 at Sutherland Res. on 26 Dec (SJD,WRS), and 10,000 at Funk Lagoon on 22 Feb (LR,RH).

**Northern Pintail:** A few were noted in Dec at several locales. The only Jan report was 4 at BOL on 18 Jan (BP,LP). Spring migrants begin drifting north in early Feb and migration is well under way during the latter half of that month; evidence of this is 10,000 at Funk Lagoon on 22 Feb (LR,RH).

**Northern Shoveler:** The only report was from Sarpy Co. on 2 Feb (DS); this species is rare in midwinter.

**Gadwall:** Dec reports include 4 at Wolf L. on 21 Dec (TH) and 1 on the HCR CBC on 15 Dec (JGJ). The only Jan reports were of 1-3 at NPNWR on 15-16 Jan (LKM) and in Sarpy Co 4 Jan (DS). Northbound migrants were detected in late Feb.

**American Wigeon:** This species was well reported this winter. High counts include 40 west of Scottsbluff on 21 Dec. and 60 in Scotts Bluff Co. on 7 Feb (LKM). Jan reports include 2 at BOL on 18 Jan (BP,LP) and in Sarpy Co 4 Jan (DS). Northbound migrants were detected in late Feb.

**Canvasback:** The only reports were of returning birds during the latter half of Feb, with the highest count being 256 at CLNWR on 21 Feb (MF).

**Redhead:** The only reports before Feb were singles at both BOL 18 Jan (BP,LP) and the HCR CBC on 15 Dec (JGJ). High count of spring migrants was 213 at CLNWR on 21 Feb (MF).

**Ring-necked Duck:** Earliest, and the best count, was 25 at BOL on 18 Feb (LE). All other reports are as follows: 7 were at Wolf L. on 22 Feb (TH) and 3 at Ft. Kearny on 23 Feb (LR,RH).

**Greater Scaup:** The only report was of a pair at Sutherland Res. on 15 Feb (JGJ,WRS).

**Lesser Scaup:** Good Dec and Jan counts include 15 at Grandpa's Steakhouse L. on 7 Dec (LR,RH), 9 at the HCR CBC on 15 Dec (JGJ), and 6 at the Omaha CBC on 4 Jan. Small numbers arrived in late Feb.

**Oldsquaw:** The only report of this rare winter visitor was a female at LM on 28 Dec (SJD).

**Common Goldeneye:** High counts of wintering birds include 350 at Johnson L. on 4 Jan (LR,RH) and 430 at Sutherland Res. and LM 1 Feb (LKM).

**Barrow's Goldeneye:** This species should be looked for with Commons in the North Platte valley. A pair was found on 15 Feb (JGJ,WRS) at L. Ogallala, the first report from the LM area since 1991 (Rosché 1994, Birds of LM).

**Bufflehead:** Singles or pairs were noted at HCR on 13 Dec (JGJ), Johnson L on 14 Dec (LR,RH), and Offutt Base L on 13 Dec (BP,LP). The only mid-winter report was 8 at LM on 1 Feb (LKM). A few returning birds were detected in late Feb, including the season's best count of 27 at CLNWR on 21 Feb (MF).

**Hooded Merganser:** Only report was a single at Holmes L. on 12 Feb (LEI).

**Common Merganser:** An estimated 12,000 at HCR on 1 Dec (LR,RH) nearly doubled to an estimated 23,071 on 15 Dec (JGJ). A cold Dec may have been the impetus for the growth in numbers at HCR, forcing birds south that were to the north. Cold weather and a nearby frozen lake is also the likely reason that only 4,000 were recorded

at LM on 28 Dec (SJD,JS).

**Red-breasted Merganser:** Overwintering is not expected, but a determined female apparently did so at L. Ogallala, as it was found with Common Mergansers on 28 Dec (SJD) and 15 Feb (JGJ).

**Bald Eagle:** Notable concentrations include 45 at Johnson L. on 14 Dec (LR,RH), 176 at HCR on 4 Jan (LR,RH), and 218 at LM and Sutherland Res on 1 Feb (LKM). Respectable away from a major reservoir was the count of 23 on the Omaha CBC on 4 Jan.

**Northern Harrier:** Moderate numbers were encountered throughout the period in the south, with the best count being 13 at HCR on 13 Dec (JGJ). One pair of observers (LR,RH) were able to tally 22 in eight counties during the period. A report from Knox Co. on 2 Feb (MB), was the only report from n of the Platte R valley.

**Sharp-shinned Hawk:** Up to 17 were recorded in eleven counties. None were recorded in the north-central or Pine Ridge.

**Cooper's Hawk:** In contrast to the preceding, only 3 were found in three counties. Singles were found in Buffalo Co. on 11 Jan (LR,RH), in Lancaster Co. on 17 Jan (LE), and on the Scottsbluff CBC on 21 Dec (LKM).

**Northern Goshawk:** No reports were received.

**Red-tailed Hawk:** Notable concentrations include 53 counted on the Omaha CBC on 4 Jan and 47 counted on the HCR CBC on 15 Dec (JGJ).

**Ferruginous Hawk:** Even though this species is expected to be found in winter near prairie dog towns, 7 at one town west of Kearney on 8 Dec (LR,RH) is a superb count. All other reports include singles in Franklin Co. on 1 Dec (LR,RH), at HCR CBC on 15 Dec (JGJ), in Scotts Bluff Co. on 21 Dec (LKM), in Harlan Co. on 26 Dec (LR,RH), in Morrill Co. on 28 Dec (BFH,MB), in Cherry Co. on 29 Dec (BFH,MB), and at LM on 1 Feb (LKM).

**Rough-legged Hawk:** Words such as common, ubiquitous, and numerous were used to describe this species' occurrence in the north and west. Up to 25 were tallied in sw Sioux Co. on 27 Dec (SJD,WRS,JS), 35 were found along the road from Neligh to North Platte on 27 Dec (BFH,MB), and 10 were noted at Valentine NWR on 31 Dec (JGJ,GEJ). Small numbers were found in the east and south.

**Golden Eagle:** Best count from the panhandle was 3 tallied on the Scottsbluff CBC on 21 Dec (LKM). The only report away from the panhandle was 2 at HCR on 12 Jan (LR,RH).

**American Kestrel:** Best counts include 23 on the Omaha CBC on 4 Jan and 8 on the Scottsbluff CBC on 21 Dec (LKM).

**Merlin:** Singles were noted in Buffalo Co. on 7 Dec (LR,RH), Harlan Co. on 15 Dec (JGJ), Pierce Co. on 21 Dec (MB), Morrill Co. on 28 Dec (MB), Sioux Co. on 29 Dec (BFH,MB), and Garden Co. 8 Jan-2 Feb (MF), and two were noted in Kearney Co. on 18 Jan (LR,RH).

**Prairie Falcon:** Most easterly was a single, whose black axillars were noted, east of Tekamah on 21 Dec (JGJ). Two observers (LR,RH) found 4 in the south-central during the period, including two in Webster Co. on 31 Dec. A final easterly report is from Knox Co. on 2 Feb (MB). In addition, 4 were found from Keith Co. westward.

**Gray Partridge:** No reports were received, which is not a surprise in light of this species' current population crash.

**Ring-necked Pheasant:** A respectable panhandle count was 27 in Morrill and Cheyenne Cos. on 13 Jan (LKM), but that count is eclipsed by 200+ in Dixon Co. on 6 Dec (JJ).

**Greater Prairie-chicken:** This species is proving to be more numerous in the south-central than previously thought. In recent years, Randolph (LR) and Harding (RH) have brought to light the existence of isolated populations in remnant sandhills in Kearney Co and adjacent Adams Co. Also, in Dec birds were found at HCR where large tracts of grassland exist in the arroyos in the Republican R drainage, offering suitable habitat for the species.

A covey of 15 was found on 13 Dec (JGJ) near the HCR dam and 7 were found at the other end of the lake on 15 Dec (WRS). Since this species is known to wander in fall and winter, a follow-up would be needed in summer to provide evidence of breeding in the area.

**Sharp-tailed Grouse:** A good count was 56 at and around Valentine NWR on 31 Dec (JGJ,GEJ).

**Wild Turkey:** Notable counts include 64 in Carter Canyon on 29 Jan (LKM) and 37 tallied on the Omaha CBC on 4 Jan.

**Northern Bobwhite:** Only 8 were tallied on the Omaha CBC on 4 Jan and 9 on 16 Dec was the best count from ADF (LF,CF), while 35 were found in a single covey in Kearney Co on 18 Jan (LR,RH) and 15 were tallied on the HCR CBC on 15 Dec (JGJ). Much of the non-agricultural land in the far east is succeeding to more mature woodland and quality brush habitat appears to be minimal. Are higher densities of this species now found away from the Missouri R valley, especially in the south?

**Virginia Rail:** A single lingered at CLNWR to 1 Dec (MF). At a more traditional winter locale were 8 in late Dec at Clear Creek Marsh near Lewellen (SJD,WRS,JS).

**American Coot:** A late bird was noted at Grandpa's Steakhouse L on 7 Dec (LR,RH) and the first spring migrant was detected at Funk Lagoon on 22 Feb (LR,RH).

**Sandhill Crane:** First arrivals were 50 in Kearney Co. on 16 Feb (LR,RH) and 1000 there on 23 Feb (LF,CF).

**Killdeer:** As many as 10 were tallied along the North Platte R below the Keystone Diversion Dam on 28 Dec (SJD,JS), dropping to 3 on 1 Feb (LKM), and none were found on a quick check on 15 Feb (JGJ). A single was also found at NPNWR from 14 Jan-7 Feb (LKM). Likely a spring migrant was 1 at BOL 18 Feb (LE).

**Greater Yellowlegs:** A surprise find was a single at Stateline Island on 14 Jan (LKM). This is the first Jan report for this species and the first between 28 Dec and 3 Mar.

**Common Snipe:** A single at Scottsbluff on 21 Dec (LKM,AK) and 8 Feb (LKM,LR,RH) likely wintered. In addition, 2 were at Stateline Island on 7 Feb (LKM).

**Franklin's Gull:** A very eager adult was at BOL on 23 Feb (JGJ).

**Mew Gull:** An adult at BOL, first observed and photographed on 1 Dec (JGJ), remained until 5 Dec (BP,LP\*). This will likely become the third state record as well as the third 1996 record, although all three still await NOURC approval.

**Ring-billed Gull:** This species is numerous on either side of Jan. Good Dec counts were 1000 at Johnson L. on 14 Dec (LR,RH) and 467 at HCR on 15 Dec (JGJ). Good Feb counts include 250 at LM on 1 Feb, 450 at HCR on 22 Feb (LF,CF), and 500 at Pawnee L. on 23 Feb (JGJ).

**California Gull:** An adult on 13 Dec (JGJ) and a first-winter on 15 Dec (WRS) at HCR represent only the 4th and 5th reports east of Cherry and Lincoln Cos. An adult was with Herring Gulls at Sutherland Res on 27 Dec (BFH). Only 1-2 were at LM on 28 Dec (JGJ,BFH), but 20 were tallied on 1 Feb (LKM), dropping back to 1 on 15 Feb (JGJ).

**Herring Gull:** Respectable Dec counts include 446 at HCL on 15 Dec (JGJ) and 100 at Johnson L. on 14 Dec (LR,RH). The 220 at LM on 1 Feb (LKM) grew to 400 on 15 Feb (JGJ,WRS).

**Thayer's Gull:** Despite able and cautious observers, hard evidence (i.e. specimens, photographs) of this species' regular occurrence in the state is lacking, as most documented reports involve descriptions. Identification of "light end birds" i.e. birds tending towards Iceland Gull, can be tricky, as can that of "dark end birds", those resembling pale Herring Gulls. Single first-winter birds were well-studied at BOL on 8 Dec (MB), HCR on 15 Dec (WRS,JGJ) and Sutherland Res. on 27 Dec (SJD,WRS). At least one

first-winter and an apparent fourth-winter were at L. Ogallala on 15 Dec (JGJ,WRS).

**Iceland Gull:** A standoff, with good cases made by each camp, involved the identity of a first-winter bird at BOL on 1-5 Dec. The gull in question appeared much like a first-winter Glaucous Gull present, except that it was markedly smaller and the division between the pink and black on the bill was not clean-cut. One pair of observers believed it to be an Iceland Gull (BP,LP), while another pair thought it to be a Glaucous Gull of one of the smaller subspecies, such as *barrovianus* (WRS,JGJ). Distinguishing these possibilities has bedeviled west coast birders for some time. NOURC will attempt to sort this one out, but resolution may not be possible.

**Glaucous Gull:** Still rare, but regular in the east, 1-2 (see preceding) were at BOL on 1-5 Dec (JGJ,WRS,BP,LP). Up to 5 were tallied at the HCR CBC on 15 Dec (JGJ), providing the best count to date away from the reservoirs of the western Platte valley. At IM, 7 were counted on 1 Feb (LKM) and 9, including 2 adults, were there on 15 Feb (WRS,JGJ). Up to 4 first-winters were tallied at Sutherland Res on 26-27 Dec (BFH,SJD,WRS).

**Great Black-backed Gull:** A second-winter was present at L. Ogallala on 15 Feb (WRS,JGJ). This is plausibly the same individual present last winter and in Aug.

**Glaucous-winged X Western Gull?:** Of interest to gull-watchers was the presence of two Herring Gull-sized first-winter gulls, which are as likely to be this hybrid or a related backcross as either of two other equally intriguing possibilities at L. Ogallala on 16 Feb (JGJ,WRS). The two, essentially identical and possibly siblings, could be described as giant, pale Thayer's Gulls but lacking checkering on their tertials. A series of slides were reviewed by three west coast experts, who all came to different conclusions. Potential identities of the gulls include Slaty-backed or introgressants of Glaucous-winged and Herring or Glaucous-winged and Western. These individuals, along with the Iceland/Glaucous Gull (see above), illustrate the minefield that is gull identification on the west coast and apparently now posing similar problems on the northern Great Plains.

**Rock Dove:** Best count was 150 in Lincoln 10 Jan (LE).

**Mourning Dove:** All reports were from the extreme se, best count a remarkable midwinter tally of 270 n of Lincoln (LE). An excellent 60 were recorded on the Omaha CBC 4 Jan.

**Inca Dove:** Nebraska's 4th (see Fall) was noted at the Uridil feeder in Chadron 14 Nov (ZU); the last date noted in the Fall Report was 6 Nov.

**Eastern Screech-Owl:** Reports were routine.

**Great Horned Owl:** Reports were routine.

**Snowy Owl:** The only report was of 1 seen on an "igloo-shaped" church building in Kearney 3 Dec (LR,RH). Must have felt at home!

**Barred Owl:** The only report was from an expected location in Sarpy Co (DS).

**Long-eared Owl:** There were only 3 reports: 5 were at a roost 7 mi n of Lincoln through the period (DS), 1 was at ADF 3 Dec (LF,CF), and 1 was in Stanton Co 21 Dec (MB).

**Short-eared Owl:** The only midwinter report was of 2 birds 3 mi s of Peterson WPA 26 Jan (LR,RH). Dec reports were of 1 at CLNWR 17 Dec (LKM) and another in Cass Co 1 Dec (GW et al).

**Northern Saw-whet Owl:** A fresh road-kill was picked up at mile marker 121.5 just east of Ash Hollow SHP on 28 Dec (MB,BFH). This was the only report for this species.

**Belted Kingfisher:** Likely to winter anywhere if open water is present, a midwinter report of interest was of 1 at Blue Creek 6

Feb (LKM), a stream which stays open all winter and harbors wintering Trumpeter Swans.

**Red-headed Woodpecker:** As is expected in midwinter if any remain, reports were from the extreme se, singles in Saunders Co 4 Jan (DS), Cass Co 22 Jan (GW et al), and Otoe Co on 9 Feb (LF,CF).

**Red-bellied Woodpecker:** None were reported w of Saunders Co.

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:** Like Red-headed Woodpecker, wintering birds are usual during the period only in the extreme se; there were 3 reports, more than usual in midwinter: 1 wintered at ADF (LF,CF), 1 was reported on the Omaha CBC 4 Jan, and 2 were at Arbor Lodge 31 Jan (BP,LP).

**Downy Woodpecker:** Reports were routine.

**Hairy Woodpecker:** Reports were routine.

**Northern Flicker:** None were reported between 7 Dec and 17 Feb; these birds are scarcest in midwinter.

**Horned Lark:** Best count was 5275 around LM 28 Dec (LR,RH).

**Steller's Jay:** Leading off a great array of invading montane species this winter were 2 cooperative birds which appeared during the fall period in Carter Canyon and remained there through the winter period (mob). For a time, only 1 was present; the other may have been the bird seen at Mitchell 16 Jan (AK). This occurrence is about the 30th for this species in Nebraska.

**Blue Jay:** Now rather common throughout the Platte valley, if not everywhere in the state, 23 were counted on the Scotts Bluff CBC 21 Dec.

**Pinyon Jay:** The numbers reported, higher than in average winters, suggested that this species was involved in the general invasion of Scotts Bluff Co by montane species. Best count was 125 along the White River in Sioux Co 29 Dec (JGJ,GEJ), while up to 41 frequented the exciting Wildcat Hills NC feeders through the period (SJD, mob). Most significant report was of a single bird which attended feeders at the Dummer and Rumery residences in Kearney through the period (LR,RH).

**Clark's Nutcracker:** This is another montane species which appeared this winter. First were up to 6 present in Monroe Canyon 29-30 Dec (MB,BFH,JGJ,GEJ). These birds probably came from the Black Hills of South Dakota, but provenance of 1-2 in Morrill Co 11 Jan (AK) through 8 Feb (LKM,LR,RH) is less obvious.

**Black-billed Magpie:** Recently appearing regularly around BOL, 1 was there 6 Dec (LE), also the most easterly reported. Best count was only 25, those at HCR 12 Jan (LR,RH).

**American Crow:** Best count was a modest 90 at BOL 31 Jan (LE).

**Black-capped Chickadee:** Reports were routine.

**Mountain Chickadee:** The influx noted in fall continued through the winter period. Surprisingly far to the east was 1 at the KNOP TV station's feeder in North Platte at least 4-6 Dec (NR,BP,LP). This species reached Lincoln Co during the 1968-69 invasion, when the most easterly Nebraska report, from Dawson Co in early 1969, was made. Best count was up to 5 at the Wildcat Hills NC feeders through the period (mob). The other report received was of 1 in Gering 4 Dec (AK).

**Tufted Titmouse:** Reports were from regular locations in Sarpy and Cass Cos.

**Red-breasted Nuthatch:** The many reports received totalled only about 22 birds, rather routine. Best count was 8 at the Wildcat Hills NC feeders (surprise!) 3 Jan (LKM). Reports were statewide.

**White-breasted Nuthatch:** Reports were routine; none from areas where breeding does not occur.

**Pygmy Nuthatch:** This species was common this winter, indicating an influx of non-resident birds, especially on the Pine Ridge. Best counts were 38 in the Sioux Co Pine Ridge 29 Dec (SJD) and 21 in



Monroe Canyon 29 Dec (JGJ). Up to 6 were at the Wildcat Hills NC feeders throughout (mob), a not unusual number for the location.

**Brown Creeper:** Reports were from the se, where best count was 6 at Wyuka Cem, Lincoln, 21 Dec (LE), except for 1 bird at the Gering Cem 4 Dec (LKM). Creepers are uncommon in fall and rare in winter in the panhandle away from the Pine Ridge.

**Carolina Wren:** Only 2 reports were received: 1 was in Cass Co 1 Dec (GW et al) and another was at ADF throughout (LF,CF). Reports of this species have declined recently.

**Winter Wren:** The only report was of 1 at Indian Cave SP 1Feb (WRS). Few overwinter.

**Marsh Wren:** This species winters regularly in the LM area, but also apparently around springs in Scotts Bluff Co; 1 was observed there 28 Jan (LKM).

**Golden-crowned Kinglet:** Several wintered in the se; 4 were counted on the Omaha CBC 4 Jan, and 3 were at ADF 23 Jan (LF,CF). Furthest w were singles at Wild Rose Ranch 12 and 28 Dec (TEL).

**Eastern Bluebird:** Reports were from Buffalo and Franklin Cos southeastward. A good midwinter count was 9 in nw Franklin Co 2 Feb (LR,RH).

**Mountain Bluebird:** The only report of this species, Nebraska's best candidate for an "altitudinal migrant", was 10 around LM 28 Dec (BFH). Wintering is regular in the Platte valley as far east as se Lincoln Co.

**Townsend's Solitaire:** Rather far e was 1 at Wolf L 8 Dec (TH). Elsewhere, best count was a modest 13 around LM 1 Feb (LKM).

**American Robin:** An excellent midwinter count was 475 at Wolf L 3 Jan (TH). Returning flocks were noted at Nebraska City 17 Feb, when 55 were counted (LF,CF).

**Gray Catbird:** Chuck and Joan Dummer reported 1 in their Kearney yard 5 Jan (fide LR,RH). No details were provided. The only other midwinter report for the state is 7-8 Feb 1993 in Douglas Co (AB 42:273).

**Brown Thrasher:** The only report for the period was 1 in Kearney 21 Dec on the CBC. Dec reports are rare, but not unusual in s and e Nebraska.

**Bohemian Waxwing:** A beautiful sight were 362 flying around Harrison 29 Dec (SJD, mob). Few have been reported in recent years. A smaller group, 10 birds, were at LeMoyne on LM 28 Dec (JGJ,GEJ).

**Cedar Waxwing:** Best count among the statewide reports was 255 at Wolf L 21 Dec; 220 were there 4 Jan also (TH). Reports were about average.

**Northern Shrike:** Several reports were received, indicating a good year for this species. Furthest se were 1 in Sarpy Co 11 Jan (DS), 2 in Lancaster Co 6 Dec (LE), and 1 at BOL 18 Jan (BP,LP).

**Loggerhead Shrike:** The only reports were from Cass Co; none were reported in midwinter, when most depart the state. Singles were in Cass Co 1 Dec (LP,BP) and 23 Jan (GW et al).

**European Starling:** Best count among the statewide reports was 475 at NPNWR 16 Jan (LKM). Rather lonely at an unexpected midwinter location was 1 at CLNWR 12 Jan (MF).

**Orange-crowned Warbler:** No details were received with a report of 1 on the UNL East Campus, Lincoln, 21 Dec (LE). This would be the latest ever by over a month, although it was described as "wintering as far north as Omaha" without details in 1979-80 (AB 34:287).

**Yellow-rumped Warbler:** Dec reports from the se are not unusual, but 1 at North Platte 6 Dec (BP,LP) was rather far west at that date.

**Northern Cardinal:** Best count was a modest 20 in n Lancaster Co 10 Feb (LE), while the small Scotts Bluff Co population continues: 2 were seen 21 Dec (AK), hopefully male and female.

**spotted Towhee:** All towhees reported were this species; most Easterns leave in midwinter. As many as 4 were as far e as Lancaster Co 21 Dec (LE).

**American Tree Sparrow:** Best counts were 300 in Otoe Co 9 Feb (LF,CF) and 280 in Lancaster Co 10 Feb (LE).

**song Sparrow:** Wintering statewide wherever water remains open, a good midwinter count was 9 at NPNWR 16 Jan (LKM).

**Swamp Sparrow:** One of only a handful of midwinter panhandle reports was 1 at Stateline Island 7 Feb (LKM). This species is rare anywhere in the state in midwinter, with most reports from the se. Less unusual was 1 at HCR 14 Dec (JGJ).

**White-throated Sparrow:** Furthest w were 1 wintering in a yard near Gibbon (LR,RH) and another at HCR 14 Dec (JGJ). Most wintering reports are from the se.

**White-crowned Sparrow:** No large counts were received; most are s of Nebraska in midwinter. Scotts Bluff Co hosted 4 on 21 Dec (LKM) and singles were at BOL 18 Jan (LP,BP) and 12 Feb (LE).

**Harris' Sparrow:** Rare in the northwest, 1 was at a feeder in Chadron 11 Dec (ZU, photo). Other reports were from the s and e, with best counts an excellent 95 in Otoe Co 1 Jan (LF,CF) and 50 in Lincoln 21 Dec (LE).

**Dark-eyed Junco:** Observers should note, if possible, the plumage type of juncos; treat them as though they were different species! Observers in the e generally do not differentiate types, probably because most are "Slate-colored". No "Oregon" Juncos were reported e of Hall Co, where 1 was seen at Wild Rose Ranch 12 Dec (TEL). "White-winged" Juncos were at the James Ranch feeders through the period (SL). Best counts of "Dark-eyed" were 350 in Otoe Co 9 Feb (LF,CF) and 75 at BOL 10 Feb (LE).

**Lapland Longspur:** Good midwinter counts were received: 3000 were in se Gosper Co 26 Jan (LR,RH), and 1500 were in sw Phelps Co 26 Jan (LR,RH) and in sw Dixon Co 1 Feb (JJ). Very large numbers appear in ne NE in late Feb, presumably migrants; at least 10,000 were noted in sw Dixon Co 20 Feb, where "mile after mile ... they kept rising out of the cornfields. I've never seen this many at one time before." (JJ).

**Snow Bunting:** This was a good year for this species. Many reports were received, including excellent counts of 1000 in Wayne Co 7 Jan (JJ), 160 near Niobrara 30 Dec (BFH), and 92 w of Valentine 30 Dec (JGJ). All reports were n of the Platte R, except for 15 n of Lincoln 10 Feb (LE).

**Red-winged Blackbird:** An amazing concentration was 12,500 in a creek bottom at Pawnee Prairie 8 Feb (JGJ,WRS); these may have been early migrants. Singing birds were on territory by 22 Feb at Wolf L (TH).

**Western Meadowlark:** First identified by song were in Otoe Co 22 Feb (LF,CF).

**Meadowlark sp.:** None were reported, although several reports of "Western" Meadowlark were received without identification details. Although most, if not all, winter meadowlarks in Nebraska are probably Westerns, field identification to species in winter is difficult if not impossible unless a call is heard.

**Rusty Blackbird:** The only reports were of 41 at HCR 14 Dec (JGJ) and at least 1 in Cass Co 5 Jan (GW et al). This species is not unusual in the se as late as early Jan.

**Brewer's Blackbird:** The only report was from Cass Co 5 Jan (GW et al). There are a few reports in midwinter in the se, but these are poorly documented.

**Common Grackle:** Midwinter reports were from the se, as expected, except for 1 in Knox Co 19 Jan (MB). Few overwinter, usually singles at feeders. One, the only sighting by this observer, was at

a feeder in Lincoln 16 Jan (LE), and 1 was reported on the Omaha CBC 4 Jan.

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** Rare in midwinter, 3 reports were received: 3 were in w Lancaster Co 2 Jan (LE), 1 was in Sarpy Co 12 Jan (DS), and 6 were in the observers' yard near Gibbon 10 Feb (LR,RH).

**Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch:** This was a good winter for this species. The flood of rarity-hunters in w Nebraska in late Dec located a flock of 30-40 at a rocky outcropping roost site on the Hughson Ranch n of Scottsbluff 27 Dec (SJD,WRS,JS). These birds had been in the area for some time (Helen Hughson fide WRS). A flock of about 100 were near Whitney in Dawes Co 29 Dec (SJD,JS,WRS,BFH) and up to 75 were at a Chadron feeder through the period (ZU). Other reports were 40 at L Alice 14 Jan (LKM), 3 at the Wildcat Hills NC feeders 23 Feb (AK), 2 w of Fort Robinson in Sioux Co 30 Dec (JGJ), and the first to appear at the James Ranch feeders was seen 16 Dec (SL).

**Purple Finch:** Fewer than 10 were reported, but 1 was far west near Gering for the winter (AK).

**Cassin's Finch:** Observers were afforded an opportunity to study the rarest of the 3 Carpodacus finches in Nebraska when several Cassin's appeared at the Wildcat Hills NC feeders during the fall, probably also part of the montane influx. Not as many remained there through winter, best count 5 on 27 Dec (SJD).

**House Finch:** Best count was 48 on the UNL East campus in Lincoln 17 Jan (LE).

**Red Crossbill:** After a promising eastward move in the fall, winter reports east of the expected range were sporadic at best. Best eastern count was 35 in Harlan Co 2 Feb (LR,RH), and 1 was at Wild Rose Ranch 28 Dec (TEL), another at Cottonmill Park in Kearney 23 Feb (LR,RH), 5 were at Nebraska City 24 Feb (LF,CF), and it was reported from Cass (GW et al) and Saunders (DS) Cos without numbers given. Best count was from the west: 65 at Wildcat Hills NC 25 Jan (LKM).

**Common Redpoll:** As seems to be usual for this species following a good year, none were reported this year.

**Pine Siskin:** Reports were statewide in average numbers except for the west, where good numbers were reported, including up to 300 at the Wildcat Hills NC 27 Dec (SJD) and 80 at Chadron 3 Feb (ZU).

**American Goldfinch:** Numbers were about average statewide. Best counts were 75 at a single feeder in Lincoln 10 Jan (LE) and 45 in Nebraska City 13 Jan (LF,CF).

**Evening Grosbeak:** Most reports were from (where else?) the Wildcat Hills NC feeders, where a flock wintered; best count was 48 on 25 Jan (LKM). Numbers were good in the west, as 116 were counted on the Scottsbluff CBC 21 Dec and 12 were seen at Harrison 29 Dec (SJD). Easterly reports were of 3 at Kearney on the CBC 21 Dec, 5 at LM 28 Dec (BFH), and 15 at HCR 12 Jan (LR,RH).

**House Sparrow:** This species appears to be intimidated not only by House Finches, but by Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches; all the House Sparrows left whenever Gray-crowns appeared at the observer's feeders (ZU).

#### OBSERVERS

Mark Brogie (MB), Creighton; Stephen J. Dinsmore (SJD), Fort Collins, CO; Larry Einemann (LE), Lincoln; Carol Falk (CF), Nebraska City; Laurence Falk (LF), Nebraska City; Marlin French (MF), Ellsworth; Robin Harding (RH), Gibbon; Thomas A. Hoffman (TH), Omaha; Bill F. Huser (BFH), South Sioux City; Jan Johnson (JJ), Wakefield; Joel G. Jorgensen (JGJ), Blair; Alice Kenitz (AK), Gering; Lucy Koenig (LK), Scottsbluff; Thomas E. Labeledz (TEL), Lincoln; Sandy Lemmon (SL), Crawford; Larry K. Malone (LKM),

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