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## Winter Field Report, Dec. 1993-Feb. 1994

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WINTER FIELD REPORT, DEC 1993 - FEB 1994

Compiled by

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Introductory Remarks by Ross Silcock

After volunteering to gather data and write a series of seasonal summaries for The Nebraska Bird Review, I was surprised that my offer was accepted and now the time has come already for the first report. I asked for comments and suggestions from contributors to the traditional six-month "spring" and "fall" Occurrence Reports and received many helpful ideas. The biggest concern was the possible loss of accessibility to data on a county-by-county basis. I do have the information entered into a database so that it can be accessed by county, and would be happy to respond to any requests for data. Dick Rosché offered to summarize data for western Nebraska, so this report is really a joint effort by Dick and me.

A comment to reporters is in order. The reports I received were excellent and voluminous. The reports could be shortened somewhat by leaving out permanent resident species, defined as those where the individuals remain year round, such as gallinaceous birds, House Sparrow, Rock Dove, and some of the woodpeckers. Perhaps each observer could (only once) come up with a list of these species and an indication of how common these permanent residents are in the area. Subsequent reporting then would be less time-consuming. However, not all species that are present year-round are "permanent". Many individuals are migrants, or the winter birds are not the summer birds. Examples are American Goldfinch, Red-winged Blackbird, etc. For these species, numbers seen on certain dates are important, so that we can gauge migration peaks and winter lows. All other species are absent for part of the year, so early and late dates of occurrence for each reporting period are important.

Observers who find unusual species or even rarities should at least add comments on the sighting, or even a complete documentation for submission to the NOU Records Committee. This provides a permanent record for unusual occurrences.

I look forward to receiving seasonal reports from additional observers; the more the merrier. Also, please let me know if any of my comments seem inaccurate to you based on your knowledge of your area; I welcome constructive criticism.

NOTABLE EVENTS

Highlights of birding in the winter period are late records for summering birds or migrants; invasions of winter finches such as crossbills, redpolls, and grosbeaks; invasions of corvids and other Rocky Mountain species; and gull watching. This year we had examples of three of these; lacking, as usual, was an invasion of winter finches. Incredibly late records of Nashville Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, and Summer Tanager were highlights, while a spectacular concentration of gulls below Kingsley Dam in late February drew several gull aficionados and resulted in several significant records, including Thayer's, Iceland, Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls, large numbers of Glaucous Gulls, and a lost Franklin's Gull. Perhaps not an invasion, but of great interest nevertheless, was the appearance of Clark's Nutcrackers in Scotts Bluff County.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Initials refer to observers; a list follows this report.

\* = documented; m.ob. = many observers; CBC = Christmas Bird Count.

**Common Loon:** The last and only one reported was on L. McConaughy, Keith Co., 16 Dec (SJD).

**Pied-billed Grebe:** One lingered as late as 31 Dec at Offutt Base Lake, Sarpy County (RCK). There were no reports for the period from the Platte valley.

**Horned Grebe:** A late bird was on L. McConaughy 17 Dec (SJD).

**Western Grebe:** In recent years sizeable late flocks have been found lingering on L. McConaughy; this year 28 were counted 16 Dec, and were still present the next day (SJD).

**American White Pelican:** Four were at Sutherland Res. 14-16 Dec (SJD, WRS), but only 3 could be found 12 Jan (JoJ) and 11 Feb, all capable of flight (WRS).

**Double-crested Cormorant:** The only report was of 10 on the Platte R. in Cass County 29 Dec (GWO).

**Great Blue Heron:** This species winters along the entire Platte R. wherever open water occurs. Best count was 7 on the ice below Kingsley Dam 13 Feb (WRS); wintering birds were found at opposite ends of the Platte R. in Saunders (THo) and Scotts Bluff (Ake) Cos., and a midwinter report was of one at Kearney 22 Jan (LRa, RHa).

**Trumpeter Swan:** At least one family group, possibly breeders from the western Sandhills or South Dakota, winters in the L. Ogallala-Keystone L. area in Keith Co. most years; 6 unmarked birds, 4 adults and 2 immatures, appeared there on 16 Dec (SJD, WRS), and 7 were reported there 28 Feb (JoJ). At least 2 wintered, both adults, seen 11-16 Feb (WRS, m.ob.).

**Greater White-fronted Goose:** Latest in the east were in Sarpy Co. 5 Dec (RCG), but small groups probably wintered in the central Platte valley: 10 were in Buffalo Co. 16 Jan (LRa, RHa) and 22 were at Elwood Res., Gosper Co. 22 Jan (LRa, RHa). Migrants are abundant in central Nebraska, but wintering is unusual.

**Snow Goose:** Wintering is unusual in this species also, and so 8 at Grandpa's Steakhouse, Buffalo Co., 30 Jan and 2 at Wild Rose Ranch, Hall Co., (LRa, RHa) were of interest. Most departed the Missouri valley in Dec, with 100 at Base L. 6 Dec (BGC), the last sizeable group. A few were reported from the west, where the species is not as numerous: 6 at Morrill, Scotts Bluff Co., 8 Dec (Lma) and one at Scottsbluff 18 Feb (Lma), while 1 was at L. McConaughy 17 Dec (SJD).

**Ross' Goose:** None were reported.

**Canada Goose:** Sizeable flocks winter at favored spots in the Platte valley, including 5000 in Garden Co. 14 Dec and 4000 at Sutherland Res. 11 Feb (WRS), 4000 at Wild Rose Ranch 5 Feb and 3000 at Grandpa's 18 Dec (LRa, RHa), and 3000 at Elwood Res. 22 Jan (LRa, RHa). Highest count was 15,950 at L. Minatare, Scotts Bluff Co., 2 Dec (Ake), probably migrants, as well as 1100 at Calamus Res. 11 Dec (LRa, RHa). Migrants departed northeast Nebraska 4 Dec in Dakota Co. (BFH), and 19 Dec in Knox Co. (MAB), but wintering birds were in Saunders Co., where up to 300 were present (THo), Lancaster Co. (LEi), and Harlan Co. (LRa, RHa).

**Wood Duck:** Wintering birds are unusual; singles were at Base L. 4-5 Jan (BP, LP), and Fort Kearny State Park 11 Jan (JoJ). Last in fall was 1 at Overton, Phelps Co., 23 Dec (LRa, RHa) and first in spring were 10 as far west as Scottsbluff 20 Feb (Lma). Wood Duck has increased in the west since the 1970s.

**Green-winged Teal:** The only midwinter report was 1 at Base L. 22 Jan (VHa), although 13 below Kingsley Dam 11 Feb may have been wintering (WRS). Last in fall were 58 on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec (Ake) and first in spring were 4 at Midway L., Dawson Co. 19 Feb (LRa, RHa).

**American Black Duck:** Latest were 10, a good total, at Snyder's Bend, Dakota Co. 2 Jan (BFH). All other reports were in Dec, westernmost in Boone Co. 22 Dec (WMO). No Feb reports were received.

**Mallard:** As with Canada Goose, sizeable flocks winter at certain spots, not always the same as those used by the geese. Largest wintering flock was at Sutherland Res. where 8000 were present 11 Feb (WRS), with other groups 2510 below Kingsley Dam 11 Feb (WRS) and 1000 at Snyder's Bend 2 Jan (BFH). Best count was 45,485 at L. Minatare 2 Dec (Ake), many probably migrants, as were many of the 20,000 at Sutherland Res. 14 Dec (WRS). Wintering birds were

also in Saunders Co. (THo), Lancaster Co. (PK, KK), Buffalo Co. (LRa, RHa); and in Dixon Co., where 8 were seen 22 Jan near Wakefield (JJo).

**Northern Pintail:** Scattered wintering birds were reported, including 2 at Sutherland Res. 12 Jan (JoJ), and singles in Buffalo and Kearney Cos. 30 Jan (LRa, RHa). Best count was a group of 50 spring migrants in Cass Co. 19 Feb (BP, LP), although earliest in spring were 15 at Winters Creek L., Scotts Bluff Co. 17 Feb (AKe).

**Northern Shoveler:** This species is very rare in midwinter, and so 1 at Grandpa's 30 Jan (LRa, RHa) was noteworthy. The only other reports were 11 and 21 Dec at Base L. (RCG, KCR) in fall and 1 in Saunders Co. 13 Feb (THo), possibly wintering. No spring influx was detected before the end of the period.

**Gadwall:** A few winter in the Platte valley, such as 14 below Kingsley Dam 11 Feb, possibly the same birds seen below the Keystone Diversion Dam 16 Dec (WRS). Also possibly wintering were 2 at Branched Oak Res., Lancaster Co. 22 Jan (BP, LP). Last in fall in Dakota Co. were 2 at Snyder's Bend 29 Dec (BFH), and earliest spring migrants were 2 at Winters Creek L. 18 Feb (LMa).

**American Wigeon:** This species is another rare midwinter bird; the only group possibly wintering was the 15 in Scotts Bluff Co. 6 and 17 Feb (LMa, AKe). Last in fall were 2 below Kingsley Dam 16 Dec (WRS) and first in spring was 1 in Saunders Co. 27 Feb (THo).

**Canvasback:** None wintered, as expected; fall birds were 1 below Kingsley Dam 16 Dec (WRS) and in Sarpy Co. (RCG), while the first in spring were 16 on Base L. 24 Feb (BP, LP).

**Redhead:** Also rare in midwinter, the only such report was of 5 at Base L. 23 Jan (BP, LP); fall birds were seen as late as 2 Jan in Dakota Co. (BFH), and first spring birds were 20 at Winters Creek L. 17 Feb (AKe), also the best count.

**Ring-necked Duck:** Yet another rare winter bird, none were reported in midwinter. Last in fall were in Sarpy Co. 22 Dec (RCG) and first in spring 6 at Winters Creek L. 17 Feb (AKe). Best count was 14 at L. Minatare 15 Dec (AKe).

**Greater Scaup:** Only two reports were received, a group of 15 fall migrants below Kingsley Dam 16 Dec (WRS), and 3 spring migrants there 21 Feb (JoJ). This species is uncommon, but often overlooked late in fall and early in spring.

**Lesser Scaup:** No spring birds had arrived by the end of the period, and none wintered. Latest in fall was in Sarpy Co. 22 Dec (RCG).

**Oldsquaw:** This was a good year for this species, with about 9 birds seen. Best count was of up to 6 below Gavin's Point Dam, Cedar Co. 12-19 Dec (BFH, MAB). One was seen in midwinter at L. Maloney, Lincoln Co., 12 Jan (JoJ), one at Sutherland Res. 27 Feb (BP, LP), and a third below Kingsley Dam 21-26 Feb (JoJ, WRS).

**Black Scoter:** The only report of this rare duck was of one at Norfolk, Madison Co. 17 Dec (DWO). No details were provided, however. This species is not reported every year in the state.

**Common Goldeneye:** Largest wintering group was below Kingsley Dam, where 750 were estimated 11 Feb (WRS); Sutherland Res. also had 200 on 11 Feb, probably wintering, with 750 there 14 Dec (WRS). A few wintered in the central Platte valley also, including 20 at Elwood Res. 22 Jan and 5 at Wild Rose Ranch 5 Feb (LRa, RHa). Unusual in midwinter was 1 in Boone Co. 6 Feb (WMO).

**Bufflehead:** None were reported for midwinter. Last in fall was 1 at Johnson L., Gosper Co. 23 Dec (LRa, RHa), and first and only spring report was of 2 at Base L. 24 Feb (BP, LP). Best count was 25 below Kingsley Dam 16 Dec (WRS).

**Hooded Merganser:** None were wintering; last in fall was in Sarpy Co. 20 Dec (RCG), and the only spring report was of 2 below Kingsley Dam 21 and 28 Feb (JoJ).

**Common Merganser:** Like Common Goldeneye, this species winters when open water can be found. Very large numbers winter on Sutherland Res., with 15,000 there 11 Feb, more than the 10,000 there 14 Dec (WRS). In addition, there were 8000 below Kingsley Dam 11 Feb (WRS). Probable migrants were 2000 at Harlan County Res., Harlan

- Co., 4 Dec (LRa,RHa); this reservoir usually freezes completely in midwinter, although 1 was there 1 Jan (LRa,RHa). Other wintering birds were 25 at Elwood Res. 22 Jan (LRa,RHa) and at least 1 at Branched Oak Res. (PK,KK).
- Ruddy Duck:** There was only one report of this cold-sensitive species; from Sarpy Co. 15 Dec (RCG).
- Turkey Vulture:** A report without identification details was received of one in Sarpy Co. 10 Dec, a very late date. While possibly correct, details should be provided with Dec reports of this species.
- Bald Eagle:** Scattered birds winter around the state, concentrating wherever waterfowl are present. What was described as "the largest concentration in four years" was 284 birds below Kingsley Dam 11 Feb (Omaha World Herald, 15 Feb). Another good count was 64 at Harlan Co. Res. 8 Jan (LRa,RHa).
- Northern Harrier:** Only 3 midwinter reports were received, all from southeast Nebraska: 4 were at Harlan Co. Res 8 Jan (LRa,RHa), and singles were at Branched Oak Res. 22 Jan (PK,KK) and at Crane Meadows, Hall Co. 5 Feb (LRa, RHa). Wintering is uncommon north of the Platte valley; the latest in Dakota Co. was 4 Dec (BFH).
- Sharp-shinned Hawk:** Midwinter reports of singles were scattered around the state as expected; in all about 24 birds were seen, with the best one-day count 4 birds at Gavin's Point 23 Jan (JJo).
- Cooper's Hawk:** About 12 were recorded, distributed statewide; the only multiple report was of 2 in Kearney Co. 26 Feb (LRa,RHa), possibly migrants.
- Northern Goshawk:** Only 2 of these rare accipiters were reported, suggesting an average to poor year. One was reported without details at Raven Oaks, Douglas Co. 23 Dec (JLa), and the other, an adult, was at Gavin's Point 23 Jan (JJo).
- Red-shouldered Hawk:** Nebraska's only known breeding population returned to Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co., when 2 were seen 17 Feb (JAl).
- Red-tailed Hawk:** Overwintering was reported statewide, but the best tally was only 9 in Harlan Co. 1 Jan (LRa,RHa).
- Ferruginous Hawk:** This hawk winters in small numbers over most of western and southern Nebraska, east regularly to about Clay Co. south of the Platte R.; it is probably absent from northern Nebraska most years due to snow cover. Reports were received east to Adams Co., where 1 was at the Community College in Hastings 16 Jan (WMo). In winter prairie dogs are a favored food source, and so 2 at a "town" west of Funk Marsh, Phelps Co., 5 Dec (LRa,RHa) were not unexpected. A dark morph was reported without details 12 Feb in Phelps Co. (LRa,RHa); these birds are difficult to identify and are probably overlooked by most observers.
- Rough-legged Hawk:** This species appeared to be widespread this winter, with several multiple reports submitted, such as 6 in Keith Co. 16 Dec (WRS), 4 near Farnam, Dawson Co. 19 Feb (LRa,RHa), 3 near Morrill 8 Dec (LMa), 3 at Sutherland Res. 17 Jan (LMa), and 3 in southwest Kimball Co. 13 Feb (WRS).
- Golden Eagle:** Reports from the eastern two-thirds of Nebraska are generally of fall migrants in Dec, but the species is resident in the extreme west and there are scattered winter occurrences east of the breeding range. Reports received fit this pattern, with 1 in Knox Co. 19 Dec (MAB), and an unusual midwinter sighting in extreme northcentral Phelps Co. 15 Jan (LRa,RHa). Other reports were of an immature 17 Dec in Keith Co. (SJD) and 1 near Lisco, Garden Co. 11 Jan (LMa). Best count was 4 in Sioux Co. 15 Dec (WRS,SJD).
- American Kestrel:** This falcon winters throughout the state, but is more numerous southward. High count was 8 in Cass Co. 17 Feb (Gwo).
- Merlin:** This species may appear anywhere in the state in winter, but is most common in the west. In Knox Co. it is considered a migrant, and the last bird was seen 30 Dec (MAB). Most easterly was 1 in Douglas Co. 23 Jan (JS1), and the only multiple report was of 2 near Axtell, Kearney Co., 5 Dec (LRa,RHa).

- Peregrine Falcon:** The only report was of one near North Platte 11 Jan (LMa). No details of the sighting were provided. Midwinter records are unusual, although this species is becoming more common due to restocking.
- Prairie Falcon:** Surprisingly few reports were received. Two observers "did not see as many as usual" (LRa,RHa). Winter distribution of this species is similar to that of Merlin. Most easterly was 1 in Dixon Co. 27 Feb (JJo), and another was near Wilcox, Kearney Co., 5 Dec (LRa,RHa).
- Gray Partridge:** Only one report was received, from Knox Co., where it is resident (MAB). None were seen in several trips to its stronghold in northeast Nebraska during Snowy Owl searches (WRS), suggesting that perhaps the population is at a low ebb.
- Ring-necked Pheasant:** This species was reported statewide, but best count was 150 in Dixon County 28 Feb; these birds were in a CRP field (JJo). Another good total was 32 at Crescent L. NWR, Garden Co., 22 Dec (LMa). Are there areas of the state where this species is absent or very scarce?
- Greater Prairie Chicken:** This species is widely distributed in Nebraska, although only isolated populations exist in the east and northwest. Observers in south-central Nebraska were surprised to find 14 in northern Phelps Co. 12 Feb (LRa,RHa), although another observer found 37 across the Platte R. in southeast Dawson Co. 28 Feb (JoJ). It would be of interest to document populations in eastern Nebraska in addition to the well-known groups at Burchard L. in Pawnee Co. and just northeast of Grand Island in Hall Co.
- Sharp-tailed Grouse:** Compared to the preceding, this species is more western in its distribution. The only reports were of a single near Harrison, Sioux Co., (WRS) and from Garden Co., where 12 were seen at Crescent L. NWR 22 Dec (LMa). Reports from the eastern edge of its range would be of interest.
- Wild Turkey:** Now rather common in wooded areas statewide, high counts were received from opposite ends of the state. In Carter Canyon, Scotts Bluff Co., 83 were seen together 21 Feb (AKe), and in Cedar Co. 70 were counted near Wynot 15 Jan (JJo). A flock of 19 was found in Saunders Co. along the Platte R. 27 Feb (THo).
- Northern Bobwhite:** All reports were from eastern Nebraska, north to Cedar Co. and west to Phelps and Harlan Cos. Information from west of this area would be of interest. Best count was 10 near Elmwood, Cass Co. 22 Feb (Gwo); 6 were near Wynot 15 Jan (JJo), 8 were at Cattail SWA, Hall Co., 5 Feb (LRa,RHa), and 2 were near Huntley, Harlan Co. 1 Jan (LRa,RHa).
- American Coot:** All reports were for Dec except for 5 birds lingering as late as 2 Jan at Snyder's Bend (BFH). Best count was 9 below Kingsley Dam 16 Dec (WRS), also the most westerly report. None were reported in midwinter or in February.
- Sandhill Crane:** Overwintering is rare, and so 2 flying over Sutherland Res. 14 Dec (SJD) may have been late migrants. However, 1 at Grandpa's 11 Jan may have wintered, although the same observer noted that cranes became "regular" after 28 Jan (JoJ). Spring arrivals generally appeared in mid Feb; earliest was 12 Feb in Phelps Co. (LRa,RHa), with "hundreds" flying over North Platte by 17 Feb (WWy).
- Killdeer:** A few attempt to winter along the Platte R. in western Nebraska, although midwinter reports are rare. Latest were 3 near Morrill 1 Jan (ECT). None were reported in late Feb, the expected arrival time.
- Common Snipe:** This species also may attempt to winter on rare occasions, but there were no such reports this year. Latest were 3 in Scotts Bluff Co. 18 Dec (AKe), and earliest in spring were 5 there 20 Feb (LMa). No reports were received from eastern Nebraska.
- American Woodcock:** No reports were received; this species sometimes arrives in late Feb in eastern Nebraska.
- Franklin's Gull:** A single bird in breeding plumage was below Kingsley Dam 14-17 Dec (RCR\*,SJD,WRS) and again 13 Feb (WRS) and 21 Feb

(JoJ). It was not seen there 11 Feb (WRS). It is not known whether it wintered there or moved out and returned after midwinter. In recent years a few of these birds have appeared in winter in the northern Plains; the reasons are unclear. The normal winter range is in South America.

**Bonaparte's Gull:** The latest, and only report, was at Branched Oak Res. 1 Dec (BJR). Most leave by early Dec.

**Ring-billed Gull:** This species is rare in midwinter, tending to move north and south according to presence of open water. The few midwinter reports were of rather low numbers: 30 were at Sutherland Res. 11 Feb and 50 were below Kingsley Dam the same day (WRS). It was also reported from Harlan Co. Res. 8 Jan (LRa, RHa). Soon thereafter numbers increased, as 200-300 were below Kingsley Dam 16-28 Feb (JoJ, WRS). Best count was 450 at Harlan Co. Res. 27 Dec. Spring birds appeared at many locations by late February, as expected, including 3 on the Platte R. in Cass Co. 19 Feb (GWO).

**California Gull:** In recent years this gull has become common in western Nebraska, particularly at L. McConaughy. Highest numbers occur in fall and most depart by midwinter. There were still up to 74 present 16-17 Dec (SJD). No other reports were received.

**Herring Gull:** This species occurs along with Ring-billed Gulls in Nebraska, although usually in lesser numbers except for colder periods, when it may outnumber Ring-bills. The large concentration of gulls below Kingsley Dam in late Feb was made up mostly of Herring Gulls; 1000 were there 21 Feb (JoJ), but a week earlier only 150 were counted (WRS). At about the same time only about 75 were at Sutherland Res.; about a third were immatures, a high proportion (WRS). Elsewhere, late birds were at Harlan Co. Res. until 8 Jan (LRa, RHa), and at Branched Oak Res. until 22 Dec (LEI). Apart from the Keith Co. birds, surprisingly, no spring reports were received.

**Thayer's Gull:** Among the incredible list of rare gulls below Kingsley Dam was at least 1 first winter bird of this species, seen 26 Feb (WRS\*) and 28 Feb (JoJ). This appears to be Nebraska's 7th report of this species, the 1st in 1981 (NBR 50:14).

**Iceland Gull:** At least 1 first winter bird was below Kingsley Dam 20 Feb (RCR\*) and 26 Feb (WRS\*), for Nebraska's 5th report, all but one dating from 1988, affording a rare opportunity to compare this species and the preceding. Consensus is developing that the two may merely represent discernible variation within a single species.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull:** With only two prior records for Nebraska, the appearance of 1-2 winter adults below Kingsley Dam was a pleasant surprise. A single adult was seen there 21 Feb (JoJ), 2 were seen on the ice 26 Feb (WRS\*), and at least 1 remained through 28 Feb (JoJ).

**Glaucous Gull:** This winter saw the largest "invasion" by this species yet recorded in Nebraska. It was difficult to get an accurate count of the many individuals below Kingsley Dam, but at least 6 (JoJ) and probably more than 10 (WRS) were present during the period 16-28 Feb. Most were first and second winter birds, but at least 1 adult was seen 26 Feb (WRS\*). It was a good year for this species elsewhere, also, with up to 5 at Gavin's Point 4-19 Dec, including an adult 12 Feb (BFH, MAB). At Sutherland Res. 1-2 immatures were present 14-16 Dec (SJD, WRS), and a single immature was there 11 Feb (WRS). Four were at Johnson Res. 12 Jan and 3 were at Elwood Res. the same day, for an excellent one-day tally (LRa, RHa). Finally, a large first winter white-winged gull with a conspicuous tail band and primary and secondary markings which was seen below Kingsley Dam 26 Feb was identified as a Glaucous-Herring hybrid (WRS\*).

**Great Black-backed Gull:** A single first winter bird was reported from below Kingsley Dam 21 Feb (JoJ). No details were provided for what would be only the second confirmed Nebraska record. The other was a bird which was found by Rosche at Sutherland Res. two winters in a row, Feb 1988 (NBR 57:42) and Jan 1989 (NBR 58:90).

- Rock Dove:** This species occurs statewide, usually around human artifacts; reports of occurrence in natural habitats or high counts are of interest. High count was 120 at Scottsbluff 10 Feb (LMA).
- Mourning Dove:** This species is unusual in midwinter, especially as far north as Boone Co., where 3 wintered (WMO). Less unusual were the 5 which wintered in a Sarpy Co. yard (KCR). Latest, apart from wintering birds, were in Sarpy (RCG) and Lancaster (LEi) Cos. 22 Dec, and Scotts Bluff Co. 21 Dec (NMV). Only one spring report was received; 1 at Sartoria, Buffalo Co. 27 Feb was considered "unusually early" (LRA,RHa).
- Eastern Screech Owl:** An excellent count of 17 was made at DeSoto NWR, Washington Co. 25 Jan (JTo), indicating how common this species is, at least in eastern Nebraska, in its preferred habitat of scattered groves and woodland edge interspersed with mature or dead large trees.
- Great Horned Owl:** Reports were received statewide for this nocturnal habitat equivalent of Red-tailed Hawk. No indication of nesting was received, although many birds begin before the end of Feb.
- Snowy Owl:** A few individuals were reported, but tended to be elusive. Earliest report was of 1 in Madison Co. 4 Dec (MAB), and another was in northeast Wayne Co. during the period 2-20 Jan (JJo). Two found in south-central Nebraska in Nov could not be located in Dec, although 1 was apparently seen by others in Dec (LRA,RHa). Another was seen in Gosper Co. 16-17 Jan (SK,JK). One of the Nov birds was injured and sent to Betsy Hancock in Lincoln for rehabilitation (LRA,RHa).
- Barred Owl:** Two reports were from Dakota (BFH) and Washington (JTo) Cos., well within the known Nebraska range. Reports further west would be of interest; where is the western edge of its range?
- Long-eared Owl:** The few reports were from eastern Nebraska, including good counts of 4-7 at Glen Cunningham Res. in Douglas Co. 26 Dec-1 Jan (JoJ, JTo). In Dixon Co. 2-3 were present in Jan (JJo). This species probably winters statewide.
- Short-eared Owl:** Only 2 reports of single birds were received; this species is scarce, especially in winter, in Nebraska. One was at Glen Cunningham Res. 1 Jan (JTo), and the other was in Dixon Co. 27 Feb (JJo), possibly a migrant. Most winter birds are found roosting with Long-eared Owls.
- Northern Saw-whet Owl:** None were reported.
- Belted Kingfisher:** Individuals may attempt to winter wherever open water exists; it is probably most common along the Platte R. valley. Midwinter reports came from Cass (GWO), Sarpy (BP,LP,TEB), Saunders (THo), Lancaster (PK,KK), Hall (LRA,RHa), and Keith (WRS) Cos.
- Red-headed Woodpecker:** Most leave Nebraska in winter, and most of those remaining frequent oak woodland in southeast Nebraska. A single midwinter report was received from an expected location, Neale Woods, Douglas Co., on 20 Jan (JBr).
- Red-bellied Woodpecker:** This resident woodpecker is found almost statewide, but is rare in the panhandle. Most westerly were 2 in a North Platte yard 19 Feb (WWy). It is regular in the Republican valley west at least to Harlan Co., where 8 were counted 1 Jan (LRA,RHa).
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:** This species is an uncommon migrant in Nebraska and is rare in midwinter, primarily occurring in the southeast. Two such reports were of 1 at Bellevue, Sarpy Co. 6 Jan (KCR) and another at Lincoln, Lancaster Co. 9 Jan (WCS). Last in fall was in Douglas Co. 30 Dec (CJo); no spring arrivals were reported nor expected until late March.
- Downy Woodpecker:** A common resident, rather evenly distributed statewide, although one observer thought it was declining in northeast Saunders Co. (THo).
- Hairy Woodpecker:** Also distributed fairly evenly statewide, although not as numerous as Downy Woodpecker, and least numerous where large trees are scarce. A report of interest was of 2 near Haigler, Dundy Co., 25 Feb (LMA).



- Northern Flicker:** Breeding birds are supplemented (replaced?) by migrants and wintering birds. Numbers are probably lowest in midwinter, and no such counts higher than the 2 in Dixon Co. 2 Jan (JJo) were received.
- Horned Lark:** This species becomes abundant during migration and often in winter, when resident birds are joined by others. Best winter counts were 8000 at Sutherland Res. 17 Jan (LMa) and 2000 in Wayne Co. 16 Jan (WRS). Residents are on territory in mid-Feb, exemplified by a count of 251 along 28 miles of southwest Kimball Co. roads 13 Feb; most were in pairs (WRS).
- Blue Jay:** This species is now fairly common even in extreme western Nebraska, as shown by a good count of 30 at Morrill (ECT) and 2 in Kimball, Kimball Co., 13 Feb (WRS). Most birds are resident, but migrants occur most years and some of these may winter in Nebraska. Reports from areas where Blue Jays appear, or numbers increase, in seasons other than summer are of interest. Best counts from the east were 7 in Dixon Co. 1 Jan (JJo) and 5 near Talmage, Otoe Co. 30 Dec (MBI).
- Pinyon Jay:** No reports were received.
- Clark's Nutcracker:** Almost as rare as some of the gulls reported, 2 birds were present from 13 Dec through the period 2 miles south of L. Minatare (NMV). At this location, these birds probably wandered into the state via the Platte valley from Wyoming, which fits the pattern of most previous Nebraska records. This species is a casual winter visitor to Nebraska; it is not resident in the Black Hills of South Dakota.
- Black-billed Magpie:** Fairly common throughout except for the southeast, easterly reports were from Knox Co., where it is resident (MAB), near Newcastle, Dixon Co., where 1 was seen 15 Jan (JJo), and at Branched Oak Res. 22 Jan (PK, KK). Best count was 9 near Elwood Res. 22 Jan (LRa, RHa).
- American Crow:** Large flocks form in winter, although many birds probably leave the state in severe weather. Best counts were 225 at Gering, Scotts Bluff Co., 11 Jan (LMa) and 339 counted from Omaha to North Platte on I-80 11 Feb; most were in the central Platte valley (WRS). Peak count in Dixon Co., however, was 26 (JJo).
- Black-capped Chickadee:** A common resident statewide, no unusually high counts were received.
- Tufted Titmouse:** This resident species is restricted to southeast Nebraska, from where the lone report came: 1 was seen in Cass Co. 31 Dec (GWO). Reports from the northwestern edge of the range, approximately the limit of oak woodland, would be welcome.
- Red-breasted Nuthatch:** This was an up year for this species, which is a regular winter visitor, with occasional invasion years. This winter a few appeared at virtually all reporting locations. It was considered "common at feeders" in Dakota Co. (BFH), and an "invasion" in southcentral Nebraska, where large numbers appeared in Nov and Dec but dwindled into Jan (LRa, RHa). Best count, however, was only 7 near Gering 1 Jan (LMa).
- White-breasted Nuthatch:** This species occurs virtually statewide in winter, even though it is rare as a breeding bird in parts of western and southwestern Nebraska. In North Platte it was described as a "winter resident", first appearing 10 Oct (WWy). Winter reports from other western locations where summering birds are absent are of interest.
- Pygmy Nuthatch:** The only report of this Pine Ridge resident and winter visitor was of 4 in Sowbelly Canyon, Sioux Co., 15 Dec (WRS).
- Brown Creeper:** Scattered reports of single birds came from throughout the state. This species is primarily a winter resident, most numerous in southern and eastern Nebraska. Westerly and northerly reports were from Scotts Bluff Co. 10 Dec (AKe) and Dakota Co. 1 Jan (BFH).
- Carolina Wren:** This resident species is restricted to southeast Nebraska, and it is unusual north of Sarpy Co. Hence 1 near Willis, Dakota Co., 24 Dec provided a first winter record there; it had occurred previously only in summer (BFH). All other

reports were of birds in Sarpy Co., except for 1 in Lincoln 25 Feb (WCS).

**House Wren:** A report was received without details of one in Sarpy Co. on the extremely late date of 10 Dec. This report is questionable, as there are only 3 previous reports for Dec and Jan, none documented.

**Winter Wren:** Most Nebraska records are of migrants, and wintering is rare and restricted to the southeast. One at Fontenelle Forest 17 Feb (JAl) may have wintered, however. The only other reports were probably of fall migrants, in Sarpy Co. 10 Dec (RCK) and Douglas Co. 3 and 11 Dec (CJo).

**Marsh Wren:** A few occur into Dec (and possibly later?) in cattails in Keith and southeastern Garden Co. each year. Two were near Lewellen, Garden Co., 14 Dec (WRS).

**Golden-crowned Kinglet:** Most years a few winter, primarily in the south and east. This year midwinter reports fit this pattern, with reports from Douglas Co. 28 Jan (BP,LP), and from Buffalo Co. 30 Jan, Gosper Co. 22 Jan, and Harlan Co. 8 Jan (LRa,RHa). There were no Feb reports however. Reports further north and west were in Dec. Best count was 8 at Mt. Vernon Gardens, Douglas Co., 25 Dec (BP,LP).

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** This species is rare as late as Dec, especially away from the lower Missouri valley, and so 1 at the Kearney Cemetery, Buffalo Co. 18 Dec (LRa,RHa) was unexpected. Less unusual was one in a Sarpy Co. yard through 30 Dec (KCR) as well as another in Sarpy Co. 10 Dec (RCK). Any winter period reports of this species should include details of identification.

**Eastern Bluebird:** Most leave the state in midwinter, and by Dec are in the south and east. Three midwinter reports fit this pattern, although a male in Box Elder Canyon, Lincoln Co., 11 Feb (WRS) was a little far west. Others were in Hall Co. 16 Jan (LRa,RHa) and Saunders Co. 15 Jan (THo). Best fall count was 25 at Louisville, Cass Co. 29 Dec (Gwo). The only spring report, possibly wintering birds, was of 2 near Talmage 28 Feb (MBi).

**Mountain Bluebird:** Wintering birds are regular in the Platte valley east to the extensive juniper woodland in southeastern Lincoln County, where 25 were in Box Elder Canyon 11 Feb (WRS). However a flock of 20 near Midway L., Dawson Co., was unexpected (LRa,RHa).

**Townsend's Solitaire:** This species was generally inconspicuous at the eastern edge of its winter range, roughly similar to that of Mountain Bluebird in the Platte valley, but extending eastward throughout the Niobrara valley; none were seen where expected in south-central Nebraska (LRa,RHa), but 1 did show up near Jackson, Dakota Co. 6 Feb (BFH), at the east edge of the winter range.

**Hermit Thrush:** Wintering occurs on occasion in the southeast; 1 was at Fontenelle Forest 20 Jan (JAl), and 1 in a Sarpy Co. yard 22 Feb (BP,LP) may also have wintered. Another was trying to winter with American Robins amongst junipers in Dakota Co.; it was there until 1 Jan (BFH). No other reports were received.

**American Robin:** Large flocks congregate amongst junipers in late fall, and will remain as long as the food supply holds out. Notable concentrations were 1000 near L. McConaughy 14 Dec (WRS), 1000 at Calamus Res. 11 Dec (LRa,RHa), and 822 in Box Elder Canyon 11 Feb (WRS); at least the latter group probably overwintered in the area. Sizeable groups of 100 were wintering in the northeast in Dixon (JJo) and Dakota (BFH) Cos.

**Brown Thrasher:** Wintering is rare, and is restricted to the southeast. Probably having wintered successfully was 1 at Elmwood, Cass Co., 23 Feb (Gwo), about 2-3 weeks too early to be a spring migrant. There were no Dec reports.

**Bohemian Waxwing:** None were reported from northwest Nebraska (RCR), where they occur most years.

**Cedar Waxwing:** No large wintering concentrations were reported, the best count was 300 in Saunders Co. 5 Feb (THo). Peak counts in southeast Nebraska were rather poor, such as 40 at Elmwood 7 Feb (Gwo) and 35 at Bellevue 13 Feb (KCR).

- Northern Shrike:** Most wintering shrikes in Nebraska are this species; Loggerheads usually winter only in the southeast. The species was "fairly common and widespread in early winter" but rather scarce later (RCR). The southeasternmost reports of Northerns were from Harlan Co. 4 Dec and 1 Jan (LRa,RHa) and Dodge Co. 20 Jan (CHO). Reports from southeast Nebraska should have identification details.
- Loggerhead Shrike:** The only report suggestive of wintering was of 1 in Cass Co. 1 Jan (GWO), an expected location. This species is virtually unrecorded in midwinter away from southeast Nebraska. Latest in the west were 2 in Carter Canyon 18 Dec (LMA,AKe). Other reports from the southeast were in Dec.
- European Starling:** Many birds leave the state in severe winters, and flocks as large as the 100,000 roosting at Clear Creek Marsh, Garden Co., 14 Dec (WRS) do not usually winter. Best midwinter count was 200 at Talmage 2 Feb (MBi). They were "especially numerous" in Scotts Bluff Co. this winter (AKe).
- Nashville Warbler:** Completely unprecedented for the season was the presence of up to 3 birds in large Blue Spruces at Mt. Vernon Gardens in Omaha 18-20 Dec (CKL\*, DBr,BP,LP). These birds were with Golden-crowned Kinglets. The previous latest date for the state was 3 Nov.
- Yellow-rumped Warbler:** This is the only warbler normally recorded in winter in Nebraska, although it is rare at that time. None wintered this year. Latest were one 11 Dec at Smith L., Sheridan Co., "our 2nd Dec record in 20 years" in northwest Nebraska (RCR) and another in Sarpy Co. 10 Dec (RCK).
- Northern Waterthrush:** An extremely late record was one at Fontenelle Forest 8 Dec (BP,LP). This species is not usually a late fall migrant; the previous latest date was 22 Oct.
- Summer Tanager:** Extraordinary was the presence of one at a Bellevue feeder 20 Nov-27 Dec (KCR\*). The previous latest date for this species, uncommon anywhere in Nebraska even in summer, was 30 Oct 1985, also from Sarpy Co. (Am. Birds 40:137). Why 2 unexpected warblers and this species would linger so late is open to question.
- Northern Cardinal:** This species occurs virtually statewide, as far as the Wyoming border in the Platte valley. In Scotts Bluff Co. 3 were seen 15 Dec and again in the same place 28 Feb (AKe), for a westerly report. Reports from other western localities are welcomed; does it occur in winter before it establishes itself in summer? Best count was 12 in Dixon Co. 2 Jan (JJJo). One with white patches on its head was at a feeder at Douglas, Otoe Co., during the period (MHu).
- Rufous-sided Towhee:** Midwinter records are unusual; virtually all are of the western "spotted" race, such as 1 in Dixon Co. 2 Jan (JJJo) and another at Branched Oak Res. 22 Jan (BP,LP). Two other midwinter reports, race not determined, were from Hall Co. 5 Feb (LRa,RHa) and at a North Platte feeder 2 Feb (WWy). Most depart by Dec, and so 1 in Lancaster Co. 11 Dec (LEi) was noteworthy.
- American Tree Sparrow:** This common statewide wintering species was widely reported, but the best count was only 150 at Crescent L. NWR 22 Dec (LMA). Other reported peak counts were 75 in Dixon Co. 15 Jan (JJJo), and very low counts of 10 in Saunders Co. 27 Feb (THo) and 5 in Cass Co. 14 Feb (GWO). However 50 were counted at Base L. 1 Dec (KCR), possibly migrants.
- Chipping Sparrow:** This species is very rare as late as Dec in Nebraska, and reports without details are questionable, such as one 10 Dec in Sarpy Co. Most records this late are of single birds at feeders.
- Field Sparrow:** Another very rare bird as late as Dec, but more likely than the preceding species; 1 was reported from Lancaster Co. 19 Dec (LEi). There are only about 25 Dec reports for the state, but there are also 10-15 Jan reports.
- Song Sparrow:** This species winters wherever cover adjacent to open water can be found, mostly from the Platte valley southward. Unexpected was a single bird at an open spring at the west end of

Oliver Res., Kimball Co., 13 Feb (WRS). This is one of few breeding sites in the panhandle for this species; are Nebraska Song Sparrows largely resident wherever open water remains? No reports were received from north of the Platte valley. Best counts were 7 at the seep marsh below Kingsley Dam 16 Dec (WRS) and 6 in Kearney Co. 26 Feb (LRa, RHa).

**Swamp Sparrow:** Like the preceding, this species may attempt to winter in the same habitats, although it is more sensitive to cold weather. One was at Snyder's Bend as late as 2 Jan (BFH), and another was at Fontenelle Forest 20-21 Jan (TEB). Rather far west was 1 near Lewellen 14 Dec (SJD, WRS). No Feb reports were received, suggesting that wintering attempts were unsuccessful.

**White-throated Sparrow:** Overwintering is uncommon, and expected only in the southeast. Thus unprecedented in the observer's experience were 2 wintering at Chadron feeders (RCR). No other reports were received northwest of Douglas and Lancaster Cos.; the only other report of wintering was of 3 in a Bellevue yard for the period (KCR). Otherwise the latest reports were of one at another Bellevue feeder through 5 Jan (BP, LP), and one in Omaha 8 Jan (TEB). Possibly wintering successfully was one 17 Feb in Fontenelle Forest (TEB).

**White-crowned Sparrow:** Wintering birds are far more numerous in western Nebraska, and the best counts were from Scottsbluff, where 60 were counted 18 Dec (AKE), and in Dawson Co., where 18 were near Midway L. 19 Feb (LRa, RHa). Reports from the east were few, with no more than single birds seen. All were in Dec except for one that wintered in Bellevue (KCR).

**Harris' Sparrow:** Wintering birds occur primarily in the southeast and the Missouri valley, including Knox Co. No reports came from west of Gosper Co., where it was found 22 Jan at Elwood Res. (LRa, RHa). The best counts were 35 near Harlan Co. Res. 4 Dec and 30 in Kearney Co. 13 Feb (LRa, RHa). It was "virtually absent" from Boone Co. (WMo).

**Dark-eyed Junco:** This species winters statewide. Eastern birds are virtually all "slate-colored", while in the panhandle "oregons" are much more in evidence, and "white-winged" and "pink-sided" birds also occur. Of about 50 in Sioux Co. 15 Dec, about 80% were "oregons" (WRS). Peak counts reported were only average, with 50 in Dixon Co. 2 Jan (JJo) and 20 in Saunders Co. 27 Feb (THo).

**Lapland Longspur:** Reports were all from the eastern half of the state, but no large flocks were found. Best counts were 75 in Buffalo Co. 18 Dec (LRa, RHa) and 50 in Wayne Co. 16 Jan (TEB).

**Snow Bunting:** Reports received were all from northern Nebraska, as expected, although no reports came from the west; it is rare south of the Platte valley. Observers thought this a good year for the species, with the best count 152 in Wayne Co. 15 Jan (JJo), the 40 in Dakota Co. 24 Dec considered the "best in years" (BFH), and 30 birds in Boone Co. 29 Jan the "first in years" (WMo). Most westerly report was of 15 on the Calamus Res. Dam 11 Dec (LRa, RHa).

**Red-winged Blackbird:** Large flocks were reported in Dec: 5000 were at Clear Creek Marsh 14 Dec (WRS), and 1500 were near Gering 1 Dec (LMa). Midwinter numbers are usually low, and no concentrations were reported. Unusual were 4 at a warm-water spring in central Sioux Co. 22 Jan (RCR). Spring arrivals included 1500 near Gering 28 Feb (LMa), 40 in Kearney Co. 26 Feb (LRa, RHa), and 35 in Dixon Co. 18 Feb (JJo).

**Eastern Meadowlark:** While this species may winter occasionally in the extreme southeast, identification without hearing calls is difficult. Thus, reports from Cass Co. 31 Dec and 19 Jan are questionable, although the location is likely for wintering. Returning birds are expected in late Feb.

**Western Meadowlark:** Most meadowlarks wintering in Nebraska are probably this species, but sightings should be reported as "Meadowlark sp." unless identification can be made by calls. Midwinter numbers are low; a peak count of 7 birds in Dixon Co. 29 Jan (JJo) was about as expected. A count of 40 in Kearney Co.

26 Feb (LRa,RHa) probably was of returning migrants.

**Rusty Blackbird:** This species is rare in midwinter, with most migrants departing by Dec; latest was a single male at Snyder's Bend 2 Jan (BFH). The only Feb report was of 1 in Saunders Co. 19 Feb (THo), which may have wintered. Best count was 23 in Dixon Co. 5 Dec (JJo).

**Brewer's Blackbird:** No reports were received.

**Common Grackle:** This species is uncommon in midwinter, with most reports of single birds or small groups at feeders or farmsteads. The only midwinter report was of one at Scottsbluff 15 Jan (AKe). Other reports were in Dec, as late as 31 Dec in Sarpy Co. (RCK), and as far west as Champion, Chase Co., where 10 were seen 18 Dec (RCR). A flock of 20 spring migrants appeared at Elmwood 27 Feb (GWO).

**Brown-headed Cowbird:** This species is rare in midwinter and no reports were received later than 31 Dec in Cass Co. (GWO). There were no Feb reports.

**Purple Finch:** Numbers seemed average for this species, which winters statewide, although it is most numerous in eastern Nebraska. Best count was 35 in Saunders Co. 5 Feb (THo); no reports were received from west of Loup or Buffalo Cos., where singles were found 11 Dec and 18 Dec respectively (LRa,RHa).

**Cassin's Finch:** No reports were received other than from the L. McConaughy CBC.

**House Finch:** Reports indicated that the gap is being closed between rapidly westward-spreading eastern birds and established western populations as far east as Kearney. It is resident in Knox Co. (MAB), but is probably least numerous, if present, in northcentral Nebraska, the Loup drainage, and the Big Blue drainage. Reports from these areas would be of interest. Best count was 43 at 2 feeders in Kimball 13 Feb (WRS).

**Red Crossbill:** This was not a "winter finch" year. The only reports were from the panhandle, where this species is a regular winter visitor. Best count was 30 in East Hat Creek Canyon, Sioux Co., 15 Dec (WRS); 15 were near Gering 27 Feb (LMA), and 9 were at the same place 1 Jan (LMA).

**Common Redpoll:** This was a good year for this species, which usually occurs in numbers only in northern and western Nebraska. This year, while the best count of 154 was from Sioux Co. 15 Dec (SJD,WRS), flocks were seen as far south and east as Louisville, where 25 were found 29 Dec (GWO). Also, a male was at a feeder in Omaha 15-28 Feb (RVA). A flock of 15 was near Allen, Dixon Co., 20 Feb (JJo).

**Pine Siskin:** This was an above-average winter for this species, which may be abundant in some winters but absent in others. Reports were received statewide. Best counts were 40 at Scottsbluff 27 Feb (LMA), 36 at Wakefield, Dixon Co. 9 Jan (JJo), and 20 at Elmwood 8 Dec (GWO).

**American Goldfinch:** Not a remarkable year for this species, the best counts being rather modest: 100 was the peak in Dixon Co. 12 Feb (JJo), and 25 on 11 Dec was the topper in Saunders Co. (THo). Apparently there was no significant movement of wintering birds into the state.

**Evening Grosbeak:** This species is expected only in the Pine Ridge and nearby areas of the panhandle most years; occasionally incursions take place and birds appear statewide. This year the only report was of one at Morrill (ECT). Recent years have seen few if any of these attractive but hungry birds.

**House Sparrow:** A common resident statewide, no remarkable reports or high counts were received.

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