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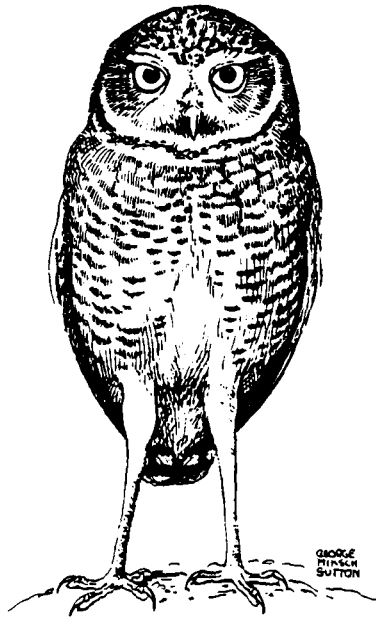
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WINTER FIELD REPORT, DEC 1998-FEB 1999

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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

THE BIRDS

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

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

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

ABBREVIATIONS

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

GAZETTEER

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

OBSERVERS

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

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Canada Goose: Routine reports.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mallard: Routine reports.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cooper's Hawk: Routine reports.

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

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

Red-tailed Hawk: Routine reports.

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

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

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

Golden Eagle: Routine reports.

American Kestrel: Routine reports.

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

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

Gray Partridge: None reported.

Ring-necked Pheasant: Routine reports.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lesser Black-backed Gull: None reported.

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

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

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

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

Rock Dove: Routine reports.

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

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

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

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

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

Great Horned Owl: Routine reports.

Snowy Owl: None reported.

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

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

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

Belted Kingfisher: Routine reports.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pinyon Jay: None reported.

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

American Crow: Routine reports.

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

Black-capped Chickadee: Routine reports.

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

Tufted Titmouse: Routine reports.

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

White-breasted Nuthatch: Routine reports.

Pygmy Nuthatch: Routine reports.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

European Starling: Routine reports.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cassin's Finch: None reported.

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

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

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

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

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

Evening Grosbeak: None reported.

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

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Two winter records of Pacific Loons at Lake McConaughy

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Pacific Loons are rare migrants in Nebraska, with most of the recent records coming from the western half of the state. Many of the recent records are from Lake McConaughy in Keith County and from Lake Minatare in Scotts Bluff County. Most records are from fall in the short period between 20 October and 20 November. There is a single spring record from April, 5 summer records in the period June to August (all but one from western Nebraska), and a few fall records

outside the peak period. The latest fall record from Nebraska is 9 December. In this note, I detail two January sightings of single Pacific Loons from Lake McConaughy.

On 2 January, 1998, I was scanning the rafts of Western Grebes above Kingsley dam when I spotted a distant loon. I studied the bird from 3:45-4:30 p.m. Even at a great distance, the bird was clearly a small loon, slightly larger and longer-necked than a Common Merganser. The shape of the bird was distinctive: fairly short, stocky body and a long-necked, puffy-headed appearance. The bill was very short and stocky, and I estimated the length was less than the length of the head. Because of the great distance, many details of the plumage were difficult to observe, but I noted the very dark-backed appearance, the sharp line of demarcation between the light foreneck and darker nape, and the dark area around the eye. On 3 January, I relocated the bird off the south end of Kingsley dam under much better viewing conditions. At this distance, the bird was easily identified as a Pacific Loon in first-basic plumage. The dark mantle and upperwings were edged with pale buff color. The neck pattern included a white foreneck with a thin dark chinstrap, a dark gray crown and nape, and a darker black line separating the two. The color of the nape was slightly paler than the mantle. The bird remained in this area through at least 15 January and was seen by several other birders.

On 9 January 1999, I was scanning Lake McConaughy from the K-1 Cabin Area, located just west of the south end of Kingsley dam, when I spotted a distant loon. The bird was with a group of three Western Grebes. I studied the bird from 8:25-9:18 a.m. The bird was clearly larger than the grebes, but did not dwarf them like I would have expected from a Yellow-billed or Common Loon. The viewing distance did not allow me to study the bird in great detail, but I did note several key features. The bill was short, straight, rather stout, and dark-colored. The head was held level, not tilted upwards like a Yellow-billed or Red-throated Loon. There was dark color surrounding the eye. I also noted a clear line of separation between the white foreneck and the dark back of the neck. I did not see a chinstrap, although this may have been due to the distance. The mantle and upperwings were dark with some paler mottling giving the upperparts a scaly appearance. On the basis of this last feature, I concluded the bird was in first-basic plumage.

Similar species and how eliminated: The bird was clearly a loon because of the shape and size. The combination of bill size and shape and neck pattern eliminated the other three loon species.

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The 1998-99 Nebraska Christmas Bird Count Summary

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The 1998-99 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) period included eight counts in Nebraska. Counts were scattered statewide, but most effort was in the eastern half of the state. I know of at least one additional count (Branched Oak Lake) that was run this year, but not submitted.

In the following discussion, I have attempted to discuss what I believe are the more important aspects of this year's CBC period. This includes my general impressions about some of the commoner species, mention of rarities, notable misses, and other topics.

DISCUSSION OF SPECIES

The 1998-99 CBC period in Nebraska will probably be best remembered for the extremely mild pre-count weather. Many of the reservoirs and larger lakes were completely devoid of ice during the early part of the count period. This caused many waterbirds to linger in larger than expected numbers. Three Common Loons at Harlan County were a bit tardy; this species very rarely overwinters in Nebraska. The eleven Pied-billed Grebes at Omaha were a good total; singles were west to Harlan County and Lake McConaughy. Lake McConaughy also had 2 Eared and 285 Western Grebes, the former the first January record for Nebraska. Farther east, a single Western Grebe at Lincoln was noteworthy. A lone American White Pelican lingered at Calamus-Loup. Given the mild fall, it was surprising more pelicans didn't linger into the count period. Great Blue Herons were present in expected numbers, but a single immature Black-crowned Night-Heron at Lake McConaughy was the first January record for Nebraska.

Waterfowl were well represented this year with an outstanding 26 species reported statewide. Canada Goose and Mallard were reported from all counts. Harlan County reported 228 Greater White-fronted Geese, a great total for mid-December. Good numbers of Snow Geese lingered on three counts, and observers at Harlan County managed to find 33 Ross's Geese among the Snow Geese. Among the regular waterfowl, noteworthy totals included 731 Green-winged Teal at Harlan County, 87 Canvasback and 114 Redheads at Lake McConaughy, and 12 Wood Ducks and 230 Gadwall at Omaha. Unusual waterfowl included an Oldsquaw at Harlan County and 9 Oldsquaw and a Barrow's Goldeneye at Lake McConaughy.

Bald Eagles were found on every count with the largest numbers at Harlan County and Lake McConaughy, not surprisingly the two counts with the largest bodies of water. Given the mild fall, Bald Eagle numbers were generally quite good. Accipiters were widespread this year. I was surprised at the disparity in numbers between the two expected species; 19 Sharp-shinned Hawks versus 7 Cooper's Hawks. I would have expected closer to a one to one ratio. Red-tailed Hawks occurred on all counts. They were scarcest in the west and Sandhills and most numerous in the southeast. It was an average year for Rough-legged Hawks with 23 reported, most in the Sandhills and west. Among the less common raptors, statewide totals of 4 Ferruginous Hawks, 4 Golden Eagles, 5 Merlins, and 2 Prairie Falcons were about normal.

Gallinaceous birds were a mixed bag this year. The mild weather and lack of snow cover probably contributed to the dismal count of just 43 Ring-necked Pheasants statewide. Greater Prairie-Chickens fared better. Counts of 47 at Calamus-Loup and 34 at Lake McConaughy reflect the presence of large tracts of native sandhills habitat within those count circles. Calamus-Loup also had a good total of 112 Wild Turkeys. Three Virginia Rails were at Lake McConaughy where the species is regular in winter. I would not be surprised if this species were also present in the Scottsbluff count circle in winter. American Coots were found on

TABLE ONE

Count Name	Date	Species	Total birds	Obs.	Pt.	Hrs.	Field Temp		Snow depth	Wind
							L	H		
Harlan County	18/12	86	29,926	7	5	40	25	46	0	NNE 20-25
Scottsbluff	2/1	39	17,728	16	3	16.5	9	26	0	NW 25-48
Lake McConaughy	2/1	87	16,373	13	6	54.5	5	14	2	NW 15-30
Omaha	19/12	70	10,511	35	15	69	15	25	0	NW 10-20
Calamus-Loup	27/12	52	9,793	10	?	?	?	?	?	?
Beaver Valley	19/12	39	1,011	4	1	9.5	10	14	1	NW 10-20
Loup City	26/12	36	1,203	1	1	9	20	51	0	SW 10-20
Lincoln	19/12	74	11,273	36	14	81.5	18	21	0	N 0-23

four counts with a high of 300 at Lake McConaughy. Despite the mild pre-count weather, shorebirds were scarce this year; Killdeer and Common Snipe were recorded on just three counts each. The diversity and number of gulls were disappointing. Only five species were reported, and only Ring-billed Gull was found in good numbers. Harlan County Reservoir had a good total of 26 Bonaparte's Gulls. Ring-billed Gulls occurred on four counts and Herring Gulls on just three counts. Lake McConaughy had 17 California Gulls and a lone Thayer's Gull.

Mourning Doves were unusually scarce this year; Omaha had 25 and 1-5 were reported on three other counts. Eastern Screech-Owl and Great Horned Owl were reported in expected numbers. Barred Owls were reported from Omaha and Lincoln. This species occurs westward along the Republican River at least as far as Webster County, so perhaps one will be found at Harlan County Reservoir in the future. Single Long-eared and Short-eared Owls were found at Harlan County Reservoir and Lake McConaughy, respectively. Three Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were found this year, an excellent statewide total. The Downy to Hairy Woodpecker ratio was 399:42 statewide, which is about normal. Northern Flickers were numerous this year with good numbers recorded on all counts. Northern Shrikes were present in low numbers, although 12 were at Calamus-Loup. The lone Loggerhead Shrike was at Harlan County Reservoir, not an unexpected location for this species in winter. Horned Larks were generally scarce, although 1,553 were counted at Lake McConaughy. Omaha had good counts of several urban species, including 42 Tufted Titmice and 167 White-breasted Nuthatches. It was a down year for Red-breasted Nuthatches; the 6 at Lincoln were the only report. Carolina Wrens continue in the southeast part of the state, but the 2 at Harlan County Reservoir were a surprise. Six Winter Wrens at Omaha was an excellent count. Four Marsh Wrens were at Lake McConaughy where the species is regular in winter. Golden-crowned Kinglets were numerous and widespread this year with an excellent count of 67 at Lincoln. Four late Ruby-crowned Kinglets were at Harlan County Reservoir. It was a good year for frugivores; American Robins and Cedar Waxwings were numerous and Eastern Bluebirds were found on three counts.

A single Orange-crowned Warbler, possibly a late fall migrant, and 17 Yellow-rumped Warblers were at Harlan County Reservoir. Single Eastern Towhees were at Omaha and Lincoln while Spotted Towhees were reported from four counts with a high of 13 at Harlan County Reservoir. A lone Savannah Sparrow at Lake McConaughy was unusual in winter. Fourteen Fox Sparrows on three counts, all in the east, were a good winter total for Nebraska. The *zonotrichid* sparrows were well represented, especially on eastern counts. Harlan County Reservoir had the *zonotrichid* sweep, highlighted by an immature Golden-crowned Sparrow. Harris's Sparrows were found in good numbers with 183 at Harlan County Reservoir and 144 at Lincoln. Smaller numbers of White-crowned Sparrows were on four counts. There were 2,129 Lapland Longspurs at Lake McConaughy, the only count to record this species. A lone Snow Bunting was at Calamus-Loup.

Icterids were widespread in small numbers. Red-winged Blackbirds were recorded on all counts except Calamus-Loup. The Western Meadowlarks reported at Scottsbluff and Beaver Valley should probably be changed to meadowlark sp.; Eastern Meadowlark is possible in winter, especially in a mild year like this. Rusty Blackbirds were on three counts, topped by a good total of 68 at Harlan County Reservoir. Surprisingly, Common Grackles were reported from only two counts.

Great-tailed Grackles were also reported from two counts; 12 at Lincoln, a regular winter location, and a single bird at Beaver Valley.

It was clearly a poor year for winter finches. Purple Finches were reported from just two counts; the single bird at Harlan County Reservoir was a bit far west. The only Red Crossbills were 12 at Beaver Valley. Small numbers of Pine Siskins were found on six counts. American Goldfinches were found on all counts with a high of 469 at Calamus-Loup.

UNDOCUMENTED REPORTS

There were a number of reports this year that probably should have been accompanied by some supporting details. However, such details have never before been requested, so I accepted most of these sightings. Some that come to mind include a Western Grebe at Lincoln, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Calamus-Loup, and an Orange-crowned Warbler at Harlan County Reservoir. Perhaps in the future compilers could include a few brief supporting details for unusual reports. The only report I did not accept was of 10 Chipping Sparrows at Lincoln. Winter reports of this species in Nebraska should be fully documented. Confusion with American Tree Sparrow is a frequent and under-appreciated problem.

COMMENT

I believe this is the first time that Nebraska's CBCs have been summarized in other than a tabular format. I have styled this summary after a similar summary I have written for Iowa Bird Life for several years. If anyone has comments or suggestions, I would very much like to hear them. I also want to encourage CBC compilers to send in their results next year so they can be included. Please be sure to also include the data for Table 1.

Table 2. 1998-99 Nebraska Christmas Bird count Species Totals

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Common Loon	3							
Pied-billed Grebe	1		1	11				
Eared Grebe			2					

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Western Grebe			285					1
American White Pelican					1			
Double-Crested Cormorant	34			1				6
Great Blue Heron	4	1	4			1		
Black-crowned Night-Heron			1					
Greater White-fronted Goose	228							1
Snow Goose	895		1	2011				363
Ross' s Goose	33							
Canada Goose	507	8358	4588	610	3801	70	1	1831
Trumpeter Swan			12					
Wood Duck	5			12	1			
Gadwall	7		92	230				35
American Wigeon	3	22	74	57				7
Mallard	5339	6859	678	766	606	365	325	227
Northern Shoveler	56		3					9
Northern Pintail	19	3	4					
Green-winged Teal	731		92	11			1	37
Canvasback	2		87	2				
Redhead	2		114					2
Ring-necked Duck			21			1		9
Greater Scaup			9					
Lesser Scaup	7		122	14				53
Oldsquaw	1		9					

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Bufflehead	17		23			1		2
Common Goldeneye	105	83	257	97	73			66
Barrow's Goldeneye			1					
Hooded Merganser			1	2	1			5
Common Merganser	8671		889	3	60			96
Red-breasted Merganser	4		1					
Ruddy Duck			22					
Bald Eagle	63	11	53	23	14	5	7	2
adults	36	2	24	19		4	5	2
immatures	27	9	29	4		1	2	
Northern Harrier	17		13		5	3	2	12
Sharp-shinned Hawk	8	1	5	1	2			2
Cooper's Hawk	3			1				3
accipiter sp.								1
Red-tailed Hawk	21	3	17	68	25	2	14	61
Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk						1	1	
Red-tailed (Krider's) Hawk				1				
Ferruginous Hawk	1		2		1			
Rough-legged Hawk		4	2	2	10	3		2
Buteo, Sp.					4			4

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Golden Eagle		2	1			1		
adults		2				1		
immature			1					
American Kestrel	7	6	15	14	9	3	4	13
Merlin	1		2					2
Prairie Falcon			2					
Ring-necked Pheasant	5	2	8	1	14	2	3	8
Greater Prairie Chicken	1		34		47	6	3	
Sharp-tailed Grouse			6		9			
Wild Turkey		69	2	46	112			
Northern Bobwhite			8		1			13
Virginia Rail			3					
American Coot	8		300	12				1
Killdeer	4		3					3
Common Snipe	3	1	9					
Bonaparte's Gull	26							
Ring-billed Gull	5103		400	210				551
California Gull			17					
Herring Gull	98		37					22
Thayer's Gull			1					
Rock Dove	74	95	37	179	65	1	3	235
Mourning Dove	1		4	5				25

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Eastern Screech-owl	10		2	4			2	2
Great Horned Owl	5	1	7	4	2	1	3	3
Barred Owl				1				3
Long-eared Owl	1							
Short-eared Owl			1					
Belted Kingfisher	3	2	2	3	1			4
Red-bellied Woodpecker	22		1	67	3	4	3	23
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker				1	1			1
Downy Woodpecker	26	6	14	177	20	10	9	137
Hairy Woodpecker	2		2	19	3	1	2	13
Northern Flicker	34	5	40	54	33	11	8	44
yellow-shafted	4	3	8	54		10	5	4
red-shafted	5	2	18			1	3	1
unspecified	25		14					39
Northern Shrike	2	1	5		12		2	1
Loggerhead Shrike	1							
Blue Jay	10	25	8	106	13	5	1	146
Black-billed Magpie	30	39	63		2	3	1	2
American Crow	634	54	33	441	1270	46	37	343
Horned Lark	36	38	1553	18			19	30
Black-capped Chickadee	128	8	43	306	44	22	13	316
Tufted Titmouse				42				

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Red-breasted Nuthatch								6
White-breasted Nuthatch	43		7	167	4	14	5	65
Brown Creeper	7		5	15	3	3	3	23
Carolina Wren	2			5				4
Winter Wren				6				
Marsh Wren			4					
Golden-crowned Kinglet	19		9	8	13	4	2	67
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	4							
Eastern Bluebird	6			11	18			
Townsend's Solitaire		4	22		1			
American Robin	2633	7	1404	96	1558	30	150	32
European Starling	2085	1526	1161	794	434	170	210	1060
Cedar Waxwing	233		373	65	230	25		41
Orange-crowned Warbler	1							
Yellow-rumped Warbler	17							
Eastern Towhee				1				1
Spotted Towhee	13			1	1			9
American Tree Sparrow	593	11	246	384	371	53	115	656
Chipping Sparrow								10
Savannah Sparrow			1					
Fox Sparrow	6			2				6
Song Sparrow	47		6	16	1		1	9

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Lincoln's Sparrow	2			5				
Swamp Sparrow				1				
White-throated Sparrow				4			2	19
White-crowned Sparrow	38	3	1					12
Harris' s Sparrow	183			32			7	144
Golden-crowned Sparrow	1							
sparrow sp.		3						
Dark-eyed Junco	366	34	415	1986	267	26	23	1266
slate-colored	356	8	307	1983				372
oregon	7	20	108	3			1	13
pink-sided	3							
unspecified		6					22	881
Lapland Longspur			2129					
longspur sp.								50
Snow Bunting					1			
Northern Cardinal	50		11	194	9	1	6	169
Red-winged Blackbird	79	272	62	87		20	125	2087
Western Meadowlark		2				1		
Meadowlark sp.	52		26	67				56
Rusty Blackbird	68			50	9			
Common Grackle				5	13			
Great-Tailed Grackle						1		12

Species	Harlan County Reservoir	Scottsbluff	Lake McConaughy	Omaha	Calamus- Loup	Beaver Valley	Loup City	Lincoln
Brown-headed Cowbird				50		25		
blackbird sp.								60
Purple Finch	1			5				
House Finch	89	10	51	55	37	18		66
Red Crossbill						12		
Pine Siskin	40	43	7	4	2			41
American Goldfinch	99	72	150	231	469	5	35	161
House Sparrow	106	28	135	533	87	25	55	437

Common Crane in Central Platte Valley, Nebraska, March 1999, and a Discussion of Prior North American Records.

W. Ross Silcock and Stephen J. Dinsmore

P.O. Box 57, Tabor, IA 51653 (Silcock)

612 1/2 West Magnolia, Fort Collins, CO 80521 (Dinsmore)

On 5 March, 1999, a report appeared on the listserver of a Common Crane sighted at 2.30 p.m. that day by Tammy VerCauteren (fide Paul Tebbel) about 2 miles east of Lowell Road in southeastern Buffalo County. The next morning, WRS drove to the location. After about 2 hours of searching, he refound the Common Crane at 8:57 a.m. among Sandhill Cranes about 50 meters south of Elm Island Road at a spot 2 miles east of Lowell Road. It was refound by SJD at 11:00 a.m. on March 9 northeast of the junction of roads X and 41 in northeast Kearney County. (The south channel of the Platte, just south of Elm Island Road, is the boundary between Buffalo and Kearney Counties.)

The Common Crane was easy to spot as it was as tall or taller than the tallest Sandhill Cranes present and was paler than most if not all of them. In fact, it was so pale WRS suspected it might be *leucistic*, although SJD thought it to be no paler than the palest Sandhill Cranes, although probably unusually pale for the species; perhaps the early morning light was responsible for its pale appearance on March 6.

The bill was horn-colored and the crown, nape, and foreneck were black, leaving a pale gray-white line up each side of the neck, which terminated just before each eye. We could not discern any red coloration on the crown. Otherwise the plumage was pale gray. WRS saw the bird in flight on March 6, and was impressed by the entirely black primaries and secondaries contrasting strongly with the pale gray wing coverts. In flight, the black tail feathers were also revealed; when the bird is at rest, the much-elongated tertials and inner secondaries are folded over the gray tail feathers, giving a black and gray mottled look to the "bustle." It has been suggested that due to its paleness, the bird might be a Whooping Crane-Sandhill Crane hybrid, but the entirely black secondaries--a feature possessed by neither of the putative "parent" species--would appear to rule out this possibility.

Messages (to WRS) from Jeff Bouton and Steve DuBois indicated that this was probably the same pale to "almost white" (DuBois) bird which they and others saw at Delta Junction, Alaska, from 15 September to late September, 1998. DuBois had noted some reddish coloration "at times" on its crown. Dave Rintoul (1999) suggested that it had migrated down the eastern edge of the Front Range in Colorado in fall of 1998 with its "fellow trans-Bering Sea Sandhill Cranes" to winter in eastern New Mexico or western Texas. David Sarkozi, who noted that "Ninety percent of Texas is private and inaccessible," answered questions on the TEXBIRDS and KS-BIRD-L listservers as to why nobody sees Common Cranes anywhere but in Nebraska. Sarkozi noted (1999), "You guys have it lucky there [in Nebraska]; all the cranes are lined up in one place, here they are scattered over an area several times the size of your little state."

Following the initial sightings, the Common Crane was seen by many observers in the same general area until March 26 (Loren and Babs Padelford, Nebraska Birdline). This is the 12th acceptable sighting in North America, although it is possible that as few as 6 individuals were involved in these sightings (American Birding Association 1996). A report in Texas from 10 January to 3 February, 1979, was not accepted by the Texas Ornithological Society Records Committee (Lingle 1996).

The first four sightings were from 11 to 20 December, 1957, in Alberta; 20 March, 1958, in Alberta; between 24 April and 10 May, 1958, at Fairbanks, Alaska; and 19 September, 1958, in Alberta (American Birding Association 1996). All these sightings may have been of the same individual. One was at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico, on 10 March, 1961 (American Birding Association 1996). Four sightings in Nebraska between 1972 and 1974 may have involved only two or possibly three different birds. One was near North Platte, Lincoln County, between 26 and 31 March, 1972 (Tremaine et al 1972, contra American Birding Association 1996) and another was at Elm Creek, Phelps County, between 31 March and 1 April, 1972 (Tremaine et al 1972). One was seen in southern Buffalo County on 16 March, 1974, and in northern Kearney County on 25 March, 1974 (Nebraska Bird Review 42: 63-64).

The "single bird hypothesis" in 1972 would require one bird to fly from the North Platte area eastward to Elm Creek on 31 March. This would seem to be an

unlikely flight pattern, although cranes have been seen flying high and parallel to the Platte River (Tremaine et al 1972). A comparison of photographs of the 1972 bird at Elm Creek and the 1974 bird in Kearney County suggested they were different birds (NBR 42: 63-64). Another bird was in southern Hall and northern Adams Counties in Nebraska from 30 to 31 March, 1996 (Lingle 1996). Based on published photographs, this bird seems significantly darker in color relative to Sandhill Cranes than the 1999 Nebraska bird. Finally, prior to the current sighting, one was at Delta Junction, Alaska, in September of 1998; as discussed above, this is likely the same bird described in this note.

The provenance of Common Cranes in North America has not been determined with certainty, but it seems likely that occasionally an individual or even family group may wander into the breeding range of Sandhill Crane and then migrate with the Sandhill Cranes into North America to winter. The breeding ranges of the two species in eastern Siberia are separated by about 600 miles (Flint et al 1984). It has been suggested that the presumed two different birds in Nebraska in 1972 may have been a family group separated by hunter disturbance on the wintering grounds in Texas (Tremaine et al 1972).

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COOPERATIVE WHOOPING CRANE TRACKING PROJECT (August 1998-January 1999)

(An edited version of the United States Department of the Interior report follows.)

Between 1977 and 1988, 132 juvenile whooping cranes were color-marked on the breeding grounds; of these 37 were accounted for during the winter of 1998-99. Five color-marked cranes were observed during the fall migration. All sightings of color-marked cranes during migration are maintained at the Grand Island office.

One hundred eighty-one cranes began the 1998 spring migration. Forty-nine nests were confirmed on the breeding grounds. Forty-seven chicks were located during June surveys, and the surveys during August determined that at least 24 chicks were surviving. Under optimum conditions about 2054 birds were expected to arrive at Aransas last fall. The first arrival at Aransas was confirmed on October 28. About 77% (140 birds) of the arrivals at Aransas occurred between November 13 and December 3. A record 182 cranes are believed to have arrived at Aransas, including 18 young birds. On January 4, 1999, an adult plumaged whooping crane was confirmed wintering with sandhill cranes near Sabinal, Uvalde County, Texas. Another crane, observed with sandhill cranes on January 24 near Brazos Bend State Park in Fort Bend County, Texas, could be the crane observed near Sabinal, an Aransas bird that moved north, or a new bird. A total of 182 (164 adult/subadult and 18 young) whooping cranes are wintering at Aransas, and at least one additional is wintering in south Texas. A 1986 color-marked female with a broken leg, first observed at Quivira NWR on November 12, apparently left Quivira NWR on December 29, and has not been reported since. As of February 4, sixteen adult/subadult cranes, of the number anticipated, had not arrived at Aransas.

The first dates recorded for confirmed observations of migrating whooping cranes were August 12 in Canada and October 2 in the United States. The last sighting date was January 24. Sightings were reported from Saskatchewan, Canada (62); North Dakota (9); South Dakota (4); Nebraska (7); Kansas (15); Oklahoma (1); Texas (5), and Illinois (1). The combined total of 104 confirmed sightings in Canada and the United States established a new fall migration record.

Weather during September and October was mild with above-normal temperatures. Based on the number of sightings reported in Saskatchewan and North Dakota during late October and early November, it appeared that the majority of migrant cranes were still north of Nebraska. The first confirmed arrival at Aransas (2 birds) was on October 28, further confirmation that the migration was about 2 weeks later than average. On November 9 and 10, an intense storm center moved northeast across the Dakotas, creating blizzard conditions. Northwest and west winds of 30-50 mph swept across the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas. A large migration of waterfowl and cranes occurred on November 11 and for several days following, during which large numbers of migrating sandhill cranes were reported in eastern Nebraska and Iowa, and was likely the result of the strong winds associated with the November 9-10 storm. Also, possibly as a result of the storm, a single whooping crane was confirmed (by photograph) at Illinois Beach State Park, about 5 miles north of Waukegon, Illinois, on November 11, and a highly probable sighting of an adult plumaged whooping crane was reported near Des Moines, Iowa, on November 12. On November 12, sightings of whooping crane family groups were confirmed in eastern Nebraska (the furthest east sighting ever confirmed in Nebraska) and eastern Kansas. One might speculate that the leg injury to the whooping crane, first observed at Quivira NWR on November 12, was the result of strong winds.

Please contact Mr. Wally Jobman, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service if observation details are desired (203 West Second Street, Federal Building, Second Floor, Grand Island, NE, 58801; commercial telephone: (308) 382-6468, ext. 16; FAX (308) 384-8835; or e-mail, wally_jobman@mail.fws.gov).

Confirmed

Fall 1998 Whooping Crane Sightings in the U.S.A.

State/Obs.	Date	No.	Location
ND 98B-1	10/02-04/98	2	Mountrail Co., 3 mi. northwest of Palermo. T157N, R90W, S36.
ND 98B-2	10/16-17/98	1	Emmons Co, 5 mi. west of Braddock. T136N, R76W, S20, S1/2
ND 98B-3	10/19/98	9	Williams Co, 6 mi. south of Appam. T158N, R100W, S36. Flying.
SD 98B-4	10/09/98	7	Walworth Co., 11 mi. east of Hwy 83 on Hwy 12, near Spring Lake. T123N, R74W, S30. Flying
NE 98B-5	10/20/98	2+1	Rock/Keya Paha Co. line, Niobrara River, 0.5 mi. east of Carns bridge. T32N, R18W, S19.
KS 98B-6	10/21-11/08/98	1	Stafford Co., Quivira NWR. T22S, R11W, S5.
KS 98B-7	10/20-28/98	2	Stafford Co., Quivira NWR. T21S, R11W, S32.
NE 98B-8	10/22-11/09/98	3	Buffalo Co., Platte River, Rowe Audubon Sanctuary, 1.25 mi. east of Hwy 10 bridge. T8N, R14W, S10, NE4; S10, NE4, SW4.
OK 98B-9	10/22/98	2	Alfalfa Co., Salt Plains NWR.
KS 98B-10	10/20/98	5	Barton Co., Cheyenne Bottoms SWA. T18S, R12W, S28.
SD 98B-11	10/19/98	6	Haakon Co., flying near Ottumwa. T3N, R23E, S10.
ND 98B-12	11/01/98	2	Divide Co., 12 mi. south and 6 east of Colgan. T161N, R99W, S24.

State/Obs.	Date	No.	Location
ND 98B-13	11/01-02/98	2	Divide Co., 2 mi. west and 5 north of Noonan. T163N, R95W, S7, NE4.
NE 98B-14	10/23/98	3	Cherry Co., flying over northeast corner of Valentine NWR. T30N, R27W.
ND 98B-15	11/03-04/98	11+2	Divide Co., 12 mi. south and 4 west of Crosby. T161N, R98W, S28, 33. G-R.
ND 98B-16	10/17/98	4	Kidder Co., 4 mi. south and 4 west of Robinson. T142N, R72W, S30.
SD 98B-17	10/21/98	2	Bennett Co., LaCreek NWR, pool #10, flying about 5 mi. north of headquarters. T37N, R36W, S26.
SD 98B-18	11/01/98	2	Sully Co., Cottonwood Lake, about 8 mi. east of Agar. T116N, R75W, S30.
NE 98B-19	11/03-08/98	2	Phelps Co., Linder WPA, 5 mi. east and 1 north of Bertrand. T7N, R20W, S25, SE4.
KS 98B-20	11/05-08/98	3	Stafford Co., Quivira NWR. T21S, R11W, S22.
KS 98B-21	11/06/98	1	Barton Co., 6 mi. south and 2 west of Ellinwood. T20S, R12W, S35, SW4
ND 98B-22	11/07/98	2	McKenzie Co., 1 mi. southwest of Buford. T152N, R104W, S20.
ND 98B-23	11/10/98	5	Williams Co., 3 mi. north of Williston. T154N, R101W, S3, SW4.
KS 98B-24	11/11/98	2+1	Saline Co., 4 mi. west of Solomon. T13S, R1W, S20, S1/2.
NE 98B-25	11/11/98	1	Hall Co., flying west along Platte River south of Wood River I-80 exit. T11N, R9W.
NE 98B-26	11/11-18/98	2+1	York Co., 2 mi. south and 3 east of McCool Junction. T9N, R2W, S27, SW4, NE4.

State/Obs.	Date	No.	Location
KS 98B-27	11/12-15/98	8+2	Stafford Co., Quivira NWR, T21S, R11W, S28, 29. BWB-nil; o/w-Bwsp (injured leg, remained until 12/29).
KS 98B-28	11/13/98	2	Kingman Co., 3 mi. east, 1/2 north, and 1/4 east of kingman. T27S, R7W, S36.
KS 98B-29	11/13/98	1	Russell Co., flying 2 mi. east of Bunker Hill. T13S, R12W, S32.
NE 98B-30	11/16-28/98	2+1	Garfield Co., 16 1/4 mi. east and 1 north of Burwell. T21N, R13W, S10.
KS 98B-31	11/12/98	2+1	Riley Co., 3 mi. north of Manhattan. T9S, R8E. Flying.
KS 98B-32	11/14-24/98	6	Pratt Co., 5 mi. south and 4 east of Pratt. T28S, R12W, S32.
TX 98B-33	11/24-29/98	2+1	Fayette Co., 6 mi. West of La Grange.
TX 98B-34	11/24/98	2	Wheeler Co., 15 mi. northwest of Shamrock.
KS 98B-35	12/02-03/98	2+1	Barton Co., Cheyenne Bottoms SWA. T18S, R12W, S10, NE4.
IL 98B-36	11/11/98	1	Lake Co., 5 mi. north of Waukegon, Illinois Beach State Park. Flying
KS 98B-37	12/03-06/98	2+1	Stafford Co., Quivira NWR. T21S, R11W, S28, SE4.
TX 98B-73	12/23-26/98	1	Jackson Co., 4 mi. south of Edna along Hwy 111.
TX 98B-74	01/02-21/99	1	Uvalde Co., 1 mi. east of Sabinal.
KS 98B-76	11/11-12/98	1	Stafford Co., Quivira NWR. T21S, R11W, S29.
KS 98B-81	11/14/98	3	Pratt Co., 1 mi. east and 4 north of Sawyer. T29S, R12W, S5.
TX 98B-82	01/24/99	1	Fort Bend Co., near Brazos Bend State Park.

Two poems by William Kloefkorn

The first poem captures well the sense of satisfaction those involved in CBC and other bird counts experience:

COUNTING THE COWS

Because earlier in the day I walked the fencelines
I know that none has escaped or wandered off,
and though I realize that should the count fall short

I'd have two options, count again or shrug my shoulders,
I go to the field to count them, anyway, knowing as I do
that counting is itself sufficient cause for counting,

something sweet in the accumulation, you understand,
and if the count should complement the ledger
how much sweeter then the effort. And if the count

falls short, as occasionally it does? Always I choose
to shrug the shoulders, my consolation more than equal
to potential loss, the credit being this: that I have

seen and have inhaled, at dusk, the lovely bulk of cow,
that its path returns no less than takes me away from
home. All of this is what my grandfather in the course

of an autumn morning more or less informs me. We are
in that room where Grandmother died, her body at last
a fencepost under a hand-tied quilt. And before the sun

quite drops behind its hill I'll be moving in my father's
familiar Chevrolet, gravel pelting its underside
like the rain that so far not even prayer has been able

to induce. Dusk. At my left I see the darkening silhouettes
of grandfather's cows, their heads lowered as if in ritual
into the occasional nourishment

of bunchgrass. One. Two. Three. All there, each cud
in a land of milk and of honey, you understand,
and accounted for.

* * *

The second poem connects people and birds in a most natural way:

GEESE

I hear them honking
before I see them,
a low-flying V

going wherever V's go
when the sap in the ash
gives way to gravity.

And I am tempted to draw
some natural-world
conclusion,

to say that the birds
know something the rest
of us don't, and maybe

they do, though my mother
at eighty-three
takes her cue each year

from the first frost, she
and her boyfriend then
as if a skein of two

on the wing for Texas. So
it seems to me that
the natural world

and the other one
considerably overlap.
I hear them honking

before I see them, my mother
and her boyfriend
in a blue pickup

lifting off, the motion
of my mother's out-
stretched arm

as natural as any natural
world can be
in its act of going.

From Covenants by William Kloefkorn and David Lee (Spoon River Poetry Press, Granite Falls, MN. 1996). Bill Kloefkorn's latest works include a memoir, This Death by Drowning (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1997), and a book of short stories, A Time to Sink Her Pretty Little Ship (Winside, NE: Logan House Press, 1999). In addition to the preceding works, Bill Kloefkorn has published more than twenty volumes of poetry. For further information, see the following internet site: <http://mockingbird.creighton.edu/NCW/kloefkor.htm>.

* * * * *

The Age of Birds in Nebraska

by Paul A. Johnsgard, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Let each mile of highway I-80 represent a million years. That way, 1/2 mile represents 500,000 years, 1/10 mile = 100,000 years, 1/100 mile (52 feet) = 10,000 years; 1/1000 mile (5.2 feet) = 1,000 years, and 6 inches = 100 years. A decade (ten years) equals about a half-inch. It is 450 miles from the 60th St. on-ramp to I-80 in Omaha to the westernmost exit at the Wyoming border. These 450 million years encompass most of the time that evidence of life has been found on earth, but the earth itself is more than four billion years old, or ten times older than the time scale described here.

Some 450 million years ago, as we join the I-80 in Omaha, we are in the middle of the Paleozoic era, when Nebraska was submerged in a great inland sea, and the animals present would be mostly corals, sponges, and mollusks, plus a few primitive fishes, such as sharks. Evidence of this early life can be found in limestone outcrops such as those near Weeping Water in southeastern Nebraska. There were no birds or mammals to be seen.

As we drive the 50 miles to Lincoln, we have covered 50 million years to 400 million years ago, and are entering the Devonian era. We must drive all the way to Kearney, some 270 million years ago, before the last remnants of the Permian Sea have retreated and left us on dry land. To reach the great age of dinosaurs, the Mesozoic, which started some 220 million years ago, we must get to

Cozad. From there to Ogallala, the distance representing the peak of the dinosaur era, there is no clear geologic record in Nebraska, but dinosaur fossils in eastern Wyoming and western South Dakota tell us of these great beasts. The first known bird, *Archaeopteryx*, took flight during the middle of the Mesozoic, sharing the sky with flying reptiles, about 140 million years ago. By then a few primitive mammalian groups were also already present. The last great period of the Mesozoic, the Cretaceous period, covers the distance from Ogallala to Sydney. It is a time when Nebraska was again covered by shallow seas, with long-necked plesiosaurs swimming through the waters and sometimes rivaling the largest dinosaurs in size. There were also mosasaurs, sea-going lizards with large crushing jaws, eating sharks and bony fishes. Loon-sized but flightless fish-eating birds, *Hesperornis* and its kin, swam through the shallow seas of what is now Kansas and probably also Nebraska. Above the seas, tern-like birds (*Ichthyornis*, *Apatornis*) fished in the shallows.

Finally, near Sydney, about 60 miles from the Wyoming border, we reach the start of the Cenozoic era, the Age of Mammals. During this time what is now Nebraska was covered in sequence by tropical forests, then savanna-like mixtures of trees and grasses, and finally true grasslands. Many browsing and grazing mammals were present, from camels through rhinos, horses, and many others. Early ducks, geese, cranes, hawks and other predatory birds were common. Great elephant-sized titanotheres lumbered across the uplands of Nebraska nearly 40 million years ago (near Potter on our I-80 time scale). Some 30 million years ago large, long-legged predatory birds such as *Bathornis*, distant relatives of cranes and rails, stalked the Nebraska grasslands. It isn't until we reach Kimball, 20 million years ago, that Nebraska began to resemble the grassy plains we know today. At that time grazing animals such as horses, rhinos, camels, grass-eating rodents and dogs occurred, and the earliest cats arrived. Some 15 million years ago, in the middle Miocene, limpkin-like (*Aramornis*) birds also waded through Nebraska's wetlands, only later to disappear completely. The first elephants arrived from Asia 14 million years ago; these were mastodons and four-tusked. These would also disappear and be replaced later by more modern kinds of elephants, including mammoths. Most or all of the modern families of birds were present by then.

About ten million years ago, or near Bushnell on our I-80 time-scale, vast volcanic clouds of dust settled on Nebraska, choking herds of horses and rhinos, and providing the basis for what is now the Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park in northeastern Nebraska. Cranes, closely resembling the modern crowned cranes of Africa were there, and only a few million years later sandhill cranes were wading the marshes of ancient western Nebraska, making that species the longest-surviving known species of extant bird.

A little more than two million years ago, or just two miles from the end of our road, the first of several glaciers swept slowly southward out of Canada, bringing with them enormous mammals, such as mammoths, arctic-adapted bears,

giant camels, large beavers and giant predatory cats. Arctic-adapted birds were also no doubt present, but except for a few species (such as bald eagles) we know little of the specific types that were present in what is now Nebraska.

The first humans (Native Americans) probably reached North America about 12,000-15,000 years ago, or about 75 feet from the end of our trip. By then there were already two kinds of bison on the plains of Nebraska, a giant type that became extinct about 10,000 years ago and a smaller one that was the direct ancestor of the modern bison. The last glacial retreat from the Great Plains left deposits of rich glacial till over earlier layers of wind-blown loess deposits in the Missouri Valley, remnant woodlands of boreal-adapted trees in the Niobrara Valley, and opened the way for temperate-loving birds such as cardinals and mockingbirds to move gradually into southern Nebraska. The majestic seasonal migrations of bison developed in the Great Plains, and the Platte gradually settled into its present-day meandering channels, giving water and safety to these great herds and to the vast migrating flocks of waterfowl and cranes that followed the retreating glaciers northward to tundra breeding grounds.

America wasn't "discovered" by Europeans until about five centuries ago, or about three feet from the end of our road. Nebraska was mostly settled by Europeans less than a century ago, or about six inches from the last turn-off. That settlement spelled disaster for the passenger pigeon, Eskimo curlew, and near-extinction for many other bird species including the whooping crane, but the recognition of such losses also marked the start of such conservation-oriented groups as the National Audubon Society and the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union.

The people who are alive today represent only a few inches or even less of our total history, based on this 450 million-year time scale between Omaha and the Wyoming border. If this time-scale were expanded to include all of the earth's 4-5 billion-year history, our trip would have had to start on the eastern side of the Atlantic Ocean, and the human story would represent a distance of a few hundredth's of an inch, or about the thickness of the metal on the last Nebraska I-80 exit sign.

This is a sobering realization, especially when we consider the great ecological damage that we have done to our environment during our relatively short stay on earth. Even the greatest dinosaurs left no visible scars on our land during their hundred-million-year rule, yet we are unwilling to leave mountains unmined, marshes undrained, and forests uncut. When the last prairie has been ploughed, the last prairie-chicken silenced and the last prairie rose killed by herbicides, we might perhaps pause and wonder where they all went, and where we too have gone.

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