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WINTER FIELD REPORT, December 2004 to February 2005

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INTRODUCTION

This winter was generally unremarkable except for the occurrence of good numbers of several species at the western edge of the state, notably Clark's Nutcracker, Pygmy Nuthatch, and Bohemian Waxwing. There were a couple of sightings of Mountain Chickadee and one of Cassin's Finch for good measure. All of the winter finches on the Nebraska list (except for Hoary Redpoll) appeared, most notably Pine Grosbeak, represented by two birds. One of these was in the southwest (Kansas had several reports) but the other was in the east, suggesting either multiple points of origin, or, as suggested by some in Kansas, northern rather than western origin. Also in good numbers were Red-breasted Nuthatches, but Harris's Sparrows were scarce. Black-capped Chickadees remained in very low numbers in southern Nebraska west of the Missouri River Valley.

Of interest was the discovery of wintering Marsh and Winter Wrens along the central Niobrara Valley; perhaps this is a regular occurrence, but who's been looking? This phenomenon may be linked to other occurrences that would be expected in a warmer winter: several species of ducks that are generally not seen in midwinter were found on the Scottsbluff and Gering Sewage Lagoons, sapsuckers were in good numbers, catbirds and Brown Thrashers put in unexpected winter appearances, and a Loggerhead Shrike was far to the north.

Notable sightings were several, ranging from huge counts to birds rare in winter but expected at other times to bona fide rarities, although the last is a matter of one's definition of rare. Best sightings in these categories were probably the 2,000,000 Snow Geese reported (half the North American population), 4 Barrow's Goldeneyes, a financially savvy Sharp-tailed Grouse, a first-documented Dec Osprey, 3rd-latest Least Sandpipers, Great Black-backed and Iceland Gulls, first winter record for White-winged Dove, 9568 crows and 10,216 robins at Calamus Res, White-winged Crossbill, and, of course, 2 Pine Grosbeaks.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADF: Arbor Day Farm, Nebraska City
BOL: Branched Oak L, Lancaster Co
CBC: Christmas Bird Count
Cem: Cemetery
FF: Fontenelle Forest, Sarpy Co
GPD: Gavins Point Dam, Cedar-Knox Cos
HCR: Harlan Co Res, Harlan Co
LM: L McConaughy, Keith Co
LO: L Ogallala, Keith Co
m.ob.: many observers
NC: Nature Center
NNF: Nebraska National Forest
NWR: National Wildlife Refuge

PL: Pawnee L, Lancaster Co
RWB: Rainwater Basin, south central Nebraska
SCP: Spring Creek Prairie, Lancaster Co
SHP: State Historical Park
SL: Sewage Lagoon(s)
SP: State Park
SRA: State Recreation Area
WMA: Wildlife Management Area
WSR: Wind Springs Ranch, Sioux Co.

GAZETTEER

Boyer Chute NWR: Washington Co
DeSoto NWR: Washington Co
Johnson Res: Gosper-Frontier Cos
Sutherland Res: Lincoln Co
Wildcat Hills: Scotts Bluff-Banner Cos.

OBSERVERS

AK: Alice Kenitz, Gering
BFH: Bill F. Huser, South Sioux City
BG: Betty Grenon, Bellevue
B&LP: Babs & Loren Padelford, Bellevue
BS: Bill Schmoker, Boulder, CO
B&DW: Bruce & Donna Walgren, Casper, WY
CC: Carol Carpenter, Verdon
CM: Connie McCartney, Grand Island
CNK: Clem N. Klaphake, Bellevue
CS: Carolyn Sonderman, Omaha
CWH: C.W. (Bill) Huntley, Ogallala
DH: Dave Heidt, Norfolk
D&CN: Don and Colleen Noecker, Albion
D&JP: Don & Jan Paseka, Ames
EB: Elliott Bedows, Bellevue
EV: Eric Volden, Grand Island
GH: Gerard Harbison, Lincoln
G&WH: Glen & Wanda Hoge, Alma
GKH: G.K. Hanily, Omaha
HA: Henry Armknecht, Ovid, CO
HKH: Helen K. Hughson, Mitchell
JCm: Jay Carmer, Lincoln
JED: James E. Ducey, Omaha
JG: Joe Gubanyi, Seward
JGJ: Joel G. Jorgensen, Blair
JJ: Jan Johnson, Wakefield
JS: Jim Schmoker, Boulder, CO
JSt: Jon Strong, Omaha
JT: Jerry Toll, Omaha
KD: Kathy DeLara, Mitchell
LB: Laurel Badura, Kearney
LD: Linda Dennis, Omaha

LE: Larry Einemann, Lincoln
L&CF: Laurence & Carol Falk, Nebraska City
LO: Linda Ollinger, Wilsonville
LR: Lanny Randolph, Gibbon
LRB: Linda R. Brown, Lincoln
MB: Mark Brogie, Creighton
NB: Norma Brockmoller, Winside
NP: Nathan Pieplow, Boulder, CO
NR: Neal Ratzlaff, Omaha
P&DD: Phyllis & Dean Drawbaugh, Scottsbluff
PJ: Paul Johnsgard, Lincoln
PK: Peter Kondrasov, Maryville, MO
RE: Rick Eades, Lincoln
RG: Ruth Green, Bellevue
RH: Robin Harding, Gibbon
RS: Ruben Siegfried, Scottsbluff
SJD: Stephen J. Dinsmore, Starkville, MS
TEL: Thomas E. Labedz, Lincoln
TJW: T.J. Walker, North Platte
TP: Theresa Pester, Lincoln
TR: Tommie Rogers, Mound City, MO
WRS: W. Ross Silcock, Tabor, IA
ZU: Zee Uridil, Chadron

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Greater White-fronted Goose: The last fall flock was the 50 in Lancaster Co 28 Dec (LE), but one was in Scotts Bluff Co 1 Jan (KD), where the species is rare. Rather early migrants were 15 in Seward Co 4 Feb (JG) and 203 at LM 12 Feb (JGJ), the latter an excellent westerly count. Best count was 2340 at BOL 20 Feb (LE). A hybrid with Snow Goose was reported at BOL 19 Dec (JG).

Snow Goose: Incredible numbers appeared this spring in central Nebraska. A Corps of Engineers count at HCR in Feb yielded 1,161,608 (fide G&WH); these birds were still present 28 Feb (G&WH). The observers (G&WH) estimated about 10-15% of these birds were Blue Geese, suggesting a different provenance from the birds in the central Platte Valley and RWB, where the flocks are nearly evenly split between blue and white birds. Estimates of the latter birds of 500,000 to 1,000,000 were made 23-26 Feb (LB, RE,LRB,PJ). Thus there were about 2,000,000 Snow Geese in central Nebraska at peak migration this spring, about half the currently estimated total for the species (Canadian Wildlife Service website). Good numbers were noted in the Panhandle also; these western flocks contain essentially all white birds and are from more westerly nesting areas than the huge numbers of eastern birds. Best Panhandle count was the 5000 flying over Scotts Bluff Co 18 Feb (KD); a lone straggler was noted 1 Jan (KD). Unexpected for the dates were the 300 flying south over Dodge Co 3 Jan (D&JP), and 400 rather early in Dixon Co 19 Feb (BFH).

Ross's Goose: Few were reported, as observers apparently spend little time searching among Snow Geese for these birds; midwinter records are few, latest this season were 6 at Swanson Res 20 Dec (SJD).

Canada Goose: The usual large numbers were wintering in the central and western Platte Valley; tens of thousands were seen 30 Jan between Brady and Sutherland, a stretch of only about 40 miles (TJW). Most CBCs reported good

numbers, highest the 3840 at Scotts Bluff 18 Dec (fide AK).

Cackling Goose: Expected to be an abundant spring and fall migrant, best count was 1000 in the central Platte Valley 26 Feb (LRB,PJ). Best fall count was only 50, in Cass Co 26 Dec and Dundy Co 29 Dec (TJW). Also expected to overwinter, but in smaller numbers, 30 were near Seward 4 Feb (JG), possibly early migrants, 7 were in Dawson Co 9 Jan (TJW) and singles were in Scotts Bluff Co 17 and 24 Jan (KD, photo).

Trumpeter Swan: A total of 58 was reported from Gordon (JED) eastward, including 25 in southwest Cherry Co 15 Dec (LB). One at Beaver L, Cass Co, 26 Dec, was a female banded in Minnesota in 2002 (TJW). Of 7 birds in Butler Co 26 Feb (LR,RH), 3 had red collars, presumably from Iowa, 2 had orange wing tags, presumably from Minnesota or Wisconsin, and 2 were unmarked.

Wood Duck: Rare in midwinter anywhere in the state, surprising were as many as 7 at Berggren Pond, Scotts Bluff Co, 1-17 Jan (KD). Less unusual were 2 seen 5 Feb and thought to be wintering at Carter L, Douglas Co (CNK). Two at ADF 19 Feb (L&CF) were new arrivals.

Gadwall: The 70 on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec were a new count high; some apparently wintered, as did the 14 at the Scottsbluff SL 24 Jan (KD).

American Wigeon: Another species finding the Scottsbluff SL to its liking, 684 were a new Scottsbluff CBC high 18 Dec, and 50 were still there 17 Jan (KD). Also wintering were 4-9 present 7-23 Jan at Berggren Pond, Scotts Bluff Co (KD). This species seems to be more often seen in midwinter recently.

American Black Duck: None were reported; this species may no longer be a regular winter visitor.

Mallard: Best counts were the 15,000 on 20 Jan wintering at Sutherland Res (TJW) and 11,882 on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec (fide AK).

Northern Shoveler: The only midwinter report was of up to 8 at Berggren Pond, Scotts Bluff Co, 7-17 Jan (KD); this species winters regularly but in small numbers only in the Platte Valley.

Northern Pintail: Routine reports.

Green-winged Teal: Routine reports.

Canvasback: Few were reported, none in midwinter.

Redhead: Rare in midwinter, the only report was of 2 at Scottsbluff SL 24 Jan (KD).

Ring-necked Duck: Rare in midwinter like Redheads, the 65 on 18 Dec provided a Scottsbluff CBC high (fide AK), and 1-2 remained in the area through 17 Jan (KD) for the only midwinter report.

Greater Scaup: About 170 were reported, including 118 fall migrants at LO 19 Dec (SJD) and 36 spring migrants at LM 12 Feb (JGJ). The only midwinter report was of one at Scottsbluff SL 17 Jan (KD).

Lesser Scaup: The only midwinter report was of 15 at Scottsbluff SL 17 Jan (KD). Most midwinter reports are from LM, and of only 7 elsewhere, 3 are from Scotts Bluff Co.

White-winged Scoter: The 2 reports included 3 birds (adult male, 2 immatures) at LM 17-19 Dec (SJD), one first-winter bird apparently staying until 31 Dec (BS,JS). The other report was of a single first-winter bird at GPD 3-8 Jan (MB,DH,JJ). Except for 2 winter reports, these are the latest fall dates for the state.

Bufflehead: The 2 at Scottsbluff SL 4 Feb (KD) may have wintered, following a CBC high of 5 there 18 Dec (fide AK); the 7 at Scottsbluff SL 18 Feb (KD) were likely early migrants. The 8 at LM 12 Feb (JGJ) probably wintered there; 148 were there 19 Dec (SJD).

Common Goldeneye: A good northerly count for the date was the Calamus CBC high of 327 on 1 Jan (fide DH). A male hybrid with Hooded Merganser at LO 12 Dec (HA) and 31 Dec (BS,JS) has wintered there for a few years now. Another of the same cross was photographed at Scottsbluff SL 17 Jan (KD) and possibly the same bird was nearby 18 Feb (KD).

Barrow's Goldeneye: Regular in winter in the North Platte Valley, 4 were reported. Up to 3 were in Scotts Bluff Co 11 Dec (KD) through 18 Feb (KD), including 3 on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec (fide AK) and a pair at the Scottsbluff SL 4 Dec (KD). Another (juvenile male) was on the LM CBC 19 Dec (SJD).

Hooded Merganser: Rare in midwinter, one was at Scottsbluff SL 24 Jan (KD).

Common Merganser: Best counts were the 5000 at Swanson Res, Hitchcock Co, 16 Feb (JSt) and the 3000-4000 on 20 Jan wintering at Sutherland Res (TJW).

Red-breasted Merganser: Generally casual in winter, but probably regular at LM, as many as 10 were still at LO 12 Jan (TJW), declining to 2 on 10 Feb (CWH), but an apparent influx 12 Feb saw 29 there, including 26 males (JGJ). Unexpected was one at L Maloney, Lincoln Co, 31 Jan (TJW).

Ruddy Duck: The only reports of this cold-sensitive species were of one on the Branched Oak-Seward CBC 19 Dec (LE, fide JG) and 7 on the LM CBC the same day (SJD).

Gray Partridge: The only report was from the population at WSR, where 8 wintered around the homestead (HKH).

Ring-necked Pheasant: Best count was an excellent 181 at Boyer Chute NWR 10 Jan (JT).

Sharp-tailed Grouse: One in a small tree next to a North Platte banking facility 22 Dec was thought to be opening a lekking account because business was booming (TJW). Other reports were from expected locations in north-central Nebraska (DH,NPi,JED).

Greater Prairie-Chicken: Good numbers were noted in north-central and southeast Nebraska, including 100 at an irrigated corn stubble field in southwest Custer Co 23 Jan (TJW) and 51 in Johnson Co 9 Dec (TEL). At the northeast edge of the range were 7 on the Ponca SP CBC 27 Dec (BFH).

Wild Turkey: Huge counts were received of this species, which is obviously doing very well statewide. Best were 484 on the Grand Island CBC 18 Dec (fide CM) and 444 on the DeSoto NWR CBC 19 Dec (fide JT), although most impressive were the 375 in one flock near Orleans 21 Jan (G&WH).

Northern Bobwhite: Impressive for the location was the count record 68 on the Calamus CBC 1 Jan (fide DH). Also of interest were the 8 on the Crawford CBC 20 Dec (B&DW), where the species is rare.

Common Loon: The only report was of one rather late on the LM CBC 19 Dec (SJD); there are only about 6 later sightings.

Pied-billed Grebe: Rather late was one in Dundy Co 29 Dec (TJW); a few linger until freeze-up most years.

Horned Grebe: Last was one at LM 17-19 Dec (SJD).

Western Grebe: The only report was of the 20, fewer than in recent years, on the LM CBC 19 Dec (SJD).

Clark's Grebe: Rather late was one at LM 19 Dec (SJD).

American White Pelican: Two wintered at LO (CWH,JGJ,BS,JS) and 5-6 at Sutherland Res (TJW,JGJ), both locations where a few now winter regularly. One as far northeast as the Norfolk CBC 18 Dec was a count first (fide DH). Returning birds included 8 rather early at HCR 25 Feb (G&WH).

Double-crested Cormorant: One at Sutherland Res 12 Feb (JGJ) may have wintered there; there are a few similar records for this location.

- Great Blue Heron:** Only casual in winter away from the Platte River Valley, one at Burwell on the Calamus CBC 1 Jan (NB,DH) was unexpected.
- Osprey:** An injured bird was found near Doniphan on the Grand Island CBC 18 Dec; it was captured and taken to a recovery center but died a few weeks later (fide EV). This is the first documented Dec report for Nebraska, albeit an unfortunate one.
- Bald Eagle:** Nesting was under way at NNF-Halsey, Thomas Co, 15 Feb (RG) and in Nemaha Co 25 Feb (CC).
- Northern Harrier:** Routine reports.
- Sharp-shinned Hawk:** Routine reports.
- Cooper's Hawk:** Routine reports.
- Northern Goshawk:** There were 3 reports. Single immatures were near North Platte 3 Jan (TJW) and in Otoe Co 17 Jan (L&CF), and an adult was seen in Carter Canyon on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec (WRS, PK,TR).
- Red-shouldered Hawk:** None were reported; most winters this species is reported from FF.
- Red-tailed Hawk:** An early nester, one was repairing a nest near Alma 27 Feb (G&WH).
- Ferruginous Hawk:** Easternmost of the 7 reported was near Orleans 21 Jan (G&WH). One of the 5 on the LM CBC 19 Dec was a dark morph (CNK); this is the 5th Nebraska report of this form, which comprises about 1% of the total population and breeds mostly in Alberta and Saskatchewan (Wheeler, *Raptors of Western North America*).
- Rough-legged Hawk:** Numbers were good, with best counts 16 between WSR and Hemingford 12 Dec (HKH), 12 in about 25 miles south of Harrison 25 Jan (HKH), and, eastward, 7 in Polk, Merrick, and Platte Cos 3 Feb (D&JP).
- Golden Eagle:** Easterly, where it is only casual, were singles on the DeSoto NWR CBC 19 Dec (fide JT) and the Ponca SP CBC 27 Dec (fide BFH).
- American Kestrel:** They were everywhere in southwest Nebraska 29 Dec, where some 150 were counted in 300 miles (TJW). Because migration is essentially over by late Oct, this must represent an extraordinary lingering concentration attracted by an extraordinary prey supply.
- Merlin:** Routine reports.
- Prairie Falcon:** Rare southeastward, singles were found during count week of the 19 Dec Branched Oak-Seward CBC (fide JG) and in Seward Co 4 Feb (JG).
- Peregrine Falcon:** Although fall migration ends in mid-Nov and spring migration starts in late Mar, nesting began early, with 3 eggs present at the Woodmen Tower, Omaha, 28 Feb (fide CNK). Similarly, 3 birds were noted around the State Capitol, Lincoln, 18 Feb (JCm). This, along with previous winter sightings in Omaha and Lincoln, suggests that stocked resident birds winter in the vicinity; Wheeler (*Raptors of Western North America*) noted that stocked birds as far north as Minneapolis usually winter there.
- Virginia Rail:** This species winters regularly in the North Platte Valley; 5 were found on the LM CBC 19 Dec (SJD). Another known wintering location is the upper end of Rock Creek L SRA, Dundey Co, where one was found 20 Dec (SJD). However, searches by JED revealed that similar habitats (spring-fed unfrozen marsh, usually minimal in extent, each possibly hosting only a single bird) as far north as the Niobrara Valley host wintering birds also. Singles were located south of Nenzel and Merriman, Cherry Co, 16 Dec, at the latter location again 18 Feb, and at two locations just north of NNF-McKelvie, Cherry Co, 18-19 Feb (JED). These are the northernmost wintering records in Nebraska.

- American Coot:** The only midwinter report was of 35-65 at Scottsbluff SL 17 Jan-18 Feb (KD), although 4 at LM 12 Feb (JGJ) probably wintered there.
- Sandhill Crane:** Most years the first movement is noticed in late Jan; this year first were 75 flying over McCook 4 Feb (fide CH); first large concentration reported was 25,000 in the central Platte Valley 26 Feb (LRB). Unexpected was one near Gibbon 5 Feb (LR,RH); it may have been a lone early migrant.
- Killdeer:** Rare in winter eastward, one was near Fremont 2 Jan (D&JP).
- Least Sandpiper:** Two lingered very late at PL, last seen 11 Dec (LE); this is the 3rd latest fall record for Nebraska.
- Wilson's Snipe:** Northernmost lingering birds were 3 on the Calamus CBC 1 Jan (fide DH). None were reported later.
- Franklin's Gull:** No details were provided for a report of this species on the Grand Island CBC 18 Dec. There are, however, about 15 reports, most recent, of single adult-plumaged birds for the period 15 Dec-21 Feb.
- Bonaparte's Gull:** The only report was of two rather late at Swanson Res, Hitchcock Co, 20 Dec (SJD). Lingered birds have been noted more often in recent years.
- Ring-billed Gull:** Routine reports.
- California Gull:** Rare away from LM, an adult at Cunningham L, Omaha, 4 Dec (JGJ), was only the 6th fall record from the east, while another was at Swanson Res 20 Dec (SJD), a far less surprising location.
- Herring Gull:** Best counts were the CBC-high 314 at Calamus CBC 1 Jan (fide DH) and 200 at Johnson L, Gosper Co, 12 Feb (JGJ).
- Thayer's Gull:** The reports were all from LM, where up to 3, including an adult, were found 12 Dec through 2 Jan (HA,SJD,PK,BS,JS).
- Iceland Gull:** A 2nd-winter bird frequenting the spillway at LM 12 Dec-2 Jan (HA, m.ob.) was probably the same bird that was there last year. This is the 8th fall and 21st overall record for the state.
- Lesser Black-backed Gull:** The only report was of a 1st-winter bird at Johnson Res 12 Feb (JGJ).
- Glaucous Gull:** Only 4 were reported, an adult and 2 first-winters at LM 12 Dec-2 Jan (JGJ, m.ob.) and an immature at Johnson Res 12 Feb (JGJ).
- Great Black-backed Gull:** The only report was of a second basic immature on the LM CBC 19 Dec (SJD). There are now some 14 records for the state. Individuals that discover LM tend to stay there for extended periods.
- Rock Pigeon:** Routine reports.
- Eurasian Collared-Dove:** Numbers continue to increase, with best counts 42 on the Grand Island CBC 18 Dec (fide CM), 37 at Mitchell 19 Feb (KD), and 37 at Brady, including 28 at the observer's feeder (TJW). So far, highest counts are in winter, indicating that flocking occurs at his time of year. As with Rock Pigeon, breeding may be attempted at any time; copulation was seen near Brady 16 Dec (TJW). There are still a few counties without records, mostly in the Sandhills: Adams, Blaine, Boyd, Cedar, Cherry, Gosper, Grant, Hooker, Jefferson, Keya Paha, Logan, Loup, Pawnee, Saline, Sherman, and Thomas.
- Ringed Turtle-Dove:** While most reports of this species probably are Eurasian Collared-Doves identified by folks with older field guides, a few escaped or released birds appear from time to time, and the problem of hybridization of released birds with naturally-occurring Eurasian Collared-Doves may be an under-appreciated phenomenon. Four white birds were found in southwest Butler Co 27 Dec, probably variant Ringed Turtle-Doves (LR,RH). One that was carefully observed in downtown Omaha 4 Feb had been there a few days (GKH).

White-winged Dove: One was seen in Morrill by an experienced observer 9 Feb (fide AK); this is the first winter record for this species, although one was reported from Oshkosh 14 Dec 2002. All of the other 31 reports, all since 1988, are in the period 15 Apr-10 Oct.

Mourning Dove: Wintering is regular in southeast Nebraska, where there were several reports, including a winter roost of 75+ on the campus at University of Nebraska-Omaha (JGJ) and 65 at a Fremont elevator corn pile 10 Jan (D&JP). Elsewhere midwinter sightings are unusual; despite a count-high 82 on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec (fide AK), the 2 in Scotts Bluff Co 17 Jan were the observer's first in midwinter (KD). A group of 90 in Lincoln disappeared after 7 Jan (LE). A single in Dixon Co 27 Dec-8 Jan (JJ,BFH) was northerly. Returning birds were first noted at Wilsonville 15 Feb (LO) and Alma 26 Feb (G&WH).

Eastern Screech-Owl: Routine reports.

Great Horned Owl: Routine reports.

Snowy Owl: None were reported.

Barred Owl: Routine reports.

Long-eared Owl: Of the few reports received, best count was the count high 10 on the Branched Oak-Seward CBC 18 Dec (fide JG).

Short-eared Owl: All of the 5 reports were in Dec and from the Platte Valley southward. Occasionally this species can be found roosting with Long-eared Owls, especially when snow cover is heavy; one such was in Douglas Co at a traditional Long-eared roost 20 Dec (JT). Encouraging was one on Conservation Reserve Program ground near Vesta 9 Dec (TEL).

Northern Saw-whet Owl: The only report was of one in cedars along the south side of Enders Res, Chase Co, 20 Dec (SJD).

Belted Kingfisher: Routine reports.

Red-headed Woodpecker: All reports were from the southeast, where a few winter most years. Best count was 28 on the Omaha CBC 18 Dec (fide BG).

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Only recently expanding into the Panhandle along the North Platte Valley, one was counted on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec (fide AK) and a westerly male wintered at an Ogallala feeder (CWH).

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: This species was present in good numbers, about 21 in all. All reports were from south and east of a line from Ponca SP to Seward and Lancaster Cos, defining the extent of regular wintering. Best count was 5 on the Lincoln CBC 18 Dec (fide LRB). The Ponca SP bird was an adult male seen 8 Jan (BFH).

Downy Woodpecker: Routine reports.

Hairy Woodpecker: Routine reports.

Northern Flicker: A few red-shafted flickers made it to the extreme east: one, along with 138 yellow-shafted flickers, was found on the DeSoto NWR CBC 19 Dec (JT), and singles were in Lincoln 5 Dec (RE) and in Gage Co 28 Feb (JSt). At the other end of the state, the count high 54 on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec had 25 red-shafted, 6 yellow-shafted, and 6 orange-shafted birds (fide AK).

Pileated Woodpecker: The only reports were of singles at FF 4-5 Feb (CNK,EB).

Northern Shrike: Reports were statewide, with best counts 6 on the LM CBC 19 Dec (fide SJD) and 4 as far southeast as the Lincoln CBC 18 Dec, where the count high is 5 (fide LRB), and Branched Oak-Seward CBC 19 Dec (fide JG).

Loggerhead Shrike: Details were received of one on the Beaver Valley CBC 2 Jan (D&CN). A few occur in the extreme southeast most winters, but occurrence within the winter range of Northern Shrike is rare, and documentation of such sightings is necessary.

Blue Jay: Routine reports.

Pinyon Jay: None were reported.

Clark's Nutcracker: Following a couple of sightings in the fall, this species appeared in the northwest in invasion numbers, with 40-50 in the Sowbelly Canyon area of Sioux Co 5 Feb (KD), and other counts in the area involving several groups of as many as 30 birds 21 Dec-25 Jan (EB,B&DW,HKH). The last such irruption was in 1996-97.

Black-billed Magpie: This species occurs eastward in the extreme northeast to Dixon Co, where most birds are seen at Buckskin Hills WMA and along the Missouri River (JJ) to the Ponca SP area, where one was seen 27 Dec (BFH). Also easterly were one in Dodge Co through the winter (D&JP) and 5 on the Norfolk CBC 18 Dec (fide DH).

American Crow: An excellent CBC count of 8568 was made at Calamus CBC 1 Jan, close to the count high of 9602 on 27 Dec 2003 (fide DH). These are the highest CBC totals for the state.

Horned Lark: Best count was an excellent 5000 in Sherman Co 17 Jan (LR,RH).

Black-capped Chickadee: Numbers continue to be very low in south-central Nebraska, east to Lancaster Co, where only 29 were found on 1038 miles of almost-weekly trips in Lancaster Co, 2 CBCs in the county, and home feeders (LE). The Branched Oak-Seward CBC reached a new low count of 11, when last year's then-new low was 28 and the 10-year average is 144 (fide JG). The first chickadee in the observers' yard near Gibbon for over a year was seen 15 Jan (LR,RH). On the other hand, CBC numbers along the Missouri River Valley at Omaha and DeSoto NWR were normal (fide BG,fide JT).

Mountain Chickadee: The only reports were of two singles in widely-separated Scottsbluff yards through the period; one, counted on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec, was in the west Scottsbluff yard of Rod Smith (fide AK), and the other was in the Drawbaugh yard beginning 13 Dec, but not seen for the CBC (P&DD, fide AK).

Tufted Titmouse: Routine reports.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: Good numbers, significantly more than usual, were reported statewide, with best CBC counts 27 at LM 19 Dec, a count high (fide SJD), 24 at Scottsbluff 18 Dec, also a count high (fide AK), and 17 at Branched Oak-Seward 19 Dec (fide JG).

White-breasted Nuthatch: Three birds in Sowbelly Canyon, Sioux Co, 21 Dec were of the expected resident western subspecies *nelsoni*, but one in nearby Harrison was of the eastern subspecies *cookei* (EB), which occurs during winter in areas where it does not breed. The extent of movement of *nelsoni* in winter in Nebraska is not well known, but there are reports from Bushnell and LM, suggesting that either subspecies might occur in winter in the Panhandle and nearby.

Pygmy Nuthatch: Numbers in the western Pine Ridge were amazing on 28 Dec (B&DW), and 75 were estimated in Monroe and Sowbelly Canyons 21 Dec (EB). This suggests an influx from farther west or north. All reports were from expected Pine Ridge or Wildcat Hills locations except for a report without details of one as far east as LO on 2 Jan. Such a report seems highly unlikely, as this species is very rare away from Ponderosa Pine habitat.

Brown Creeper: An excellent CBC count was the 22 at Lincoln 18 Dec (fide LRB).

Carolina Wren: Good numbers were reported: about 15, all from the Lincoln and Omaha areas. Best counts were 5 at Spring Lake Park, Omaha, 25 Dec (JED) and 5 on the Omaha CBC 18 Dec (fide BG).

- Winter Wren:** There are very few overwintering records in northern and western Nebraska, and so the presence of 3 birds along the Niobrara River in Cherry Co 15-18 Dec (JED) was a surprise. That these birds were indeed attempting to winter is suggested by the presence of one on the Niobrara at Buckhorn Spring, Cherry Co, 19 Feb (JED). There is a prior report for Cherry Co 5 Jan 1957. Wintering in extreme southeast Nebraska is not unusual, although there are very few Feb and Mar records; one was at Wilderness Park, Lincoln, 30 Jan (LE).
- Marsh Wren:** Reports at favored locations continue, but unexpected was the presence of 5 along the Niobrara in Cherry Co 15-18 Dec and 4 in the same general section of the Niobrara River 18-19 Feb (JED). Other reports were from Scotts Bluff Co (fide AK,KD), the LM CBC (SJD), 4 birds at Rock Creek L SRA, Dundy Co, 29 Dec (TJW), and, perhaps most surprising, one in Lincoln on the CBC 18 Dec (LE, fide LRB).
- Golden-crowned Kinglet:** Good numbers lingered into Dec, with 33 counted on the DeSoto NWR CBC 19 Dec (fide JT), the best count. Stragglers in Jan are very rare away from the southeast, and so one on the Beaver Valley CBC 2 Jan (D&CN) was unexpected. Three other reports in Jan, including 3 birds at FF 20 Jan (B&LP) and one at Wilderness Park, Lincoln, 30 Jan (LE) were unusual, even for the southeast.
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** This species is rare westward into Dec, and so 3 reports were a surprise: singles were in Scotts Bluff Co on or about 18 Dec (fide AK), on the LM CBC 19 Dec (SJD), and at Rock Creek L SRA, Dundy Co, 29 Dec (TJW).
- Eastern Bluebird:** There were mid-winter reports of small numbers statewide, most notably 3 in Cherry Co 19 Feb (JED). Returning birds were noted in Harlan Co 18 Feb (G&WH) and Dodge Co 23 Feb (D&JP). Best counts were 64 on the Omaha CBC 18 Dec (fide BG) and 53 at DeSoto NWR CBC 19 Dec (JT).
- Mountain Bluebird:** Wintering birds were found at the usual location in cedar canyons in southeast Lincoln Co 25 Jan (TJW), and arrival on the breeding grounds was noted in mid-Feb, with 3 at Wildcat Hills 18 Feb (P&DD). The 20 in southern Sioux Co 18 Feb (HKH) were migrants, as were probably a small flock at the Oshkosh SL 13 Feb (HA).
- Townsend's Solitaire:** This species was common in the west, with best counts 140 on the LM CBC 19 Dec (fide SJD) and 67 on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec (fide AK). Easternmost were a surprising 5 on the Branched Oak-Seward CBC 19 Dec, tying the count high (fide JG); 2 were in Cedar Co 8 Jan (JJ) and another was at Ponca SP 19 Feb (BFH).
- Hermit Thrush:** Three were reported on CBCs in southeast Nebraska, about normal, but one as far north as Steer Creek Campground, NNF-McKelvie, 15 Dec (JED) was unexpected. A belated report was of one apparently wintering at a heated waterer at Neale Woods, Douglas Co, and seen 8 Feb 2004 (CS,LD).
- American Robin:** Remarkable numbers occur in the extensive cedar areas of central Nebraska in late fall; 10,216 were tallied on the Calamus CBC 1 Jan (fide DH). Similarly, thousands were in southeast Lincoln Co cedar canyons 25 Jan (TJW).
- Gray Catbird:** The two reports were surprisingly far west, especially one at LO 2 Jan (HA); the other was at Wilsonville 22 Jan (LO).
- Brown Thrasher:** A surprising 4 were reported. Rare enough were singles on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln downtown campus 18-28 Dec (LE) and on the Branched Oak-Seward CBC 19 Dec (fide JG), but singles at a feeder in North Platte 10 Jan (fide TJW) and another in Morrill Co 1 Feb (fide AK) were unexpected. The latter two sightings are only the 7th and 8th mid-winter reports away from the southeast.

European Starling: Best count was a remarkable 33,207 on the Grand Island CBC 18 Dec (fide CM).

Bohemian Waxwing: This was a banner year for this species in the west after a virtual absence for many years; CBC totals were 100 at Scottsbluff 18 Dec (fide AK), 237 at LM 19 Dec (SJD), and 225 at Crawford 20 Dec (fide B&DW). None were reported east of LM, however.

Cedar Waxwing: Best count was an excellent 1742 on the Calamus CBC 1 Jan (fide DH), one of the highest CBC totals for the state. Another good count was 500+ near Kearney 1 Jan (TEL).

Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler: The only reports were of 10 below the dam at HCR 1 Jan (G&WH) and 5 on the LM CBC 19 Dec (SJD); this species is rare as late as Jan anywhere in the state.

Spotted Towhee: Only 4 were reported, including one as far west as Scottsbluff, on the CBC there 18 Dec (fide AK). Two were wintering on the city campus of University of Nebraska-Lincoln (LE,GH), and one was found on the Branched Oak-Seward CBC 19 Dec (fide JG).

American Tree Sparrow: Good numbers were reported; best CBC count was an excellent 795 on the DeSoto NWR CBC 19 Dec (fide JT) and best non-CBC tally was 200 in southern Sioux Co 1 Feb (KD).

Savannah Sparrow: Details were provided for one at Boyer Chute NWR 10 Jan (JT); this is only the 4th documented record for Jan-Feb, although there are a few other reports. This species winters regularly in northern Kansas and Missouri.

Song Sparrow: Routine reports.

White-throated Sparrow: Wintering birds, maximum count 3, were noted at feeders in Otoe (L&CF), Douglas (NR) and Sarpy (B&LP) Cos. Few others were reported, all from the southeast (fide BG, fide LRB,RE).

White-crowned Sparrow: Numbers are lowest in mid-winter, especially in the east; all Jan-Feb reports were from Harlan Co westward. Few were reported on eastern CBCs, and best CBC count was 53 at Scottsbluff 18 Dec (fide AK).

Harris's Sparrow: Most observers mentioned the scarcity of this species this winter; in Lancaster Co, only 19 were found during the period over a total of 943 miles driven (LE). The best CBC count was only 13, at LM 19 Dec (fide SJD). A regional look might indicate that these birds wintered elsewhere; otherwise it seems that Harris's Sparrow is in decline in recent years.

Dark-eyed Junco: CBCs had good numbers, best the 798 at DeSoto NWR 19 Dec (fide JT). Two of the DeSoto NWR birds were Oregons, which compares with the mix on the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec, which had 287 juncos, consisting of 57 Oregon, 43 Pink-sided, 90 Slate-colored, 5 White-winged, and 92 unidentified to form (fide AK). Other easterly Oregons were one at a Nebraska City feeder 26 Dec (L&CF), two in a Lincoln yard 14 Feb (RE), and a surprising 14 on the Branched Oak-Seward CBC 19 Dec (fide JG). None of the 437 juncos on the Omaha CBC 18 Dec were Oregons (fide BG). Unexpected was a junco which fit the description of the stable hybrid form *cismontanus* (Oregon x Slate-colored) in Lincoln 14 Jan (TP). Good numbers of White-winged juncos were reported in the western half of the state, some 27, including 17 on the Crawford CBC 20 Dec (fide B&DW). Easternmost White-winged were 2 at North Platte 15 Feb (TJW); this form is rare east of the Panhandle.

Lapland Longspur: An amazing 5000 were estimated near Oxford 23 Jan (LR,RH).

Snow Bunting: None were reported.

Northern Cardinal: Numbers continue to consolidate in Scotts Bluff Co, where 5 were counted on the CBC 18 Dec (fide AK) and a female was visiting a Gering feeder through the period (fide AK). One singing in a Lincoln yard 31 Jan was 2 weeks earlier than last year (RE). Westerly was one along the Niobrara River at NNF-McKelvie, Cherry Co, 19 Feb (JED).

Red-winged Blackbird: Best counts were of spring returnees: 2000 in Lancaster Co 16 Feb (TP), 2200 in the same county 20 Feb (LE), and 2000 in Dixon Co 27 Feb (JJ). The first female flock reported was 550 in Scotts Bluff Co 19 Feb (KD). Unexpected in mid-winter were 750 in Dixon Co 8 Jan (JJ), 50 at Agate 5 Feb (KD), and one at a Mitchell feeder 9 Jan (KD).

Eastern Meadowlark: Routine reports.

Western Meadowlark: First singing birds were noticed in Dodge Co (D&JP) and Otoe Co (L&CF) the same day, 3 Feb.

Rusty Blackbird: This species occurs occasionally in winter in the east, but one on the Calamus CBC 1 Jan was a bit far west (fide DH,NB). Eastern midwinter reports were of 3 in Lancaster Co 8 Jan (LE), 15 in Otoe Co 17 Jan (LE), and 25 in Otoe Co 25 Jan (L&CF). Best count was 30 on the Greeley-Wheeler Cos line 12 Feb (LR,RH), presumably migrants (presumably also in single file?).

Brewer's Blackbird: The only reports were from CBCs: 3 at Grand Island 18 Dec (fide CM), 3 at LM 19 Dec (fide SJD), and one at Beaver Valley 2 Jan (D&CN), which was rather northerly for the date.

Common Grackle: Typical winter reports are of single birds; thus one appeared to be wintering at a garden store feeder in Scotts Bluff Co, where it was seen 1 Feb (KD). Another was late in Dixon Co 1 Jan (JJ). Spring arrivals were led by two rather early in Scotts Bluff Co 19 Feb (KD).

Great-tailed Grackle: Routine reports.

Brown-headed Cowbird: Generally rare in mid-winter and restricted to the southeast, there were more reports than usual in late Dec into Jan. At least 3 wintered at a Bellevue feeder (CNK), one was in Dixon Co 8 Jan (JJ), one was in Lancaster Co 30 Dec (TEL), and one was at BOL 28 Dec (LE). Earliest in spring was one rather early with Red-winged Blackbirds at Verdon 15 Feb (CC). Other early arrivals were 5 in Hamilton Co 20 Feb (LR,RH) and 5 near Alma the same day (G&WH).

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch: None were reported; none had been seen all winter at WSR (HKH).

Pine Grosbeak: This winter saw an incursion of limited numbers onto the western Great Plains, notably in Kansas, but detected in Nebraska as well. Only two birds were found in Nebraska, but this species has been essentially absent since the 1980s; these are only the 8th and 9th reports since 1980. A female was feeding on crabapples at BOL on the Branched Oak-Seward CBC 19 Dec (LE), and a male at Grant 20 Dec was photographed (SJD). The eastern location of one of these seems surprising, but information from Kansas sightings suggests that these Pine Grosbeaks may have been northern, rather than western, birds.

Purple Finch: Following a good year last year, numbers were excellent this year, with about 129 reported. Best CBC counts were 25 at LM 19 Dec (fide SJD) and 21 at Omaha 18 Dec (fide BG), while elsewhere best count was 20 at Anderson Bridge WMA, Cherry Co, 19 Feb (JED). Purple Finches are rare in the Panhandle, and so one in a Gering yard for the period (fide KD, fide AK) was a surprise.

Cassin's Finch: The only report was of two rather easterly birds on the LM CBC 19 Dec (fide SJD). This species has been found on this CBC three times now.

House Finch: Four CBCs reported more than 100, best LM with 220 on 19 Dec (fide SJD). Best non-CBC count was 100+ near Kearney 1 Jan (TEL).

Red Crossbill: Reports were statewide, with some good counts from the east; 91 were counted on the Branched Oak-Seward CBC 19 Dec (fide JG), and 20-25 were visiting a Bellevue feeder through the period (fide RG). The birds in a flock of 11 at Ericson L, Wheeler Co, 12 Feb were very bright red, sounded different, had seemingly smaller bills, and the females were rich golden brown (LR,RH). Red Crossbill types, possibly separate species, are difficult to identify in the field, however.

White-winged Crossbill: The only report was of one at in Duncan 30 Jan (LR,RH).

Common Redpoll: A few were reported, all at 3 eastern locations. Up to 5 were regulars at an Omaha feeder through 7 Feb (NR), one was at a feeder near Lincoln 25 Dec (GH), and 15 were found at BOL 12 Feb (LE).

Pine Siskin: Numbers were generally good in the west, but observers in the east thought numbers were low. Feeders in Chadron (ZU) and near Mitchell (KD) had over 100 in attendance, and the Scottsbluff CBC 18 Dec had 148 (fide AK). Among the Mitchell birds were two very pale, perhaps leucistic, individuals (KD, photo). Best count in the east was 35-40 at a Garland feeder through the period (LE).

American Goldfinch: Best tally was the 753 on the Calamus CBC 1 Jan (fide DH).

Evening Grosbeak: There were only two reports; despite some early and easterly appearances in the fall, there was no incursion detected. The reports this winter were of 4 in Scottsbluff 4 Dec (RS), and one near Kearney 1 Jan (TEL).

House Sparrow: Best CBC count was 975 on the Norfolk CBC 18 Dec (fide DH). This is far lower than the counts in the 5000 range reported some 20 years ago on CBCs in the larger cities.