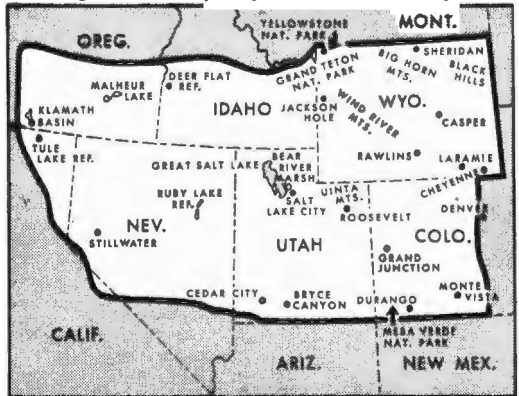


## GREAT BASIN, CENTRAL ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION / Oliver K. Scott

Where did our birds go this past winter? Normally there are good populations of winter residents and visitors such as Bohemian Waxwings, Evening Grosbeaks, rosy finches and many other



species, but not this season. The early part of the winter—December and January—were wet and cold in the north and very dry in the south. The s. portion borders on the Southwest, where severe drought conditions exist.

The Bohemian Waxwings didn't make an appearance in the Region until the end of March. Where they wintered is not known. Gray-crowned Rosy Finches have wintered in good numbers in

central Wyoming for at least 23 years, but this year they were not seen at all. Black Rosy Finches were absent from Salt Lake City, where they normally winter. Evening Grosbeaks appeared in s.w. Colorado in great numbers but were scarce elsewhere, and the paucity of most land birds remains unexplained. Perhaps the sharp contrasts in weather were factors. For example, Grand Junction in w. Colorado had the driest winter on record (LFE), while a short distance e. the snowfall was almost double normal depths.

**SWANS**—Although 40 Trumpeter Swans wintered at Malheur Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, Harney Co., Ore. some of the population here is now believed to be wintering in California. [Evidence?—Ed.] The colony of Trumpeters at Malheur Refuge is not only growing (7 young joined the flock last year) but it is also beginning to move about (ELMcL). The spring migration of Whistling Swans at Malheur Refuge came a week later than in 1970, and in numbers double those of last year. The high count, Mar. 21-27, was 11,600. The migration of the great majority of Whistling Swans in this Region has been fairly stereotyped. It is refreshing therefore to find a large flock—1500—straying into the Snake R. division of Deer Flat Nat'l Wildlife Refuge in w. Idaho, on Mar. 31. The normal number for this refuge is only 40-80. Five Whistlers turned up in Rocky Mountain Nat'l Park, Colo., at Estes L., Mar. 17-18, for a first record for the park e. of the Continental Divide. At lower altitudes such an occurrence would not be unusual.

**GEESE AND DUCKS**—With good snows of a severe winter and good spring rains L. Malheur, Ore. increased to 45,000 acres, the greatest area it has had since 1965. Nearby L. Harney, which varies from nothing to a very sizable lake is now 10,000 acres in extent, and Malheur L. is expected to overflow into it, to make it even bigger. Therefore, the outlook for waterfowl production in this area is excellent. The wintering waterfowl population at the Malheur Refuge was extremely low this past winter, presumably owing to the severe weather. While Snow Goose concentrations at Malheur Refuge were 8000 less than the peak total of 1970, and one week later, (from Mar. 21 to Mar. 27), there were still 42,000 Snows in the area at the close of the period. The peak of the spring migration of ducks was the same fourth week of March, with 155,600 ducks counted, some 66 percent greater than 1970 (and two weeks later than last year). The predominant species was Pintail, with 128,000 (ELMcL).

The waterfowl migration was normal at Stillwater Nat'l Wildlife Refuge in w. Nevada and peaked at 63,000 in mid-March here, with good water conditions prevalent (LDN). The great snow pack in the mountains of Idaho resulted in high water in the Snake R., with resultant difficulties for nesting Canada Geese at Snake R. Division of Deer Flat Refuge (JTA). With the cold hard winter, Bear River Refuge, Utah, was

frozen until March, and the spring migration of ducks peaked at only 50,000, on Mar. 26, which is low for this Refuge. Monte Vista Nat'l Wildlife Refuge counted a peak population of 48,940, mostly Mallards. This Refuge in s. Colorado continue to grow more attractive to waterfowl (CRB). The only rare duck reported during the period was a Black Duck at Greenrock, Wyo. Jan. 3 (OKS).

**EAGLES AND HAWKS**—Stillwater Refuge reported 5 Bald Eagles wintering, slightly above normal (LDN). Monte Vista Refuge reported 16 (CRB). All the refuges report Bald Eagles wintering; they winter along all the major streams in the Region. Up to 13 were reported at Vernon, Utah, on the desert s.w. of Salt Lake City, on Feb. 13 (WS). This was a good year for the species, perhaps owing to the severe weather to the north. Two Harlan's Hawks were observed at Monte Vista Refuge during the period, as well as 45 Rough-legged Hawks and 33 Marsh Hawks (CRB). The refuges remain good places for hawk-watching.

**CRANES**—The spring migration of Sandhill Cranes began at Monte Vista Refuge on January 24 and reached its peak Mar. 7-13 with 6021 birds present. A student working on the Sandhill Cranes of the Rio Grande R. drainage system estimates that 12-14,000 cranes now use the system during migration (CRB).

**OWLS**—A pair of Screech Owls was found at a small mine in the Steens Mountains of e. Oregon on Mar. 31. This pair has been present for three years, and represent only the third record for that area (WLA). Five Barn Owls were known to be at Malheur Refuge headquarters early in the winter. Four were found dead during the winter, but 2 survived the winter with another alive not far away, which is either bad arithmetic or more owls to start with than anyone suspected. The species is rare and local in the Great Basin, but 2 were present this season at Salt Lake City where they roosted in a hole in a clay bank (GK). The cemetery at Salt Lake City remains the best owl-finding spot in the Region. Both Saw-whet and Screech Owls were reported there this past winter on numerous occasions and nearby, at City Creek, both Long-eared and Pygmy Owls were observed. Short-eared Owls occur at all the Refuges and extensive grassy areas. Both Sheridan, Wyo. (TK) and Cedar City, Utah (SM) reported an increase in the species this year.

**WAXWINGS TO GROSBEAKS**—Salt Lake City had no Bohemian Waxwings this year, but Cedar Waxwings appeared instead (GK) in a pattern not unusual. Red-breasted Nuthatches were absent over much of the Region, in contrast to last year's invasion. None whatsoever were reported from Salt Lake City (WS). A Pygmy Nuthatch in n. Wyoming Mar. 27, at the base of the Big Horn Mts. near Buffalo was a first record for that area (TK, PH).

An **Ovenbird** visited a feeding station at Estes Park Nov. 22-Dec. 28 (AC). There has been only one previous record for this area and for adjoining Rocky Mt. Nat'l Park, and that in summer.

While central Wyoming had few reports of Evening Grosbeaks, there were concentrations at Grand Junction and Durango, Colo. At Durango the birds appeared in much greater numbers after the great storm of early January (OR).

**SPARROWS TO BUNTINGS**—Both Harris' and White-throated Sparrows wintered high on the Wind R. at Dubois in w. Wyoming (MB). For the White-throat this was the third consecutive winter in the same location, suggesting involvement of a single individual. Another Harris' Sparrow at Estes Park on for several weeks until December 23 was unusual for such an altitude in Colorado; there are only two previous records for the area. Two others were at feeders along the Animas R. at Durango all winter (OR). This is another repeat visit in an area where the species had been unknown. The Cassin's Sparrow reported last season (Am. Birds 25:86) remained all winter at the feeder in Evergreen in the mountains w. of Denver (WB). A Lapland Longspur was seen at Cedar City Jan. 20 (SM).

A sizable flock of Snow Buntings, 175 or more, was seen near Harney L. at Malheur Refuge on Dec. 18; they have been only casual winter visitors here (WLA). On Jan. 21 many flocks were found on a high altitude plain near Bates Creek Reservoir in central Wyoming. This is a remote high-grass and low-sage plateau, elev. 7600 ft., which is the n. terminus of the Laramie Plains, almost never traversed by man in winter owing to deep snows and inaccessibility. One wonders whether this observation is of an unusual invasion or of a regular phenomenon never before observed.

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