

GREAT BASIN— CENTRAL ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION / Hugh E. Kingery

The following report sounds more like spring migration than an accounting of winter visitors. Only a few winter wanderers came in, such as Bohemian Waxwings, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Snow Buntings, while numbers of the common winter finches—juncos, towhees, sparrows—seemed much reduced. The early part of the winter brought heavy snow and cold temperatures



throughout the Region; Reno had its coldest December since records began in 1888. A warming trend began in February, with everywhere but Wyoming reporting spring-like weather, without moisture, broken only by a cold snap at the end of March. Grand Junction had its driest season since 1898. In Salt Lake City a late-March freeze nipped early-blooming fruit trees and killed 90 per cent of the fruit crop. Winter continued, however, in Wyoming and n.e. Utah, where the whole winter was severe. The cold weather drove out any lingering southern-inclined birds, but failed to bring in the winter birds from the north. Then the spring in February ushered in substantial numbers of migrants, with early arrivals reported from all sectors: hummingbirds, flycatchers, swallows, and sparrows came in to several areas 10-20 days earlier than ever before. Also arriving early were Killdeer, Band-tailed Pigeon, White-throated Swift, and Water Pipit. Horned Larks reached timberline in February. Then by the end of March, nesting cormorants and crossbills had joined the usual nesting owls.

LOONS, GREBES, PELICANS, CORMORANTS

— Com. Loons occurred on scattered dates at scattered spots in the Region: Dec. 2 at Sheridan, Wyo.; Jan. 6 at Carlin, Nev. (AB); 3 on Feb. 1 at Nampa, Ida.; 15 on Feb. 26 at Hutton L. Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, Wyo.; 10 on Mar. 15 at Pathfinder N.W.R., Wyo. Two Eared Grebes stayed at Dubois, Wyo., long enough to be counted on the CBC, and 1 overwintered at Malheur N.W.R., Ore.; by mid-March migrants began to appear, the first at Ruby L. N.W.R., Nev., Mar. 14. Forty W. Grebes lingered at Klamath N.W.R., Calif., on Dec. 1, and 1 remained for the Honey L., Calif., CBC Dec. 21. White Pelicans had returned to the Great Salt L. by Mar. 5 (WS) and observers noted them during March at Still-

water W.M.A., Nev. (a peak of 225 birds), Modoc N.W.R., Calif., and Lower Klamath N.W.R., Calif. Double-crested Cormorants have already begun nesting at Malheur, some sitting on up to 5 eggs on Mar. 31.

HERONS, EGRETS — A siege of Great Blue Herons—at least 100—overwintered at the Klamath Refuges (R.V.A.S., ODS, JHH). At Monte Vista N.W.R., Colo., where normally the only wintering shorebirds are snipe, 1 Great Blue wintered, along with an Am. Bittern and 4 Killdeer. Cold weather in mid-January, however, froze the herons at Stillwater, with 4 found dead. Com. Egrets may have wintered at Klamath, with observations of 1 Jan. 22 (ODS) and 20 Mar. 12 (*vide* ODS). They appeared 10 days early, on Mar. 20, at Malheur. Of several Black-crowned Night Heron reports, the most surprising were 1 on the Jordan R., Salt Lake City, Feb. 2 (GLK), and 25 wintering at Stillwater (1890 use days) [no. ind. x days present—Ed.]. Am. Bitterns, not expected winter birds in our Region, cropped up on the Monte Vista (it wintered) and Honey L. CBCs. At Ogden Bay, Great Salt L., the evening of Dec. 4, an inexplicable flock of 30 flew north, single file (MLK). [slightly incredible—Ed.]

SWANS, GEESSE — Whistling Swans peaked at 5320 at Klamath in early December. A few wintered, and the population began building up in February. Malheur's December population of 8000 dropped to 35 on Jan. 1. The spring migratory peak of 5000, Mar. 3-11, compared with 11,600 last year; the difference probably occurred because the birds continued to move, encouraged by the warm weather. Only 200 remained by Mar. 31. Migrating swans began arriving in most places during March although 6 in Moffat Co., Colo., Feb. 20 (BA) seem early. The **White-fronted Goose** at Hutton L. N.W.R. Mar. 24 represents a species omitted from the Wyoming list, although they have been observed there in past years (RFK). One stayed at Grand Junction, Colo., for 3 weeks from Feb. 22; at Truckee Meadows, near Reno, Nev., 33 were present Mar. 9; and at Honey L., Christmas counters found 50. While single Snow Geese occurred at 3 locations in Colorado—Monte Vista N.W.R., Grand Junction, and Antero Res.—large flocks occurred on Honey L. CBC (7142 birds) and migrated as usual through the w. part of the Region: 5000 on Mar. 30 at Deer Flat N.W.R., Ida. (HES) and 62,300 as the peak at Malheur—twice last year's numbers. Blue Geese also appeared for the Honey L. CBC and on Feb. 19 (GM); Malheur had 3 observations during the winter. Ten Ross' Goose were at Honey L. Feb. 19 (GM) and by Mar. 31 Malheur had 100.

DUCKS — Deer Flat N.W.R. had the highest populations of the season on the CBC Dec. 18, with 262,956 Mallards, 18,045 Pintail, and 5308 Canada Geese. Most wildlife refuges reported drastically reduced wintering populations, attributed to the extremely cold weather in December and January. Camas N.W.R., Ida., had only 200 Mallards on Jan. 1, compared with 15,000 on New Year's Day, 1971; Stillwater had 10 swans and 235 ducks (vs. 165 and 1500 a year ago); Malheur had only 2200 ducks; Ruby Lake's population dropped to 325 ducks and 50 coots on Jan. 19. Seedskaadee N.W.R., Wyo., had but 300 Mallards (1000-1500 normal) in mid-

January, although it did have the usual 1600 Com. Goldeneyes; the goldeneyes survived in very poor condition, with a low food supply—some could not even fly. Monte Vista held only 13,000 ducks compared with 48,000 a year ago. Klamath's low occurred Jan. 3-7, with 25,500 ducks, 10,500 geese, 500 coots, and 1427 Whistling Swans. Midwinter found 1000 Mallards and 500 Com. Goldeneyes on an 8-mile stretch of the Colorado R. between Rifle and Silt, Colo. (ED).

Populations began building up again in March. Klamath hosted peaks of 145,000 Shovelers and 50,000 Am. Widgeon Mar. 20, and on Mar. 25-26 262,800 Pintails, 18,600 Mallards, 6000 Canvasback, 3300 Bufflehead, and 23,000 other ducks. Ruby Lake's population built up to 6490 ducks and 13,745 Am. Coots by Mar. 30; Camas N.W.R. had 10,000 Mallards (17,000 last year at the same time); Hutton L. N.W.R. had 11,500 including 2800 Lesser Scaup, 1700 Pintail, and 1600 Green-winged Teal. At Malheur, Pintails peaked at 68,000 Mar. 3, compared with 128,000 a year ago; the total usage reflected the fewer Pintails this year, with the peak on Mar. 16 of 116,500 ducks comparing to last year's peak of 155,600 a week later.

At Pathfinder N.W.R. refuge manager Rodney Krey discovered a new species for Wyoming—2 ♂♂ of the spreading **European Widgeon**. A White-winged Scoter at Grand Junction Dec. 4 was at a different lake than the Nov. bird. Hooded Merganser reports came from Honey L. CBC, Salmon Ida., Pocatello, Hutton L. N.W.R., and Nat'l Elk Ref., Wyo.

KITES, VULTURES, BUTEOS — The **White-tailed Kite** evidenced its recent population expansion by appearing for the Yerington, Nev., CBC, and staying through at least until Jan. 26. Seen by numerous observers for Nevada's first verified record, the bird stayed in an area from which the species was reported 3 times last year. This year other kites were reported from Reno and Pyramid L., Nev. (CSL). Turkey Vultures began arriving in March, except that Malheur's first arrived on Feb. 28, 10 days earlier than ever before. Reporters turned in 53 Goshawk observations, 35 of Sharp-shinned Hawks, and 31 Cooper's Hawk observations. At Pueblo observers saw no Sharp-shinned, contrasting with 1-3 on each trip last year; the difference may have related to the lack of prey; no Robins inhabited the piñon/juniper forest this year. Harlan's Hawk reports came from Honey L. (2 on CBC; 2 on Mar. 31-Apr. 1, RSt) and Curlew Valley, 50 mi. s. of Pocatello, Mar. 19. Two Red-shouldered Hawks, rare on the e. side of the Sierras, were seen in Mono Co., Calif., Dec. 13 (*vide* JMF). Observers reported 67 observations of Ferruginous Hawks.

EAGLES, FALCONS — Hawks and eagles winter commonly over the vast open stretches of the desert West. By traveling long distances, observers can easily spot them, but much territory lies inaccessible, particularly in winter. Hence the Wyoming Game & Fish Comm'n survey of wintering eagles, made using methods developed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, assumes great importance as an estimate of the *total* winter population in Wyoming. Using airplane flyovers on pre-selected transects, the survey estimated Wyoming's wintering eagle population at **11,068 Golden Eagles, 413 Bald Eagles, and 481 unidentified eagles.** (Those

killed last year amount to about 8 per cent of this total.) In Colorado, the Game, Fish & Parks Division also conducted an eagle survey. In one week employees actually counted 206 Golden, 231 Bald, and 29 unidentified (in the whole state, including the Southern Great Plains Region); the count does not estimate the state's total population. Bald Eagles concentrated along the rivers in w. Colorado, with 61 on the Rio Grande, 26 on the Colorado, and 24 on the White (GC). Throughout the Region, Am. Birds contributors reported a total of 193 Golden and 534 Bald Eagle observations for the season, totals which partially reflect the distribution of observers at places of Bald Eagle concentrations.

Numerous Marsh Hawk observations, totaling 374, included 38 on the Nampa CBC; 33 at Eureka, Nev., compared with 26 last year; peaks of 25 at Stillwater and 17 at Monte Vista; and 12 in the Curlew Valley during March. The Gyrfalcon invasion extended to Sheridan, Wyo., Jan. 5 (PH, TK), Pocatello Mar. 4, and Curlew Valley, Ida., Mar. 11 (CRT, LRP). Nineteen Peregrine observations included 8-12 birds.



Tree full of Bald Eagles, Vernon, Utah, Jan. 30, 1972. Photo/Lyle E. Colbath, courtesy The Salt Lake Tribune.

GROUSE, CRANES, RAILS, COOTS — During the winter at Crater L. Nat'l Park, Ore., Blue Grouse frequently fed along the highway at dawn, between vertical walls of snow 12-15 feet high. The White-tailed Ptarmigan flock above timberline on Guanella Pass, presumably typical of the Colorado population, spent a normal winter, although possibly suffering to a minor decrease because of the extremely dry conditions (CEB). The Sage Grouse flourishes in the Great Basin, according to visitors to the various booming grounds, with 630 birds reported from 10 strutting grounds. The conversion of sagebrush into farms or grassland may adversely affect these birds in a few localities. Sandhill Cranes lingered late—4 on the Honey L. CBC—and then began

returning to the Region with February's warm weather. First arrivals came to Monte Vista N.W.R. Feb. 15, where the migration peaked at 4058 on Mar. 10. The migration moved north with birds noted in March at many locations. Am. Coot peaked at Klamath with 40,500 birds on Mar. 26. Virginia Rails stayed late in the Region, with single birds Dec. 5 and 16 in the Zion Nat'l Park region; 1 Dec. 19 at Grand Junction; and 1 Jan. 2 at Pocatello.

PLOVERS, SANDPIPERS, GULLS — Killdeer returned to Camas N.W.R. Mar. 6, 22 days earlier than last year, and to the high country early with 3 at Estes Park, Colo. Mar. 13 (RD). A Black-bellied Plover which struck a fence at Lower Klamath Refuge provided a late Dec. 10 record. Com. Snipe had begun their mating flight by Mar. 16 at the Alturas, Calif. airport. Long-billed Curlew began arriving early: Mono Co., Calif., had its first ones Feb. 7, and they arrived at Nampa Mar. 17, Malheur Mar. 23; and Boardman, Ore. Mar. 26 (ODS). A few Greater Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitchers, Am. Avocets, and California Gulls arrived in the Region in March. At Fish Springs N.W.R., Dugway, Utah, an 80-year-old trapper, James P. Harrison, picked up a fresh carcass of a **Black-legged Kittiwake** Mar. 12. This specimen, first for Utah, reposes now at the Univ. of Utah (*vide* MM). At Provo, Utah, 16 Franklin's Gulls were seen Feb. 29 (WWB).

PIGEONS, OWLS — The flock of 300-500 Band-tailed Pigeons in the Washoe Range near Reno from Mar. 8-31 constituted possibly the largest flock ever reported from Nevada. The birds have now spread into the Virginia City area. In Colorado Band-tailed Pigeons appeared 2 weeks earlier than usual. Numerous Barn Owl reports came in, including 12 known roosts near Rupert, Ida., and Camas N.W.R.'s first record, found dead Mar. 3. Single Snowy Owls appeared at L. Isabel, near Pueblo, Colo., Dec. 24 (DBr); at Sheridan, Wyo. from Dec. 30-Jan. 19; at Reno with several reports, including 1 on Jan. 27 (CSL). A Great Gray Owl wintered in farmland near Pocatello for a month before "making contact with a car." After recovery he will be released to return to his nesting grounds, possibly at Yellowstone N.P. Short-eared Owls reportedly have declined in the Region, with only a few winter reports, the most being 15 from Stillwater N.W.R., with 58 use days.

SWIFTS, HUMMINGBIRDS, WOODPECKERS — White-throated Swifts arrived a week early—Mar. 11—at the Garden of the Gods near Colorado Springs, and Springdale's first 20 arrived Mar. 25. Hummingbirds came early to the Zion country, with the first Black-chinned seen at Virgin, Utah, Mar. 12; both Black-chinned and Broad-tailed at Springdale Mar. 18 (10 days early), and a ♂ Calliope there Mar. 25. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, usually fairly common in winter at Springdale, were absent. A Williamson's Sapsucker arrived at Crater L. Mar. 7—an early upward movement. White-headed Woodpeckers were reported from Crater L. Feb. 3 and Mammoth Lakes, Mono Co., Calif., Mar. 15 (JD).

FLYCATCHERS, LARKS, SWALLOWS, JAYS — A surprising 4 species of flycatchers had arrived in

the Region by Mar. 31, most of them early. Western Kingbirds had come to Virgin, Utah by Feb. 24, and to Malheur Mar. 23 a month earlier than the previous first of the season. Mar. 1 found the first Black Phoebe at Springdale, and Say's Phoebes wintered at Virgin and arrived throughout the Region as usual in March. A W. Wood Pewee at L. Isabel Mar. 29 was likewise very early (DBr). Several groups of Horned Larks arrived above timberline at Guanella Pass, Colo., in February, a month earlier than usual (CEB). Early swallows, especially Tree, appeared everywhere during March, earlier than usual. At Ruby L. Barn Swallows came Mar. 3, Violet-green on Mar. 4. At Malheur 10 Violet-greens appeared Mar. 23 and 2 Rough-winged arrived Mar. 30, both 2 weeks earlier than ever; the first flock of Tree Swallows appeared at Malheur Mar. 5, with 6000 there by Mar. 12—the large flocks arriving 1 month earlier than 1971. Com. Crows enjoyed a good winter in the Region; 300 wintered at Ruby L. and several small groups stayed at Seedskaadee N.W.R., neither a normal winter haunt for the crow. One lingered until Dec. 6 at Alturas, and a rare one visited Virgin Mar. 2. Clark's Nutcrackers seemed scarce in the RMNP area (*vide* AC), while 2 appeared low down at a foothills feeder on the Denver CBC and they were more numerous at Nat'l Elk Refuge.

NUTHATCHES, WRENS, THRASHERS, THRUSHES — Pygmy Nuthatches visited feeders at Durango for the first time in several years, but were scarce or absent at feeders in the Denver foothills. Red-breasted Nuthatches made scattered appearances: common at Crater L. and RMNP, with good numbers on n. Colorado CBCs; only a few at Sheridan, Salmon, Durango, and Colo. Spgs.; and none at Pueblo, Salt Lake City, and Rupert. A Brown Thrasher stayed in January at a Golden, Colo. feeder (GS), and Malheur recorded its first winter Sage Thrasher, on Jan. 8. First spring birds arrived there and at Snowville, Utah (LRP) on Mar. 20. After last year's scarcity, Robins returned for high counts on the CBCs and wintered commonly in many locations such as RMNP (almost to timberline, RD). McCoy, Colo., Sheridan, Salmon, and Malheur (a record CBC total of 1500). Spring arrivals began in mid-March at places like Jackson, Wyo., Nampa, and Crater L. even with 12 ft. of snow on the ground. Jan. 13-14 an inexplicable Veery fed on berries in a Salt Lake City park (GLK). Small numbers of W. Bluebirds wintered at Zion and perhaps at Cortez, Colo. (WWB). Mountain Bluebirds returned in large numbers in March throughout the Region, with scattered reports during the winter coming from southern parts of the Region. Like the Robin, Townsend's Solitaires returned to the Region this winter, with Denver noting a record 144 on the CBC.

KINGLETS, WAXWINGS, SHRIKES, WARBLERS — Ruby-crowned Kinglets were observed Dec. 23-Jan. 1 at Alturas, twice in January at Zion, Feb. 15 at Malheur, and frequently there after Mar. 19. Water Pipits included 1 on Dec. 5 at Eureka, Nev.; 1 on Dec. 6 at Dubois; 160 at Bear R. N.W.R. Feb. 21 (MRC); 2 at Malheur Feb. 5, the earliest record there (average arrival date Mar. 15). Bohemian Waxwings failed to live up to the fall's promised invasion. They occurred commonly in Sheridan, Rexburg, Ida. (DH), Rupert, and

Pocatello (MRC), south to Salt Lake City, and a flock of 14 provided Ruby Lake's first record. But in the Wyoming and Colorado mountains observers found few flocks: Nat'l Elk Refuge, Golden (D.F.O.), Evergreen Feb. 20 (*vide* TM), Gunnison, and possibly farther south. Audubon's Warblers were abundant on the Nampa CBC—34 counted—but scarce at Springdale—only 10 on Dec. 31 and 1 on Feb. 15. One observed Mar. 26 at Evergreen was early (D.F.O.). In RMNP a Yellowthroat sat exhausted, on Mar. 4 in the middle of a road surrounded by snowbanks (IS); the previous early Colorado record was April 18 from the plains.

BLACKBIRDS — Hundreds of W. Meadowlarks wintered in s. Idaho (WHS), and they may have wintered near Burns, Ore. (SF). The first week in March found the first arrivals at Ruby L. and Dubois. A Yellow-headed Blackbird was out of place Jan. 6 with Red-winged Blackbirds at Grand Junction; first migrant Yellow-headed arrived at Bear R. Mar. 14 (WWB). Malheur Mar. 19 (R.V.A.S.), Ruby L. Mar. 26, and Modoc N.W.R. Mar. 27, early by 3 weeks. At Camas N.W.R., only 100 Red-winged wintered compared with 1000 last year.

FINCHES — Evening Grosbeaks were scarce, with only Estes Park reporting them regularly. Observers saw few Cassin's Finches; only at Crater L. were they present in normal numbers. Rosy finches occurred commonly in mountain towns, largest flocks reported being 2000 at Estes Park Jan. 18 (MP), 1000 at Gunnison Mar. 23 (ASH), and 600 at Westcliffe all winter. Of interest was a flock of about 20 at Tonopah, Nev. Jan. 25-27 (CSL). A few Com. Redpolls penetrated the Region, regular reports coming from Estes Park (AC) and Salmon; a few at Sheridan, Dubois, and Nampa. Pine Siskins, like many other winter finches, were scarce in Salt Lake City (WS, EG) and Colorado Springs, but abundant at Crater L. Red Crossbills flocked commonly in the Colorado Rockies south to Denver foothills and Westcliffe, but not to the Pikes Peak area. Good cone crops, as they often do, induced mid-winter nesting: at Evergreen 1 found on CBC Dec. 19 failed, blown down by extremely high winds; another at Estes Park failed, having 3 eggs on Feb. 15 and empty Feb. 27 (WR), but a third successfully fledged 3 young Mar. 25 at Evergreen (DSt). Outside of Colorado the only crossbill reports were of 3 birds at Crater L. and 2 at Nat'l Elk Refuge. Six White-winged Crossbills were courting and singing at Evergreen Feb. 13-19. Observers described wintering Rufous-sided Towhees as scarce at Ogden, Utah (MLK), Malheur, Zion, Denver; yet on Mar. 9 Camas N.W.R. had its first refuge record.

SPARROWS — Vesper Sparrows came to Malheur, 3 weeks earlier than average, on Mar. 12. RMNP recorded its second Sage Sparrow at a feeder Mar. 18-21 (AC). Juncos, like towhees, were unusually scarce: one-third the usual numbers at Ogden (MLK), reduced in the Denver foothills, Grand Junction (WAD), Sheridan, Zion (record low on CBC). Tree Sparrows were unusually scarce at Rexburg (only 1 on the CBC—DH), but 1 appeared at a feeder surrounded by deep snow in Summit Co., Colo. (HEK) Feb. 20-27. Brewer's Sparrows—15 of them—arrived at Malheur Mar. 23, 3 weeks earlier than the previous early record and way

ahead of the average arrival date of May 5. They had arrived at Curlew Valley, Ida., Mar. 26 (LRP). The usual scattered reports of Harris' Sparrows came in. White-crowned Sparrows continued scarce this winter, according to observers at Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Denver, Salt Lake City, Alturas, and Zion. A Golden-crowned Sparrow appeared Mar. 19 at Malheur, a month earlier than the previous early record and almost 50 days earlier than the average arrival date of May 6. Fox Sparrows occurred in March at Colorado Springs, Westcliffe, and Gunnison (ASH). The Honey L. flock of longspurs built up to 300 for the CBC—the largest mixed flock ever recorded in California. Snow Buntings were scarce, but single birds occurred as far south as Moffat Co., Colo. Feb. 19 (BA) and Gunnison in December (ASH).

ADDENDA — At Lyons, Colo., banders caught a Pine Warbler on Nov. 26 (PW). A Hooded Warbler, first for w. Colorado, visited Great Sand Dunes Nat'l Mon., Oct. 21-22 (RAW).

CORRIGENDUM — Hummingbirds eat voraciously, but not as greedily as described in *Am. Birds* 26:97. The Springdale birds consumed 5 quarts a day—not 300.

ABBREVIATIONS — CBC: Christmas Bird Count; RMNP: Rocky Mtn. Nat'l Park.

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