

SOUTHWEST REGION
/ Ted Parker

The drought conditions of the previous two periods continued through the winter. Some relief came in March when about one inch of rain fell over most areas.



The high country of north-central New Mexico experienced periods of snow and cold in January and February, but bird populations were virtually unaffected.

Associated with the dry weather, above-normal temperatures induced many fall migrants to linger well into December throughout the Region. "The warm weather and ever improving habitat of cottonwood and willow trees along the effluent channels in the Salt-Gila riverbed southwest of Phoenix account for several species wintering over for the first time . . . W. Flycatcher, Tree and Rough-winged Swallow, Townsend's Warbler" (JW). This warmer-than-usual weather resulted in first winter records even in the far north.

Despite the weather, wintering Fringillids were decidedly scarce in s. Arizona, probably because of low seed production last summer. Chipping Sparrows were virtually absent there, but were abundant (along with Dark-eyed and Gray-headed Juncos) much farther south in the mountains of southern Chihuahua — lat. 27° N (RP, TP). It will be interesting to see whether these species are as common in that region every winter. Other finches that were notably scarce in southern Arizona and northwestern Sonora (*fide*SR)

include Lark Bunting, Brewer's Sparrow, and White-crowned Sparrow; all of these must have moved south of normal wintering areas.

Berry-feeding thrushes were also scarce in southern Arizona, but normal to above-normal numbers were reported from the central New Mexican highlands where food must have been reasonably plentiful.

As might have been expected, some very early migrants (or wintering birds?) were recorded, especially swallows and those species that winter in western Mexico (i.e. "Bullock's" Oriole, Lazuli Bunting, and Lucy's Warbler). Several days of strong southerly winds in southern New Mexico were no doubt responsible for the appearance of an adult White Ibis and a variety of early migrants on March 9-10.

Another phenomenon directly related to the drought was a three- to four-week delay (or aborting?) of the nesting of desert species in s. Arizona — especially Curve-billed Thrashers, Verdins, and Cactus Wrens. Such delays probably result from a scarcity of insects, for last year, despite the cool (but wet) winter weather, the above species nested on time (*vide* Pat Gould).

LOONS, GREBES — An unusual count of Com. Loons, which usually appear singly on larger lakes during migration and winter, was ten at Painted Rock Dam near Gila Bend, Maricopa Co., Ariz., Feb. 23 (RN *et al.*). Other reports were of two at Bitter Lake N.W.R. (hereafter Bitter L.) n. of Roswell, Chaves Co., N. Mex., Nov. 16-Dec. 7 (DB,JC), and two on L. Pleasant near Phoenix Jan. 20 (*vide* JW). An Arctic Loon was reported from Sierra Vista, Cochise Co., Ariz. Dec. 12 (VC,FS); there are few Arizona records away from the Colorado River. At Bosque del Apache N.W.R. (hereafter Bosque) in Socorro Co., N. Mex., two Horned Grebes were identified Mar. 17 (GZ). The peak winter count of Eared Grebes at Bitter L. was 31 on Mar. 15, and 12 W. Grebes were noted there Dec. 28. Elsewhere, the four W. Grebes seen at Painted Rock Dam Feb. 9 (JW, RW) was a good count for Maricopa Co. The only large number of Pied-billed Grebes reported was 150-200 present in March at Bosque.

PELICANS THROUGH BITTERNS — Flocks of migrant White Pelicans were seen as follows: 55 at Hermosillo, Sonora Feb. 27 (TP, RP), 40 at Bitter L., Mar. 20 (down to one Mar. 26), and six on Bill Evans L. south of Cliff, Grant Co., N. Mex., Mar. 20 (D.E. Hunt). A Double-crested Cormorant visited Phoenix Jan. 22-Mar. 22 (GB *et al.*), another was at Bosque Mar. 28, and 7 were counted on L. Patagonia near Nogales Dec. 9 (PN, MH); the most seen were 13 at Bitter L. on Dec. 1 and Mar. 22 (none seen between Dec. 8 and Mar. 15). Two imm. Olivaceous Cormorants were photographed (to N.M.O.S.) at Bosque Dec. 18 (GZ); this species is usually considered a rare straggler to s.e. Ariz. and s.w. N. Mex. (from Mexico) but has recently nested in the latter state (*Wilson Bull* 86: 65).

Heronries of Great Blue Herons were occupied by Mar. 17 n. of Gila, N. Mex. (236 birds) and near the Gila Cliff Dwellings (six birds) Mar. 30 (RF). As a possible result of mild winter weather the species was common at both Bitter L. and Bosque throughout the winter. Green Herons observed along the Gila R. near Cliff

Dec. 15 (RF, M&DZ) and Feb. 17 were the first winter records for that area; another wintered at the Gila Hot Springs (RF). Fifty Cattle Egrets seen in alfalfa fields n. of San Luis, Yuma Co., Ariz., Dec. 18 was a high count for the state; others were at Bosque one Dec. 1-4 and Phoenix (3-7) Dec. 15 to the end of the period (m.ob.). Between three and 12 Great Egrets spent Jan. 14-Feb. 23 at Painted Rock Dam. An Am. Bittern seen at Farmington Dec. 15 and about a week later was the first winter record there (AN). One of the most amazing records of this season was of an ad. **White Ibis** present at Bosque Mar. 9 to at least Mar. 31. This bird was seen by several competent observers and was photographed. It appeared after several days of southerly winds.

SWANS, GEESE, DUCKS — Thirty-two Whistling Swans were at Bitter L. from Dec. 28-Jan. 4, and 17 (3ad., 14 imm.), an incredible count for s. Arizona, were seen at Nogales Jan. 7 (BW). Peak counts of wintering Canada Geese were 1200 at Bosque Jan. 6 and 1246 at Bitter L. Jan. 16. Two Black Brant were seen at Puerto Peñasco, Sonora Mar. 24 (GB, JW, RW); how this species can be so regular in the Gulf of California and at the Salton Sea in Calif. and so scarce along the Colorado R. is somewhat of a mystery. At Bosque 16,000 (65% immatures) Snow Geese were present during December; 389 were taken during the annual goose hunt. The wintering population at Bitter L. was a low 3200 on Dec. 7, but to the south 1200 were counted on L. McMillan n. of Carlsbad Dec. 21. Also notable were at least four that wintered in the Farmington area from January through the end of the period (AN). Surprisingly, the only report of Ross' Goose was an impressive 150-200 which spent most of December at Bosque; 49 were shot. This is the only locality in the Region that gets such numbers. Few large concentrations of ducks were reported. A count of 31,800 Mallards was made at Bitter L. Jan. 16 and 20,000 were present at Bosque Jan. 18. High counts of other species censused at Bosque include: Gadwall, 800 on Dec. 11; Pintail, 4000 on Dec. 11 and Feb. 11; Green-winged Teal, 600 during March; Cinnamon Teal, 500 on Feb. 21; Am. Widgeon, 500 on Dec. 11; and N. Shoveler, 2000 on Dec. 20 and Feb. 21. Wood Ducks, uncommon in this Region, were reported three times: a pair at Phoenix Dec. 22 (*vide* SD), Jan. 6-Mar. 12 in Phoenix (RN *et al.*) and two near Cliff, N. Mex., Feb. 17 (BHay, WB). Buffleheads were more common than usual in s. Ariz. and 150 were at Bosque during March. Few Hooded Mergansers were reported (4), but Com. Mergansers were present in large numbers (250 on Jan. 2) through the period at Bosque. Five Red-breasted Mergansers were in Maricopa Co., Ariz.: three ♀♀ at Scottsdale Jan. 1 to the end of the period (m.ob.) and two ♀♀ in Phoenix Mar. 10-21 (GB, RB).

HAWKS THROUGH FALCONS — Lowland Goshawk reports include one in Phoenix Dec. 15-Feb. 6 (ST, SD *et al.*), one at Mesa Dec. 28 (Russell Payson) and one on Feb. 1 at Bitter L. (DB). Red-tailed Hawks were seen in numbers (incl. immatures) and six Rough-legged Hawks on a Bitter L. winter raptor count Feb. 20 (BS) was a good count; a late one was seen 20 mi. n. of Lordsburg, N. Mex., Mar. 31 (M&DZ). Few Ferrugin-

ous Hawks appeared this winter; it would be interesting to find out how many winter in the grasslands of n.c. Mexico. Golden Eagles seen include: N. Mex. — nine adult, two immatures, and ten (age?); Ariz. — eight (age?); in New Mexico Bald Eagles seen were: four adult, four immature, and six (age?). An Osprey noted along the Verde R. e. of Phoenix Dec. 21 and Jan. 12 (SD, L&JG) becomes one of the few winter records for the Region. Marsh Hawks were common (50-60) at Bosque during the period, but were very scarce in the grasslands of s.e. Arizona. Eleven Peregrine Falcons (ages not determined) were reported Region-wide.

PRAIRIE CHICKENS THROUGH GALINULES — A Lesser Prairie Chicken at Bitter L. Jan. 26-30 (BS, DB) was one of the few there in recent years though "in its regular habitat about 40 mi. east and a few miles north, the carryover seems to be good and booming was well underway as early as Apr. 1" (JC). Scaled and Gambel's Quail were still reported in numbers despite the continuing drought conditions; the former species was seen regularly in three localities n. of Silver City, N. Mex. (elev. 6200 ft.), "considerably higher than their usual habitat in Grand County" (*vide* M&DZ). Flocks of Montezuma Quail were reported from six areas in the high country of s.w. New Mexico; this may indicate an upward population trend since their numbers fluctuate markedly from year to year.

Wintering Sandhill Cranes at Bitter L. numbered around 6000 with a pre-departure peak of 11,200 on Feb. 1 (DB). Hundreds were at McAllister Lake N.W.R. Jan. 20 and Feb. 23 (WS), 667 flew over Albuquerque Mar. 3 (PB), 50 were at Bosque Mar. 10, and in Ariz. 200 were counted near Kansas Settlement Dec. 8 (Bonnie Swarbrick) and up to 80 wintered (to Mar. 7) at Arlington w. of Phoenix where the species does not appear every winter (DT). In n.w. New Mexico, unusual for winter were up to four Virginia Rails at Farmington Dec. 29 (AN) and in nearby Kirtland one was observed Feb. 17, Mar. 13 & 26 (CS). A possible Sora seen on the Farmington CBC Dec. 15 (*vide* AN) and another at Buckhorn Marsh near Silver City on the same date (RF) were unusually late. One to four Com. Gallinules withstood ice and snow as they wintered at a spring near Kirtland Dec. 17 — Feb. 17 (CS).

SHOREBIRDS — Seven Snowy Plovers present near Gila Bend Jan. 15 (RW *et al.*) represent the second winter record for Maricopa Co. and Arizona away from the Colorado R.; elsewhere, the first of the season appeared at Bitter L. Mar. 15 (19) and there were 124 there by Mar. 22 Thirty Mountain Plovers wintered (to Mar. 19) s. of Phoenix (GB, RB), and to the west 40 were near Gila Bend Jan. 14 (RW *et al.*), and 84 were at Painted Rock Dam Feb. 23 (RN *et al.*); the species was last reported wintering in Maricopa Co. in 1970. A Long-billed Curlew lingered at Mormon L. near Kirtland until Dec. 4 (CS). A Herring Gull wintered at Bitter L. (to Mar. 15) where six were present Jan. 16. The only large number of Ring-billed Gulls reported was 100-300 wintering and 6000 on Feb. 26 at Bitter L.

OWLS — Barn Owls were found to be common in the farming areas near Tempe and s.w. Phoenix (ST). A Burrowing Owl found dead on Rt. 70 eight miles n. of Lordsburg Jan. 5 becomes one of the few actual winter records for that area (M & DZ). Roosts of Long-eared Owls were located as follows: 11 eleven mi. n. of Dem-

ing, s.w. N. Mex., Dec. 22 (M & DZ), two in the Kofa Mts., Yuma Co., Ariz., Jan. 1 - Feb. 17 (S & StL), seven in the desert near Tucson Jan. 23 (m.ob.), and a single bird at Phoenix Dec. - Feb. 20 (ST).

SWIFTS THROUGH WOODPECKERS — A huge concentration of 2000+ White-throated Swifts was observed in s.w. Phoenix Jan. 11 (ST), and hundreds were over Portal, Cochise Co., Ariz., Mar. 1 (SSp). Costa's and Anna's Hummingbirds were numerous in the Yuma area from November on (AC). Other reports of Anna's include: two males, one female at Globe, Ariz., Dec. 4 — Jan. 10 (SH), and a pair in Tombstone to Dec. 17 (DD). Rufous Hummingbirds, which normally migrate (in spring) almost exclusively through the deserts of s.w. Arizona (but occur commonly in the southeast in the fall), appeared in Tucson Feb. 27, one male (Marjorie Shepard) and March 2 - 16, one - two males (GMO), and one at Portal Mar. 15 (IH). A ♀ or ♂ Rivoli's Hummingbird (possibly 2) was photographed in Las Cruces Jan. 18 (Mrs. Eugene Schafer); this is exceptional since the species is quite scarce even in summer away from the Animas Mts. of the extreme s.w. portion of New Mexico. Early migrant Rivoli's appeared in Ramsey Canyon, Huachuca Mts., Ariz., Mar. 6 (JP) and at Portal Mar. 13 (IH). A ♀ Blue-throated Hummingbird wintered at Portal (IH, SSp), and at least 2 ♂♂ Broad-billed Hummingbirds visited Tucson feeders in January and February. The second winter record of Coppery-tailed Trogon in Arizona was obtained when a male and two females were found in Garden Canyon of the Huachuca Mts., Dec. 28 (DD); the male was still present Feb. 9.

An ad. **Red-headed Woodpecker** present in Ash Canyon, Huachuca Mts., from around Feb. 15 - Mar. 11 (DD, JB, VC, SH, GMO) is the third for Arizona. An unusual number of Williamson's Sapsuckers (mostly females and immatures) were seen in the lowlands and mountains of s. Arizona and s.w. New Mexico; most notable of these records include a pair at Phoenix Dec. 1-23 (m.ob.) and a female in Silver City Feb. 10 (M&DZ).

FLYCATCHERS — Despite mild weather in February and March, Cassin's Kingbirds were up to two weeks late arriving in s. Arizona. An early W. Kingbird was found at Bosque Mar. 10 (WS). An Ash-throated Flycatcher was found dead in Albuquerque Jan. 2 after a snow storm (PB) and also unusual was an ad. E. Phoebe on the La Joya Game Range, Socorro Co., N. Mex., Jan. 21 (C.G. Hawkins). At least three W. Flycatchers wintered in s.w. Phoenix and an unprecedented eight were seen Mar. 17 (ST); this latter date is quite early for migrants. A Coue's Flycatcher was regularly observed e. of Tucson Nov. - Jan. 30, and a ♂ Vermilion Flycatcher was at Bosque Mar. 10 (WS).

SWALLOWS — For the most part migrant swallows appeared early throughout the Region, and for the first time both Tree and Rough-winged Swallows spent the entire winter in Phoenix. One Rough-winged and a Barn Swallow were identified Dec. 18 at Imperial Dam on the Colorado R. (DE, TS) where the species are rarely known to winter. Violet-green Swallows were not uncommon in s.w. Phoenix by Feb. 17 (ST), and 200-300 Tree Swallows appeared at Bosque Mar. 9. A very early Cliff Swallow was seen in Tucson Feb. 7 (J.P. Schaefer).

JAYS TO WRENS — A Steller's Jay at Bosque Jan. 17 was one of the few seen away from the high mountains. There were no flights of any jays into the lowlands. Red-breasted Nuthatches wintered in small numbers in the lowlands of s. Arizona, but White-breasted Nuthatches were very scarce there.

WRENS THROUGH SHRIKES — A lingering House Wren was at Pipe Spring Nat'l Mon., Mojave Co., Ariz., in December (RW1) and another was at Kirtland, N. Mex., Feb. 24 & Mar. 24 (CS). A winter Wren, always uncommon in this Region, was in Phoenix November - mid-February and three were in Columbine Falls Canyon, lower Grand Canyon Mar. 18&21 (Amadeo Rea). An inexplicable invasion of Bewick's Wrens occurred at Pipe Spring Mon. in December when as many as 50 were counted in one area (RW1). This species was more evident this winter than in the past few at Globe (BJ).

In New Mexico, a Mockingbird wintered at Silver City Dec. 6 - March (M&DZ), and others were at Farmington Dec. 29 (AN) and Kirtland Jan. 12 (CS). A Brown Thrasher was in Albuquerque Dec. 11 - Mar. 26 (PB) and at Rattlesnake Springs s. of Carlsbad Caverns Feb. 11 (MW). Two Bendire's Thrashers identified in cholla desert below the Kofa Mts., Yuma Co., Mar. 30 (S&StL) are of interest because their status in this portion of the state is uncertain. More Crissal Thrashers were reported than usual, and wintering birds were at Silver City, Deming, and Redrock, N. Mex., near Duncan, Ariz. (all *fide* M&DZ), and at Globe (BJ). Sage Thrashers, Am. Robins, and bluebirds were noticeably scarce in s. Arizona, but Am. Robins were common at Pipe Springs Mon. in n. Arizona and in the highlands of C. New Mexico where juniper berries must have been prevalent.

S.A.

In Arizona, Rufous-backed Robins (all singles) appeared as follows: Nov. 21 - Jan. 3 e. of Tucson (Chas. Corchrn), Nov. - Apr. at Cave Cr., Maricopa Co. (Ellis Jones), Dec. 23 along Sonoita Cr. w. of Patagonia (Jeff Mangum), and Dec. 29 in Miller Canyon, Huachuca Mts. (RN *et al.*). Now that this species, an inhabitant of tropical deciduous forests from s. Sonora to Oaxaca, has been recorded in the s.w. United States more than twenty times - s. Arizona (20), Texas (2), California (1) - it is apparent that the bird is now a regular straggler to the Region. All records except two fall between October and May with most from late November to mid-February. Most of these individuals probably followed the north-south river systems of Sonora (i.e. Yaqui, Mayo) north to the Rio Sonora and Magdalena in n. Sonora, the Santa Cruz R. in s. Ariz., and the Rio Grande in Texas. These frequent recent occurrences (all since 1960) may indicate a northerly expansion of the bird's range in Sonora.

A ♂ Varied Thrush in Phoenix Dec. 15 (ST) was only the eighth for Arizona. Ruby-crowned Kinglets wintered in unprecedented numbers in s.e. Arizona and s.w. New Mexico n. through the Pinos Altos Mts. Waxwings were scarce throughout the Region; the only Bohemians reported were singles at Farmington Jan. 29 & Mar. 10 (AN). Phainopeplas were "more abundant than ever noticed before in all areas where mesquite occurs around Phoenix; there is a large crop of mistletoe berries as a result of last year's rains" (JW). From all indications, Loggerhead Shrikes are doing well in the Southwest. The only N. Shrike reported was one at Tuba City, Coconino Co., Ariz., Jan. 6 (RW1).

S.A.

STARLINGS — It is unfortunate that movements of undesirable birds often go unnoticed or at least unstudied. Starlings first appeared in Arizona (presumably from the east) in the late 1940's, and the first nest was not found until the spring of 1954 near Phoenix (*Birds of Arizona, 1964*). The species has apparently not increased as rapidly as may have been expected, for none were seen in Nogales, Ariz. until 1959, and even in the late 1960's they were still an uncommon sight in n. Sonora, s. to Santa Ana (*Finding the Birds in Western Mexico, 1969*). They may be extending their range southward more rapidly now, for recently the following records surfaced: I saw over 250 (a wintering or migrant flock?) on roadside wires at Empalme, just s. of Guaymas, Son., Nov. 12, 1973, but more importantly, on April 6, 1974, Donald Lamm and Steven Speich observed several pairs investigating woodpecker holes in short tree forest w. of Alamos, Son., some 400 miles south of Nogales. These represent the southernmost records for w. Mexico known to me. Starlings have been moving south over the Mexican plateau for some years, but their increase along the coasts has been slow. If they become established breeding birds in Sonora, they may continue their southward expansion into the agricultural country of n. Sinaloa. Hopefully, future travelers to western Mexico will report their records of this potentially harmful species.

Starling numbers were up at Pipe Spring Mon. in n. Arizona (RW1) but down at Farmington, N. Mex. this winter, and in n.c. New Mexico McKnight reports that "the species is moving into the mountains in tremendous numbers" and mentioned sightings of a flock of 2000 in piñon-juniper woodland near Sandia Knolls at the end of January.

WARBLERS — A Black-and-white Warbler in Phoenix, Dec. 15 (RN) was the only reported. Also in Phoenix, a well-described Yellow Warbler Dec. 15 (SD *et al.*) represents the third Ariz. winter record; another was seen (no details) at Green Valley s. of Tucson Jan. 14 (Anne Brison, *fide* GMo). Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers were at Cedar Crest Dec. 13 - 16 (BMck) and Phoenix Mar. 17 (ST). For the first time several

Townsend's Warblers spent the entire winter in Phoenix, and one was seen high in the Chiricahua Mts. Jan. 10 (*vide* SSp). An Ovenbird in Phoenix Dec. 15 (KK) is the second winter record for the state, and N. Waterthrushes were seen in the same city Dec. 8 & 15 (RB,RN) and along Sonoita Creek at Patagonia Feb. 3 (Robt. Buttery). Several Wilson's Warblers wintered in the Phoenix area, and one was seen on the Tucson Valley CBC Dec. 30. Belatedly, here are the details of a **Rufous-capped Warbler** (*Basileuterus rufifrons*) observation made in the Chisos Mt. Basin of Big Bend Nat'l Park, Tex. Sept. 9, 1973 by David Wolf of San Antonio. A very detailed description was submitted and notes on call (a "metallic chip-note") and behavior ("cocked its tail") were included. The bird was found in narrow Campground Canyon below Pulliam Ridge and was observed for some ten minutes as it foraged with Black-crested Titmice in oaks and a Mexican Buckeye thicket. This is only the second sight record for the A.O.U. Check-list area, the first was found at Falcon Dam earlier in the year. The species is resident in both the Sierra Madre Oriental (from Nuevo Leon south) and Occidental (s.e. Sonora and w. Chihuahua south).

BLACKBIRDS THROUGH TANAGERS — Fifteen Great-tailed Grackles were observed at Kirtland, N. Mex., Jan. 2 (CS), and two were at Albuquerque by Mar. 28 (PB). Quite unusual was an ad. ♂ Orchard Oriole in s.w. Phoenix Jan. 11 (RW *et al.*), the third Maricopa Co. record and first Arizona winter record. An imm. ♂ Scott's Oriole wintered at Silver City Jan. 7 Mar. 29 (M. O'Byrne, M&DZ). Female-plumaged N. (Bullock's) Orioles appeared in Phoenix Feb. 17 (ST) and Albuquerque Mar. 3 & 4. (DDe). A ♀ Hepatic Tanager at Imperial Dam Park Dec. 19 may be the first winter record for the Colorado River region.

FRINGILLIDS — A ♂ Rose-breasted Grosbeak was found dead in Tucson Jan. 4 (*vide* GMo). The second winter record of Blue Grosbeak in Maricopa Co. was one at Phoenix (TF) Dec. 15. Early was a ♂ Lazuli Bunting at Bosque Mar. 10 (WS). A Dickcissel was in Nogales Mar. 18 into April (J. Bache-Wiig). Few Evening Grosbeaks wandered to the lowlands this winter, and similarly Lawrence's Goldfinches were quite scarce. Twenty Brown-capped Rosy Finches were in the Pecos Wilderness Area near Santa Fe Feb. 17 (HK) and 75 were still present in the Jemez Mts., Sandoval Co., N. Mex., Dec. 30 (R. Swain). At least nine White-throated Sparrows and three Fox Sparrows wintered in the Phoenix area. Seven Harris' Sparrow reports were received, all were of immatures. Swamp Sparrows seen include 1 imm. in Phoenix Dec. 15 (KK) and Mar. 27 (SD, JW) and an imm. at Nonoava, Chihuahua Feb. 27 (TP).

CORRIGENDA — In *Am. Birds* 28:88 change Snowy Plover peak at Bitter L. to Aug. 1 (not Aug. 8), Mountain Plovers w. of Clayton Oct. 2 (not Oct. 11); *Am. Birds* 28:89 - Two Red-headed Woodpeckers at Los Lunas (not Albuq.), Blue Jay at Bitter L. Nov. 6 (not Nov. 16), and Prothonotary Warbler at Silver City Oct. 4 (not Oct. 14).

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