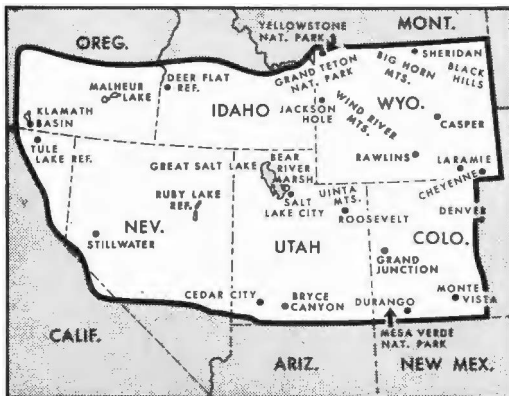


GREAT BASIN, CENTRAL ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION. — The winter of 1968-69 will go down in the weather annals as the Region's



toughest winter to date. Although snow does not remain for long in the intermountain basins and plains, the average snowpack in the mountains from the Sierra Nevada eastward to Denver in the Rockies was 200 percent of normal. In many places, including the Sierra Nevada, such a snowpack has never been recorded previously, and the winter might be compared with the one that trapped the Donner party in 1846-47. These conditions affected virtually the

entire Region except for Wyoming where there were only average snows in the mountains. However, it was not a *cold* winter.

A great flight of Bohemian Waxwings carried them farther southward and westward this winter than ever before, and it is noteworthy that much of this movement occurred before the weather worsened. During the winter many birds such as jays, chickadees and finches came down into the valleys and entered towns as never before.

Perhaps reflecting the winter's severity, the spring waterfowl migration in the Great Basin, which occurs during the winter season, was one of the latest on record. With heavy snows across the Region, the prospects for water in the arid Great Basin have never been better. Although the goose nesting will undoubtedly be flooded out, nesting of other waterfowl should be excellent during the coming season.

Grebe — A Pied-billed Grebe was found wintering on Silver Lake near Picabo, Blaine Co., Idaho on Jan. 27 (*DLC*).

Swans — Because of the late spring the concentration of Whistling Swans at Bear River Marshes on the Great Salt Lake never reached the large numbers recorded in past years; the swans moved on rapidly and the peak count was 9700 (*LFG*). Three Trumpeter Swans seen on the Sanke River near Rexberg, Madison Co., Idaho on March 18 (*RGo*) were out of the species' normal range.

Geese, Ducks — At Ruby Lake Nat'l Wildlife Refuge in eastern Nevada, the refuge's breeding flock of Canada Geese arrived early in February only to find everything covered with snow; a few died of starvation despite supplemental feeding with grain (*LLN*). Migrant Canada Geese peaked at 1000 between March 16 and 22 at Monte Vista Nat'l Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Colorado and were gone by the end of the month; at the end of the period 1100 Canada Geese of the locally resident population and some 29,000 ducks were present at this refuge (*CRB*). During the spring waterfowl migration at Malheur Nat'l Wildlife Refuge in eastern Oregon, fewer birds stopped at the refuge; a combination of deep snow on part of the area and poor waterfowl habitat on the refuge itself was believed responsible (*ELMcL*). Only 70,000 Snow Geese were recorded on the refuge at the peak of their migration in the third week of March, and the duck migration peaked at 85,500 in the last week of March, 100,000 short of last year's high count. However, with the increase in moisture — nearby Harney Lake grew from 3000 to 8000 acres of water during the period — future prospects at Malheur Refuge are excellent. At Deer Flat Nat'l Wildlife Refuge in western Idaho, the peak of the fall concentration of waterfowl occurred Dec. 8-14, with 412,600 ducks recorded, of which 378,000 were Mallards (*RVP*). This figure is lower than normal; last year 480,700 Mallards were present at the refuge on Dec. 29, 1967. The concentration of Mallards at Deer Flat Refuge dwindled during the rest of the winter, and only 10,000 were present at the end of March. At Stillwater Nat'l Wildlife Refuge in western Nevada, the spring duck migration peaked at 40,000 in mid-March,

47 percent below last year's peak (*LDN*). At Bear River Marshes, where the spring waterfowl migration usually begins in early February, the migration took place mainly in March. However, the peak of 223,000 waterfowl was the highest in years, and a count of 29,000 Canvasbacks was the highest number of this species reported there in a long time (*LFG*). The only rare duck reported during the season was a female Wood Duck, first seen on Dec. 27, which spent the winter on a pond at Springdale in southern Utah (*BAL*).

Hawks, Eagles — A count of 85 Red-tailed Hawks in the lower part of the Klamath Basin on Feb. 15 (*JHH*) was by far the largest concentration of this species reported in recent years. A concentration of 113 Bald Eagles near Lower Klamath Nat'l Wildlife Refuge on the California-Oregon border, Feb. 11 (*JHH*) was an unusually high count, and a total of 73 noted at Bear River Marshes, March 9-26 (*LFG*) was better than in recent years. The next largest concentration of Bald Eagles reported was of 30 in the Parowan Valley of southern Utah (*SM*). Perhaps the severe winter had something to do with these concentrations of hawks and eagles.

Grouse, Shorebirds — Near Carey, Blaine Co., Idaho, 40 Sage Grouse were apparently using the highway as a strutting ground because of the heavy snow cover (*DLC*); this seems particularly remarkable because they usually will perish rather than change their hereditary mating ground. Four Killdeer spent the winter in a slough near the upper Wind River of western Wyoming (*MB*); with open springs all over Wyoming in any weather, a few such birds manage to overwinter regularly.

Owls, Woodpeckers — A favorite spot to see the Pygmy Owl is in a cemetery, and this winter one was seen in the cemetery at Grand Junction, Colo. on Jan. 16 (*LFE*). Other Pygmy Owls were seen at Evergreen, Colo. in the mountains west of Denver (*WWB*), and many were noted at Durango in southwestern Colorado (*OR*). A Long-eared Owl was observed on Dec. 11 near Cedar City, Utah (*SM*) where the species is rare. A Red-headed Woodpecker also was observed near Cedar City on Feb. 17 (*SM*); this species is considered casual in Utah.

Jays, Bushtits, Nuthatches — A big invasion of Steller's Jays into the lowlands and cities, presumably because of snow cover in the highlands was reported. They were noted in several areas of the canyon bottoms at Zion Nat'l Park in southern Utah and in the surrounding country (*BAL*), at Salt Lake City (*GK*), and at Durango, Colo. where the species has not been observed in town in a dozen years (*OR*). Piñon Jays also moved down to much lower altitudes, presumably because of snow at higher elevations; they were reported at Zion Nat'l Park in Utah (*BAL*) and on the western slope of the Rockies in Colorado (*TC*). On March 10, Com. Bushtits were found at lower altitudes near Salt Lake City for the first time; a concentration of 2500 birds of this species observed near Cedar City, Utah on Jan. 23 (*SM*) was an unusually large number for the area. A flock of 14 Com. Bushtits was seen at Niagara Springs in central

Idaho, Feb. 3 and March 19 (*DLC*); this locality is near the northern limit of the species' range. The Red-breasted Nuthatch was noted as being very scarce in the central Rockies (*VR*), in Utah (*GK*), and in central Wyoming (*OKS*).

Waxwings, Pipits — Although the northern half of the Region regularly has Bohemian Waxwings in winter, this winter's flight brought birds to much of the western and southern portions of the Region for the first time. Great numbers were noted at Reno, Nev. (*JMD*), which is most unusual, and the movement reached as far west as Klamath Falls, Oreg. where birds were noted on March 10 (*RGr*). Flocks of up to 2500, an unprecedented number, were reported from the mountains west of Denver (*VR*); 2000 were noted at Hotchkiss, Colo. on the western slope of the Rockies (*TC*); and large numbers were observed at Durango in southwestern Colorado (*OR*). A Sprague's Pipit seen near Durango on Feb. 28 (*HW*) was far west of this species' normal range along the western side of the Great Plains.

Warblers — A wintering *Orange-crowned Warbler* observed on Feb. 3 at Niagara Springs in central Idaho (*DLC*) constituted the first winter record for the state. Two Audubon's Warblers wintered at feeders in Salt Lake City (*GK*).

Grosbeaks, Finches, Buntings — Pine Grosbeaks were much more numerous than usual in the Rockies west of Denver (*HK*). On Dec. 15, *Purple Finches* were observed at Banner on the eastern edge of the Big Horn Mountains in northern Wyoming, in company with Cassin's Finches and Com. Redpolls (*TK*); the Purple Finch is rare in the Rockies. Cassin's Finches came down into the valleys in western Nevada but were almost absent from the Rockies west of Denver where they usually are very common. Hundreds of Lapland Longspurs were seen at the Honey Lake Waterfowl Management Area, Lassen Co., Calif., Feb. 21-22 (*MP, et al.*). This is a little-known section of the Region, and these birds may be more common there than has been appreciated. Snow Buntings were frequently reported this winter, with flocks seen regularly near Craters of the Moon Nat'l Monument in central Idaho (*DLC*); 39 seen east of St. Anthony in eastern Idaho on Feb. 15 (*RGo*); 3 seen at Lake De Smet in northern Wyoming on Dec. 1 and the species noted there many times in February (*TK*); and 1 seen on Pike's Peak in Colorado on Dec. 31 (*A.O.S.*). It was a tough winter.

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