

Colorado & Wyoming



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Although bitterly cold the first week of December, the rest of the season was marked by above-average temperatures. One correspondent from Wyoming even commented on the “lack of winter” this year, as the state remained nearly 4–5° F above its 110-year average. Precipitation in both states was near normal throughout the period, with the exception of a wet January in Colorado, continuing our hiatus from the multi-year drought fresh in everyone’s memories. Pleasant surprises on regional Christmas Bird Counts included Gyrfalcon, American Woodcock, Anna’s and Costa’s Hummingbirds, and Sedge Wren; the Pueblo Reservoir count set a new Colorado record with 129 species. The highlight of our winter gull scene was a cooperative Iceland Gull that lingered in the Denver area for at least a week. The occupation force of Bohemian Waxwings remained strong, and unusual sparrows (e.g. Green-tailed Towhee, Chipping, Lincoln’s, Swamp, Sage, and Golden-crowned Sparrows) rewarded diligent searchers. Rosy-finches made good showings at several locations, despite the loss of one of the most reliable feeders for these high-elevation specialists, while Pine Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, and Evening Grosbeaks made their way down to lower elevations in unex-

pected numbers. Especially unusual were the record numbers of Purple Finches that found their way into our Region.

Abbreviations: Cañon (Cañon City, *Fremont*); Chatfield (Chatfield S.P., *Jefferson/Douglas*); C.V.C.G. (Crow Valley Campground, Pawnee National Grasslands, *Weld*); E.K.W. (Edness Kimball Wilkins S.P., *Natrona, WY*); J.M.R. (John Martin Res., *Bent*); Union (Union Res./Calkin’s L., *Weld*); Valmont (Valmont Res. complex, *Boulder*). “West Slope” denotes locations west of the Rockies. Due to reporting biases, all locations can be assumed to be in Colorado except that each Wyoming location is noted as such the *first time* it appears in the text.

LOONS THROUGH DUCKS

The juv. Red-throated and Pacific Loons present at Pueblo Res., *Pueblo* from the fall continued throughout the winter season (BKP, m.ob.), though the Red-throated was something of a will-o’-the-wisp. As many as 9 Common Loons also wintered at Pueblo Res. (m.ob.). Two Red-necked Grebes put in one-day appearances in Colorado this winter, one at Lathrop S.P., *Huerfano* 8 Dec (R. Miller) and the other at Pueblo Res. 15 Jan (BKP, K. Lewantowicz et al.). Though Western Grebes typically winter at Pueblo Res., one on the w. side of Colorado at Fruitgrowers Res., *Delta* throughout the season (D. Galinat, m.ob.) was not typical. Quite rare in Wyoming were 7 American White Pelicans that wintered in *Natrona* (*vide* DF). The species also lingered into mid-Dec at three Arkansas River valley locations on the Colorado plains. Double-crested Cormorants wintered at the typical Valmont location (m.ob.) and at Pueblo Res., with up to 4 at the latter site (BKP, m.ob.).

American Bitterns are almost unheard of in winter in the Region, so individuals in e. Colorado in *Boulder* 6 Dec (D. Williams) and *Bent* 29 Jan (DN) are noteworthy, but the 2 in a marsh in *Delta* 18–22 Dec provided the first West Slope winter record. The Green Heron found by Nelson below John Martin 12 Dec was quite late. Black-crowned Night-Herons were found this winter at six Front Range sites and at one site in *Mesa*; this is a typical winter pattern in Colorado. The ad. Turkey Vulture at Ft. Carson Army Base, *El Paso* 3 Jan (RB) provided the first Regional winter record; the 2nd was provided by a juv. at John Martin 13–15 Jan (DN). We also received two undocumented Feb reports from Colorado.

After a good fall for Greater White-front-



In four-year gulls, third-year ("third-cycle") plumages are the rarest, so, though the species is not a rarity in Colorado, this Thayer's Gull provided a rare opportunity to document this uncommonly seen plumage. Photograph by Tony Leukering.

ed Geese, the numbers wintering in Colorado this year were higher than usual, with the highest count of individuals known to have wintered being the returning flock at Cañon numbering 13 (m.ob.). The 26 and 14 at Jumbo Res., Logan/Sedgwick and Haxtun, Phillips, respectively, on 25 Feb were probably early spring migrants (JK, R. Olson, GW). Counts of wintering *Chen* in the Arkansas River valley seemed lower than usual, though spring migrants were noted early, with 5000 passing northward over Yuma 5 Feb (G. Goodrich) and 1900 Snow Geese and 100 Ross's Geese at Haxtun 20 Feb (TL). The large fall flight of (and observers' intense attention to) Cackling Geese this fall carried over into winter, as the species was found widely on Christmas Bird Counts in Colorado, with many birds staying throughout the winter. The goose highlight of the winter was a first-winter Black Brant found at Inverness on the Arapahoe/Douglas line 18 Feb; it stayed into



Delighting Denver-area larophiles, this second-winter Iceland Gull found by Glenn Walbek on 11 (here 12) February 2005 at Cherry Creek Reservoir lingered for about a week, providing Colorado's fourth record. Photograph by Bill Schmoker.

the the spring period (B. Torbert, m.ob.) and provided possibly the southernmost record in the Region. What were probably 4 of the previous winter's 5 Trumpeter Swans returning for their 2nd winter at Loveland, Larimer were present until at least 18 Feb (m.ob.). Other Colorado winter reports came from Arapahoe, Boulder, and Jefferson. Among six Regional reports of Tundra Swans were a wintering ad. in Natrona (fide DF), one at Bull L., Fremont, WY

25 Jan (SP), 2 ads. and a juv. near Pawnee 12-13 Dec (E. Albright), and returning birds (2 ads., 1 juv.) at the CF&I Lakes s. of Pueblo, Pueblo 1 Jan-19 Feb (P. Sandstrom-Smith, m.ob.); perhaps the latter two records refer to the same family.

A male Wood Duck at Totten Res., Montezuma 20 Jan (Jbt, S. Allerton) was locally unseasonable. A male Eurasian Wigeon posed for birders and photographers at Pueblo 19 Feb+ (BKP, m.ob.). Almost missing their typical Feb arrival schedule, the spring's first Cinnamon Teal were found in Fremont 26 Feb (MP et al.). Odd for a mountain location, one to 2 Greater Scaup wintered at Sands L., Salida, Chaffee after being

found 2 Dec (TL et al.); an additional 22 Colorado sites hosted the species at some point during the season, all but one on the e. side. Two imm. White-winged Scoters loafed at Sands L. 2-6 Dec (TL, R. Levad, S. York). A female Black Scoter at Valco Ponds, Pueblo 2 Dec (Jbt, P. Derven) provided the only seasonal record. Rare on the West Slope was a female Long-tailed Duck at the Clifton sewage ponds, Mesa 1 Jan-21 Feb (FL, m.ob.); another was at Gray Reef Res., Natrona, WY 25 Jan (B. Rickman). Six female-type Ruddy

Ducks at Totten Res. 20 Jan (Jbt) were either quite late, quite early, or wintering. Ruddy Ducks that definitely wintered were a male at Cherry Creek Res., Arapahoe (GW, m.ob.) and up to 4 at Big Johnson (MP).

HAWKS THROUGH GULLS

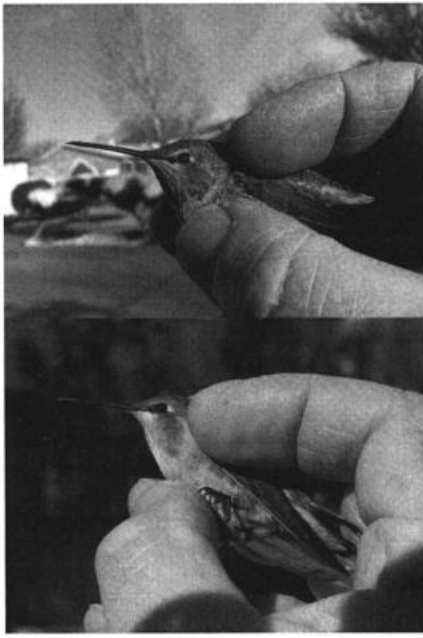
Northern Goshawks on the plains, where rare, were ads. in Pueblo 18 Dec-10 Jan (CLW, MP) and Bent (MP, LE) 31 Dec and juvs. in Phillips 12-20 Feb (MP, ph. TL et al.) and Adams 22 Feb (DE). A bird described as a white-morph Gyrfalcon sw. of Casper, Natrona, WY 9-19 Dec (CM) was of uncertain origin; that morph is quite rare in the continent's interior. A juv. gray-morph Gyrfalcon was found on the Pueblo Res. C.B.C. 18 Dec and seen by three parties (P. Hurtado, CLW et al.). Michelson reported another Gyrfalcon, an unaged gray bird, at Alcova Res., Natrona, WY 10 Feb, and a juv. gray was found in sw. Weld 30 Jan (B. & I. Prather); what may have been the same bird was on the



Great Black-backed Gulls made a record ten appearances this winter in Colorado, including this second-winter bird at Cherry Creek Reservoir 12 February 2005. Photograph by Glenn Walbek.

Adams/Denver line 28 Feb (DE).

In recent years, Sora has been found annually in winter in the Arkansas River valley on the Colorado plains. Three were detected in the Ft. Lyon, Bent marshes 15 Dec (BKP et al.), and one was at Lamar, Prowers 14 Jan (JT). Though Sandhill Cranes winter regularly on the West Slope in Delta, cranes elsewhere at this season are unexpected. Thus, 4 at John Martin 13 Jan (DN), 14 at Zink's Pond, La Plata 24 Jan (Jbt), and one in Boulder, Boulder 1 Feb (D. Pratt) were of interest. Two Spotted Sandpipers along the Arkansas River in Pueblo 2 Jan+ (GW, m.ob.) provided one of few Regional winter records. If correctly identified, a Western Sandpiper at Wilson, Teton, WY 17 Jan (R. Sievers) would be Regionally unprecedented for the season. The Least Sandpiper at Highline Res., Mesa 25 Feb (L. Arnold) was unique this season. A Dunlin wintered (28 Dec-10 Feb) near the



A dynamic duo of hummingbirds anytime in Colorado, these adult female Anna's (upper) and Costa's (lower) Hummingbirds enchanted viewers near Grand Junction from early December 2004 well into the winter season. Both were banded on 4 December (here).
Photographs by Deb and Steve Bouricius.

Spotted Sandpipers in Pueblo (DS, m.ob.). The shorebird prize of the winter was an American Woodcock in s. Adams 31 Dec–18 Jan (R. Lentz et al.).

Though the numbers of gulls this winter in Colorado were not spectacular, various rare species made spectacular to unprecedented showings, particularly Mew, Glaucous, and Great Black-backed. As many as 10 Mew Gulls were reported, all on the Front Range edge and the plains. The most observed was an obliging ad. at Crown Hill L., Jefferson, present 3 Feb+ (P. Plage, ph. BS, m.ob.). California Gulls seemed scarce in Colorado this winter, with the 2 ads. at Bonny Res., Yuma 20 Jan (TL) being the most noteworthy. An ad. darker-mantled Herring Gull at Valmont 21–29 Jan (TF, BS, TL) was quite interesting but could not be precisely identified. At least 17 Thayer's Gulls were found this winter (m.ob.), the vast majority along the foothill edge in e. Colorado, as is typical. Walbek found Colorado's 4th Iceland Gull, a second-cycle bird, at Cherry Creek 11 Feb. This year's bird was the longest staying, with many birders catching up with the species until at least 18 Feb. After this date, all reports of Iceland Gull from Cherry Creek probably pertained either to a leucistic ad. Ring-billed Gull with entirely white plumage or to the small first-winter Glaucous Gull also present. Ten years ago, who would have thought that the 20+ Lesser Black-backed Gulls found this winter in Colorado would be considered "average"? This was the best winter in recent memory

for Glaucous Gull in Colorado, with at least 15 reported. Included among these were up to 5 at Cherry Creek (m.ob.), with single ads. at Cherry Creek, Pueblo Res., and Bonny Res., and 2 ads. at L. Loveland, Larimer 13 Jan–18 Feb (R. Halpin, m.ob.). The 10 Great Black-backed Gulls reported, including a good number of imm. birds, made for the best-ever showing in Colorado. An ad. Black-legged Kittiwake at Chatfield, Douglas 1 Dec (JK) and a juv. at Cherry Creek 5 Dec (GW) were late-fall migrants.

DOVES THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Recent years have seen numerous reports of wintering Band-tailed Pigeons, and the 12 in Green Mountain Falls, El Paso throughout the period (RB) and the 40 in Trinidad, Las Animas 4 Feb (MP, BKP) continued this new tradition. Triple-digit winter counts of Eurasian Collared-Doves are now expected in many e. Colorado towns. White-winged Doves continue to consolidate their range expansion into Colorado by wintering, or attempting to, at numerous e. plains locations. High counts were of 66 at Pueblo 18 Dec (MP) and 21 at Rocky Ford, Otero 16 Dec (SO). Other reports of note included the northernmost reports: singles at Boulder 19 Dec (R. Linfield) and 6 Feb (L. Griffin, S. Riffe) and the easternmost report (and first Kit Carson record) at Burlington 20 Feb (ph. TL). Though Inca Doves have wintered previously at Rocky Ford and Lamar, and did so again this year, more noteworthy were the single at Florence 19 Dec (ph. MP) that provided a first Fremont record and the individual that wintered in Fowler, Otero (M. Favior).

Adams scored the lion's share of wintering

Barn Owls, with 7 and 6 on the Barr Lake (TL et al.) and Denver (Urban) C.B.C.s (fide HK), respectively. Winter records of Burrowing Owl in the Region are not particularly numerous, so the single bird in Baca 28 Dec (J. Jones) was of interest. An incredible 42 Long-eared Owls were counted on the Rocky Mountain Arsenal N.W.R., Adams on the Denver (Urban) C.B.C. (fide HK), making the record-high count of 15 on the Bonny Res. C.B.C. seen minor in comparison. Seven Short-eared Owls at five locations was a bit better than average for a Colorado winter. An ad. female Anna's Hummingbird first reported on 1 Dec and captured and banded on 4 Dec (D&SB) remained in Orchard Mesa, Mesa until 1 Mar and provided the first record of a successfully wintering hummingbird in Colorado. Interestingly, not far away in Clifton, Mesa, an ad. female Costa's Hummingbird reported first in early Dec and banded on 4 Dec (D&SB) was present until 19 Jan and provided only the 4th or 5th Colorado record.

The small colony of Acorn Woodpeckers in Durango, La Plata continues. In recent years, extensive efforts by some, particularly Moss and Peterson, in Fremont, Pueblo, and Huerfano have turned up numerous wintering Williamson's and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. This winter, Fremont hogged all the Williamson's with 4 at three sites (all found by SM). Yellow-bellieds were more widespread, with individuals noted in four counties, with Pueblo hosting 7 of the 11 reported. In a continuation of the fall phenomenon, a mountain-race Downy Woodpecker (leucurus) was photographed on the plains at Barr L., Adams 12 Feb (TL). An apparently pure Yellow-shafted Flicker



This male Pine Warbler provided welcome winter color at a feeder in Golden, Colorado 7 January–19 (here 12) February 2005. Photograph by Bill Schmoker.

was in The Redlands, Mesa 9 Jan (ph. TL, MP) for a rare West Slope record.

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH FINCHES

The Region's 2nd winter **Black Phoebe** was found at Cañon 24 Jan (SM)—the same location where the first winter record of this species was established in 1995. Say's Phoebe made a strong showing, with at least 9 in se. Colorado. The species is very rare in midwinter away from the West Slope and se. Colorado; this winter one was at Hygiene, Boulder 25 Jan (S. Roederer). Equally unseasonable was a **Loggerhead Shrike** at White Rocks, Boulder 24 Jan (TF). Seven Northern Shrikes on the John Martin C.B.C. 15 Dec was a rather high count for the southeast. Little mention was made of corvids this season, perhaps surprising after last fall's eclectic mix. Exceptions were single **Clark's Nutcrackers** in the Denver Metro area at Lakewood 4 Feb (M. Chavez) and **Broomfield** 18 Jan (LS), the latter likely establishing a first for that small sprawling suburban county. The only unexpected **West Slope Blue Jay** reported was a bird at Craig, Moffat 24 Dec (FL).

A **Sedge Wren** at Fort Lyon 2 Dec (DN) may have been the passerine of the season were it not for an even more unexpected **Sedge Wren** found on the Grand Junction C.B.C. 19 Dec (RL). This bird remained all winter and furnished not only a first for Mesa but a first for the West Slope and a first wintering record for the Region. A wintering **Carolina Wren** visited feeders at Clark, Routt through at least 21 Jan (S. Berry, T. Litteral, FL), when the homeowners retreated to sunny Florida; the only previous West Slope Record was from Grand Junction (May 2000). The Carolina Wren found last fall at Lamar remained all winter, while another briefly lingered at John Martin 7–13 Jan (DN). House Wrens are overreported in winter and rarely documented. An exception was one at John Martin 15 Dec (DN, BKP, MP, SO et al.). Current data suggest that e. **Winter Wrens** are much more expected in the Region during winter and migration than are w. **Winter Wrens**. Of the 10 reported this season, it is quite surprising that 2 were w. taxa: one along Boulder Creek 29 Dec–8 Jan (TF m.ob.) and the other at Two Buttes 31 Dec–21 Jan (CLW, ph. TL, m.ob.). Photographs of the latter may be the first taken in the state of an individual of this subspecies group.

The situation for **Hermit Thrush** subspecies groups is apparently the reverse of that for **Winter Wren**, with most records referring to w. taxa and only one record (a specimen) of the e. subspecies group (*C. g. faxoni*) of **Hermit Thrush**. Eight **Hermit Thrushes** this season continued the trend of increasing numbers in the winter, with one

of the e. subspecies group along Boulder Creek 29 Dec–12 Jan (TF; ph. CLW). Small numbers of **Eastern Bluebirds** are now expected on the w. side of Grand Junction, but the species is very rare elsewhere on the West Slope. Three **Eastern Bluebirds** in the nw. corner of Colorado at Craig 2–15 Jan (FL) established the first record for *Moffat*. At least 4 **Varied Thrushes** were found in the Region, including a female in Cheyenne, WY early Jan–2 Mar. One at **Broomfield** 3 Dec (E. Zorawowicz, ph. L. Kilpatrick) established a first for that county.

On the heels of a terrific fall, **Bohemian Waxwings** remained in most of the Region this winter. Reports stretched as far s. as Durango and Walsenberg. In all, over 10,000 were found in Colorado; the paucity of coverage in Wyoming makes it difficult to determine their abundance in that state. Several unusual warblers were recorded this winter, highlighted by the first winter record of **Black-throated Green Warbler** at Rock Canyon/Valco Ponds, Pueblo 11 Nov–18 Dec (BKP). Up to 2 male **Pine Warblers** were in Pueblo 11–18 Dec (L. Lilly), and another was in Golden, **Jefferson** 7 Jan–19 Feb (K. Schofield). Very rare in Dec, an **Ovenbird** was in Denver 1–14 Dec (B. Santangelo, DF). Somewhat tardy was a **Common Yellowthroat** eating suet at a Denver feeder 4–6 Dec (J. & M. A. Roller).

Continuing recent winter trends, several sparrows wintered in rather high numbers. Three **Green-tailed Towhees** were in Colorado, and one was at Jackson, WY 12 Jan (B. Raynes). Most winter **Chipping Sparrow** reports in the Region are erroneous, so the total of at least 7 this winter was quite high, with birds photographed at Lamar and Pueblo Res. Six **Lincoln's** and 27 **Swamp Sparrows** were found this winter in Colorado, totals on par with recent winters. Completely unexpected was a **Sage Sparrow** at Red Rocks Trading Post 7–8 Jan (BS, W. Finch). A returning **Golden-crowned Sparrow** wintered near Fruitgrower's Res. (D. Galinat).

We received notice of several high counts of **rosy-finches** this winter, including 280

Brown-capped Rosy-Finches wintering at Crystal Park, El Paso (B. Steger) and 250 **Black Rosy-Finches** wintering in Teller (MP). Rather depressing was the decision by the Arapaho N.F. to bar the ski patrol from filling bird feeders at the Loveland Basin Ski Area (located on the Arapaho N.F.). Many birders from throughout the world had enjoyed studying all three species of rosy-finches at this location, which had become the most accessible and reliable location along the Front Range to observe these species. The initiative to preserve natural conditions would be laudable, if not entirely hypocritical: Loveland Ski Area has nine lifts and over 70 runs with thousands of skiers visiting each winter. **Pine Grosbeaks** were noted in several locations in the piñon-juniper zone in sw. Colorado, including up to 11 at Ft. Lewis College 18 Dec–6 Jan. Other lowland **Pine Grosbeaks** were 3 s. of Lamar 1–2 Jan (DAL) and up to 5 near Ft. Collins 21–22 Dec (NK, B. Miller, K. Keirn). Three **Common Redpolls** were found, one at Jackson 22 Jan (J. Lucas), one at Allenspark, Boulder 31 Dec–1 Feb (RS), and one e. of Colorado City, Pueblo 25 Jan–5 Feb (B. B. Hahn).

Cited observers (subregional editors in boldface): **Jim Beatty** (sw. Colorado), Susan Berry, Deb & Steve Bourcius (D&SB), Richard Bunn, Coen Dexter (w.-cen. Colorado), David Ely, Doug Faulkner, Ted Floyd, Hugh Kingery, Nick Komar, **Jim & Gloria Lawrence** (J&GL) (statewide RBA, Wyoming), David A. Leatherman, Tony Leukering, **Forrest Luke** (nw. Colorado), **Terry McEneaney** (Yellowstone), **Chris Michelson** (Casper, WY), SeEtta Moss, Duane Nelson, Stan Oswald, **Susan Patla** (Jackson, WY), **Brandon K. Percival** (se. Colorado), **Mark Peterson** (cen. Colorado), **Bert Raynes** (Jackson, WY), Scott Roederer, Bill Schmoker; **Larry Semo** (ne. Colorado), **Janeal Thompson**, **Glenn Walbek** (n.-cen. Colorado), Christopher L. Wood. Many other individual observers contributed information to this report but could not be personally acknowledged here; they all have our thanks and appreciation. 🐦

SA An unprecedented invasion of **Purple Finches** was detected in Colorado, with at least 18 individuals reported. Most birds were reported along the Arkansas River Valley, particularly from Lamar and Las Animas. Even Wyoming had one, on the Crowhart C.B.C. 1 Jan (A. Moscinski). However, the most interesting facet of the flight was the brown-plumaged individual apparently of the w. race *californicus* found at Lamar (in easternmost Colorado) 7 Dec (ph. TL, MP). There are no previous Regional records of this taxon. In fact, we know of no records of the subspecies e. of Utah. The bird frequented a feeder that up to 4 nominate **Purple Finches** (ph. JT) visited sporadically Nov–Jan. Photographs have been circulated to California experts, who concur with the identification.



This **Purple Finch** at Lamar, Colorado 7 December 2004 was one of a record-high 18 reported in the Colorado & Wyoming region in winter 2004–2005. Photograph by Tony Leukering.