

BY RICK WRIGHT, WITH THANKS TO JON DUNN
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Mid-November to mid-January

PHENOMENA: While most northern owls stayed home this winter, **Snowy Owls** staged a moderate invasion, with birds noted as far south as the mid-Atlantic states and, remarkably, Arkansas. The largest numbers were reported from the northwest, where owls wintering near the coast profited from another of the period's phenomena: late December storms pushed many thousands of **Red Phalaropes** onshore, some even a short distance inland, from California to British Columbia, where in subsequent days a number ended up in owl pellets.

Southeast

A **Clark's Grebe** was in coastal Virginia December 31. Rare at any season, two American Golden-Plovers were in Florida's Viera wetlands in late November, and one found at St. Marks NWR December 1 persisted into the new year, as did a Purple Sandpiper discovered in Volusia Co. mid-November. "Western" hummingbirds included a **Broad-tailed Hummingbird** in Hamilton, Tennessee, in early December, the state's second if accepted; Georgia's fourth record of the species was a bird banded in late November. A male **Costa's Hummingbird** banded New Year's Day will be Alabama's first, pending acceptance, and the first east of the Great Plains. An **Allen's Hummingbird**, confirmed in the hand, remained at a Cape Charles, Virginia, feeder into December. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird made it to the first day of winter in Maryland; in Florida, Buff-bellied Hummingbirds were reported from Tallahassee and Panama City. A long-staying **Broad-billed Hummingbird** was in Arkansas for a potential state first. Two **Vaux's Swifts** were reported from Alachua Co., Florida, into early January. Ivory-billed Woodpecker vocalizations were reported in Arkansas January 4.

Wintering tyrannids furnished some surprises. A **Hammond's Flycatcher** in Maryland in late November was that state's second and one of only a handful of records ever in the east. A Brown-crested Flycatcher was reported in Dade Co. in late December, followed a week later by an Ash-throated Flycatcher in Orange Co., Florida; another Ash-throated was at Alabama's Eufala NWR in December. A **Fork-tailed Flycatcher** was admired in December and January at an Orange Co., Florida, roost also including at least one Cassin's Kingbird; a Cassin's was also in Hillsborough Co. A vocal **Tropical Kingbird** was in Apalachicola in January, while another spent much of December at Lake

Phelps, North Carolina. Cave Swallows lingered into December in Virginia and the Carolinas.

A Brown-headed Nuthatch in Fairfax Co. December 31 was said to be a first for northern Virginia. A **Townsend's Warbler** January 2 in Frederick Co., Maryland, will be a state first if accepted, as was a **MacGillivray's Warbler** banded at Kiptopeke, Virginia, in November. Black-throated Gray Warblers were reported from Florida, and a late Blackburnian Warbler graced a Georgia CBC end of December. Georgia hosted two apparently different Bullock's Orioles in December, one at Smyrna and one in Bulloch Co. A male Black-headed Grosbeak continued at a Florida feeder into late November.

A Le Conte's Sparrow was near Williamsburg, Virginia, New Year's Day. A **Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow** identified near Bon Secour Bay on a CBC will be Alabama's first, if accepted. Tennessee birders enjoyed two potential firsts: a **Black-throated Sparrow** discovered in late December and a **Golden-crowned Sparrow** a month later, both photographed.

Northeast

An unprecedented flight of white geese to Newfoundland mid-December included the province's first **Ross's Goose**. A Black Brant at South Amboy, New Jersey, in November fit a recent pattern of 1-2 winterers. A Tufted Duck was in Nova Scotia mid-December. A *borealis* Common Eider was identified at Freeport, Maine, January 4; more than 100 eiders were in New Jersey in early January.

Nantucket's CBC discovered a **Black Rail**, while Cape May counters found a Yellow Rail. A Purple Gallinule rescued from a Newfoundland highway in December was photographed and released; the same island hosted a **Northern Lapwing** in late November. Up to 6 American Avocets were in south-coastal Maine in November. A Black Guillemot was at Barnegat Light, New Jersey, into January. Record numbers of Black-headed Gulls arrived in Newfoundland mid-November, bringing with them three Common (Mew) Gulls; the Yellow-legged Gull at Quidi Vidi Lake, Newfoundland, remained into January. An **Ivory Gull** was near Point Pelee mid-January. A Franklin's Gull was on Cape Cod in early December; a December Black Skimmer in Northampton Co., Pennsylvania, was out of season and out of range. A long-staying Gyrfalcon was still on Long Island in January.

Western visitors included American White Pelicans, with as many as 7 in New Jersey in December. Single Western Grebes were in Massachusetts in November and in New Jersey through December. A **Prairie Falcon** in

Reports in this column are tentative, gathered from hotline transcriptions furnished by the National Birding Hotline Cooperative and from reports by volunteer contributors. All birders are urged to submit documentation of significant sightings to the appropriate state or provincial records committee. For full analysis of important bird records, subscribe to *North American Birds*, the richly illustrated journal of ornithological record published by the ABA (americanbirding.org/pubs/nab).

Cumberland Co., Pennsylvania, in December was not obviously an escape. A **Black-chinned Hummingbird** visited a New Jersey feeder in November.

Following Hurricane Wilma, large numbers of Chimney Swifts were reported from New England and the Maritimes in November, with numerous birds in western Europe and the Azores as well.

Bohemian Waxwings were on Nantucket in November and on the Montauk, Long Island, CBC. Two Townsend's Solitaires on Cape Cod and a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Swampscott, Massachusetts, continued into December. Nova Scotia birders found a Townsend's Solitaire in late November, and a **Bell's Vireo** was beautifully photographed there in early December, after a "Western" Warbling Vireo mid-November. Varied Thrushes appeared from Massachusetts to Maine, and a Rhode Island CBC discovered a potential state-first **Redwing** December 26.

Nearly a dozen Townsend's Warblers were found in Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Massachusetts. A Northern Parula was at a New York feeder in late November, while three Ovenbirds tarried in central Philadelphia. Cape May Warblers lingered north to Nova Scotia and Vermont through December, while a "Yellow" Palm Warbler at Niagara Falls, Ontario, in December was unusual. Yellow-throated Warblers visited feeders in Massachusetts and Connecticut in November and January, respectively. A very late Scarlet Tanager was on Cape Cod in late December; a Bullock's Oriole (or hybrid?) near Bethlehem in January was said to be Pennsylvania's third, pending acceptance. Blue Grosbeaks were in Pennsylvania and Maine in late December.

A Spotted Towhee photographed in Connecticut in January will be a state first if accepted. Nova Scotia feeders fattened a "Gambel's" White-crowned Sparrow in December and a **Golden-crowned Sparrow** January 1; another Golden-crowned was in New Jersey in January. Pennsylvania birders found two Harris's Sparrows in late November. A November flock of ten Lapland Longspurs was one of Delaware's highest counts ever.

Midwest

Easily the most unexpected bird of the season anywhere was a light-morph **Short-tailed Hawk** photographed both perched and in flight November 21 at Michigan's Whitefish Point—bold type doesn't come close to doing this bird justice. Casual in Iowa, a Ferruginous Hawk passed the Hitchcock Hawkwatch in late November, and North Dakota's first winter Red-shouldered Hawk was on the Upper Souris CBC.

A Barrow's Goldeneye in western Iowa in late November would be an 11th record; a Clark's Grebe was nearby November 26, while a Brown Pelican was still on Red Rock Reservoir November 20. A December Big Day in Iowa produced a California Gull; a Mew Gull was photographed in January in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A **Northern Gannet** in Wayne Co., Michigan, in December was injured, but a late Whooping Crane near Pierre, South Dakota, seemed healthy.

Snowy Owls were widely reported in November and December. January single-day counts in Minnesota included up to 6 Great Gray and 12 Northern Hawk Owls. A Burrowing Owl was in Illinois in early December.

An **Anna's Hummingbird** discovered in mid-November in Butler Co., Ohio, will be that state's

first if accepted. A Say's Phoebe was in Mason County, Illinois, in December, while a **Black Phoebe** returned to McCurtain Co., Oklahoma, for a second winter. More than 50 **Cave Swallows** were still in Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin at Thanksgiving. Arkansas's Lake Millwood hosted a Rock Wren in December. A Townsend's Solitaire was reported from Devil's Lake, Wisconsin, in November.

Rare in winter, a Henslow's Sparrow was in Oklahoma in late December. Spotted Towhees were found in Illinois and Michigan in November and December. The Cass Co., Michigan, Eurasian Tree-Sparrow remained through December; another pioneer in Washington Co., Iowa, was at a new location 50 miles from the Mississippi River.



Henslow's Sparrow. Photo © David Arbour.

Southwest

Essentially extirpated as a breeder, **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** staged a notable invasion into southern Arizona, with as many as 21 birds at a single site in December. Six unmarked Trumpeter Swans appeared near Patagonia, Arizona, in mid-January. A “Black” Brant was in Fort Collins, Colorado, in late December.

New Mexico birders found two **Yellow-billed Loons** in December; one near Carlsbad was particularly far south for the species inland, as were two Glaucous Gulls in the area. A Red-necked Grebe was found Christmas Day in Sandoval Co., and another a week later at Elephant Butte.

A Roseate Spoonbill at the Salton Sea mid-November was Riverside Co., California’s, first in 30 years. Mesa, Arizona’s, Gilbert Water Ranch produced a Groove-billed Ani, a Streak-backed Oriole, and an often elusive **Prairie Warbler** during the period. A Broad-billed Hummingbird in Yuma, Arizona, in December was a second record locally. A **Green Kingfisher** on the Pecos River in late fall will be a first for New Mexico, if accepted. Arizona’s Patagonia Lake hosted a male **Rose-throated Becard**, especially rare in winter; also there were a Worm-eating Warbler, Black-capped Gnatcatchers, and two Elegant Trogons, with up to 4 other trogons wintering in the vicinity. Black-capped Gnatcatchers were also reported from Madera and Montosa Canyons in January. Arizona tallied some 70 Ruddy Ground-Doves in November and December.

A Black Phoebe in Pueblo in December was said to be Colorado’s third winter record. A **Wood Thrush** was discovered in early December in Arizona’s Chiricahuas, and Rufous-backed Robins appeared in Miller Canyon and Superior, Arizona, and at the south end of the Salton Sea.

A Northern Parula was in snowy Boulder, Colorado, December 3, and a Northern Waterthrush was found December 21 on the Fort Collins CBC. A Pine Warbler spent the second half of December in Larimer Co., Colorado; another was in Albuquerque in January. Tucson’s Sabino Canyon harbored a Tennessee Warbler in late December, while an extraordinarily late Lucy’s Warbler at Whitewater Draw, Arizona, was likely attempting to winter. Two Black-throated Blue Warblers were in the Tucson area in mid-November, and a Magnolia Warbler mid-December. A **Rufous-capped Warbler** was seen repeatedly in Sycamore Canyon, west of Nogales, Arizona, from late November into January.

A male Orchard Oriole returned for its third winter in Tucson. A female Eastern Towhee was photographed at

Colorado’s Bonny Reservoir December 23. New Mexico birders found a Le Conte’s Sparrow in San Miguel Co. in late November. All four longspur species, including a stunning male **Smith’s Longspur**, were observed in Calipatria, California, into mid-January.

Texas

A banded Greater Flamingo was still present in the Coastal Bend region in January, while a **Snow Bunting** lingered happily on South Padre Island from December 24 to January 3. Fort Worth birders ended the year with an adult Mew Gull. A Least Grebe in El Paso was far out of range.

A **Williamson’s Sapsucker** strayed to central Texas in December. Casual in winter, a Great Crested Flycatcher was found December 31 on the upper Texas coast, while a Dusky-capped Flycatcher returned for a second winter at Los Indios. A **Social Flycatcher** was reported January 3 from Bentsen; there is only one fully documented record of this species for the ABA area. A Tropical Parula was wintering far north in San Antonio; Sabal Palm harbored a probably returning Gray-crowned Yellowthroat in early January.

West Coast

Fulvous Whistling-Ducks were reported from Los Angeles Co. and from Goleta, California, in December. The returning Coburg, Oregon, Falcated Duck lingered into December. Recent population increases have been reflected in scattered Alaska records of **Baikal Teal**, but a male discovered December 10 at Lompoc, California, was only the second “chasable” individual ever on the West Coast; it returned January 9 after a two-week absence. A female **King Eider** at Alsea Bay, Oregon, was seen through mid-December; a young male was in Vancouver, British Columbia, early in the month.

A Clark’s Grebe spent the first week of December at Esquimalt, British Columbia. An early-December trip to California’s Cordell Bank found a Short-tailed Albatross. A Laysan Albatross returned to the shores of Mendocino Co. November 29; this is probably the easiest-seen individual of the species within sight of land in North America. Santa Clara Co. hosted a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in December; a Baird’s Sandpiper was out of season in Santa Maria. The Coos Bay, Oregon, CBC reported a **Curlew Sandpiper** December 18. A Lesser Black-backed Gull was at Doheny State Beach, California, in mid-December, while reports of Slaty-backed Gull came from Half Moon Bay. A **Chuck-**

will's Widow was brought to a rehabilitator in Del Norte Co. December 2.

At least 10 Dusky-capped Flycatchers were reported from Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz Cos. in California, while two Thick-billed Kingbirds were found in late November. A Bell's Vireo in San Francisco in November was described as bright, suggesting the nominate, eastern race. At least four Painted Redstarts were in Los Angeles through late December. A Blackburnian Warbler visited a Portland, Oregon, feeder December 28.

A Rusty Blackbird continued in San Mateo Co., California, in early December, while a **Common Grackle** attended stables in southern San Diego Co. Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows were found in January at the Tijuana Estuary and in San Mateo Co.

Northwest

A Bewick's (Tundra) Swan was in western Oregon in mid-December. Alberta's first **King Eider** in more than a century

was found dead December 26 after its week-long stay. Lesser Black-backed Gulls were in Vernon and Kelowna, British Columbia, in November and December. A **Western Gull** was far inland November 20 in Grant Co., Washington, as was a Yellow-billed Loon on British Columbia's Lake Country CBC.

November found a Costa's Hummingbird in Rogue, Oregon, and an Anna's Hummingbird in Calgary. Single-day Snowy Owl counts reached 21 in British Columbia, and a Barn Owl roost in southeast Washington contained 10 birds in late December.

Western Scrub-Jays were out of place in Wallowa Co., Oregon, and Nez Perce Co., Idaho, in early January. Late-staying warblers included an Ovenbird in Washington, a Black-throated Green Warbler in Oregon, and a Cape May Warbler in Calgary in December. A Western Meadowlark was at Ketchikan, Alaska, in November and December.

A free-roaming housecat captured an **American Woodcock** December 1 in Dillon, Montana; the bird was fed some worms and released—leaving birders to wonder which was more surprising: the woodcock, or the worms?

Epicenters of Imminent Extinction

Can They Become Centers of Hope?

American Bird Conservancy (ABC) is joining conservation groups around the world to help stave off an imminent extinction crisis.

Research conducted by scientists working with the 52 member organizations of the Alliance for Zero Extinction (www.zeroextinction.org) and published by the National Academy of Science (www.pnas.org) shows that safeguarding 595 carefully identified sites would save hundreds of imperiled species. The study lists nearly 800 species threatened with imminent extinction, each of which is in need of urgent conservation action at a single remaining site. Just one third of those sites are known to have legal protection, and most are surrounded by human population densities approximately three times the global average. Conserving these 595 sites should be an urgent priority for everyone from national governments to local communities.

The United States ranks among the ten countries with the most sites. Listed locations include Torrey

Pines in California, a cave in West Virginia, a pond in Mississippi, and six sites in Hawaii. The Whooping Crane and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker are two spectacular American birds that qualify for inclusion. Sites are also concentrated in the Andes, in Brazil's Atlantic Forests, throughout the Caribbean, and in Madagascar.

ABC led in identifying the sites in the Americas of greatest significance to birds, and is currently involved in conservation projects with partners at 19 of the region's 88 bird-triggered sites. For example, in just the past year ABC has helped partner-groups in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru purchase more than 20,000 acres to create five new private bird reserves and to expand five others. The species protected include the Blue-billed Curassow, Long-whiskered Owlet, Colorful Puffleg, Jocotoco Antpitta, and Pale-headed Brush-finch.

Maps, photos, and a searchable database of sites, along with web links to the 52 organizations making up the Alliance for Zero Extinction, can be found at www.zeroextinction.org.