

NOTEWORTHY BIRD SIGHTINGS IN WEST CENTRAL MANITOBA IN 2021

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A handful of noteworthy bird sightings occurred near The Pas, Manitoba in 2021. Gulls, a wren, thrushes, and waterfowl all made visits to an area where they are seldom seen.

On 12 May, the author found three California Gulls (*Larus californicus*) among the ring-billed gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) that frequent the dock area on the Saskatchewan River in The Pas. On 4 June, a lone California Gull was located at Sunset Beach in Clearwater Lake Provincial Park about 17 km north of The Pas. Though The Pas is at, or just north of the range indicated for California Gull in *The Birds of Manitoba*, and *Birds of The World*, 2021 is the first year that I have located this species in the area, with more than 15 years of fairly diligent searching.^{1,2} A search of eBird Canada only produced two recent nearby records for California Gull.³

On 20 June 2012, five were reported at Gyles Campground in Grass River Provincial Park, Manitoba, and two days later, 30 were reported at Denare Beach, Saskatchewan.³

On 22 May, the author photographed a Rock Wren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) in a former gravel extraction area 14 km south of The Pas, Manitoba. As this was an unfamiliar species, and the individual was in worn plumage, identification assistance was sought and received from the manitobabirds@groups.io listserv. In a 2003 publication, the Manitoba Avian Research Committee mentions about a dozen occurrences



A Rock Wren was observed and photographed on 22 May 2021 in a former gravel extraction area 14 km south of The Pas, Manitoba. Photo credit: David Raitt.

for this species in southern Manitoba, including some multi-individual, and some multi-day records.¹ This publication also noted six occurrences for Rock Wren in the Churchill area including nesting evidence in 1956 and 1988.¹ A search of eBird Canada for Rock Wrens reported in Manitoba since 2003 revealed several sightings that can likely be grouped into four occurrences, the furthest north of which occurred in the southern part of Riding Mountain National Park, about 350 km south of The Pas.³

On 17 October, in a gravel pit 19 km northwest of The Pas, the author noticed two unfamiliar birds land

in a white birch (*Betula papyrifera*). Digital photographs were recorded and revealed a Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*) and possibly a bluebird. Identification assistance was sought from the listserv manitobabirds@groups.io. Members of the group confirmed the second bird was a Mountain Bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*). A range map in a 2003 publication from the Manitoba Avian Research Committee indicates the Mountain Bluebird is a "rare migrant or visitor" in this area.¹ The same publication shows the Townsend's Solitaire as a "rare migrant of visitor" in Manitoba south of Riding



A Townsend's Solitaire was observed and photographed on 17 October 2021 in a gravel pit 19 km northwest of The Pas. Photo credit: David Raitt.

Mountain National Park, but also notes two Townsend's Solitaires at The Pas in 1994 from 11 to 17 December.¹

On 30 October, the author observed a large number of Hooded Mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) on Grace Lake just east of The Pas. The birds were primarily in two large groups with some smaller groups also visible. Diving birds complicated the counting process, but after several scans with a spotting scope, a minimum count of 280 Hooded Mergansers was confidently achieved. Later in the day, the significance of this number of Hooded Mergansers

together became apparent with searches of reference material. *The Birds of Manitoba* states "flocks rarely exceed 20 birds at any season", and notes two concentrations in Manitoba of 65 birds, and a high count of 214 on 31 October 1998.¹ Regarding reports of large flocks, *Birds of the World* mentions 225 in Massachusetts in November 1964, and 730 in Minnesota in November 1993.⁴ Viewing the birds on 31 October was complicated by near-freezing temperatures, snow, and poor visibility, but still produced a minimum count of 214 Hooded Mergansers. On 1 November, viewing

conditions were greatly improved, but many of the birds had either left the lake or retreated from the viewable area. A video recorded that day (showing the bulk of the visible Hooded Mergansers) shows that at least 125-130 Hooded Mergansers were still in the area.

On 1 November, while at Grace Lake documenting the Hooded Merganser group detailed above, the author observed five Surf Scoters (*Melanitta perspicillata*). This adds to the five records of this species in west central Manitoba detailed in a previous article.⁵

Acknowledgements

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3. eBird (2022) eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: <http://www.ebird.org>. (accessed Feb 22, 2022).
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5. Raitt D (2021) Noteworthy bird sightings in west central Manitoba in 2020. *Blue Jay* 79.2:5. 🐦