

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY RECORDS OF SASKATCHEWAN BIRDS: 2023

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This is the third article intended to bring together important bird records for the province that update information in *Birds of Saskatchewan (BofSk)*.¹ It covers observations for the period ending 31 December 2023 and includes: one new species for the province, which continued from 2022 (Costa's Hummingbird); five accidentals (Slaty-backed Gull, Glaucous Gull putative subspecies *barrovianus*, Black-legged Kittiwake, Anna's Hummingbird, Hooded Warbler); one accidental upgraded to straggler (Little Gull); and one confirmed accidental, up from hypothetical (Pygmy Nuthatch). Also, first confirmed breeding records are described for three species (Barn Owl, Northern Pygmy-Owl, and Northern Parula warbler). Plus, some record spring and fall dates for 2023 are presented.

An effort has been made to include only records that can be verified as reliable: "confirmed species have photographs, videos, audio recordings, or specimen documentation; hypothetical species lack such documentation even if seen by more than one observer; accidental species have 10 or fewer records in the province; straggler species have 11 to 30 confirmed records. Once a species has been recorded 31 or more times it is considered a regular part of Saskatchewan's avifauna and is generally beyond the focus of this article, except for a few notable instances."^{2,3} The ability to verify discoveries is becoming increasingly important. This is even more evident with the availability of Cornell's app, *Merlin*, which has encouraged people to report birds they hear, but do not necessarily see. If the observer wishes to remain unknown (anonymous) or cannot be contacted to provide sufficient details, the record is not included in this article.

All historical numbers and records

mentioned for each species under Status and Remarks come from *BofSk*, unless otherwise stated. Terms describing seasons follow *BofSk*.

Note: Nature Saskatchewan (Regina) houses the complete list of rare birds for Saskatchewan, which provided the data base used in writing *BofSk*. It is inevitable that some important bird sightings were missed and not included in this article. Anyone with information about such sightings is encouraged to pass the details on to Nature Saskatchewan or submit the records to eBird for confirmation.

Bird names, common and scientific, follow the American Ornithological Society's *Check-list of North American Birds* and its 63rd and 64th supplements.^{4,5}

The Records 2017

Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*): on 18 July 2017, Ron Jensen photographed an active Chimney Swift nest containing two young chicks at a farm near Zenon Park. The nest was located inside a wooden ventilation shaft within a barn, which rose into a cupola extending above the roof peak, providing access for the swifts to enter and leave the chimney-like structure. The eyes of both chicks were still shut, and pin feathers were starting to erupt on their backs and wings. In addition, a nest with two eggs, which had fallen from the wooden wall surface to the floor of the cupola, was recovered by Jensen on 18 July and donated to the Royal Saskatchewan Museum (collection's accession number RSKM_BIRD_A-10484) (fide Ryan Fisher, Curator of Vertebrate Zoology, RSM, Regina). When this second nest was occupied is unknown: it was a failed attempt in either 2017 or a previous year. **Status:** only the third confirmed nesting location in the province and the first site found occupied for more than one year. Chimney Swifts are a solitary breeder with only one pair occupying a nesting site.⁶

Remarks: this was the same location where Chimney Swifts were observed during the 2014 breeding season.¹ The 2017 photos suggested the young swifts were probably close to 7-8 days of age on 18 July; swift chicks open their eyes around 14 days of age.⁷

With this information as a starting point, we can extrapolate forward and back to estimate key dates in the breeding cycle for the swift nest near Zenon Park in 2017. Data collected on breeding swifts at St. Adolphe, Manitoba in 2014 to 2022 by Stewart and Stewart⁸ provide us with a valuable chronological template. Calculations for the Chimney Swifts nesting cycle in 2017: *egg laying* likely took place about 22-23 June (using an incubation period of 17 days); *hatching* occurred about 9-10 July (based on the estimated age of the two swift chicks in the nest); *fledging* happened around 6-7 August (about 28 days after hatching); and the swift's *final departure*, both adults and chicks, was expected around 18-19 August (using the median departure date). Chimney Swifts arrive in southern Manitoba in the last week of May and start nest building starts almost immediately. Fall departure seems less predictable, varying between years as weather and availability of food fluctuates.

Unfortunately, many older buildings with chimneys used as nest sites are being lost, and artificial nesting towers built to replace them have had limited success attracting swifts for roosting or nesting.^{6,9}

2018

Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*): in autumn 2018, remarkable concentrations of Whooping Cranes were reported staging near Marcelin. As their numbers were apparently peaking, Guy and Sandra Wapple, Dale Booth, and Philip Taylor observed 152 Whooping Cranes, including seven rusty plumaged juveniles, in one harvested field on 11 October 2018,

late in the afternoon (G Wapple, eBird S49132269; ML 609267043, 7057, 7068, 7070, 7072, 7079, 7085, 7092). The cranes were scattered loosely over a distance of about 600 m, along the lower edge of the field, on a gentle, undulating slope adjacent to an uncultivated low-lying area that contained a slough. Several small groups of Whooping Cranes were observed flying in and out of the field, and within 5 km of this field, so the total number of Whooping Cranes using the general area that afternoon could have quite easily exceeded 152. Also attracted to this field were hundreds of Mallards, Canada and Greater White-fronted geese, and in the surrounding vicinity several larger flocks of dark geese were noted. In the same area, Marten Stoffel saw approximately 161 Whooping Cranes on 6 October during a Saskatoon Nature Society field trip; Brian Johns observed 151 cranes on 17 October. **Status:** a spring and fall migrant through Saskatchewan. **Remarks:** Whooping Cranes are drawn to many wetland complexes in the agricultural regions of central Saskatchewan during migration. The fall staging period is protracted, extending from mid-August to late October, compared to their shorter, more urgent spring transit in April and May. To see even a few dozen Whoopers in a single day usually requires visiting several traditional stopover locations, one of these being the area around Blaine Lake. These cranes migrate through Saskatchewan to their breeding grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park, and winter on Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas where an annual count is done by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The 2018-19 winter count found 504 wild birds (491 adults, and 13 juveniles). The 2022-23 winter count found 536 (including at least 88 juveniles), down slightly from the previous year's count of 543 (including at least 31 juveniles). Annual fluctuation in numbers is expected as older birds die and survival of young birds varies depending on habitat conditions on the nesting grounds. Amazingly, the 152 birds seen in one field at Marcelin in October 2018 represented 30 per cent of the total wild population and 50 per cent of the

young produced that year! This species continues to recover from its low of perhaps only 16 wild birds in early 1941, but is still listed as Endangered under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*.¹

2019

Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*): two breeding records were reported in 2019. Annie McLeod and Joel Cherry found a pair on 1 June 2019 displaying breeding behaviour near a nesting site (eBird S56977468) in Duck Mountain Provincial Park; then on 22 June, A McLeod, J Cherry and Bob Luterbach observed the two adults bringing food into the cavity: "the 7th confirmed breeding locality for this species in Saskatchewan, and first confirmed breeding record since 1995" (eBird S57603714; ML165326891, 29151). On 11 August 2019, Don Weidl photographed two adults and two juveniles 6 km southwest of Broadview (eBird S58924335; ML172158541); on 3 September 2019, D Weidl again observed the birds at the same location, but this time noted three fledged young (eBird S59488585; ML175478571, 8601). **Status:** this woodpecker is rare, occurring unpredictably across southern Saskatchewan.

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*): on 22 August 2019 Eliann Guinan (nee Stoffel) discovered a desiccated Barn Owl carcass below a window of the vacant United Church in Drinkwater (fide Marten Stoffel 14 June, 5 July 2023). Some of the salvaged parts of the specimen are preserved in the Royal Saskatchewan Museum (RSM) collections: accession number RSKM_BIRD_A-10180. **Status:** this is the 21st report, and first documented breeding record for this species in the province. Barn Owls are rare stragglers to southern Saskatchewan, which is the northern limit of their range. *BofSk* lists 18 records of this owl with known dates of occurrence, plus one additional record with limited data. The 20th record was of one owl photographed on 7 December 2016 at the Briercrest College Campus, Caronport and later found dead by K and J Jaarsma (fide A.R. Smith), which just missed inclusion

in the *BofSk*. Great Horned Owls that frequent abandoned buildings are often mistakenly called "barn owls". This confusion may obscure true occurrences of Barn Owls in the province. **Remarks:** E Guinan, Archaeologist, Alt Heritage Service Corp., was conducting a survey of the Drinkwater Cemetery and photo documentation of the church (built in 1911), prior to its scheduled demolition. She found the owl carcass outside the unoccupied church building, below a window (see photos of the church posted on 12 Oct 2018 by Michael Truman <everybodyhastobesomewhere.blogspot.com>). The tall church steeple was thought to be the possible nesting site, so M Stoffel and Dan Zazelenchuk visited the site later that fall, but they could not fully access the steeple loft for a thorough search. However, they did conclude the area had been used by pigeons for an extended period of time. Karen Wiebe, Department of Biology, University of Saskatchewan, determined the owl carcass was a fledged, young Barn Owl. Ray Poulin, Head of Research and Collections, Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport, RSM (fide 16 June 2023) kindly provided photographs of this specimen in the RSM (Figure 1), which substantiates it being about 50 days of age: (a) all the owl's tail feathers (rectrices) were still growing, and only half erupted from their tubular keratin sheaths; (b) only three bold black cross bars were exposed on the tail feathers compared to the four or five expected to be visible when fully grown¹⁰; (c) the talon flange on the owl's claws had not developed, another characteristic of very young Barn Owls.¹¹ The rich colour of the upper sides of the wings and tail, heavily patterned grey with black flecking overlying the golden buff-orange, suggest the bird was most likely a female.¹⁰

Cramp et al state young Barn Owl's tail feather growth starts at 12-19 days of age and is completed by 70 days of age.¹² Juveniles fledge at 50-55 days of age. Then, after gaining independence from their parents in one to two months, they disperse from their natal nesting area, beginning on average around 94 (63-122) days of age. Distances these young owls

travel is typically short, usually under 30 km.^{13,14}

This young fledgling Barn Owl represents Saskatchewan's first confirmed breeding record, with the discovery site being the nest location. It had apparently died soon after leaving the nest, before being old enough to disperse. Unfortunately, we cannot estimate the nesting chronology of the Drinkwater Barn Owls.

Barn Owls are not hardy birds and it is difficult for this species to survive at these northern latitudes. This is the eighth specimen that has been found dead in the province. As unused barns and outbuildings in farm yards and quiet rural areas fall or are torn down, potential roosting and nesting sites used for shelter continue to be lost. Artificial nest structures have limited success attracting the Eastern Barn Owls.¹⁵

The Eastern Barn Owl population that occurs in Saskatchewan is listed as Endangered under Canada's *Species at Risk Act* in 2010.

2022

California Gull (*Larus californicus*): one adult in winter plumage was

photographed in Wascana Park, Regina on 12 and 14 December 2022 by Laurie Koepke (eBird S123865379, ML512510531; and eBird S123957355); the bird was recorded on the Regina Christmas Bird Count on 27 December. **Status:** the latest record for the province and the first within a CBC period.^{11,16} **Remarks:** California Gulls leave the province for their wintering grounds, primarily along the Pacific coast, earlier than Ring-billed Gulls and have not been recorded overwintering in Saskatchewan. Previous latest date 3 December.

2023

Costa's Hummingbird (*Calypte costae*): status update for 2023. In an effort to determine the hummingbird's origin, Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation contacted Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), Saskatoon, for assistance. On 15 January 2023, ECCC's Geoff Koehler reported "researchers estimated that the bird was most likely from the Sierra Nevada region between northern California and Nevada", opining the location was "close to Yosemite National Park". This area is near the northern edge of its breeding range,

a conclusion reached using analysis of stable isotopes from the bird's feathers.¹⁷ Several news outlets reported this story: CTV News on 3 February 2023 and CBC News on 15 November 2022.^{18,19} However, the origin of a bird can only be inferred when using stable isotope analysis, which is limited to linking a result to a general geographic area where the bird is known to occur (in this case the hummingbird's known breeding range) and where the growing feathers absorb and retain specific, identifiable ratios of hydrogen/deuterium, carbon, and nitrogen isotopes from their surrounding environment.^{20,21,22} Costa's Hummingbirds do not occur in mountainous Yosemite National Park²³, but do breed in the lower elevation deserts to the east (and less commonly west) of the Sierra Nevada mountains in northern Nevada, as per eBird Costa Hummingbird location map. They are "the dry desert hummingbird *par excellence*"²⁴ and either of these deserts could be the possible origin of this hummingbird.

Additional details regarding the story of this wayward hummingbird in Saskatchewan are available in the *Blue Jay*^{3,25} and in Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation newsletters from 2023.



FIGURE 1. A desiccated Barn Owl carcass was discovered on 22 August 2019 below a window of the vacant United Church in Drinkwater. It was determined to be a fledgling, young owl. Pictured here are its right wing and legs (left image) and its tail feathers (right image). Photo credit: Ray Poulin.

Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*): one immature was seen by Paul James on 5 January 2023 during the 2022 Christmas Bird Count period (14 December 2022 to 5 January 2023) in northeast Moose Jaw.¹⁶ Two spring records: one reported seen on 22 May 2023 at Echo Valley Provincial Park, along the Aspen Trail, in the Qu'Appelle Valley by Dan and Cindy Parliament who provided written description of the bird (eBird S138865042); photos taken. And, one bird photographed east of Kindersley (and west of Brock, which is 30 km east of Kindersley) on 31 May 2023 by Tim Ferner (posted on Sask Birders Facebook; fide G Wapple). **Status:** straggler. Only the second winter record of 37 reports to 2016. **Remarks:** the other winter record was a bird seen at Fort Qu'Appelle on 16 December 1995.

Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*): two records. An overwintering male seen by many observers. On 4 January 2023 by Suzy Duckett in the Whitmore Park neighbourhood, Regina (eBird S125391116); until the last date reported by Susan MacDonald on 4 April "eating bark butter on my tree" (eBird S132700747). Gloria and Dave Herron saw three in their farmyard at Bredenbury in the middle of October 2023. "Two of them departed after a couple of days but the third one, a female, stayed" for an extended length of time.²⁶ **Status:** the long staying male in Regina represents the 23rd record for the province; the

Bredenbury sightings are the 24th. Straggler. **Remarks:** the Regina male was first seen on 9 October 2022² and continued to visit several yards and feeders in the area. The Bredenbury report is the first observation in the province involving more than one bird. These woodpeckers are typically solitary in winter.²⁷

Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*): Vicki and Warren St. Germaine found two pairs of swans "asleep on the ice near the open water at the bridge over the Cold River near between Pierce and Lepine Lakes" in Meadow Lake Provincial Park on 4 March 2023 (eBird S130183710). Photographs confirm the identification (Figure 2). Trevor Finlay, Park Manager, Meadow Lake Provincial Park, provided the following: "I am aware of 2 swans at this location. My staff have seen them throughout the winter, so I believe the pair spent the winter here. I saw them for the first time on March 7th. Cold River remains open all year at this location unless we have an extended cold snap which did not occur this year" (pers. comm. 9 March 2023). Then, T Finlay provided two additional photographs of the four Tundra Swans together in the same location, taken on 17 March, to further document this record. **Status:** it appears this is the first record of Tundra Swans overwintering in Saskatchewan. **Remarks:** the St. Germaines provided additional details to Dan Sawatzky on 8 March (fide): "There is quite a bit of

open water on the rivers in the area. The Waterhen River, at the park gate north of Goodsoil, is open as far as the eye can see in both directions. The Cold River at Cold Lake, not so much." And "The birds were on the Cold River ... The river isn't very deep there. You can see the bottom and the vegetation is quite greened up. It's possible they could be feeding on that." The location of other northern water bodies that remain open during Saskatchewan winters is poorly documented, but as this record proves, these areas have the potential to attract some interesting birds late in the year.

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*): a single bird successfully overwintered on the river at Fort Qu'Appelle from 11 November 2022 (Jared Clarke eBird S122249204; ML502687631) to spring, 25 March 2023 (J Clarke eBird S131796902; ML549541741) (Figure 3); several observers. **Status:** seventh record of overwintering in Saskatchewan for the species. **Remarks:** Trumpeter Swans have been seen on six Christmas Bird Counts, three from the Qu'Appelle Valley. All records but one were of single birds.¹ A question remains whether this bird was not healthy enough to migrate south to traditional wintering areas like Lacreek National Wildlife Refuge in South Dakota.

Northern Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*): this account covers observations made over a period of 16 weeks, from 8 March to 28 June 2023, "near the Cold Lake



FIGURE 2. Two pairs of Tundra Swans were observed in Meadow Lake Provincial Park during March 2023. Photo credit: Vicki St. Germaine.

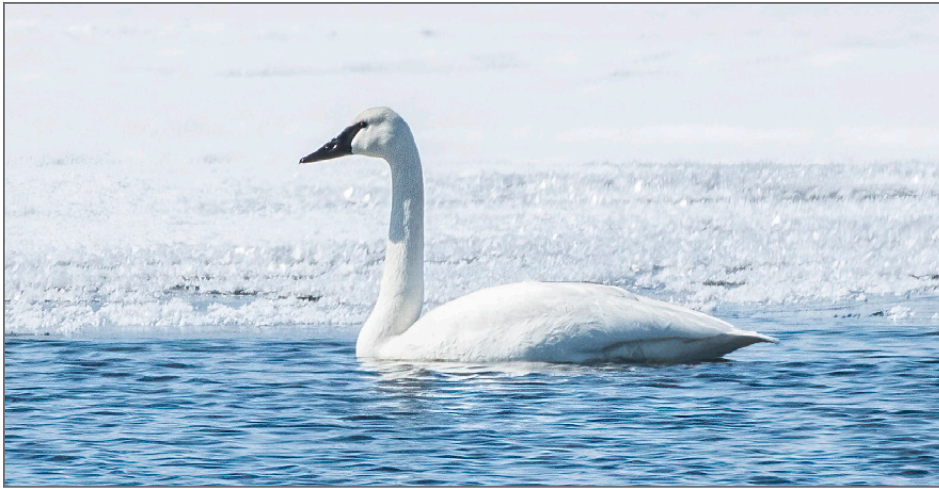


FIGURE 3. A Trumpeter Swan successfully overwintered on the river at Fort Qu'Appelle from November 2022 to March 2023. Photo credit: Annie McLeod.

campground” in the west end of Meadow Lake Provincial Park, close to where the Cold River empties into Cold Lake along highway #919. They include natural history observations that complement the article by John Patterson, Marten Stoffel, and Stan Shadick describing the discovery of the first confirmed nesting for the species in Saskatchewan²⁸:

8 March: M Stoffel and Dan Zazelenchuk found one male Northern Pygmy-Owl calling mid-day (13:00 hr) (eBird S130604704). The bird was “heard only. Called three times over 10 minutes.”

24 March: Vicki and Warren St. Germaine reported hearing one calling at approximately 11:05 hr, in the same area (eBird S131814505): the “‘toot’ song heard for approximately one minute. Tentative at first, then rhythmically for 30 seconds about 2 seconds apart, then slower again until it quit.” And, again on 25 March (eBird S131814733, and audio recording): The owl was “singing when we arrived, and constantly until we left about half an hour later.”

25 May, mid-day: M Stoffel and J Patterson saw a very small owl in the same general area single Northern Pygmy-Owls were reported calling in March. At times, the ventriloqual quality of the calls made it difficult to determine the exact direction from which the calls originated. In a fortunate turn of events, the men watched as “the owl carried a small [unidentified] bird to a tree cavity about 30 feet up in a 9-inch trembling aspen and flew off without the bird”

(eBird S139267847). This was about the time the pygmy-owl’s eggs were hatching (see Remarks below).

4 June: M Stoffel, J Patterson, S Shadick, Ron Jensen, Harold Fisher and Valerie Horner went to the same location and found a single pygmy-owl that perched about 2 m from the hole. It remained silent during the entire encounter. They believed the cavity was probably excavated by a sapsucker (eBird S140590710; fide R Jensen and J Patterson, 4 June).

22 June: S Shadick, accompanied by nature photographers Scott Currie and Jimmy MacDonald, visited the site discovered on 25 May. There they watched a single adult pygmy-owl make short flights in the vicinity of the tree cavity. At one point an adult pygmy-owl was seen carrying a small mammal (a long-tailed mouse with “a grey back, and whitish belly”): Ray Poulin from the RSM identified the rodent from a photo by S Currie — a Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus* group).²⁹ A short while later, they observed an owl pop into view from inside the cavity but not put its head outside the hole; its head appeared to be smaller than that of an adult. They did not hear the birds vocalize (fide S. Shadick 22 June 2023).

23 June: M Stoffel and J Patterson revisited the site, finding the nest cavity empty and two fledgling owlets in nearby trees (Figure 4). One fledged owlet was located “perched by the trunk of a conifer, 10-15 m from the nest and 10 m high, being fed by an adult [this first prey item

could not be identified]. It later moved further out on the branch where it was fed a large dragonfly [probably a darner *Aeshna* sp], before flying off. [We realized later that there was one more fledgling and a second adult nearby.] Both [owlets] were being fed by two adults.” Patterson included six videos that show glimpses of the captured dragonfly being brought to the owlet, and two audio recordings with “some of the back-and-forth [vocalizations] between the fledgling and an adult — a high-pitched trilled begging call from the fledgling and lower-pitched trill from the adult” and the “slow single-toot song, spaced 2-3 seconds apart” of an adult. Both fledglings were seen flying, though one was obviously stronger (fide J Patterson 25 and 29 June; eBird S142772314, videos ML588484661, 85331, 85791, 86141, 86171, 86461 and audio ML589388761, 589433401).

Evidently, the young owls left the nest cavity between 13:25 hr on 22 June (when Shadick left the site) and 12:20 hr on 23 June (when Stoffel and Patterson arrived) (fide Shadick and Patterson).

26 June: S Shadick accompanied by photographers Boyd Coburn, Deborah MacEwen and Wendy Erickson “found one fledgling about 60 plus feet up a tree.” Both adults were seen feeding them. One image by Erickson (on Saskatchewan Nature Photographers Facebook website) shows an adult bringing a large dragonfly to the young pygmy-owl (<https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=101612316444838224&set=pcb>); another image of a fledgling with scattered down feather filaments on its unspotted forehead and a short, growing ‘bob-tail’ (photo No. 10161231644748824). This was a short distance west of the nest site (fide S Shadick 30 June).

28 June: while staying at the Cold River Campground, Richard Klauke reported one pygmy-owl vocalizing in the early evening (19:28 hr) nearby. He used the Merlin app for the identification. Bird not seen (eBird S143002844).

Status: this is the first breeding record for Northern Pygmy-Owls in Saskatchewan. These observations extended over a 16-week period (8 March to 28 June 2023), culminating with

photographs of unfledged owlets in the nesting cavity, and both attending adults feeding prey to two newly, successfully fledged owlets the next day (<24 hrs out of the nest). It is only a relatively short distance south of the (general) area where pygmy-owls were found in December 2016 to April 2017.^{2,3,28}

This 2023 record is the most easterly extension of a confirmed breeding location into the boreal forest for this rare species away from the centre of its abundance in the Rocky Mountains. And, compellingly, it raises the possibility of other nesting efforts by this tiny owl elsewhere in Saskatchewan's boreal forest. Distribution and population of this owl in the province remains undetermined.

Remarks: *Breeding chronology for 2023:* it is possible to estimate when the first egg was laid, sometime between 27 April and 1 May, with laying continuing over following days until the clutch was complete. The interval between each egg being laid for this species, is approximately 1.5 days, and various studies suggest pygmy-owl's normal clutch size is 3-4 eggs (range 2-7). The incubation period is 27-29 days; thus, we can estimate hatching occurred around 24-27 May. Growth after hatching to fledging takes another 27-29 days (max 32 days), taking it to the observed fledging date of 22-23 June. The young hatch asynchronously and not every owlet that hatches is guaranteed to survive, so the total number of eggs laid and the number of chicks hatched by this pair of pygmy-owls cannot be determined.^{30,31,32}

Food habits: the 2023 observations reveal shifts in the prey caught by the adult NOPOs. The small bird carried by the pygmy-owl on 25 May was typical for that time of year: "the proportion of birds relative to small mammals in Northern Pygmy-Owl diets almost doubles from spring to summer ... presumably because of the increasing availability of fledged offspring". Male pygmy-owls are more likely to prey on small birds than female pygmy-owls.^{31,33,34} The Deer Mouse captured on 22 June was also an expected prey. Observations on 23 and 26 June of darner dragonflies brought to feed the owlets draw attention to

a fascinating shift in choice of prey as these large insects became available. The blue darners (*Aeshna* sp.) are "among the most noticeable of dragonflies", often abundant in the southern edge of the Boreal Plain ecozone.³⁵ Darners are the largest dragonflies in that area, with Lake Darners (*A. eremita*) being the first to emerge in late May to early June and flying into autumn. Capturing such fast flying, agile aerial prey attests to the remarkable hunting skill demonstrated by these energetic pygmy-owls.

Northern Pygmy-Owls remain on their territories throughout the year. They are known to cache food on tree branches (at least temporarily) to help them through lean times in order to meet their constant high energy demands.³⁶ Giese and Forsman studied Northern Pygmy-Owls on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington stating these owls "consumed a variety of small birds, mammals and insects and males provisioned females and nestlings

during incubation and brooding. In approximately 100 hr of nest observation we saw no indication of females foraging. We observed females accepting prey items from males and retrieving cached prey items, but not leaving or returning with fresh prey items of their own."³⁷

The boreal forest habitat in that region of the park is a diverse mosaic of several species of mature evergreens and deciduous trees, which is comparable to Alberta where Northern Pygmy-Owls have "demonstrated a preference for 'older' forest stands for nesting, although it seems to be [more] flexible in its habitat selection in winter. Pygmy-owls nest in cavities, relying on woodpeckers, fungal decay, and insects to provide suitable cavities."³³ Unfortunately, these mature forests are sought after and cut by the lumber industry for their high-quality wood products, which removes prime nesting habitat of pygmy-owls.



FIGURE 4. A recently fledged juvenile Northern Pygmy-Owl, observed on 23 June 2023 near the trunk of a spruce tree. Photo credit: John Patterson.

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus barrovianus*): a single immature gull was photographed (Figure 5) on the ice of the South Saskatchewan River by the Queen Elizabeth II Power Plant, Saskatoon on 10 April 2023 by Katelyn Luff (eBird S133369854, ML556293011). It was also seen on the same day and reported by Philip Taylor (eBird S133365118). **Status:** this is believed to be the smaller subspecies *L. h. barrovianus*, which is a vagrant; it breeds along Alaska's north and western coasts, and winters between the Aleutian Islands and the Pacific coast of North America, south rarely to California. **Remarks:** several field marks and observations led Taylor to speculate whether it might be a second year Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucooides glaucooides*). First, it was surprisingly small, only slightly larger than the nearby adult California Gulls; one key field mark of Glaucous Gulls is they are typically larger than Herring Gulls and only exceeded in size by Great Black-backed Gulls. Second, it showed subordinate behaviour to adult California Gulls, quickly withdrawing when they were aggressive to it. This seemed unusual since Glaucous Gulls often show dominance over other, smaller gull species. Both Glaucous and Iceland gulls can have a similar appearance in their second winter: the bi-coloured bill, nearly

all white plumage including white wing tips, and wing tips extending noticeably past the tip of the tail. However, further examination of the photo and discussions with Bob Luterbach concluded that the bird was a second winter Glaucous Gull, most likely a vagrant *L. h. barrovianus*. B Luterbach photographed an adult Glaucous Gull on 10 April 2021 in Regina that he also identified as *L. h. barrovianus* after considering if it might be an Iceland Gull (eBird S85366494, ML325384911, 369741, 367751, 367711, 367591). More detailed information on identification is available in books devoted to gulls.^{38,39} Presumably, some Glaucous Gulls become entrained with California and Ring-billed Gulls as they migrate to Saskatchewan in spring from their shared wintering areas on the Pacific coast. This is also the most plausible explanation for several other species of gulls appearing here in the spring as rarities: Western Gull, Iceland Gull, Slaty-backed Gull, and Glaucous-winged Gull.⁴⁰ The larger, widespread subspecies of Glaucous Gull (*L. h. hyperboreus*) breeds at high latitudes, throughout the Canadian Arctic, Labrador, Greenland, and east across much of northern Eurasia. It is also a rare but increasingly regular visitor to Saskatchewan.

Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*): an adult in breeding plumage was photographed by John Lundgren (Figure 6) on 26 April 2023 at the west end of Bateman Island in the North Saskatchewan River in Prince Albert (eBird S135142586, ML563557361, 57601, 57671, 58511). **Status:** this is the seventh record for the province. Accidental. **Remarks:** there are five spring reports from 30 March to 5 June, and one lingering in November. Careful examination of the photos, which showed key field marks, allowed this Asian rarity to be correctly identified, separating it from other dark-mantled gulls (e.g. Western Gull).

Hooded Warbler (*Setophaga citrina*): one male was seen by Bill MacKenzie in the Wildwood neighbourhood of Saskatoon on 10 May 2023 around 07:30 hr (fide Stan Shadick). It could not be relocated. **Status:** 10th record and seventh spring sighting for the province, which range from 9 May to 9 June. Accidental. **Remarks:** B Mackenzie "first noticed it on and around the bottom trunk of a large birch tree in our backyard. It then hunted around on the ground near the tree before leaving. I might have seen it for 20 to 30 seconds! But I did have an excellent view all that time. The bird was in the shade but bright



FIGURE 5. An immature Glaucous Gull on the ice of the South Saskatchewan River by the Queen Elizabeth II Power Plant, Saskatoon on 10 April 2023. Photo credit: Katelyn Luff.



FIGURE 6. An adult Slaty-backed Gull, in breeding plumage, observed on 26 April 2023 at the west end of Bateman Island in the North Saskatchewan River in Prince Albert. Photo credit: John Lundgren.

yellow and the hood [was] very distinctive.” The three other non-spring records for the province include one summer and two fall sightings. It will be upgraded to straggler status with future reports. The Hooded Warbler is a listed Threatened Species in Canada, but it has shown evidence of extending its range north in recent years.³ Are the recent spring records of this warbler in Saskatchewan a reflection of this expansion trend?

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*): on 12 May 2023, Jack Vaisanen photographed a Green Heron along the South Saskatchewan River, above the weir, in Saskatoon (fide Stan Shadick who confirmed the identification and reported it on saskbirds@groups.io). Then, on 29 May 2023, Shawna Dykes relocated presumably the same bird along the river in Saskatoon and it was photographed by Nick Saunders later that day (eBird S139804909, ML578884281) and other observers (including Meghan Mickelson and Leah Frei). **Status:** straggler, with 23 records from 7 May to 21 October. The second record for Saskatoon, the northernmost location reported for the species in the province. **Remarks:** Shawna Dykes photographed the first Green Heron in Saskatoon on 7 June 2019 (eBird S57331808, ML164256841).

Common Poorwill (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*): Marla Anderson photographed a small nightjar on the morning of 17 May 2023 in Regina (eBird S138180118, ML573688501 8511, 8521, 8531; fide Dan Sawatzky). Later searches were unsuccessful. On 27 August 2023 Stan Shadick, Sheryl-Elaine Brazeau, and Ronald Vandebek heard three poorwills calling, possibly others, while travelling a distance of 4.4 km through the Great Sandhills, approximately 18.5 km south of Sceptre in the evening (20:00 hr) (eBird S148324458, S148370142, S148366237). **Status:** this species is uncommon and locally distributed in the Cypress Hills and Great Sand Hills during the summer. Exceptional elsewhere in the province. One previous record from Regina was a bird seen on 17 and 18 May 1991 by Trevor Herriot in his yard. **Remarks:** M Anderson’s photos show the Common Poorwill’s large-headed proportions (characteristically appearing to be about one-third the length of a resting bird), dark facial area and upper throat, white fore collar on the lower throat, and a pattern of vertical black stripes on the breast feathers, as it sat on an open, flat gravel area of their office parking lot near Victoria Avenue. She noted the “short wings and tail” and stated it was “quite small and we never saw wing bars when it was flushed.” To estimate the bird’s

approximate size and help separate it from the larger Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus vociferus*), the openings in the chain link fence behind the bird provided a rough scale with which to measure the sitting nightjar. The resting bird appeared to be approximately 15.5 cm in length, from the front of its breast to the tip of its tail, fitting a Common Poorwill and not the larger contender.

The 27 August report of multiple birds calling is a valuable record confirming their presence on the breeding grounds at this late summer date.

Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*): there were multiple reports of this woodpecker across southern Saskatchewan in 2023.

The southeast: One on 28 May in Broadview by Don Weidl (eBird S139597988) and another near the Pipestone Valley (fide D Weidl); 29 May in Glentworth (eBird S139763785) by Julia Put.

The southwest, including one breeding record: One on 2 June in Val Marie by Katelyn Luff (eBird S140274594); then, presumably the same bird on 3 June in Val Marie by Julia and Laurens Put; (eBird S140335779); one seen 10 km west of Eastend on 4 June by Luke Peta and Karannina Schonwetter; 7 June, Mike Cowland and Nancy Douglas saw one in Val Marie town (eBird S1408862270); 11 June, one in Val Marie by Rhonda and Paul Langelaan; 12 June, Raphael Nussbaumer saw one near Val Marie at “known location (49.247198; -107.723253) entering a nest cavity. Heard first then seen both [adults] together around probable nest.” (eBird S141380700); 19 June, Bruce Di Labio saw two in Val Marie “visiting probable nest site” (eBird S142054084); many other observers saw one or two adults on the east side of town from 20 June to 28 July (eBird records). On 7 June, Janette Tilley saw one in Grasslands National Park; 25 June, Frederic Hareau photographed one in Grasslands National Park (eBird S142734754).

Central aspen-parklands, including two breeding records: one southeast of Blaine Lake at the Big Tree on 2 June by Mike Blom (eBird S140263726); 21 June,

one seen by Vicki St. Germaine (eBird S142264902) at junction of Highways 55 and 120, Meath Park; on 23 June, Kathy Hamre and Evanna Simpson photographed one in Douglas Provincial Park (eBird S142497204); on 17 July, one seen by Vicki St. Germaine along Highway 47 south of Good Spirit Lake (eBird S144884962); one photographed 2 km south of Pleasantdale (north of Naicam) on 27 July 2023, then two birds on 28 July, by Leona Douglas (eBird S145787405, S145838002). Todd James on 29 July stated “possibly one of a pair that was seen in the same yard last week” 8.5 miles NW of Carrot River (eBird S145939948), followed on 31 July by “at least 2 possibly 3 adults arrived in late May 2023, regulars at the feeder every day since. One fledgling seen last week.” (eBird S146093406); then, on 6 August, James reported “2 fledglings on feeder 3 adults” (eBird S146589034); and a third post (eBird S149063700) by James on 5 September of three birds on Range Road 2131 of “2 adults and one fledgling on sunflower seed feeder”. Carrot River is 200 km northwest of Pelly, the previous northern most breeding site in Saskatchewan. On 4 August one photographed by Robert Holtkamp who saw it carrying food, “appears to be raising a second brood” (eBird S146460678), 2 km east of Melville, then followed on 6 August with “1 parent and 2 fledglings. The young are mostly on their own.” (eBird S146656743).

Winter: One immature, “with faint red head, but mostly covered by brown”, seen on 27 December 2023 by Brett Quiring and Bruce Holmes in Glencairn neighbourhood, Regina during the Christmas Bird Count (eBird S157257345); after it was “reported a few weeks ago with pictures on the Facebook page”. Seen and photographed on 28 December by Dan Sawatzky (eBird S157364354). This may be only the third winter record. **Status:** these three breeding records add to the previous six in *BofSk*, and two in 2019. **Remarks:** the number of reports this summer is interesting for their wide distribution across southern Saskatchewan, plus the three breeding locations including a new northernmost site near Carrot River. This influx seems

contrary to the long-term decline for the species across much of its range. Red-headed Woodpeckers are a Threatened species listed under the Canadian *Species at Risk Act*.

Townsend Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*): one reported on 30 May 2023 at Conglomerate Cliffs in the Cypress Hills by Caleb Catto (eBird S139903576). Observations of single birds continued — one seen on 17 July by Adam Holder (eBird S144838486), Andrea Kingsley, and Julia Marshall. **Status:** winters annually in the province but with an irregular distribution; returning to breed in the Rocky Mountains in spring. **Remarks:** has been recorded breeding at the Conglomerate Cliffs twice, in 1979 and 1993.

Northern Parula (*Setophaga americana*): Janine McManus encountered one male on 23 May 2023 at the Nashlyn pasture headquarters. It “sang a number of times, a dry, rising ‘bzzeep’ with a drop note at the end” then moved off before other observers saw it (eBird S143504966). On 8 June 2023, a singing male was recorded and photographed at Loch Leven in the Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park (CHIP); multiple observers, Adam Holder, Aaron Roberge, Julia Marshall, David Korver, Nicole Chan, Erica Alex (Roberge eBird S140905257; photos ML582610321 & 10331; audio ML582607951, 7961). Relocated on

17 June by Paula, Dale, and Kerry Hjertaas (eBird S141901108; photos ML596927071, 7081,7101, 7111, 7141, 7171, 7191) and again on the same day by Stephanie Gauthier (eBird S141924712). One reported by Vicki St. Germaine on 24 June from spruces near Windfalls Trail, CHIP (eBird S143094879, audio ML589539171). One male photographed on 1 July (Figure 7) near Loch Leven by Katelyn Luff (eBird S143288639, photo ML590155761). Four observers — J McManus (Canadian Wildlife Service, Saskatoon), Nicole Richardson (biologist, author of the eBird post), Constanza Rivas, and Josiah Van Egmond — posted their detailed and careful observations acquired at the same location, the Loch Leven public swimming beach, for more than 30 minutes on 1 July 2023: “a familiar yet out-of-place little ‘chip’ sounded from the trees nearby. Indeed a formative/ first alternate female Northern Parula was gleaning insects from outer boughs of a nearby spruce tree;” ... “she slipped away, chipping frequently as she foraged in a small circuit and returned to vanish somewhere in the top of a tall spruce laden with lichen” ... “the male was heard singing throughout this time, a few times very close, but mostly further away from the dense crowns of spruce in the parking lot” ... then ... “in clear view of all of us, she returned to hop up and fly directly into the nest; a round hanging clump of lichen between 10 and 12 meters high



FIGURE 7. A male Northern Parula photographed near Loch Leven in Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park on 1 July 2023. Photo credit: Katelyn Luff.

in this spruce tree”... “we watched as she left and returned two more times, even managing some photo and video of her arrival and departure from the nest.” (eBird S143488961, S143504917).] McManus provided more details saying “the nest was hanging in a clump of moss [sic lichen] below one of the tree limbs, approximately “4ft down from the top of the [white spruce] tree and 2ft out from the trunk” and they “could see the nest ball, it looked to be closer to softball size” and can be seen in a video taken at the time. She was amazed she “was able to get [video of] the female doing her vertical drop out of the nest, it happened so fast each time.” (fide] McManus, 11 October 2023). Ron Jensen saw a[n adult] female at the same location on 5 and 6 July and watched her enter a tangle of arboreal lichen, the nesting site high up on a limb of an [evergreen] tree; then soon after, leave by dropping down and flying away unobtrusively (fide Jensen 21 July). **Status:** first breeding record. Even though photos of eggs or recently fledged young were not obtained, observed behavior of the adults — the female actively foraging and carrying food to a typical nest site, and the male continuously singing on a territory — supports this being the first nesting effort by this warbler for the province.⁴¹ Straggler with 33 records for the province. **Remarks:** although well-hidden and difficult to find, Northern Parula nests are distinctive, and are often occupied in successive years.^{41,42} Nests are constructed by the female while the male defends the territory. They have a short nesting cycle of about six weeks from the first egg laid to fledging. The continental population is stable or increasing, despite some regional declines that coincide with declines in Usnea lichens, which these birds depend on for nest building. This warbler is a localized and fairly common breeder in the boreal forest of southeastern Manitoba; other Manitoba records raised the possibility that this warbler might attempt to nest further west in that province.⁴³ It is an erratic wanderer across western North America with rare, out of range nesting occurring as far west as California (eBird map).

Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*): several reports along Highway 55 south of Pakwaw Lake in the western edge of the Pasquia Hills: most easterly were three singing males found on 8 June 2023 and reported by Vicki and Warren St. Germaine (eBird S140944945; ML582690991); Stan Shadick and John Patterson found two birds singing on 18 June 2023 near Red Earth Creek bridge (eBird S142265283, 5335, 5436); and, most westerly, John Lundgren recorded and photographed one on 2 July 2023 in riparian brushy habitat beside a creek, 9.5 km east of Smoky Burn (near Cracking River bridge) (eBird S143393723), where Patterson reported one on 18 June. Don Weidl photographed a male on 18 and 19 September 2018 in Broadview (eBird S48616972, ML115565951). **Status:** straggler with 22 records. Of those, 10 were single, singing males suspected of possible breeding. **Remarks:** previously, the strongest evidence of birds on territory was near the Manitoba border from the Pasquia Hills, northwest of Hudson Bay (Bainbridge River) south, including the Porcupine Hills and into Duck Mountain Provincial Park, where singing males have been reported from 1977 to 1998.

Golden-winged Warbler is a Schedule 1 listed Threatened species under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*. They have experienced a range wide population decline due in part to loss of their preferred habitat and genetic assimilation by closely related Blue-winged Warblers (*V. cyanoptera*).

Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*) formerly two closely related taxa, Cordilleran Flycatcher (*E. occidentalis*) and Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*): these flycatchers were seen by multiple observers between 11 June and 20 July 2023.

West Benson Trail (WBT), Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park, Saskatchewan: One bird reported by Raphael Nussbaumer on 11 June 2023 on WBT [location 49.611606; -109.953822] with audio recordings (eBird S141311352). Aiden Place reported a single bird on 12 June 2023 from the same location “calling incessantly at the creek crossing and flying back and forth across

the creek occasionally. Twice sang for about a minute or so. Getting harassed by a LEFL [Least Flycatcher] a few times.” (eBird S141363897). Stan Shadick viewed one bird on 12 June at “same location as COFL in previous years. Bird visited possible nest location at or very close to site used in previous years. Yellowish belly. *See-ip* call.” (eBird S141593555). Paula and Kerry Hjertaas and Stephanie Gauthier made an audio recording of one bird at the same site 16 June (eBird S141806404). At separate times on 18 June, one vocalizing bird was seen by Tony Timmons (eBird S142024703) and Kale Worman (“singing from river side”) (eBird S141952063). Single bird heard singing at same location on 21 June by Bruce Di Labio (eBird S142266237) and one seen and “heard calling” by Carlo Giovanella also on 21 June at the same location (eBird S142303506); 26 June one calling, heard at WBT by Colin Marchant (eBird S142791731); Katlyn Luff obtained recordings of vocalization of one bird on 1 July (eBird S143288892); nesting was confirmed on 10 July when David Korver (eBird S144132817), Aaron Roberge (ML593271421, 1431, 1441, 1451, 1461, 1471, 72481, 1511), Adam Holder, Julia Marshall, and Nicole Chan watched two pair along WBT: one pair had a nest “on an undercut bank [with an adult] sitting on eggs [?]”. More likely, this pair was tending to young chicks rather than incubating eggs in the nest, as the two photos taken by Roberge indicate: one, of an adult flycatcher carrying food; and a second, of an adult on the nest sitting rather high, a posture typical of a bird brooding its young. Then, Nick Saunders reported seeing “two adults and one [fledged] young” bird on 20 July, continuing at WBT (eBird S145137092).

West Block Campground (WBC) along Battle Creek Road (49.6024, -109.9266) [or 49d36'08.9" N, -109d55'36.0" W], CHIP, Saskatchewan: one “staked out bird. Heard calling, observed closely. Yellowish tone, almond [shaped] eye-ring” and photographed (ML587606691, 6701, 6711) on 21 June 2023 by Roger Foxall (eBird S142616747) and Carlo Giovanella. Note, they mention the location being “at both sites” without further details

— presumably referring to the above WBT location plus possibly the second 2022 Battle Creek Road (BCR) site 3; on 17 July, two adults and three “fledged young” found by Adam Holder (eBird S144828749), Andrea Kingsley, and Julia Marshall, with these flycatchers apparently seen at two locations described as the WBC [compare with the July observations from WBT, above]. **Status:** fourth consecutive summer that Western Flycatchers have been confirmed at the WBT location in the Cypress Hills; the third summer nesting was confirmed (previously nested in 2020 and 2022).^{2,3} The flycatchers reported near the West Block Campground on Battle Creek Road in 2023 may be a new location, and — with the sighting of two pairs in 2023 — might suggest a growing population. Dates observed in previous years: 4 July to 23 July 2020, 5 June to 25 July 2021, and 29 May to 29 July 2022.^{2,3} This species breeds in the Rocky Mountains of southwestern Alberta. **Remarks:** in July 2023, the North American Classification Committee, American Ornithological Society, passed a proposal to lump the very closely related populations of “Cordilleran (*Empidonax occidentalis*) and Pacific-slope flycatchers (*E. difficilis*)”, under their former name Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*). See discussion below in *Other Changes*.

Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*): John Lungren found birds at three locations, all singing over alfalfa fields: along Souris River Road, NW of Northgate on 26 June (two birds) then on 28 June (three birds) (eBird S142812417); another single bird (eBird S142968921) singing east of Roche Perce “over an alfalfa field” on 28 June; one on 28 June in Roche Perce town “singing over another small alfalfa field on the edge of town” (eBird S142939108), [reseen by Vicki St. Germaine 2 July]; and one singing near an unmowed alfalfa field on 8 July near Roche Perce campground by Kathy Hedegard (eBird S143965943), Craig Palmer and Guy Wapple. Nine miles south of Yellow Grass, Vicki and Warren St. Germaine saw two males singing in an alfalfa field

on 1 July (eBird S143265741), [reseen by Jared Clarke at this location 2 July]; and two photographed 8 km northeast of Vibank by Sharlane Toole on 8 July (eBird S143985973); one heard on 18 July by Jeff Mander (eBird S145002185) 11 km north of Odessa. And four were “found singing just outside” Maple Creek by Sam Wilson on 26 June and photographed (eBird S142781220). Vicki and Warren St. Germaine saw three birds east of Val Marie along Highway 18 on 28 June; and, on 29 June at Val Marie location by Wendy Woodard (three birds), Luke Peta and Samuel Davison (four birds). **Status:** irruptive, unpredictable, and rare across in southern Saskatchewan. **Remarks:** this year was noteworthy for the number of locations reported, and their widespread distribution, following previous summers when they were reported only from extreme southeastern Saskatchewan.

Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*): three recent records. On 26 July 2023, Richard Waters photographed a single adult, moulting from summer plumage, 13 km southwest of Kelliher, adjacent to Highway 35 (eBird S145712019, ML 597804731); present for a second day and photographed (Figure 8) on 27 July by others — Jared Clarke (eBird S145749099, ML 597880391), Sharlane Toole (eBird S145774840), and Annie McLeod (eBird S146051033). Previous years: Bob Luterbach photographed a single bird on 10 November 2021 at Regina Beach (eBird S97416031; ML 387062111); seen by

many observers on 11 November. Ilene Hales saw one “juvenile transitioning to winter plumage” on 22 and 23 October 2020 at the east end of Ekapo Lake (eBird S75232934); Don Weidl photographed the same bird on 24 October (eBird S75354161; ML 274065391). **Status:** straggler during migration; 12 records. **Remarks:** single Red Phalaropes have occurred unpredictably between 21 May and 11 November in the province. Their normal migration routes are over open water of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*): on 12 July 2023, Holly Costron photographed a male coming to a feeder at ‘Bonnyview Farm’, 5 km east of Craven (eBird S145758448). **Status:** rare, occurring throughout the year; increasing in numbers in recent decades.¹ **Remarks:** some of the first records of this species in Saskatchewan come from the Qu’Appelle Valley near Regina with the first specimen collected at Craven on 29 December 1960, the day of their Christmas Bird Count. Breeding has only been confirmed in Prince Albert, but as yet, no nest with eggs has been found in the province.

On 8 and 30 December 2023, Michelle Peltier reported seeing a male, “with a dark red head and bright red body” feeding on suet in her yard in Humboldt (eBird S155954905; S157522861). Jared Clarke and Al Kirkley found a male on 15 December 2023 in Fort Qu’Appelle (eBird S156392642; ML612268014). **Status:** a rare and unpredictable visitor to the province.¹

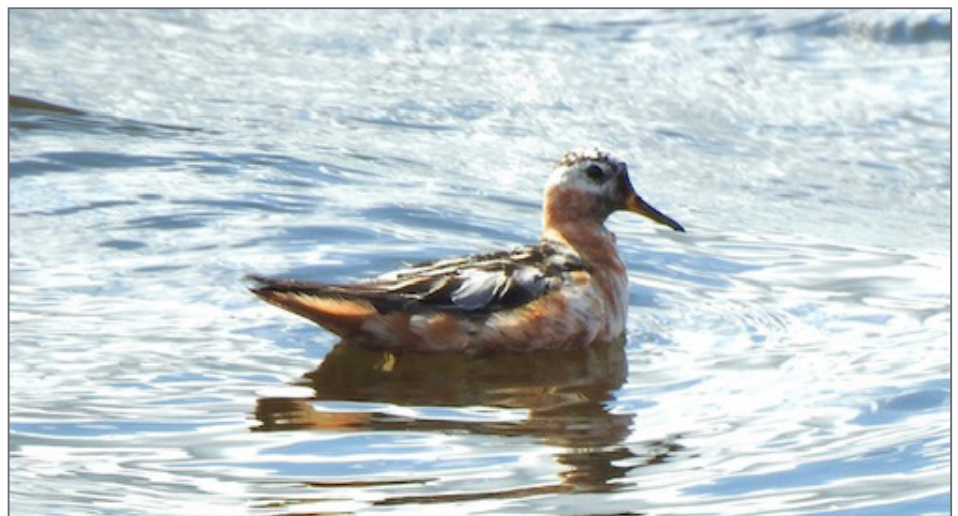


FIGURE 8. A Red Phalarope was observed on 26 and 27 July 2023 southwest of Kelliher. Photo credit: Sharlane Toole.

Remarks: the highest number of cardinal sightings in Saskatchewan, has occurred in December. The conspicuous males are more frequently seen than females.

Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*): Aaron Roberge discovered a pair nesting in Shaunavon on 4 July 2023 (eBird 143574497) “using a nest box and carrying food to it”, and heard several chicks calling from inside. Observed by several people and photographed by David Korver who saw four birds, including two fledglings, on 4 August. (eBird S146446985) **Status:** of annual but erratic occurrence. Lorne Scott writes “its numbers have diminished somewhat since 2000”.¹ **Remarks:** *BofSk* documents breeding records scattered widely across southern areas of the province, including the Cypress Hills.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*): on 10 August 2023, Nick Saunders photographed an immature bird (3rd year type) on the river near Queen Elizabeth II Power Station, Saskatoon (eBird S146944714; ML 602299751). And, on 26 September 2023, Don Weidl photographed a ‘near-adult’ at Crooked Lake (eBird S150811048, ML 609292956, 92968, 93137).^{39,44} A winter adult was observed and photographed at Wascana Lake, Regina from 2 to 5, 6, and 7 November 2023 by Jared Clarke, Dan Sawatzky, Brett Quiring, and Ian Fallas (eBird S153621423, S153758978; S153621775; S153759020; Dan S S153844096; Ian Fallas S153920536; J Clarke S153989907). **Status:** straggler with at least 34 records for Saskatchewan reported; 30 from the spring (3 April to 28 May), but only four from the fall (1 to 27 October). Therefore, these fall records are of interest. **Remarks:** determining age of subadult gulls is challenging, particularly in the large species that take four years to reach adult plumage. This includes Lesser Black-backed Gulls (LBBC). “There is more individual variation in immature plumages in the large species [of gulls, than the smaller species], and some are difficult to age with certainty; an ‘advanced’ 2nd year could look very like a ‘retarded’ 3rd year. In some cases it

may be advisable to refer to tricky birds as ‘2nd year types’, or ‘3rd year types’”.⁴⁵ Perhaps adding to these difficulties, Olsen and Larssen state the “races *graellsii* and *intermedius* may represent only one clinal taxon *graellsii*” showing a range in the darkness of their mantle colour.³⁸

LBBC have demonstrated a remarkable history of increasing vagrancy across North America in the last 30 years. Zawadzki et al compare trends in natural vagrancy with previous expanding core populations of LBBC in Europe, then the colonizing of Iceland (first arriving in the 1920s; peaking at over 40,000 breeding pair in 2004), and more recently Greenland (first vagrants in 1984; recently increasing with 2000 breeding pair by 2016).⁴⁶ The first LBBC was reported in North America in New Jersey, 1934, but they have yet to breed here (with the exception of two hybrid pairs with American Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) — 1993 in Juneau, Alaska, and 2007 on Appledore Island, Maine). LBBC reported in North America were initially described as vagrants, but with their increasing numbers, this continent is now part of the regular wintering range for LBBC. Further study should determine the movements and time that individual gulls spend in North America, and if they ‘overwinter’ in successive years.

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*): breeding at Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area was confirmed on 12 August 2023 by Annie McLeod, Joel Cherry, Dan Sawatzky, and Jared Clarke (eBird S147097226, S147104608, S147097225; ML 602818281) who observed “two full grown birds sitting in a nest on the island” in the Last Mountain Lake Migratory Bird Sanctuary, from the viewing tower constructed by the Canadian Wildlife Service south of the Last Mountain Regional Park. Simone Littledale saw four Great Egrets from the same tower on 24 August (eBird S148005031; ML608879292). On 10 August, John Lundgren photographed a single Great Egret on the northwest shore of Middle Lake (eBird S146951065; ML 602296781), possibly the same bird “previously reported by Gregory Frie on July 11 and

August 2.” Multiple single Great Egrets were photographed in September from Regina and surrounding area (various observers), and four at Ekapo Lake in the Qu’Appelle Valley on 27 September by Don Weidl (eBird S150868461). **Status:** nesting has been confirmed from only three locations in the province — the Qu’Appelle Valley east of Craven, Middle Lake, and Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area. **Remarks:** these egrets have steadily increased since the first report in 1937. Repeat sightings of rare egrets and herons in one location, over one summer, are a strong indication of possible breeding in the vicinity. Breeding locations are legally protected from disturbance during the nesting season.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Calidris subruficollis*): one bird was photographed on 16 August 2023 in Grasslands National Park “foraging in the grassland of the prairie dog colony” by Pam Hawkes (eBird S147490131; ML 604599861, 9871) and Mark Rubensohn (eBird S147442785; ML 604154221). **Status:** migrant, fewer observed in fall than spring. **Remarks:** Al Smith in *BofSk* states “it is unknown in the extreme southwest” and is generally a rare passage migrant in the [south central parts of the] province; in fall from 5 July to 18 October, peaking in August. Populations have declined steeply and it is listed as a species of Special Concern under Canada’s *Species at Risk Act*.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*): on 30 August 2023 Kerry Hjertaas and Stephanie Gauthier saw a flock of seven that “flew over [the] beach at Waskesiu townsite” in Prince Albert National Park (eBird S148526956, 6957). They were “heard calling clearly and repeatedly” and “sounded to me like a perfect match for the fifth whimbrel call in the Merlin app.” **Status:** a very rare fall transient throughout Saskatchewan” recorded from 5 July to 12 September. **Remarks:** this is the highest fall count reported, the previous being five birds. For more information watch *Whimbrels on the Wing*, an engaging visual presentation of this species epic spring and fall migrations, reinforcing the importance of protected

sites to their survival, including the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (manometinc.arcgis.com).

Townsend's Warbler (*Setophaga townsendi*): a single found on 31 August 2023 at Douglas Provincial Park by Evanna Simpson and Kathy Hamre (eBird S148657233, 7232; ML 608346231) and photographed. **Status:** straggler, with 23 records for the province to 2016. **Remarks:** 17 of the reports are fall migrants seen from 10 August to 14 September. There is one breeding record from the Cypress Hills in 1979.

Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*): Jared Clarke reported seeing five individuals — “one pair at the start, 2 halfway up and a single at the north end” of Cumberland Lake on 21 September 2023. A local resident informed him that “they nest on one of the islands on Cumberland Lake” (eBird S150430857). **Status:** this would be a new breeding location for the province. **Remarks:** these terns breed at very few known Saskatchewan colonies with regularity — Dore, Churchill, and perhaps Peter Pond lakes in the boreal and mixed forest. They have nested at several other lakes across the southcentral part of the province but usually for only a few years. The largest breeding concentrations of Caspian Terns in the prairie provinces are on lakes Winnipeg, Winnipegosis, and Manitoba; the latter, 200 km east of Cumberland Lake.

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*): a single hummingbird appeared in the yard of Murray and Cindy Koob in Crescent Heights, Prince Albert on 13 October (Figure 9) and was still present in the morning of 19 October 2023 (pers. comm. M Koob). It visited garden flowers first, before finding a hummingbird feeder. Photographs, first sent to Ron Jensen, confirmed its identification and determined it was an immature female (based on the outer three tail feathers, on each side of the tail, distinctly tipped with white — a definitive characteristic).⁴⁷ **Status:** this is the fourth record for Saskatchewan. Accidental. **Remarks:** the three previous records

involved vagrants that stayed for extended periods of time — one summer record lasting 48 days, and two fall records of 17 and 36 days.^{1,2} Late fall vagrant hummingbirds are not expected to survive our cold fall weather even with supplemental feeding. Attempts to “rescue” these birds require permits and though well intentioned are usually unsuccessful.



FIGURE 9. A single Anna's Hummingbird appeared in the yard of Murray and Cindy Koob in Crescent Heights, Prince Albert on 13 October 2023, lasting several days. Photo credit: Murray Koob.

Barrow's Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*): on 15 October 2023, among several large flocks of diving ducks (predominantly Lesser Scaup and Bufflehead) on Cypress Lake, Vicki and Warren St. Germaine counted 85 Barrow's Goldeneye, mostly “males in breeding plumage, with crescent-shaped patch behind bill”; “a few were displaying”; and “some females starting to show a bit of yellowish colour in their bills.” (eBird S152307392). On 16 October at Cypress Lake, Bruce Di Labio found 138 Barrow's Goldeneye: “counted carefully. High percentage of males, classic plumage ... Females with distinctive head shape and pumpkin orange bills.” Also present were more than 3,400 ducks of several species, 1,800 of which were Lesser Scaup (eBird S152435817). On 22 October, one male was found by Jared, Rowan, and Teal

Clarke (eBird S152879809), and the total numbers of ducks had fallen to about 500, fewer than 100 being Lesser Scaup; and, on 23 October they counted 22 Barrow's Goldeneye, five being males (eBird S152954540). **Status:** uncommon but regular fall migrant. **Remarks:** this is by far the largest number of Barrow's Goldeneye seen together; usually occurs in small numbers, singles or small groups (up to seven birds).

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*): all birds reported with photographs were the interior subspecies *L. t. tephrocotis*, unless confirmed as the coastal ‘Hepburn's’ subspecies *L. t. littoralis*. Vicki and Warren St. Germaine encountered two small groups (three and five birds, subspecies not reported) along secondary roads, in the Gap and south slope of the Cypress Hills on 15 October 2023 (eBird S152347908, S152329859); and, on 20 October, Samuel Davison photographed one in Grasslands National Park (fide G Wapple). A flock of 54 was photographed on 23 October at Bald Butte, Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park by Jared, Teal, and Rowan Clarke (eBird S152951342; ML610310121, 0122); the flock included both subspecies, *tephrocotis* and *littoralis* (Figure 10). On 2 November, Roger Sambrook photographed one south of Milestone (fide GW). Kathy Hedegard photographed one *tephrocotis* in Estevan on 10 to 12 November 2023, which stayed for several days (eBird S154158393). Nathan Heuver photographed two rosy-finches in Hafford on 16 December, one a *littoralis* the second a *tephrocotis* (eBird S156445906; ML612293253). Laura Messett found one on 25 December at Southend, Reindeer Lake (eBird S157113629; ML612664712) and saw it again on 27, 30 and 31 December (eBird S157489926, S157594959). A single bird was photographed near Nipawin by ‘Ashley TG’ (fide GW). Bert Dalziel photographed a single bird in White Fox on 28 December (eBird S157357799; ML612763840). **Status:** second earliest arrival date, earliest previous record was 12 October. A rare influx occurred in 2023. **Remarks:** these montane finches may



FIGURE 10. A flock of 54 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) was photographed on 23 October at Bald Butte, Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park by Jared, Teal, and Rowan Clarke. The flock included both the Interior (*L. t. tephrocotis*), seen in the left side of the image, and the Gray-cheeked or Hepburn's subspecies (*L. t. littoralis*), shown on the right. Photo credit: Jared Clarke.

occur almost anywhere in the province, but are often seen in and around the Cypress Hills. Most Saskatchewan records are of the interior *tephrocotis*, which regularly descend onto the plains east of the Rockies in winter, compared to only five previous records of the more sedentary coastal *littoralis*. The first major Pacific storm system of autumn brought significant snow accumulations from the Rocky Mountains east into southwestern Saskatchewan on 23-24 October, perhaps hurrying the early rosy-finches ahead of its arrival. As the strong El Niño weather pattern of 2023 continued, it brought above-average temperatures to the province in November and December and left many areas with little snow cover, when rosy-finches appeared at several locations across the province.

Red Crossbill (Douglas-fir or type 4) (*Loxia curvirostra*): recordings made on 21 October 2023, 8 km northwest of Hafford, by Nathan Heuver (eBird S152785039; ML610226868) appear to fit this “call-type”. **Status:** Red Crossbills are termed resident in the boreal forest of the province, and occur regularly in the Cypress Hills.¹ Subpopulations are highly nomadic and irruptive, as they must often search widely for suitable food sources. Traditional subspecies descriptions do not always match the subpopulations that exhibit different *call types*, so it remains unclear which types of Red Crossbills breed in Saskatchewan, especially across the northern forests; “call type 4” is not mentioned in *BofSk*. **Remarks:** many details of this fascinating

and variable species are presented in the account in *BofSk* by Maurice Mareschal. Current studies by the *Finch Research Network*⁴⁸ are clarifying the status of the Red Crossbill subpopulations (call types), providing new understanding of their distribution across North America. They suggest seven call types may occur in Saskatchewan, but this needs to be confirmed with more recordings: *type 1* (‘Appalachian form’; core range East; very rare irruptions beyond core range, into west, possible in Saskatchewan but no confirmed records yet; generalist feeder); *type 2* (‘Ponderosa Pine form’; core range west, confirmed across southern Saskatchewan including several records from the Cypress Hills and north to Saskatoon – eBird S14116989 on 14 May 2013; moderately eruptive; generalist feeder, with an “eclectic diet”); *type 3* (‘Western Hemlock form’; core range Pacific Northwest; wanders widely to the east every 2-5 years, records from Muenster, Saskatchewan 22 January 2018 – eBird S42219094 and Cypress Hills 22 June 2022 – eBird S115501215; feeds on a variety of hemlock, spruce); *type 4* (‘Douglas-fir form’; core range Pacific Northwest; wanders some in west, record from Muenster, Saskatchewan on 22 January 2018 – eBird S42219094, and eastward; uses a variety of Douglas-fir, spruce, and pines); *type 5* (‘Lodgepole Pine form’; core range Interior West; reports from the Cypress Hills 28 May and 22 June 2022 – eBird S111553807, S115501215; wanders some in west, vagrant further east; feeds on Lodgepole Pine, Engelmann Spruce primarily); *type 10*

(‘Sitka Spruce form’; core range coastal Pacific Northwest; irrupts eastward every 3-5 years, possible for Saskatchewan but no reports yet; feeds on Sitka Spruce in core range); *type 12* (‘type 12 form’ yet to be named; core range southeastern boreal to Great Lakes; irrupts west to at least Alberta — one report; feeds on a variety of spruces and pines). See the *Finch Research Network* website for the most recent study results, and their request for more recordings from the entire distribution area of this crossbill. An open question is whether each of these call types should be considered ‘cryptic species’ or remain part of a single Red Crossbill superspecies complex.

Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*): six records presented here. On 23 October 2023, Ron Jensen (pers. comm.) observed a Little Gull in the Redberry Lake Migratory Bird Sanctuary, from the Regional Park shoreline, and stated: “a non-breeding adult Little Gull, all black underwing with white edging, is flying about with 4 Bonaparte’s” Gulls; noting, the upper wing surface was light colour with no change in pattern toward the tip. On the morning of 24 October, Vicki and Warren St. Germaine found the same bird and their photograph (Figure 11) shows all the features of a non-breeding adult (eBird S153008923; ML610338297); Mike Blom (pers. comm.) saw it on 27 October, in the early afternoon.

Five reports from 2017 to 2020: a single adult found by Daniel Sawatzky on 18 October 2020 at Regina Beach (eBird S75108096). One seen at Radisson Lake

on 18 October 2018 by Nick Saunders (eBird S49279826) and other observers; and one on 16 October 2018 between Blaine Lake and Krydor by Bruce Di Labio (eBird S49242311). One winter plumaged adult photographed at the north end of Blackstrap Reservoir by Nick Saunders, with Stan Shadick, on 11 October 2018 (eBird S49122862; ML118453881). One immature photographed on 25 June 2017 by Dwaine Oakley at Big Quill Lake (eBird S37941548; ML62490781). **Status:** now changed to straggler from accidental. Ten records to 2016. **Remarks:** this is the only gull in North America with such dark underwings. It is frequently associated with Bonaparte's Gulls, particularly during migration.³⁸ The nearest regular breeding location is coastal Hudson's Bay at Churchill, Manitoba. Many spend the winter on the Great Lakes and the Atlantic coast. The Little Gull's fall passage in Saskatchewan coincides with Bonaparte's Gull migration to wintering areas along the Pacific coast, where eBird reports show Little Gulls are increasing.

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*):

two records, both from the Qu'Appelle River Valley (approximately 275 km apart). A single first winter individual found and photographed (Figure 12) on 5 November 2023 at Crooked Lake by Jared Clarke and Kristen Martin (eBird S153837768, S153866159; ML610789194, 9195); also seen by Don Weidl (eBird S153848321). Nearby Bonaparte's Gulls provided a good comparison. Then, on 17 December, one first winter kittiwake was photographed in flight by Bob Godwin during the Elbow Christmas Bird Count, at the Qu'Appelle River/Valley Dam, at the south end of Lake Diefenbaker's Gordon Mackenzie Arm (eBird S156634313; ML612381796 to 81804). It was seen by several other observers.

Status: the seventh and eighth (a new late date) records for the province.² Accidental. **Remarks:** photos of these two kittiwakes were compared to determine if they might be the same bird; the patterns of dark markings on each bird's head suggest they were two different birds. Black-legged Kittiwakes leave their arctic nesting grounds, dispersing

widely to winter on the northern Atlantic and Pacific oceans. There are scattered records of this gull throughout the North American interior, most involving first-year birds in late fall and early winter (eBird species map). All eight Saskatchewan birds fit this pattern (11 October to 17 December), being found near open water. They are likely birds from breeding colonies in the eastern Canadian Arctic that find their way into Hudson's Bay and continue travelling in a

south westerly direction to be discovered as vagrants in the prairies. This may be an example of "mirror-image misorientation" described by Howell et al.⁴⁹ Such birds have a faulty internal compass: young kittiwakes take an incorrect south westerly course rather than a normal south easterly course to traditional wintering grounds. The Black-legged Kittiwake is evaluated as 'Vulnerable' worldwide, due to a dramatic population decline of 40 per cent in recent decades.⁵⁰



FIGURE 11. A Little Gull was observed in October 2023 in the Redberry Lake Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Photo credit: Vicki St. Germaine.



FIGURE 12. A single first winter Black-legged Kittiwake was observed on 5 November 2023 at Crooked Lake. Photo credit: Jared Clarke.

Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*): one photographed by Daniel Sawatzky at a feeder in his backyard in the Hillsdale neighbourhood, Regina on 6 November 2023 (eBird S153927078; ML610848940, 48944, 48950). The white primary edges on the folded wing and whitish side of the lower mandible identify it as an immature bird.¹¹ It continued to be seen almost daily and was photographed by many observers at Sawatzky's bird feeders, and in the neighbourhood, through November and December (Figure 13); last reported for 2023 on 30 December by D Sawatzky (eBird S157543035). More details on this record are available in the *Blue Jay*.⁵¹ **Status:** first confirmed record for Saskatchewan, raising it from hypothetical occurrence, to accidental. **Remarks:** the two previous records were both from the western side of the province, each in May, but lacked sufficient documentation to be confirmed. This small nuthatch is a fairly common resident of British Columbia's southern interior.⁵² A post breeding dispersal occurs, with only a very few individuals wandering onto the Great Plains east of the Rocky Mountains, as per eBird species map.⁵¹

Pygmy Nuthatches are gregarious, travelling in flocks much of the year. During winter they descend to lower elevations where they often travel in mixed-species flocks of small birds.⁵² They have several adaptations that help them survive cold temperatures. Families roost communally in cavities overnight, where they can enter torpor to further conserve energy. More than 100 Pygmy Nuthatches have been recorded roosting in a single cavity in Colorado. There are no records of these nuthatches roosting with other species. Chickadees can also enter torpor but roost singly. Where the Regina nuthatch roosted at night was not determined.

Yellow-billed Loon (*Cavia adamsii*): Don Weidl photographed a juvenile Yellow-billed Loon at Round Lake on 19 November 2023 (eBird S154793389; ML611352360, 611678119, 611678201). Nick Saunders used image software to bring out the bird's features in photo 8201, facilitating the identification. **Status:** straggler, with 19 previous records. **Remarks:** 17 of those records are fall sightings (August through December).

Pine Warbler (*Setophaga pinus*): one photographed at a feeder in Carlyle on 9 December 2023 by Gordon Paulley, reported on Sask Birders Facebook group (fide Don Weidl and Vicki St. Germaine). Seen on 11 December by D Weidl (eBird S156159606), Kathy Hedegard, and Wes Kemp; continuing, seen on 17 December (eBird S156546371, 46979; ML612236928, ML612337116) by Jared, Rowan, and Teal Clarke and Kristen Martin (Figure 14); and on 23 December by Dan Sawatzky and Brett Quiring (eBird S156976588); **Status:** straggler. **Remarks:** Al Smith describes changes in the pattern of records for this species in the province. Prior to 1970, it could be termed an accidental migrant; then, in 1975, singing males were found on territories suggesting breeding, and recently stragglers have lingered into late fall, one even overwintering with the help of a suet feeder.¹ This warbler breeds in southeastern Manitoba.⁴³

2023 Spring and Fall Records

The following list of dates extends the information that appears in *BofSk*. It is not exhaustive since I relied mainly on reports in eBird for 2023. However, it does provide a glimpse into how birds are adjusting their migration windows and movements with changes in weather and climate. The overall diversity of species involved is striking. As we all know, year-to-year weather variation is important in influencing bird behaviour: warm spring conditions allow early arrivals and mild, snow-free autumn conditions allow many species to linger. This happened in 2023, with late departures blurring into early winter; this was particularly evident for waterfowl and some other waterbirds. See the *82nd Annual Saskatchewan Christmas Bird Count* report by Al Smith for records of late stragglers not mentioned here.⁵³

SPRING DATES: only "new" earliest dates are listed for March, April and May.

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*): on 10 April 2023, Don Weidl saw two at North Ekapo Lake, Qu'Appelle Valley "flying low over the frozen sewage lagoon" (eBird S133344113). **Status:** this matches the earliest arrival date in 1976 record from Regina.



FIGURE 13. Saskatchewan's first confirmed record of Pygmy Nuthatch. Photo credit: Annie McLeod.



FIGURE 14. A Pine Warbler was observed in Carlyle during December 2023. Photo credit: Jared Clarke.

Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*): on 20 April 2023, Don Weidl counted 34 Fox Sparrows (all the ‘Red’ form) in Broadview feeding on the ground in his yard (eBird S134420121). A late spring cold front brought widespread snow across southern Saskatchewan in the third week of April, interrupting the migration of several species. **Status:** high count for spring migration. Weidl commented this was an “unbelievable number”.

Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*): a single male observed and photographed by Annie McLeod and Joel Cherry on 21 and 22 April 2023 in Regina (eBird S134527574, S134608966). **Status:** previous early date 24 April, Kyle. Typically, Yellow Warblers arrive in mid-May.

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*): an adult male was photographed by Trevor Herriot on 28 April 2023 near Deep Lake, south of Indian Head (eBird S135277934, ML 564974121). **Status:** previous earliest arrival 4 May, Weyburn. Most arrive in late May.

Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*): two individuals were photographed on 30 April 2023 near the Swift Current Reservoir by Rita McLachlan (eBird S135738337, ML 565629651). **Status:** previous early date was 4 May, Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area.

FALL DATES: “new” latest fall dates are listed for August through to 13 December, plus a few winter dates (14 December on).

Northern Waterthrush (*Parkesia noveboracensis*): Trevor Herriot saw one on 3 October 2023 in Regina (eBird S152216063). Then Shirley Friel saw one in her yard in Regina on 15 October (Facebook post, fide Trevor Herriot). **Status:** previous latest date was 11 October in Saskatoon.

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*): one bird heard calling on 14 October 2023 at Manitou Lake by Sharlane Toole (eBird S152267854); and, one seen at Radisson Lake on 12 October 2023 by Bruce Di Labio (eBirdS152028286). **Status:** both later than previous 4 October record, Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area.

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*): one photographed at Condie Nature Reserve, near Regina, on 14 October 2023 by Fran Kerbs (eBird S152587224). **Status:** previous latest 6 October, Pasqua Lake. Most depart in September.

Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*): seven photographed on 18 October at Leask Lake by Joel Schmidt (eBird S152556947); 15 seen on 15 October 2023 by Daniel Sawatzky at Leask Lake (eBird S152363944). **Status:** previous latest report 17 October, Luck Lake.

American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*): 14 seen along the shore of Crooked Lake by Jared Clarke on 5 November 2023 (eBird S153837768); on 2 November 2023, seven were found by Don Weidl at Crooked Lake (eBird S15 3604578); 28 October 2023, sightings of up to 23 seen at Crooked Lake and Round Lake, by Don Weidl and Kale Worman (eBird S153282339; S153251915). **Status:** previous late date 3 November, Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area.

Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*): on 27 November 2023, Dan Zazelenchuk photographed two southeast of Kyle (eBird S155335509); on 13 November 2023, one photographed by John Lundgren 11 km south of Shellbrook (eBird S154414474; ML611106654, 6733) and the same bird on 4 November (eBird S153901009; ML610829167, 29221); one banded and photographed by Mike Blom on 4 November, near Saskatoon (eBird S153955697; ML610863720). **Status:** late departures; the 4 and 13 November records are post breeding movements, perhaps aided by the lack of snow cover north of the traditional breeding range.

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*): two continuing birds photographed on 27 November 2027 by Kathy Hedegard at Rafferty Reservoir, east of Estevan (eBird S155332604, ML611634101). One bird was injured. **Status:** previous record 25 November, Saskatoon. Recorded on several Christmas Bird Counts.

Baird's Sandpiper (*Calidris bairdii*):

one seen below Gardiner Dam on 14 December on the Christmas Bird Count, many observers (eBird S156312378, ML612245307); found earlier by Ryan Dudragne on 3 December 2023, and seen by Nick Saunders (eBird S155685969, ML611840555), Thompson Hyggen, and Michael Sveen (eBird S155692159, S155692020); three birds photographed at Manitou Lake, north of Watrous, on 12 November 2023 by Sharlane Toole (eBird S154355107; ML611077240); several records at Crooked Lake in the Qu'Appelle Valley — six seen by Don Weidl on 6 November (eBird S153905805); seven seen on 5 November 2023 by Jared Clarke (eBird S153837768; ML610789172); three seen 28 October 2023 by Kale Worman (eBird S153269255); one photographed on 23 Oct 2023 by Don Weidl (eBird S152935835; ML610301272). **Status:** previous late date 2 November, Lake Diefenbaker. **Remarks:** this number of late records is exceptional.

Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*): two birds photographed by Sharlane Toole on 20 December 2023 on the Harris Reservoir, 9.5 km south of Maple Creek (eBird S156852304; ML612517202).

Status: previous late departure date 2 December, Regina.

Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*): one was recorded on the Redberry Christmas Bird Count on 30 December; Mike Blom saw an adult female, on 22 December, then an immature on 25 December, both about 11 km south of Blaine Lake; a single was seen “cruising the ditch” between Young and Zelma on 10 December by Craig Busse (pers. comm.). **Status:** average departure usually by early November; rarely reported on CBCs.

Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*): one photographed by Sarah Ludlow (eBird S157248249; ML612724580) with Tracey Bakkeli, in Whitmore Park, Regina on 27 December 2023. **Status:** only the second winter record for this subspecies; the other from the Cypress Hills where they occur in summer.

Other Updates (AOS & COSEWIC news):

A Hopping and E Linck submitted a proposal (2023-D-7) to the American Ornithological Society^{54,55} for review, to consider lumping Pacific-slope and Cordilleran Flycatchers back into one species Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*). The authors discussed the biogeography, morphology, vocalizations, preferred habitat, mating systems, and population genetics of these flycatchers that led to the split in 1989. With the benefit of more recent and detailed findings gathered in the past 15 years, they state that these two taxa cannot be separated using any criteria, including vocalizations and genetics. They concluded that there is “no supporting evidence for species-level differences between *E. difficilis* (*sensu stricto*) and *E. occidentalis* as they currently stand, and we recommend that they be lumped under Western Flycatcher *E. difficilis* (*sensu lato*), reverting to their treatment prior to the 1989 split. At most, a subspecies relationship can be claimed.” This proposal convinced the AOS committee to lump these two taxa back into Western Flycatcher and was passed in July 2023.⁵ These flycatchers are now considered to be one species, Western Flycatcher (*E. difficilis*). This decision validates concerns that questioned the merits of splitting the closely related, clinal populations of this species in 1989. People who keep lists of North American birds will “lose a species”.

In another change by the AOS's North American Classification Committee (NACC), the common and scientific name of our Nearctic goshawk is now American Goshawk (*Accipiter atricapillus*) after being split from the Eurasian Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) of the Palearctic, due to genetic and vocal differences.^{5,54} This caused the four-letter ‘banding codes’ to be changed for American Goshawk to AGOS and American Goldfinch to AGOL.

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), the independent advisory panel to the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada, assesses the status of wildlife

species at risk of extinction, and makes recommendations for their protection under Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Recent update: Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Antrastomus vociferus*) is now listed as a species of Special Concern (December 2022), being down-graded from Threatened status.

Errata credit for the photograph that appears on page 369 of *Birds of Saskatchewan* is incorrect (fide Ron Jensen). The photograph of an unoccupied Chimney Swift nest near Zenon Park was taken by Philip Taylor on 29 October 2014.

Discussion

The origins of the rarest species in 2023 have come from many compass points, similar to the pattern described previously.² One species each from: northeast Asia (Slaty-backed Gull); the Bering Sea coast of Alaska (Glaucous Gull subspecies *barrovianus*); the Arctic (Black-legged Kittiwake); the woodlands of eastern North America (Hooded Warbler); and two from the west, the Rocky Mountains over to the Pacific coast (Anna's Hummingbird, Pygmy Nuthatch). The most unexpected and remarkable vagrant that continued from 2022 was from the arid deserts of the southwest (Costa's Hummingbird), while the fall records of Little Gulls may involve post breeding migration rather than vagrancy.

Some of the species discussed can be called *vagrants* — a collective term used to describe birds that are discovered far beyond their expected distribution/range. The definition of vagrancy is somewhat confusing encompassing several concepts: “dispersal”, not necessarily implying breeding attempts that might follow; “irruptions” that are episodic and often unpredictable; “migration” regular dispersal; and a “vagrant” that has moved a substantial distance outside its current range, either directional or seemingly random (in direction), but may be part of a rare or reoccurring process.⁵⁶ Howell et al state “one fundamental point is that, for a variety of reasons, young birds are inherently more susceptible to vagrancy than adult birds.”⁴⁹

Shifting migration dates: A recent study “examined the impact of temperature on long-term change of passage timing and duration of the spring migration period in birds” using data for “195 species from 21 European and Canadian bird observatories”.^{57,58} They looked at changes in different phases of migration (beginning, central and end), not just first occurrence dates that can be misleading. Generally, the median date of spring migration advanced one week from 1959 to 2015, being most pronounced in short distance migrants (1.5 to 2 days per decade) compared to tropical migrants (0.6 to 1.2 days per decade). With increasing temperatures, the advancement of spring migration was generally most pronounced in the early and middle phases, but not the end phase, leading to extended spring migration seasons. Comparable studies of fall migration have apparently not been done. Further studies may determine in which phase of the migration cycles vagrants are most likely to appear, across their range.

The spring of 2023 was rather remarkable in Saskatchewan, with a wide variety of short and long-distance migrants appearing earlier than previously recorded. Several arrived early in April after the weather suddenly warmed following an unusually cold February and March. This trend continued after a brief return of winter snow in the third week of April, and even extending into May. As birds arrive on their breeding grounds earlier in spring, their young mature and are prepared to depart earlier in autumn. Still, many late fall departure dates were recorded for a range of species including insectivorous passerines and arctic nesting shorebirds, into late October. We can only wonder how flexible these birds might be as they try to adapt to their changing environments. The long-term information on migrating birds gathered at the Last Mountain Bird Observatory, surrounded by the Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area, is important for examining these shifts.

“I envy birds their wings to fly away.”
John Clare, poet, 1841.

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2024 MARGARET SKEEL GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT: JESSIE BAINBRIDGE



Jessie Bainbridge

From my earliest memories, I've been captivated by wildlife and nature. Growing up, my grandpa and great auntie Jane, both avid nature enthusiasts, fueled my curiosity with their passion for the outdoors. I always ventured and returned to my worried mother who would sigh when I said I was looking for snails, caterpillars, minnows, frogs, turtles, bats, etc.

Upon moving to Western Canada in 2018, from southern Ontario, I pursued my passion by continuing my education at Medicine Hat College and received my Bachelor of Ecosystem Management from Lethbridge College. While attending school, I secured my first field technician position, surveying rare plants and the effects of prescribed fire to help enhance habitat for multiple species at risk in sand dune ecosystems in southeast Alberta.

During my education, I've also held other field technician roles and contractor and subcontractor positions focused on wildlife and plant-related work, either for conservation or

construction projects. Some of my most memorable experiences include working with at-risk prairie species like the Burrowing Owl and the Ord's Kangaroo Rat. The hidden treasures of the prairie ecosystems have completely captivated my interest.

My early passion for observing flora and fauna has evolved into a career dedicated to their conservation — a journey I never thought possible. Inspired by my experience in dune ecosystems and with the Ord's Kangaroo Rat, I pursued my Master of Science research at the University of Regina, focusing on informing conservation strategies for this rodent under the supervision of Dr. Ryan Fisher and Dr. Chris Somers.

The Ord's Kangaroo Rat, a federally endangered species exclusive to dune ecosystems in southwest Saskatchewan and southeast Alberta, thrives in open sandy habitats, and vegetation encroachment poses a significant threat. However, some vegetation is important for food and protection from predators, and other factors like parasites and predators also impact their habitat. Dunes are considered crucial for their long-term survival in Canada, yet defining what constitutes a high-quality dune remains a key question my research aims to address. I will also examine the genetic population structure of Ord's Kangaroo Rats across their range in Canada. Understanding the genetic variation within and among Ord's Kangaroo Rat populations across Canada will aid in identifying vulnerable subpopulations and informing habitat remediation and translocation projects. My research is a collaborative conservation effort involving the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Saskatchewan and Alberta governments. I just started my first field season and look forward to filling ecological gaps for this endangered, desert-dwelling rodent!



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Philip Taylor is a retired Canadian Wildlife Service biologist and Life Member of Nature Saskatchewan. 