

NEW AND NOTEWORTHY RECORDS OF SASKATCHEWAN BIRDS: 2024

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Introduction

This is the fourth article drawing together new and important bird records, which add to information in the *Birds of Saskatchewan (BofSk)*¹ and previous updates by Taylor.^{2,3,4} It covers observations for the period ending 31 December 2024 and includes: two new *accidental* species for the province (Short-tailed Shearwater, Vermilion Flycatcher), and a third that continued from 2023 (Pygmy Nuthatch); two *hypotheticals* upgraded to *accidentals* (Black-chinned Hummingbird, Tropical Kingbird); nine *accidentals* (Glossy Ibis, Anna's Hummingbird, White-winged Dove, Curve-billed Thrasher, Yellow-throated Warbler, Black-throated Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, Painted Bunting, Eurasian Tree Sparrow); and one new *hypothetical* species (Cassin's Kingbird). Also presented are important breeding records, and spring arrival and fall departure dates. Several species listed as "Threatened or Endangered under Schedule 1" of Canada's *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*, are given special mention.⁵

The bird records are presented in chronological order. This approach reflects the ecological relationships of wild birds to the seasonal cycles, and how they are adapting to the changing climate, weather patterns, and habitats. It allows the dynamic connections and interactions that birds have with their environment to be compared most easily. By contrast, bird taxonomy is intended to reflect the evolutionary relationships among organisms, and is in a constant state of flux depending on the changing interpretations of scientists. For those reasons, the records are not listed in taxonomic order.

Efforts have been made to include only reports that can be verified as reliable. Records posted on Cornell Lab

of Ornithology's eBird platform are given a unique identification number prefixed by "S"; accompanying photographs or audio spectrographs are numbered with the prefix "ML" for the Macaulay Library. The ability to learn about and verify bird sightings has become increasingly important. Many reports continue to be posted on other sites where varying efforts are made to confirm sightings (American Birding Association's Birds of North America; Sask Birders on Facebook; local websites and chat groups).² And, with the availability of Cornell's app, Merlin Bird ID, people report birds that are potentially mis-identified without supplying the audio recording or verifying the identification by sight. If the observer wishes to remain unknown ('anonymous') or cannot be contacted to provide sufficient details, the record is generally not included in this article.

All references to historical records mentioned under Status and Remarks come from *BofSk*, unless otherwise stated, as do terms describing seasons and habitat regions. *Confirmed* species have photographs, videos, audio recordings, or specimen documentation; *hypothetical* species lack such documentation even if seen by one or more competent observers; *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 important information on the natural history of a species.^{2,3}

Nature Saskatchewan (Regina) houses the complete list of historic bird records, which provided the data base used in writing the *BofSk*. It is inevitable that some new and important bird sightings were missed and not included in this article. Anyone with information about rare birds is

encouraged to submit their information to an official repository in Regina, which includes Nature Saskatchewan or the Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre (<http://biodiversity.sk.ca/OnlineRep.htm>). Any specimens may be donated directly to the Royal Saskatchewan Museum (instructions here: <https://royalsaskmuseum.ca/research/biology>). By reporting observations on eBird, an even wider audience is reached and birders and scientists can benefit from the information immediately, allowing them to look for the bird in a timely manner. Sharing such information through these proper channels is an invaluable contribution of citizen science.

Bird names, common and scientific, follow the American Ornithological Society's (AOS) *Check-list of North American Birds* and its 64th and 65th supplements.^{6,7}

The Records 1999

Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*):

On 27 July 1999, Mike Gollop (pers. comm. 29 August 2024) encountered a Cassin's Kingbird 8.3 km east-northeast (at 49.48N; -102.4149W) of Roche Percee, while conducting a North American Butterfly Association's *Fourth of July Butterfly Count* ('4JC'). His field notes indicated a "dark gray head with sharply contrasting white throat and no white outer tail feathers but with a full pale tip. Most notable however was the call which was nothing like a WEKI" [Western Kingbird]. The kingbird was along the north slope of the Souris River valley, "near the top of a small wooded draw that ran up from the river. The draw had a number of decent sized trees in it but the kingbird was on a lone tree nearest the top and not far from a small badland formation ... It perched there for several minutes scolding the world in general. Finally, it took off after an insect and returned to a [different] tree

some distance away. I did not follow it at this point ...” **Status:** Hypothetical. First record for the province. **Remarks:** I have no doubt that this kingbird was correctly identified, and deserves “accidental” status since this record was documented carefully by a field biologist, experienced in bird identification. Unfortunately, even though this tyrant kingbird can be identified with confidence in the field, by sight and its vocalizations, without additional supporting documentation this record remains “hypothetical”. This sighting validates the remarks by Robert Wapple and Lorrie Sielski in the Western Kingbird account in *BofSk*: “the Cassin’s Kingbird, should be on our radar as it has been found breeding as near as southeastern Montana.” And, there are non-breeding records for this kingbird, only 260 km southwest of Roche Percee (eBird records map).⁸ However, as Dunn and Alderfer point out, this species is “a scarce migrant away from [its] breeding areas”.⁹

2024

Pygmy Nuthatch (*Sitta pygmaea*): Bird first sighted in Regina on 6 November 2023 by Dan Sawatzky. The nuthatch was seen in the neighbourhood by many observers (when it was active between 09:28 and 16:18 hr), until the last sightings on 10 January 2024 (S158647690; S158647819); Bob Bowhay took one photograph of this bird on 10 January (15:30 hr) with very fluffed up body feathers (eBird S158596025; ML613382922). For more information on this record, see Sawatzky and Taylor.^{4,10} **Status:** Accidental. First confirmed record for Saskatchewan. Last seen 10 January 2024 after its long, 66-day stay. **Remarks:** In a review of North American Christmas Bird Count data, T Root stated that “a January average minimum temperature of -12 °C was [a threshold] too low for this small bird”.¹¹ The Regina Pygmy Nuthatch experienced milder than average winter weather between 6 November 2023 and 7 January 2024 with the mean daily temperatures staying above the -12 °C threshold, except on 23 November 2023 (low of -14 °C). Then on 8 January 2024, mean daily temperatures fell and remained below the critical threshold,

reaching -25.8 °C on 11 January.¹² This bird did either not survive these conditions or moved elsewhere.

One of the adaptive benefits Pygmy Nuthatches derive from living in a family group is illustrated in a striking photograph taken by Jakob Dulisse, on 13 January 2024 at South Slocan, west of Nelson, B.C. He found a huddled group of Pygmy Nuthatches with “at least 7 individuals with one white-breasted nuthatch. Sunning in a cluster on a ponderosa pine” (eBird S158822061; ML613505798).

Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*): Several records. The influx that began in October 2023 continued into April 2024; the single bird at Norvil Olson Campground, Southend, Reindeer Lake (first seen on 25 December 2023) continued in the same location to 5 April when it was observed by Laura Messett, Nolan Hoggarth, and Shayna Cossette (eBird S167303216).⁴ Another single bird (first reported 28 December 2023) continued at White Fox and was seen by Jared Clarke and Brett Quiring on 21 January 2024 (eBird S159488694, 88692) and by John Lundgren on 22 January (eBird S159586718, ML613889885).⁴ Pat Springinotic reported two in Birch Hills on 24 February 2024 (eBird S162904935, ML615309063). John Siller photographed one on 16 and 17 March 2024 at Elbow Lake, 60 km southeast of Hudson Bay (eBird S165100996, ML616133101; S165183470). **Status:** Confirmed. An irregular winter visitor, possible almost anywhere in the province. The birds reported in 2024 were all the interior subspecies *L.t. tephrocotis*. **Remarks:** What factors trigger these influxes are unknown, though it is generally accepted that weather conditions and food availability are involved.¹³ The 2023-24 winter movement of rosy-finches appeared to be more widespread than just the Prairies. Reports from many locations across southern coastal and mainland British Columbia involved the expected coastal subspecies *L. t. littoralis* (4 October 2023 to at least 15 January 2024) and was termed a “mini-invasion”.

Pine Warbler (*Setophaga pinus*): The warbler seen first by Gordon Paulley on 9 December 2023, at his yard in Carlyle, continued: 1 January, Sharlane Toole (eBird S167809857); 2 January, Kathy Hedegard (eBird S157908873); 3 January, Vicki and Warren St. Germaine (eBird S157964531). Paulley informed Don Weidl that “I am sad to say I haven’t seen him since January 6th. I am sure he has succumbed to the elements.” However, the bird may have flown away. **Status:** Straggler. The only previously recorded attempt to overwinter occurred in Saskatoon, and was apparently successful (sightings were from early December 2015 to 27 March 2016).¹³ **Remarks:** See the informative discussion concerning the status of this warbler in *BofSk*.¹

Northern Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*): Dan Zazelenchuk reported one “heard calling” east of the Calling River Campground area in Meadow Lake Provincial Park at 13:00 hr (eBird S162420915); and a second calling northeast of Cold Lake at 14:00 hr (eBird S162420992): both owls were presumably on territories, on 19 February 2024 along Highway 919. **Status:** Confirmed. First and only confirmed breeding record occurred in 2023.¹⁴ **Remarks:** There were no other reports in 2024. The status of the Northern Pygmy-Owl across the southern boreal forest is still being clarified.

Willow Ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*): On 2 March 2024, Monica and Blair Smith were driving a “couple of miles” east of their home at Sunset View Beach, Turtle Lake when they saw what she believed to be a ptarmigan. She described it being a “total white bird ... on the side of the road” and when they stopped it “ran across the road” (fide Guy Wapple). **Status:** Confirmed. Irregular winter visitor usually within the boreal forest region, being more numerous in former years. **Remarks:** Even without additional supporting evidence, this is an interesting sight record, 175 km south of recent records in this western area of the province (eBird map). M. Smith recognized the ptarmigan from nature films she’d seen.

Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*): Spring arrival and fall sightings of family groups. **1) Spring:** a single swan photographed on 23 March 2024 southwest of Prince Albert by Vicki and Warren St. Germaine with a small flock of Canada Geese (eBird S165735237, ML616379416). Two seen on 1 April in Meadow Lake Provincial Park (Dan Sawatzky and Jared Clarke, increasing to four birds on 2 April; eBird S166950984). There were multiple summer records from Prince Albert National Park in 2024 by several observers and posted on eBird. **2) Fall:** four family groups (six, three, two, and two cygnets, respectively) were observed together, and carefully documented with photographs, by John Lundgren on 16 October 2024, 10 km northwest of Paddockwood (eBird S199180120; ML625063236). Two adults accompanied by five young were photographed on 27 October 2024 by Cathy Holtslander, 6 km north of Mount Nebo (eBird S200500873). Others, including family groups, were reported from scattered locations across southern Saskatchewan into late fall 2024: two to seven Trumpeter Swans were photographed by Don Weidl from 3 November to 28 December on the open river water at Crooked Lake (eBird S201325245, ML625801107; S205761463, ML627674789; S206915783). **Status:** Confirmed. The spring and summer records continue to increase across the mixedwood forest region of central Saskatchewan. **Remarks:** These swans are reoccupying their former range, in part with carefully managed reintroductions by the Canadian Wildlife Service in Alberta and other organizations elsewhere in Canada. In 2022, a pair of Trumpeter Swans bred north of Duck Lake, 70 km southeast of Mount Nebo.³

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*): Two records. **1)** John Lundgren and Sharlane Toole photographed one, with 15 White-faced Ibis (*P. chihii*), on 15 April 2024 at Coalfields, along township road 11 (13 km south of Estevan) (eBird S169021841, ML617514557, ML617514569). **2)** On 30 April, Dan Sawatzky and Bob Luterbach

photographed one Glossy Ibis (eBird S171189963, S171340785; ML618223453, ML618223472) 6 km south of Yellow Grass; this was likely the same bird that was among 18 White-faced Ibis reported from the same area by Val Thomas on 29 April (eBird S171076001), and later found by Brett Quiring on 5 May (eBird S172271905). **Status:** Accidental. There are only six previous records of Glossy Ibis accepted for the province, the most recent in 2021.² **Remarks:** Glossy Ibis crossed the Atlantic Ocean finding their way to North America in the 1800s. The first specimen was collected in New Jersey in 1817.¹⁵ They continued to spread, eventually encountering White-faced Ibis that occurred naturally in western parts of the continent; the first hybrid was documented in Oklahoma in 2002.¹⁶ Oswald et al state they “detected signals of genetic admixture between *chihii* and *falcinellus* in individuals both near and far from their core area of sympatry. Genomic cline analysis revealed evidence of greater introgression into *falcinellus* from *chihii*, but we found little evidence for selection against hybrids.”¹⁶ This points to mixing of genes between the two forms of ibis is widespread and reproductive isolation is weak across North America. Regular dispersal events by ibis across populations with different genomic backgrounds continue, and will likely result in increased hybridization across the continent. Many birds display a variety of intermediate, often subtle characteristics. Genetic sampling would be necessary to confirm identification of these individuals, and the handful of accepted records of Glossy Ibis for the province are based on field observations.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow x House Sparrow hybrid (ETSP x HOSP) (*Passer montanus* x *P. domesticus*): Two new records of putative hybrids. **1)** On 19 April 2024, Kerry Hjertaas photographed a hybrid male ETSP x HOSP at the Saskatoon Forestry Farm (eBird S169311380; ML617636214, 618302026, 2027). **2)** On 21 July 2024 Don Weidl saw one male “with a smudged black ear patch seen clearly” at a bird bath in Broadview (eBird S188158552); this bird may have been an

immature bird starting to moult.¹⁶ **Status:** Accidental. This would be the second and third records of hybrids for the province. The first was in Regina in 2016.¹ **Remarks:** Several features of the Saskatoon sparrow suggested hybridization, including characteristics belonging to ETSP — a grey smudge on the left, grey-white cheek; a *white collar* extending backward, below a chestnut, coloured crown and back of the head and neck; a *restricted black throat patch* stopping at the upper breast; a small/restricted area of white tipped median coverts; lacking pale stripes on either side of the back. This bird appeared to be a bit smaller in size than a nearby female HOSP.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) (ETSP): On 22 September 2024, Don Weidl viewed a bright “male with brown crown and clear black dot on grey cheek” visit his feeder in Broadview (eBird S196103421); its features differed from the hybrid sparrow that Weidl saw on 21 July. **Status:** Accidental. **Remarks:** This is the sixth record for the province. All previous records are single birds across southern Saskatchewan: Regina in 2015 and 2017, Avonlea in 2018, Broadview in 2022, and Rockglen in 2022.^{1,2,3} One ETSP discovered at Fabyan, Alberta, near Wainwright (70 km west of the Saskatchewan border) was seen by many observers from 22 April to 9 June 2024. This is considerably farther northwest of the reports in 2024 from Saskatchewan: Saskatoon (310 km), and Broadview (640 km).

Sage Thrasher (*Oreoscoptes montanus*): Four sightings, three in the spring and one late fall. **1)** One photographed on 3 May 2024 in the Avalon Park neighbourhood of Saskatoon by Louisa Morrison (first posted on iNaturalist, observation 213306293; subsequently, on eBird S173030879, ML618718343, ML618718377, ML618718392). **2)** On 18 May, Linda Mikolayenko posted a photograph of a Sage Thrasher seen in North Central, Regina, on the Sask Birders Facebook page (fide Al Smith). **3)** On 21 June, Kathleen Dvorak photographed one thrasher, 9 km northwest of Spruce

Home, [at 'Fog Haven'] 27 km north northwest of Prince Albert (eBird S18269396; ML620692891, ML620692909); also seen and photographed by John Lundgren and Vicki and Warren St. Germaine. **4)** On 23 November, one very late fall bird was photographed by Maureen and Glen Lee in their yard in Wood Meadows, Regina, as it perched in a grape vine bearing fruit (eBird S204978472; ML627341853, ML627341854, ML627341855). This bird was seen at the same location by several observers: on 12 December by Jared Clarke, Brett Quiring, Dan Sawatzky, Annie McLeod and Joel Cherry (eBird S205184461, ML627437125; S205173982; S205178762, ML627432879; eBird S205210575; Figure 1); on 15 December by Ian and Rachel Fallas (eBird S205532043, S205544086); on 16 and 18 December by Dan Sawatzky (eBird S205652783, S205838119); on 19 December by Dale Hjertaas who "watched it go to [the] grape vine and get a frozen grape. It took it back to the deck and pecked it a few times before swallowing it. The grape was large enough that swallowing it frozen was a challenge and took a few seconds before the bird got it down. It then rested" (eBird S205929296); on 20 December by Kale Worman (eBird S206013442); on 21 December by Al Smith and Dan Sawatzky (eBird S206118109; S206140302). **Status:** Confirmed. This endangered species occurs only sporadically in southwestern Saskatchewan where suitable stands

of tall sagebrush and other scattered shrubs grow. **Remarks:** Presumably, the first three birds were wayward spring migrants overshooting their normal breeding range. The excellent photographs by K Dvorak show feather details consistent with a 'second year' bird (see figure 138C in Pyle).¹⁷

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*): Three records. **1)** One male photographed at Cathedral Bluffs near Saskatoon by Anita Skot on 9 May 2024 (eBird S173108638; ML619085114). **2)** A female was photographed on 12 May 2024 by Laura Chyzowski at her cottage beside Murray Lake Migratory Bird Sanctuary (eBird S173985492; ML619116139). **3)** An adult female was photographed by Kathy Hedegard on 31 July 2024 at the southwest side of Estevan (eBird S189808854; ML622068671). **Status:** Confirmed. The second record is the most north westerly location reported in the province to date. **Remarks:** Females are reported less frequently than the colourful males.

Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*): Two records. **1)** An adult plumaged male photographed on 11 May 2024 in Duck Lake town by Marcea Marine (eBird S173703590; ML618839693, ML618839695 and sonogram ML618839635), overshoot the expected breeding range by several hundred kilometres. **2)** An immature male was found on 6 June 2023 by Andy

Nguyen and Erica Alex at the Ceylon Regional Park, 20 km west of Radville (eBird S179834687). **Status:** Confirmed. A rare summer resident in southwest Saskatchewan.

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*): Two records. **1)** One male photographed by Jennifer Bisschop on 16 May 2024 at a feeder (eBird S175050056; ML619176641, ML619176703) at Good Spirit Lake, north of Yorkton. **2)** On 30 October, one other-coloured bird at a suet feeder was photographed by Jim Majewski in Bjorkdale, and posted on Sask Birders (fide Nick Saunders, 31 October 2024). **Status:** Straggler. **Remarks:** Almost a third of the 22 records discussed in *BofSk* are from the fall, and this pattern of vagrancy continues for this neotropical migrant.³ The nearest breeding area is in southwest Iowa, 1,400 km from Bjorkdale.

Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*): Two records. **1)** One 'gray adult' well described by Celine Maurice and Francois Shaffer on 19 May 2024 at the 70 Mile Butte trailhead, Grasslands National Park (eBird S175819251, S175819250). **2)** Dawn Hall saw one at Cranberry Flats Conservation Area, Saskatoon on 25 May 2024 (eBird S177116946). **Status:** Confirmed. Possibly the most westerly and northerly records in the province for this rare summer resident.

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*): One record. Glenn and Judith Annand discovered a male at their bird feeder on 20 May 2024, 4 km north of Outlook (eBird S175883954; ML619360672, ML619360691). Photographs show the bird was moulting and had not attained full breeding plumage (G Annand eBird S176283754; S176325768; ML619448754, ML619448755). Also observed by Nick Saunders (eBird S176459710; ML619467191, ML619468420) and Michael Sveen on 22 May; then on the morning of 23 May by Philip and Margot Taylor, Robin and Cydnie Mather (eBird S176946432), followed by Vicki and Warren St. Germaine (eBird S177447658; ML619648616,



FIGURE 1. A Sage Thrasher was observed in Maureen and Glen Lee's yard in Regina during November and December 2024. Photo credit: Dan Sawatzky.



FIGURE 2. A male Painted Bunting was observed at Glenn and Judith Annand's yard, near Outlook, from 20-23 May 2024. Photo credit: Vicki St. Germaine.

ML619648617, ML619648618, Figure 2), and later that afternoon by John and Sam Kearley (eBird S176630691). Last seen by the Annands on the evening of 23 May. **Status:** Accidental. Tenth record for the province; seen daily 20 to 23 May. **Remarks:** This bunting had adult male feathers on its head, nape, mantle, throat, and greater coverts, with sub-adult plumage elsewhere on the body. It had some bright blue-green edged primary and secondary feathers, indicating wing moult was in progress (P Taylor observations). Moult in Painted Buntings is complex; males retain female-like plumage for a second year before attaining full breeding plumage.¹⁸ The nearest regular breeding range is central Kansas, 1,700 km southeast of Outlook.

Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*): multiple sightings across southern areas of the province, plus three breeding records.

The southeast: single adults were seen on 22 July by Carey Bergman, along Highway 1 halfway between Moosomin and Wapella (eBird S188327954); on 29 July by Robert Brua on the east side of Whitewood (eBird S189493111); and on 14 August 2024 by Don Weidl and Wes Kemp, 12 km south of Oakshela (eBird S191442469; ML622524178).

The southwest: there were several

eBird reports of birds across southern SK, including Maple Creek in June. One adult was seen in Cypress Hill Interprovincial Park in the Meadows Campground on 29 June by Jordie Braun (eBird S184805374); another adult photographed in Golden Prairie by Rod Nikkel on 28 July (eBird S189351689; ML621960306).

The central aspen-parklands: on 22 May 2024, Darryll Myhr saw one [that he reported as a male] "feeding on a fence post" about "5 miles south and 1 mile east of Preeceville" (eBird S176416270). Jared Clarke photographed one at the Last Mountain Lake Bird Observatory on 24 May (eBird S176778597); and one was reported from Nokomis on 26 May by Katelyn Luff, Nolan Hoggarth, and Laura Messett (eBird S177392347). On 2 July, Leona Douglas photographed one adult 18 km north of Naicam (eBird S185036810; ML621987860). Ron and Julie Jensen saw one on 13 July "7 km east of junction highways 349 and 35, south of Archerwill" near a farmstead (pers. comm.) (52.434669; -106.754222). Bert Dalziel saw one adult on 2 August, 2 km southeast of Love (eBird S189936820).

Breeding records in 2024: **1**) Carrot River area: one confirmed breeding record, plus a second possible nesting record. Todd James photographed "two adults and 3 young on the lawn around the sunflower feeder" on 21 August 2024, 13 km west of Carrot River

(eBird S191257294). The adults arrived in June, visiting the bird feeder daily; first photographs of adults taken on 11 June by T James (pers. comm. 19 August, 29 October 2024); and subsequently, he saw one adult carrying food (eBird S186006791). Despite searching, T James and Bert Dalziel could not initially find the nest site among the many available dead limbs and trunks of the poplars in the shelterbelt around the farmyard, but later believed they located the nesting tree in a "large black poplar". Successful nesting was determined when the young fledged and visited the bird feeder. He saw the last woodpeckers in September 2024. **Note:** T James reported Red-headed Woodpeckers breeding successfully at the same location in 2023, raising three young.⁴ James also mentioned another possible nesting record nearby: he stated that Red-headed Woodpeckers had been seen by Bev Doerkson at her farm, 7.75 km northwest of Carrot River, from June to September 2023, with one fledgling there on 2 September 2023 (James pers. comm.).³ In 2024, the woodpeckers arrived at Doerkson's in late May, and a hatch-year woodpecker was observed later in the summer, although breeding at that location was possible, but not confirmed for 2024. **2**) 5 km northeast of Saltcoats: a pair of adults were seen regularly by Larry and Verne Trowell (the farm owner) and several other observers, from spring into the last week of August. They were observed feeding two or perhaps three fledged young, and may have nested in "a stand of dead poplar trees about 100 meters from the road" (Gerri and Ron Knudsen, pers. comm.).¹⁹ **3**) Constance Lake, 1 km east of Iroquois Lake, and 15 km southwest of Mont Nebo: on 26 August 2024, Harold Fisher (pers. comm.) and Valerie Horner watched at least three Red-headed Woodpeckers, two adults and one in juvenile plumage, on the east side of Constance Lake. They were "flying back and forth among the mixed living and dead balsam poplars along the shoreline" and would "leave their perch[es] and dart after insects." One adult was photographed holding in its bill what looked like a large

grasshopper. This is likely the most northwesterly location where breeding was believed to have occurred in the province.

Status: Confirmed. There have been more reports of this woodpecker in recent years, widely scattered across southern and central Saskatchewan, south of the mixedwood forest. This bird is listed as Threatened under Canada's Species at Risk legislation. **Remarks:** The Red-headed Woodpecker population has declined significantly across its North American range during the past 50 years.²⁰ Ken Kaufman points out that in areas where large numbers of trees die from causes — such as insect damage, disease, or fire — suitable nesting sites become more available, attracting these woodpeckers.²¹ This may explain the recent upswing in Red-headed Woodpecker numbers in Saskatchewan, which is contrary to the long-term trend across their entire range; here in our province, many trees are dying from drought conditions leaving bare limbs or full standing tree skeletons in shelterbelts and native wooded areas. Short-lived species like poplars are particularly susceptible.

Warbling Vireo (Western subspecies) (*Vireo gilvus swainsonii*): On 20 May 2024 a singing 'Western' bird was detected along the Pipestone Creek valley, 13.5 km south of Broadview by Brett Quiring, Jared Clarke, and Don Weidl (eBird S175955024). **Status:** Confirmed. The current distribution of this 'Western' subspecies in Saskatchewan has yet to be determined, but previous records are from the Cypress Hills (and perhaps northward near the Alberta border). **Remarks:** The bird was observed delivering "a broken halting call rather than the continuous song of the eastern" subspecies; the song sounded similar to recordings in the 'Sibley App'. Twelve Warbling Vireos of the eastern group (*V. g. gilvus*) were also recorded in the area, allowing the songs of each to be compared. Detailed studies may reveal if Warbling Vireos represent two separate species.

Northern Parula (*Setophaga americana*): Lori Wilson photographed a singing male in Morse on 28 May 2024 (eBird S177656029; ML619707771, ML619707773).

Status: Straggler. **Remarks:** Previous records in 2023 included Saskatchewan's first nesting record, in the Cypress Hills.⁴

Pacific Wren (*Troglodytes pacificus*): Multiple sightings of a single wren in 2024, along the Highland Trail and at the Lone Pine Group Campground, both in Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park (CHIP). On 25 May 2024, Tom Hince encountered one bird and reported "scold note heard repeatedly at close range in response to *pishing* near west end of Loch Leven. Call reminiscent of Eurasian Wren. No singing male heard" (eBird S177974922). On 13 June, Rylan Urban found one singing male, in the same area (eBird S181249451; interestingly Cornell's Merlin App did not identify the vocalizations as a Pacific Wren); on 24 June, Murray Shields and Lev Frid reported one singing bird (eBird S183505820; S183505819); on 5 and 6 July a single bird was photographed by Jared Clarke who stated "it called a bit for a while. No sign of a mate or any behaviour suggesting it was visiting a nest. Simply called and called" (eBird S18550694, S185680376, ML621205363, ML621205376, ML621205463); and Katelyn Luff on 6 July (eBird S185680624); then Laura C. Ortiz on 7 July (eBird 185866613); and on 13 July, Annie McLeod photographed a single wren "singing numerous times" (eBird S186871130; ML621453750); and finally, on 24 July, Vicki and Warren St. Germaine saw and recorded a singing wren (eBird S188852510; ML621858711). **Status:** Confirmed. Rare and local year-round resident in CHIP, which straddles the Saskatchewan and Alberta border. **Remarks:** Each record of this species is important and helps determine changes in its status from year to year. Its numbers remain precariously low. The species' occurrence in CHIP was first confirmed in 2015, although 'Winter Wrens' were detected much earlier, in 1988.¹

Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*): On the early morning of 31 May 2024, Tom Hince viewed the largest group of Sabine's Gulls recorded in the province, from

the Cold Lake campground shoreline, Meadow Lake Provincial Park. He stated: "Initially groups of up to five to twenty five sabinies were seen lifting and dropping to the water on strong onshore winds. It was clear a good number were present. After about twenty minutes all of the gulls suddenly took flight (a parasitic jaeger was the cause!). The sabinies formed a long tight string above the water and the enormous size of the group was stunning. Counting roughly in groups of fifty I estimated 600-650 individuals (I took a conservative approach [posting 550 birds]). There were several thousand franklins present but the sabinies formed tighter groups and were noticeably smaller and paler and separate." Also present were 2,000 Franklin's and three Bonaparte's gulls (eBird S178499755; ML619865065, ML619865066, ML619865067). On 30 May 2024, Hince saw "probably more but minimum two individuals flying up and down off water shore" at Jackfish Lake (eBird S178249064); also present were 3,000 Franklin's and 155 Bonaparte's gulls. **Status:** Confirmed. Historic records suggested Sabine's Gulls passed through the province in small numbers in spring, enroute from their wintering grounds on the Pacific Ocean to their Canadian Arctic nesting grounds.²² However, this report could indicate that significant numbers of Sabine's Gulls are undetected, perhaps because of their narrow migration window and passage across more remote, northern areas of the province in spring. During fall migration, sightings are scattered across many parts of the province, usually involving single birds. **Remarks:** Most records occur over water on large lakes, often near or associated with other species of gulls. Ron Jensen observed small numbers of Sabine's Gulls on Dore Lake during spring migration (29 May to 3 June 1986), immediately after ice breakup.²³ He watched the gulls forage where pollen [and other debris?] accumulated on the water surface. Pollen would be a rich source of protein and might attract other prey, such as small fish and invertebrates, for the gulls. Sabine's Gulls winter on the Pacific Ocean, where like many pelagic birds, they are attracted to 'wind and

current strand lines of material/debris' floating on the ocean surface where they forage for food (P Taylor personal observations).²⁴

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*): On the early morning of 31 May 2024, Tom Hince saw a "tight flock of eight flying together plus a close single individual" at Cold Lake, Meadow Lake Provincial Park, describing the key field marks (eBird S178499755). **Status:** Confirmed. Rarely encountered migrant, small numbers presumably transit the province northward from their Antarctic Ocean wintering grounds to nest in the Canadian Arctic, including northern Saskatchewan. **Remarks:** These terns can be challenging to identify; however in this instance, Common and Forester's terns were present for comparison.

Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*): One bird sighted by Stan Shadick and Kerry Hjertaas on 29 May 2024 among a flock of 500 Franklin's Gulls, between the Quill Lakes, from Highway 640. (eBird S178622492) **Status:** Straggler. **Remarks:** Careful observations by birders are producing more records of this gull in recent years.⁴

Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*): Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park (CHIP), *West Benson Trail location*.³ on 6 June 2024, Gavin McKinnon, Ronald Vandebek, and Sheryl-Elaine Brazeau reported two "on territory along creek. Bright yellow-olive colouration. Bold, white teardrop eye ring and clean black upper mandible and yellow orange lower mandible. Call a sharp. *Tsoo-WEE*", along West Benson west of junction with Battle Creek Road, CHIP (eBird S179744883; audio file ML620103821). In the same location: one seen on 9 June by David Britton (eBird S180412726); John Lundgren photographed a single calling on 13 June (eBird S181317904; ML620397309); Rylan Urban and Nicole Baldwin recorded "a single bird vocalizing in spruce trees along a creek" on 14 June (eBird S181988868; 8869; ML620517134). Bob Izumi reported two at the same location on 29 June (eBird S184478028, S184527644); on 5 July, Jared, Teal, and

Rowan Clarke, and Kristen Martin saw one adult "foraging along the creek, catching insects and returning to the nest and feeding chicks" (eBird185539621).

Status: Confirmed. This is the fifth consecutive summer these flycatchers have been observed in this area, and the fourth year breeding was confirmed.

Remarks: Formerly considered to be two species, Pacific-slope and Cordilleran flycatchers (following a split in 1989), but lumped into Western Flycatcher by AOS in 2023.⁴

Evening Grosbeak (type 1) (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*): A pair of "type 1" adults "in suitable breeding habitat" were reported by Annie Finch (eBird S179076776), Cameron Hunter, and Rain Saulnier, 27 km east of Cold Lake on 2 June 2024.

Status: Confirmed. This is within the species' expected range. However, the distribution of subpopulations in the province has yet to be clarified, as they wander widely, particularly during irruption years. **Remarks:** Evening Grosbeak numbers have declined 75 per cent since 1966,²⁵ the steepest drop of any landbird in North America, and is listed as a species of Special Concern under Canada's SARA. Detailed studies have identified several different subpopulations of Evening Grosbeaks in North America by analyzing their flight calls, which the birds use for contact and social cohesion in flocks: **type 1** is found widely but centred from the northern Rockies of western Alberta, through the interior and coastal mountains of British Columbia; **type 2** is found in the Sierra Nevada of California and nearby coastal mountains; **type 3** is found in eastern forests including southern Canada (Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes); **type 4** is found in the interior Rocky Mountains of west-central United States from Wyoming southward; **type 5** is the most southerly population just reaching into Arizona from Mexico.^{26,27} Studies by the *Finch Research Network* suggest these Evening Grosbeak "call types" align with subspecies descriptions (<https://finchnetwork.org/species/grosbeaks>), even though geographic variation is "moderately weak and clinal where ranges meet".¹⁷

Common Poorwill (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*): On 9 June 2024, Sarah Sharp and Andy Nguyen reported "at least three separate individuals heard singing post-sunset", with a "distinct 'poor-WILL' song emanating from a forested slope habitat" in the vicinity of Big Muddy Lake (eBird S180637316, S180637317); also seen at the same time by Erica Alex (S181057269) and Josiah Van Egmond (S181066544). **Status:** Confirmed. Uncommon and local summer resident in extreme southwestern Saskatchewan. **Remarks:** This report is considerably east of other records for this species in Grasslands National Park, East Block (100 km), West Block (200 km), and in Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park (350 km), with the exception of one record from Lonetree Lake, south of Radville, approximately 30 km east of the Big Muddy Lake area in June 1986.¹

Red-naped Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*): One possible record: on 11 June 2024, Lev Frid photographed one female sapsucker at Wood Mountain Regional Park (eBird S180867995; ML620327667, ML620327668, ML620327669, ML620327670) and seen by others (Colleen Reilly, Geordie Ray, and Murray Shields). **Status:** Confirmed. Red-naped Sapsucker is one of several species of Rocky Mountain avifauna that breeds in the Cypress Hills. Hybridization with other sapsucker species is frequent, clouding the limits of sapsucker distribution in regions where their ranges meet or overlap. **Remarks:** The bird in Wood Mountain Regional Park was more than 200 km east of the nearest documented breeding area of Red-naped Sapsuckers in North America. Photographs show characteristics for a putative female Red-naped Sapsucker;¹⁷ however, possible hybridization with Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*S. varius*) should not be ruled out because "plumage does not appear to be a reliable indicator of genotype among *S. nuchalis* and *S. varius* individuals" in a study of sapsucker hybridization conducted in southwestern Alberta.²⁸

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*): Two breeding locations. **1)** John Lundgren reported a female with nine "tiny ducklings, in the creek" by Goodwin House, Saskatchewan

Landing Provincial Park on 16 June 2024 (eBird S18190550); in the same area on 12 September, Rylan Urban and Nicole Baldwin reported seeing “One male in non-breeding plumage. Three females or juveniles.”, possibly the surviving members of the same family group, though their age and sex were not confirmed (eBird S194881363). **2)** Aaron Roberge and Kyle Ruttan reported a “female with 8 fresh ducklings” in Riverside Park, Swift Current on 21 July 2024 (eBird S188078989). **Status:** Confirmed. There are few breeding records from southwestern Saskatchewan.

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*): On 24 June 2024, Jared Clarke photographed one bird with “purplish head and neck. Grey body”, 11.5 km south of Nipawin [along Highway 35, at ‘Schindel’s Slough’] (eBird S183532043; ML620793339); seen later that day by Bert Dalziel (eBird S183590910; ML620806843, ML620806868) and John Lundgren and Lillian Donahue (eBird S183608819; ML620812480; Figure 3). Ornamental plumes evident on the heron’s pectoral area but not head. **Status:** Straggler. There are 14 previous records, the last at Last Mountain Lake NWA (October 2006). **Remarks:** Sightings have occurred in each month from 12 April to 5 October. This species is known to disperse northward, before and after the breeding season.⁹
Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus*

vociferus): Multiple records. On 23 June 2024, Jared Clarke reported four birds calling in different locations along Highway 123 (at the 30, 31, 32 and 35 km points), approximately 32 km northeast of Tobin Lake near the Saskatchewan River (eBird S183594057, S183594170, S183594220, S183594518). On 25 June, Vicki and Warren St. Germaine counted six calling birds along Highway 123, between Dragline and Sipanok channels (stopping at 36.2, 35, 34.5, 32.5, 32, and 30 km points) then two calling birds from there to EB Campbell Dam (eBird S183823951, S183824223). Annie McLeod and Joel Cherry reported seven birds calling between kilometres 30 and 32, on 28 June (eBird S184462051; ML620969579) **Status:** Confirmed. Listed as Threatened under Canada’s SARA. The highest numbers in the province occur along the road to Cumberland House.^{1,4}

Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*): Multiple records. Jared Clarke found two singing males at Cracking River bridge, along Highway 55, 9.5 km east of Smoky Burn (16 km south southwest of Red Earth) on 24 June 2024 (eBird S183594841); two birds seen at same location by Vicki and Warren St. Germaine on 26 June (eBird S183865858); and on 28 June one male recorded by Sharlane Toole and Leona Douglas (eBird S185037374); then both Annie McLeod (with Joel Cherry) and John

Lundgren (with Lillian Donahue) photographed single males there on 29 June (Figure 4). **Status:** Confirmed. Records from this general area date back to 1978, and where singing birds were found in 2023.^{1,4} Listed as Threatened under the SARA.

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*): One summer and other selected records adding to the *BofSk* account. *A summer record:* one seen on 30 June 2024 at Swift Current sewage lagoons by Torsten and Gene Walz (eBird S184646580): its age could not be accurately determined but it was likely a subadult rather than an adult, of similar appearance. *A northern record:* on 3 September, Vicki and Warren St. Germaine photographed a sub-adult gull at Paignton Beach, Prince Albert National Park (eBird S193848621; ML623375020, ML623375021, plus several additional, unpublished photographs). This bird showed a mix of characteristics often found in third cycle birds epitomizing “the variation possible in immature gull plumages” depending on the hormonal state of the bird.²⁹ The excellent photographs revealed the advanced adult-like plumage on the head and over much of the upper and lower body (plus adult bill, eye, and leg colouration). However, the feather moult in the wings was still in progress: there were two or three fresh, inner primaries; the upper coverts were old, worn, and faded prior to moult; and



FIGURE 3. A Little Blue Heron was found by Jared Clarke on 24 June 2024, 11.5 km south of Nipawin, and observed by others later that day. Photo credit: John Lundgren.



FIGURE 4. A male Golden-winged Warbler photographed along Highway 55 on 29 June 2024. Photo credit: Annie McLeod.

the outer primaries were still retained and were worn and lacked large white 'mirror spots' near their tips, found in adults.

Several fall records: on 18 September 2024 Kathleen Dvorak photographed one bird, adult plumaged in appearance, in Prince Albert (eBird S195610341; ML623889376); also seen by Vicki and Warren St. Germaine. Other sightings occurred in the fall in Regina and Saskatoon, including a third cycle bird photographed by Nick Saunders in Saskatoon on 29 October that was confusingly similar to a Slaty-backed Gull because it was so heavily marked on the head, neck and breast (eBird S199659682; ML625213860, ML625213861, ML625213862, ML625213863). **Status:** Confirmed. The 30 June bird represents the first summer record. **Remarks:** Up to 2016, Lesser Black-backed Gulls had been recorded in Saskatchewan in spring (30 records) between 28 March and 9 May plus two late records, 27 and 28 May (Regina); and in fall (four records) between 1 October (Lake Diefenbaker) to 27 October (Regina).¹ Two records in 2023 extended the fall period: 10 August (Saskatoon) and 7 November (Regina). It seems probable that the adults would return to their known North Atlantic breeding areas in the spring, while subadults might linger in the continental interior during the summer. North America is now part of the regular wintering area for all ages of this gull.⁴ There were multiple sightings in the

fall, on the South Saskatchewan River (Saskatoon, and below Gardiner Dam).

Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*): Don Weidl photographed one (Figure 5) on 29 June 2024, 12 km southeast of Broadview (eBird S184473838; ML621001263, ML621001283, ML621001300, ML621001328, ML621001376, ML621001390). **Status:** Accidental. The third record for the province. **Remarks:** The bird had very restricted and indistinct white under-tail tips combined with the indistinct spotting on the underside of the body, and lack of wing bars, suggesting this was from the subspecies group, *T. c. palmeri*, which occurs in the Sonoran Desert of western Arizona.¹⁷ Sibley describes Curve-billed Thrasher subspecies identification, but cautions that moult timing, and faded or worn plumage can make field identification difficult.³⁰ Efforts to relocate the bird were unsuccessful. **Note:** One Curve-billed Thrasher was apparently seen and photographed, on 3 August 2020 at Dalmeny, by Corinne Dagenais; and it was mentioned in the *Prairie Provinces: Fall 2020 in American Birds*.³¹ Unfortunately, Dagenais could not be contacted for further details to substantiate this report.

Brewer's Sparrow (*Spizella breweri*): One putative breeding record. Robert Brua discovered one singing male in Peturrson's Ravine, Saskatoon on 29 June

2024 (eBird S184422192; ML620965163, ML620971318), and on 6 July saw one adult sparrow "holding food so suspect there is a nest with young nearby" (eBird S185744224; ML621220616, ML621220617). Seen by several other observers: on 7 July by Nick Saunders and Dawn Hall (who described the bird being "very secretive"; eBird S185846090), and also by Rob and Andy Salisbury (eBird S185856760, S185856755); on 9 July by Guy Wapple (eBird S186203446); then on 10 July, Lorriene and Craig Salisbury identified the species' "seep call and the high-pitched buzzy trill" (eBird S186376577). **Status:** Confirmed. Northern most, putative, nesting record in the province. **Remarks:** Known to breed in the arid grasslands of Saskatchewan, more than 175 km to the south.

Black-chinned Hummingbird

(*Archilochus alexandri*): On 29 June 2024, Corinne Dagenais posted two photographs of a colourful male at a feeder on Sask Birders Facebook, stating: "I was delighted to discover a new hummingbird in our yard – a Black Chinned hummingbird and a lifer for me. June 29th north of Saskatoon." (fide Nick Saunders). There were no other observers, and unfortunately, C Dagenais could not be contacted for permission to use her photographs and discuss her sighting. **Status:** Accidental. This is apparently the first photographic record for this species in Saskatchewan moving it from Hypothetical to Accidental. There are five previous reports of males from southern Saskatchewan (20 May to late August; 1970 to 2007), all unconfirmed. **Remarks:** This bird's features, which are evident in the excellent photographs that support the identification, include: 1) the iridescent purple-violet gorget feathers bordering the lower portion of the complete black throat, 2) the dark head, green back, and dusky flanks. This hummingbird species breeds in the southern interior valleys of British Columbia and has been seen more frequently along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains of Alberta, in recent years.



FIGURE 5. Don Weidl found and photographed a Curve-billed Thrasher on 29 June 2024, 12 km southeast of Broadview. Photo credit: Don Weidl.

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*):

On 2 July 2024, Lucinda Gifford reported a single bird in her yard in Outlook (eBird S185189243; ML621116416, ML621116417; a photograph of the bird was initially posted on Sask Birders Facebook).

Status: Accidental. The 10th record for the province; previous records occurred between 2004 and 2021.² **Remarks:** Attempts by Stan Shadick and Robert Johanson to find the dove on 3 July were unsuccessful.

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*): one breeding record and multiple post breeding dispersal records.

Breeding colony: on 3 July 2024, Vicki and Warren St. Germaine counted seven Great Egrets — three at nests with two adults standing in each, and a single adult perched nearby; the egrets were part of a mixed colony including Black-crowned Night Herons and Double-crested Cormorants, on an island in the SW corner of Big Quill Lake, 1.7 km east of Highway 6 (eBird S185177846). **Note:** this appears to be a new nesting location for these egrets at the Quill Lakes.

Post breeding dispersal in 2024: single birds were found by Don Weidl 17 Aug 2024 in the Qu'Appelle Valley, Highway 47 (eBird S191837875; ML622636585); by Laurie Koepke 17 Aug 2024, along Wascana Creek, 1 km west of Regina (eBird S799819176; ML622619885); by Lara Fitzpatrick, 9 km north east of Craven on 19 Aug 2024 (eBird S192095457); by Don Weidl on 20 August, at west end of Pipestone Lake, 16 km SE of Broadview (pers. comm., eBird S192196139, ML622754515). Don Weidl saw six egrets take flight from a marsh area at the east end of Ekapo Lake, “as a spray plane flew low over head”, on 8 September (eBird S194436367); and three egrets on 28 September at east end of Ekapo Lake (eBird S196770260). Further north, on 16 August, Philip Taylor photographed one egret in the Thickwood Hills, 10.8 km north of Krydor (eBird S191791448; ML622613179, ML622613180, ML622613181). Then, in following days, presumably the same egret was seen foraging along shoreline edges and around beaver lodges on nearby wetlands: Mike Blom on 19

August, took iPhone photographs (M Blom, pers. comm.); and then Matt and Jenna Englot saw a single egret on 26 August, 2.5 km northeast of the earlier sightings (M Englot, pers. comm.). **Note:** this last group of sightings (16 to 26 August) was the most northwesterly reported location for Saskatchewan.

Status: Confirmed. **Remarks:** They follow the general pattern of records across the Prairie provinces, which are usually south of the mixed-wood forest ecoregion (eBird distribution map). These striking egrets are considered rare and locally distributed, but wander widely after breeding. Sightings are more frequent in southeastern Saskatchewan. However, there have been two remarkable records of single Great Egrets being seen in the Canadian arctic, as far north as Inuvik (for several days in October 2017) and Paulatuk (June 2023) in Nunavut.

Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*): Mike Blom had a bright male visit his yard southwest of Blaine Lake on 10 July 2024 (pers. comm.) **Status:** Confirmed. Typically found in extreme southern Saskatchewan. **Remarks:** Single birds have occurred as far north as Dore Lake.

Golden-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*): On 23 July 2024, Robert Brua encountered five kinglets in Duck Mountain Provincial Park, 3.3 km southeast of Madge Lake along the Moose Lake Loop Trail; the “1st group consisted 3 birds foraging. 2nd group was feeding a recently fledged chick” where the adults were “foraging madly in coniferous trees” (eBird S188429759). **Status:** Confirmed. This is only the second breeding record for the province. **Remarks:** These kinglets are permanent residents of the boreal forest in this region.

Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*): Vicki and Warren St. Germaine reported seeing two birds, and commenting “feeding young (confirmed)”, on 24 July 2024 (eBird S188852510). **Status:** Confirmed. One of the few confirmed breeding records for this uncommon summer resident in the Cypress Hills Interprovincial Provincial Park (CHIP).

Remarks: This tanager is given “breeding confirmed” status in the Atlas of Saskatchewan Birds, but is described more generally as “summer resident” in *BofSk* with no breeding records cited, although it is identified as part of the known breeding range in the *BofSk* map.^{1,32} Ryan Dudragne watched an adult pair (with one young) at close range, with the “male feeding a juvenile” on 27 July 2003 (eBird S66390158) in CHIP, Centre Block, near Pine Hill Campground.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Corthylio calendula*): On 25 and 26 July 2024, Jared Clarke observed an adult kinglet “frantically working to find food and feed” a fledgling Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) (eBird S188859749, S188971530; ML621862621) 5 km northwest of Edenwold; also seen 29 July; Clarke reported seeing the kinglet’s nest building behaviour on 17 June (eBird S182970647). **Status:** Confirmed. Approximately 230 km southwest of the nearest described breeding range in the Duck Mountain area. **Remarks:** A rarely reported host species of the parasitic cowbird.³³ The kinglet may not have reared the cowbird, as species other than the hosts have been recorded occasionally also feeding the fledglings.³⁴

Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*): Guy and Sandra Wapple observed seven swifts “circling over, then steeply descending into the large brick chimney” (approximate measurements: 1 m wide and reaching 7.5 m above ground) at the Estevan Curling Club, on 5 August 2024, between 20:30 and 20:41 hr. This was during ‘civil twilight’, which started at sunset 20:24 hr and ended at 21:00 hr, that evening (<https://www.timeanddate.com/sun/@5949568>). The swifts “arrived in three pairs, initially flying fairly high over the chimney with their typical high-pitched, chattering flight calls. However, they then ‘singled off’, dropping silently and rapidly into the structure. The seventh and final bird arrived a few minutes after the first six, with the same steep, silent descent.” (eBird S190400780; ML622225633). **Status:** Confirmed. This Threatened SARA species is uncommon summer resident in southeastern

Saskatchewan. **Remarks:** This may be the largest number of birds seen in one roost location in the province, in recent years. Apparently, these swifts do not use their roost sites for breeding, so the question remains “do these swifts nest in Estevan, or elsewhere?” Earlier in the summer, two birds sighted at Rice River along Highway 55 on 26 June 2024 by Vicki and Warren St Germaine (eBird S183882570); John Lundgren and Lillian Donahue encountered three on 30 June at Man River bridge along Highway 55 (eBird S184497535; ML620979833; Figure 6). These birds were within the swifts’ expected summer range.



FIGURE 6. One of three Chimney Swifts observed by John Lundgren and Lillian Donahue on 30 June 2024 at Man River bridge along Highway 55. Photo credit: John Lundgren.

Red-throated Loon (*Cavia stellata*): A “loon with a red throat patch with silver/grey head and back of neck” was seen by Shayna Cossette on 7 August 2024 on Fond du Lac, approximately 15 km west of Stony Rapids (eBird S190616519). **Status:** Straggler. **Remarks:** Little is known of bird activity on the northern lakes of Saskatchewan and further studies offer the possibility of interesting discoveries.

White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*): Several records from Rice and Goose Lakes. On a wetland connected to the north end of Rice Lake, 8.3 km east of Asquith along Highway 14, Guy and Sandra Wapple reported seeing a flock of 13 ibis on 8 August 2024 (eBird S190908794; ML622359738); and reported nine on

3 September on wetlands in the area (eBird S193907585). Nick Saunders photographed two immature plumaged birds, out of six individuals near the same location, on 18 August 2024 (eBird S191955162; ML622677666; ML622698563). Wetlands near the east side of *Goose Lake*: on 23 August, Craig, Lorriene, and Rob Salisbury encountered a flock of 70 ibis (eBird S192519401, S192521334, S192520019; ML622858230) [at 51.7378; -107.3269; C Salisbury pers. comm.] approximately 12 km south southwest of Laura (or 5 km southeast of Tessier); on 26 August, Stan Shadick (pers. comm.), Marilee Roome, and Richard Haslinger “found them at a slough between the east bay of Goose Lake and the former community pasture headquarters. Most birds were feeding out of sight ...at one point while we waited, flocks of 70 and 30 ibis flew up simultaneously from the far side of the wetland giving us a conservative total of 100 birds”; then in the same area, on 28 August, Ron Jensen counted “60 plus” (pers. comm.); and on 31 August, Nick Saunders and Ryan Dudragne found 28 ibis (eBird S193465813; ML623178833). **Status:** Confirmed. Sightings are increasing since first recorded in 1976, near Stalwart. **Remarks:** These birds are prone to disperse and wander in summer, after nesting. Many records involve single birds. Rice Lake is near the northern limit of confirmed sightings in the province. The presence of fully fledged immature individuals, in these flocks that lingered

in an area over several days, prompts the question “did these ibis nest and raise young nearby?” The birds at Goose Lake are the largest number seen in one location in Saskatchewan.

Palm Warbler (Yellow or ‘Eastern’ subspecies) (*Setophaga palmarum hypochrysea*): on 31 August 2024, Robert Brua found a bird that he described as “similar to a Western [Palm Warbler, *S. p. palmarum*], but yellow all over” (eBird S193478136). **Status:** Confirmed. This eastern subspecies occurs very rarely west of its normal range, and has been reported only twice before in Saskatchewan during spring migration (7 May 2012, Saskatoon and 11 May 2015, Regina; eBird map). **Remarks:** At the Last Mountain Bird Observatory only ‘Western’ Palm Warblers have been banded during spring and fall operations.

Black-throated Sparrow (*Amphispiza bilineata*): One immature sparrow was encountered by Kathy Hamre and Evanna Simpson in the late afternoon of 16 September 2024 at Douglas Provincial Park (Figure 7); the “strong black and white facial markings” caught their attention, specifically the “white supercilium and malar and large steel grey beak” (eBird S195421516, S195421518; ML623910200, ML623910201, ML623910202). **Status:** Accidental. The second record for the province. The first, “an adult singing male was photographed by Myrna Priebe near Hodgeville 6 June



FIGURE 7. An immature Black-throated Sparrow was encountered by Kathy Hamre and Evanna Simpson in the late afternoon of 16 September 2024 at Douglas Provincial Park. Photo credit: Evanna Simpson.

1991”.¹ **Remarks:** More photographs and details were submitted to Dan Sawatzky, enabling the identification to be confirmed (initially, similarities with a Lark Sparrow caused some confusion). Simpson stated “we spent quite a bit of time trying to coax it out from the buffaloberry thicket it disappeared into ...”; it was on the ground with some White-crowned Sparrows. Black-throated Sparrows breed in the sparse, xeric shrublands of the southwestern United States, sporadically north to the Colorado-Wyoming border region and southern Idaho, approximately 1,100 km from this Saskatchewan record.³⁵

Tropical Kingbird (*Tyrannus melancholicus*): One new record, plus a reevaluation of a 2020 record. On 15 October 2024, Shayna Cossette photographed a kingbird perched on an overhead wire, and in flight, in the town of Stony Rapids (eBird S199019105; ML625001520, ML625025686, ML625025687, ML625025688, ML625025689) after her husband Scott Cossette spotted a ‘yellow bird’ in their yard. She described it as a “medium sized bird with bright yellow belly, grey head, dark grey eye streak, black bill and grey brown back.” Initial impressions suggested it might be a Western Kingbird; however, the photographs showed no white feathers along the tail edge (eliminating Western Kingbird), and yellow underparts extending high up on the breast (eliminating Cassin’s Kingbird). This left two possibilities: either a Tropical or a Couch’s Kingbird.

Identification criteria: Recently, Cin-Ty Lee produced a video and article, using photographs and specimens to detail salient characteristics that can be used to identify many individuals of these two closely related taxa.^{36,37} Using C-T Lee’s two references, the distinguishing features present in the Stony Rapids Tyrant flycatcher that match a Tropical Kingbird, rather than a Couch’s Kingbird, include: 1) “**relatively long bill**, more prominent hook”; 2) slightly “**dingy chest**, weak contrast with throat”; 3) “lemon yellow underparts, slightly less vivid”; 4) “**weak wing panel contrast, primaries**

show pale edges” [the term ‘wing panel’ refers to the outer edges of the primary feathers on a folded wing; this is a new distinguishing field mark described by C-T Lee]; 5) “**tail usually strongly forked**”. This individual is a juvenile, hatch year kingbird: evident in photo ML625025686 are narrow rectrices with tapered tips; and a partial moult of the greater coverts.¹⁷

Shayna Cossette relocated this kingbird on 16 October (eBird S199161619; ML625059779, ML625059780; Figure 8) and filmed the event, which can be seen in the YouTube video she posted on 17 October and again on 18 October (eBird S199381112), the last date the kingbird was seen.³⁸

Earlier record reexamined. Photographs taken of the kingbird by Deborah MacEwan on 16 August 2020, east of Hanley (eBird S72580104), were reexamined using criteria from Lee’s findings.^{36,37} Distinguishing features that support a Tropical Kingbird identification included numbers 1, 2, and 4 from the list of criteria mentioned above. For those reasons, the identification of that kingbird was tentatively changed from a ‘Tropical/Couch’s Kingbird’ to a Tropical Kingbird, making it the first record for the province.² This kingbird’s age was not determined; although the presence of one freshly moulted tertial feather, and the shape of the tail feathers, suggest it was probably a juvenile bird.

To remove any doubts about the identity of these two kingbirds, when contacted by Dan Sawatzky, C-T Lee confirmed that “both are Tropical” (email, 17 October 2024). Then he expanded on each kingbird: “Oct 15, 2024. Long bill, dingy chest, pale edges to primaries on folded wing ... also, primary tip spacings look good for tropical. On flight shot p5 [5th primary] protrudes a lot. Classic hatch year tropical.” And “August 16, 2020. Bright chest might suggest couch’s but worry it’s a bit over saturated. Primary tip formula looks good for tropical though so I believe it’s a tropical too.” **Status:** Accidental. The Stony Rapids kingbird is the second confirmed record for this species in Saskatchewan. And the Hanley kingbird becomes the first confirmed record for the province, moving the species from the hypothetical list to Accidental. **Remarks:** These two records do not follow the expected pattern of vagrancy represented in the eBird range map, where Tropical Kingbird records are absent from the three Prairie provinces, and the northern and central great plains states: Montana, the Dakotas, Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma. The Tropical Kingbird’s breeding range extends north to the border regions between Mexico and Arizona, and south Texas, a distance of 3,000 km or more from Stony Rapids.³⁹ Tropical Kingbirds are regular fall vagrants to the Pacific coast, in small



FIGURE 8. A Tropical Kingbird was observed by Shayna Cossette, from 15-18 October 2024, in Stony Rapids. Photo credit: Shayna Cossette.

numbers from late September to late November, peaking in late October. Reports there are increasing and “the annual occurrence of this species is notably cyclical in British Columbia, with peak years alternating somewhat regularly with low years”.⁴⁰ Coastal BC appeared to experience a peak influx year in 2024, including at least five Tropical Kingbirds seen on the west coast of Vancouver Island on 9 October (bcbirdalert.blogspot.com).

Four species of Tyrant flycatchers that occur in North America, known as kingbirds, are somewhat similar in size and general appearance; Western Kingbird and Cassin’s Kingbird being most readily identifiable in the field. However, separating Tropical and Couch’s kingbirds from each other in the field, continues to be problematic without hearing them vocalize.

Vermilion Flycatcher (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*): On 16 October 2024, Shayna Cossette photographed and filmed a second vagrant flycatcher in Stony Rapids (Figure 9), an immature male Vermilion Flycatcher (eBird S199147577; ML625047255), which she described having an “orange belly, white chin patch, brownish back and head, with red mixed in on head.”³⁸ Later searches for the bird were unsuccessful. **Status:** Accidental. An amazing first record for Saskatchewan. **Remarks:** Stony Rapids represents the northernmost location, about 80 km south of the Northwest Territories, on the eBird range map of Vermilion Flycatcher. The nearest breeding range is southern parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, which is similar to that of the Tropical Kingbird. After seeing the vagrant kingbird one day earlier, finding a second remarkably rare flycatcher in the same vicinity would be difficult to accept without the conclusive photographic documentation by Shayna Cossette.

Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*): On 21 October 2024, a “young female” was found dead in a parking lot on the east side of Regina and submitted to the Royal Saskatchewan Museum (RSM) by Andrea Peters (pers. comm. Ryan Fisher



FIGURE 9. On 16 October 2024, Shayna Cossette photographed and filmed a Vermilion Flycatcher in Stony Rapids. Photo credit: Shayna Cossette.

and Danae Frier of the RSM; first posted on the RSM Facebook site; see also <https://royalsaskmuseum.ca/research/biology>). **Status:** Accidental. Eighth record for the province; first specimen in the RSM research collection (catalogue number RSKM_BIRD_A-10805, accession number 21219) (Figure 10). **Remarks:** This is the third record of an immature bird (others: 7 August 1989 at Fort Walsh; 2 October 2018 at McTaggart), and the latest date known (previous late date 2 October).² Five of the previous records occurred during spring migration (18 May to 5 June): three involved single males in breeding plumage, and one involved a pair (seen between Pike Lake and Saskatoon); and the sex of one bird was not identified. The Saskatchewan records are scattered across the southern

half of the province. Blue Grosbeaks breed within 300 km of Saskatchewan, in southern North Dakota; their range seems to be expanding northwestward but not dramatically. Fall migration occurs from mid-August to mid-September.⁴¹

Golden-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*): On 28 October 2024, Gail Fennell “noticed 2 sparrows” at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum, Regina, describing them having: “more yellow than the others [sparrows] and the yellow was on the crown.”¹ [One] had more yellow than the other. The upper bill was gray, unlike White-throated Sparrows. The ones with yellow on the crown were scratching in the leaves with the White-throats and Harris’s” (eBird S200667366;



FIGURE 10. On 21 October 2024, a Blue Grosbeak was found dead in a parking lot on the east side of Regina and was submitted to the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. Photo credit: Danae Frier, Royal Saskatchewan Museum.

ML625573101, ML625573155, ML625573178, ML625573189). **Status:** Straggler. This western species is seen more often in spring than in fall, and includes three winter records. Most involve single sparrows, but three records are of two birds. **Remarks:** Breeds in subalpine habitats in the mountains of Alberta and British Columbia.

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Setophaga dominica*): Two records. **1)** On 29 October 2024, one bird was discovered in Estevan by Sharlane Toole (eBird S200757079; photograph and audio ML625598781, ML625598788, ML625598794) and Kathy Hedegard (eBird S200772583). **2)** On 9 November, Lori Wilson photographed a single brightly coloured bird in Morse (eBird S202094857; ML626101883, ML626101884, ML626101885, ML626101886, ML626101887; Figure 11), seeing it again on 10 November (eBird S202096770). **Status:** Accidental. Ninth and 10th records for the province.

Remarks: Previous records: two in spring — May (Weyburn) and June (Regina); six in fall, 19 August to 20 November (Weyburn, Regina, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, and Ekapo Lake, Qu'Appelle Valley).^{2,3} Using Pyle for reference, differences in the pattern and intensity of the black, white, and yellow feathers, and bill shape, point to the birds being two different individuals; both seem to fit descriptions of the more widely distributed, western subspecies “*albilora*” (“supraloral area primarily white” having limited yellow on the white supercilium stripe near the eye); although these variations are clinal across the taxa.^{17,42} Further, the Morse warbler appears to be a male (“crown with moderate to heavy, black streaking” and “flank streaking wide and distinct”; plus deeper yellow colour of throat and normal bill) while the Estevan bird may be a female (“crown with light black streaking” and “flank streaking moderately narrow and indistinct”; plus paler yellow throat and abnormal, crossed bill). This neotropical migrant is known for spring and fall vagrancy. The nearest breeding range is 1,300 km from Estevan, in northwestern Missouri and southeastern Iowa.



FIGURE 11. On 9 November 2024, Lori Wilson photographed a Yellow-throated Warbler in Morse. Photo credit: Lori Wilson.

Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*): Margaret Johnson first observed this hummingbird on 29 August 2024 at her hummingbird feeder in Zealandia, and realized it was different from the Ruby-throated Hummingbirds that usually visited her yard. This new hummingbird was very territorial, so she set up a second feeder, allowing it to feed without it having to chase away the other subordinate hummingbirds. On 15 November, Ron Jensen, Nick Saunders, Ryan Dudragna, and Ryan Sparks visited the location to document the record (Figure 12). The bird was captured shortly after Jensen set up the

trap (at about 14:00 hr). Jensen noted it was easily caught and remarkably docile, and that it was healthy and in very good condition, weighing “a massive 6.2 grams”; it reminded him “of a soft marshmallow.” The measurements he took were “all within the range for an Anna's Hummingbird and too large for other potential hummingbird species”; several feather characteristics, and the presence of bill striations (covering about 15 per cent of the central portion of the bill), confirmed that it was an immature female Anna's Hummingbird.^{17,43} It was given an official “hummingbird band, number U13019” for scientific



FIGURE 12. An Anna's Hummingbird was observed by Margaret Johnson on 29 August 2024 and was further documented on 15 November. Photo credit: Nick Saunders.

purposes. **Status:** Accidental. The fifth record for the province.^{2,4} **Remarks:** This record ties the longest stay for this species in the province which lasted 48 days in summer (21 June to 8 August, Raymore), and passes the previous late date, 5 November (Broadview).^{1,4} The hummingbird was taken to the Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation centre in Saskatoon on 15 November, but died on 30 December.

“This species’ effective use of widely cultivated urban and suburban exotic plants and hummingbird feeders has contributed to its increased numbers and expanded range.”⁴⁴ This cold hardy species is now a year-round resident in southwestern British Columbia including Vancouver Island. “Some Anna’s Hummingbirds endure Pacific Northwest winters getting down to -12C.” Other individuals have been “observed surviving -18C temperatures in their northernmost habitat range and have been spotted surviving temperatures of -14C during their Alaska migrations.”⁴⁵ Research studies found that two captured wild female Anna’s Hummingbirds birds increased their body weight by 44 per cent (to 5.6 g); and captured wild males, prior to fall migration, increased their weight by 38 per cent above their mean body weight (to 6.2 g) with one immature male increasing 48 per cent (weight 6.5 g). Fall migration coincides with weight gain and the arrival of cold weather in some study areas.⁴⁴ The Zealandia hummingbird appeared healthy and behaved normally when it was moved into captivity on 15 November. Post-breeding dispersal and migration movements for various populations of Anna’s Hummingbird are well documented but need further detailed study to determine the differences among these populations; banding birds can help answer these questions. There were several eBird reports from 22 to 27 December 2024, of one and two wild Anna’s Hummingbirds from Carbon, Montana, a distance of about 750 km south west of Zealandia (eBird S206474639; S206785435).

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*): Bert Dalziel photographed an immature male in his yard in White Fox on 18 November 2024 (eBird S202953355; ML626433742, ML626433764, ML626433806, ML626433831), remarking: “body yellow with black wings. Yellow down center of back and undertail coverts. Tanager bill, horn color.” **Status:** Confirmed. There are 78 records of this tanager listed in *BofSk*, including only eight fall records (19 August to 17 October, Connell Creek) and only one winter record (early December to 23 December, Regina). **Remarks:** This record is approximately 60 km northwest of the previous record at Connell Creek (located 20 km southeast of Carrot River). Most records are from southeast Saskatchewan. The presence of black feathers in its wing coverts, indicated this hatch year bird had begun to moult.¹⁷

Short-tailed Shearwater (*Ardenna tenuirostris*): One stranded shearwater “found on the road” on 22 November 2024 in the community of Stony Rapids by Scott Hale who reported it to Shayna and Scott Cossette who then documented the record with photographs (Figure 13). The bird was “lively and doesn’t appear injured” so it “was released into open water on the Fond Du Lac River” (eBird S203258716, S203265095; ML626568474, ML626568475, ML626568476, ML626568477,

ML626568478, and ML626618257; the release ML626614099, ML626614100, ML626614101, ML626614102). On 23 November, ornithologists Alvaro Jaramillo and Christian Artuso both identified it as a Short-tailed Shearwater (rather than the very similar Sooty Shearwater) (fide Guy Wapple, Dan Sawatzky). **Status:** Accidental. First provincial record. **Remarks:** The arrival of Short-tailed Shearwaters off the Pacific northwest coast coincides with the stormiest weather in late fall and early winter, as they migrate from their “winter” range in the north Pacific Ocean, Chukchi and Beaufort Seas, to their breeding grounds in the southern hemisphere around Australia.⁴⁶ They are found over the continental shelf and deeper pelagic waters. It is one of the most abundant species of ‘tubenoses’ worldwide.^{47,48} An influx of this species close to land, in British Columbia’s marine waters north of Vancouver Island, occurred in fall 2021.⁴⁹ Multiple records in late fall 2024 indicate an even larger influx occurred in the Strait of Juan De Fuca and the Salish Sea around Victoria, British Columbia, from September to November (eBird range map). At least two very powerful winter storms from the Pacific Ocean arrived off the British Columbia coast just prior to this shearwater appearing in Stony Rapids, possibly contributing to its vagrancy.⁵⁰



FIGURE 13. A Short-tailed Shearwater was found on 22 November 2024 in the community of Stony Rapids by Scott Hale, who reported it to Shayna and Scott Cossette. Photo credit: Shayna Cossette.

It is well known that seabirds can be displaced inland following major storms, but finding this pelagic species so far from the ocean is exceptionally rare; there are no other records of this species from inland British Columbia or the Prairie provinces. Stony Rapids is located beside the Fond Du Lac River, 110 km east of Lake Athabasca, and a little more than 1,600 km from the nearest marine waters, north of Vancouver Island.

Other Short-tailed Shearwaters were found in late November 2024, much farther east in Canada, than previously reported. There were two sightings on the Great Lakes in November 2024, perhaps involving a single misoriented bird traveling eastward: the first report was on 14 November (09:03 and 09:30 hr) at Ashland, Wisconsin, Lake Superior; then the second report was nearly 900 km farther east, on 16 November (10:25 to 13:46 hr) at Wasaga Beach, Lake Huron, Ontario (eBird range map). Remarkably, on 22 November, 10 Short-tailed Shearwaters were reported at the central arctic community of Gjoa Haven, King William Island, Nunavut, 1,200 km east of the open ocean of the Beaufort Sea, where these shearwaters are occurring with increasing regularity, as the northern seas become free of ice for longer periods, with climate changes (eBird S203498686).

This shearwater joins a select list of seabirds found in Saskatchewan: two accidentals (Magnificent Frigatebird, Ancient Murrelet), and two hypotheticals (Pigeon Guillemot, Long-billed Murrelet). Shayna and Scott Cossette are to be commended for accurately documenting this important shearwater record and for returning the bird quickly and unharmed to the wild.

Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*): A single male at a feeder containing sunflower seeds was photographed by Jen Makowsky on 8 December 2024 (eBird S204842216; ML627268677), 14.7 km north of Dundurn; seen on 15 December by Ron Jensen; and on 16 and 21 December by Vicki and Warren St. Germaine (eBird S205646245; ML627621860; S206119226) who were accompanied by Nick Saunders on 21

December (eBird S206113195; Figure 14). **Status:** Straggler. **Remarks:** This species is expanding its range, and with more than half of the 25 observations occurring in late fall or winter.^{3,4} Red-bellied Woodpeckers are generalist feeders and “will take seeds, suet, fruits, peanut butter, and meat from feeding stations” including tough coated sunflower seeds. They roost and nest in cavities excavated in dead trees or limbs, which is similar to the Red-headed Woodpecker.⁵¹ Both species are classified in the same genus *Melanerpes*.

Overwintering bird records 2023/2024

Several species of migrant water and land birds lingered after the Christmas Bird Count period.

Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*): One continuing immature bird was seen in Regina on 4 Jan 2024 by Dan Sawatzky (eBird S158095411; ML613093111); previously seen on 28 December 2023 by Dan Sawatzky.⁴ **Remarks:** Rarely attempts to overwinter. This species range “shifts southeasterly out of the upper Midwest USA in the winter depending on food availability.”⁵²

Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*): On 3 January 2023, a single adult was reported flying, by Kale Warman, at the Diefenbaker Dam area (eBird S157964721) **Remarks:** several birds reported on Christmas Bird Counts, but no previous records in January.

Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*): several reports. One photographed by Kathy Hedegard on 2 January 2024, 7 km south west of Estevan (S158159908; ML 613129909); one seen on 30 January 2024 at Boundary Dam Reservoir by Dan Sawatzky (eBird S160223341); 5 February, two at Boundary Dam by Brett Quiring, Chris Harris, Dan Sawatzky; one female by Don Weidl on 11, 17, and 23 February on river by and shore of Crooked Lake (eBird S161845489) and one at Boundary Reservoir seen by Sharlane Toole on 17 February. One male at Gardiner Dam on 8 March 2024 (eBird S164125288) and another male at Reid Lake on 19 March (eBird S165395979) were seen by Katelyn Luff. In addition, a female at Gardiner Dam on 31 March 2024 by Bruce and Benjamin Di Labio (eBird S166686830). **Remarks:** Recorded on several Christmas Bird Counts, but not recorded attempting to overwinter. First



FIGURE 14. A single male Red-bellied Woodpecker was photographed by Jen Makowsky on 8 December 2024 and reported and photographed by others through to 21 December. Photo credit: Nick Saunders.

records of overwintering — apparently at three locations. Birds recorded after mid-March away from water that remained open all winter, were likely early spring migrants rather than overwintering birds.

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*): two photographed at Tuft's Bay, Lake Diefenbaker on 6 January 2024 by Kale Worman (eBird S158264415; ML613178576, ML613178577). A single photographed/seen in Saskatoon by several observers on 10, 12, 24 February 2024 (eBird S161145384) John Lundgren, Craig and Lorriene Salisbury; 19 February Nick Saunders saw one continuing in Saskatoon (eBird S162286803); Ryan Dudragne saw a female on 17 March 2024 near the weir in Saskatoon (eBird S165303360). **Remarks:** Recorded on several Christmas Bird Counts, but not previously recorded attempting to overwinter.

Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*): a red phase bird photographed in Old Woodlawn Regional Park [Camp], Estevan from 9 January by Kathy Hedegard (eBird S158511714; ML613312304) and Sharlane Toole; to 31 March 2024 K Hedegard (eBird S166478902; S166651343); also seen by several other observers. **Remarks:** This long staying sparrow was possibly the first confirmed overwintering record. Seen previously on several Christmas Bird Counts as far north as Turtle Lake, Saskatoon, and Hudson Bay but information on their survival through the winter was not confirmed.

Spring records 2024

Despite unusually cold and snowy weather in March, which seemed to delay spring migration of many birds returning to the province, record early spring arrivals were noted for several species. Warm weather in early April allowed a number of species to move north including raptors, waterfowl, shorebirds, and insectivorous passerines, after being “held back” further south.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*): Several spring records. Michael Sveen reported one winter plumaged “Adult. Yellow legs, yellow bill with red spot. ... Streaking in the back of the neck” at the Queen Elizabeth Power Station, Saskatoon on 25 February 2024 (10:45 hr) (eBird S162883887). One seen on 12 March 2024 at Wascana Lake, Regina by Jared Clarke and Brett Quiring (eBird S164583018; S164577870). **Remarks:** Early spring arrival dates, previous early date 14 March (Saskatoon), or possibly undetected overwintering birds. The spring bird appeared in Saskatoon on February 2024, less than 24 hours before a strong Pacific weather system from the southwest brought snow and high winds to central Saskatchewan. The first spring migrants are typically in adult breeding plumage not winter plumage.

California Gull spring migration: On 6 April 2012, Philip Taylor observed a major spring migration of nearly 1,000 California Gulls flying northeast, paralleling Highway 7 between Saskatoon and Rosetown. The single species groups ranged in size between four and 30 birds and flew low within 2-3 metres of the ground, against a quartering wind from the south east. These birds appeared to be migrating along a line between Calgary and Saskatoon, where both city's landfills provide food and open water, important for staging gulls during spring and fall migration.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*): One seen on 12 March 2024 at Wascana Lake, Regina, by Jared Clarke and Brett Quiring (eBird S164583018; S164577870). **Remarks:** Earliest spring report, previous record 22 March, Bigger.

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*): Twenty-one seen on 12 March 2024 at Wascana Lake, Regina by Jared Clarke and Brett Quiring (eBird S164583018; S164577870). **Remarks:** Earliest spring report, previous record 13 March, Last Mountain Lake NWA.

Palm Warbler (*Setophaga palmarum*): A very early bird on 17 April 2024 by Bert Dalziel on farm north of Love (eBird

S169100542); and one on 27 April by David Bell, Saskatoon (eBird S170622209).

Remarks: Previous early date 29 April, Regina and Sheho.

Nashville Warbler (*Leiothlypis ruficapilla*): One 29 April 2024 by Kale Warman at Davidson (eBird S170981561). **Remarks:** Previous early date 6 May, Ekapo Lake.

Magnolia Warbler (*Setophaga magnolia*): Three on 27 April 2024 by Robert Holtkamp, Yorkton (eBird S170533259). **Remarks:** Previous early date 5 May, Matador.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*): One on 28 April 2024 at Cherry Lake by Trevor Herriot (eBird S170808379). **Status:** Previous early date 29 April, Regina.

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*): One adult male photographed on 30 April 2024 at the Besant Provincial Recreational Campground, 26 km west of Moose Jaw (fide Guy Wapple). **Remarks:** Previous early date 6 May, Regina.

Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*): Two seen by Sharlane Toole on 29 April 2024 at the Swift Current sewage lagoons (eBird S171237995). **Remarks:** Previous early date of two terns on 30 April, Swift Current, also by S Toole.⁴

Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*): One found by Don Weidl on 5 May 2024 in the Qu'Appelle Valley (eBird S172205355). **Remarks:** Previous early date 6 May, Little Nut Lake.

Fall records 2024

More species of shorebirds were reported in July across the province, suggesting that fall migration may have begun earlier than previous years. However, it was not possible to determine if these were early returning migrants or lingering summer birds that never reached their northern breeding areas. Detailed studies of changing migration chronology/phenology in Whooping Cranes (see below) suggest shifts may be occurring for other less

studied species, and it seems to be a case of ‘when’ not ‘if’ these changes will be detected for many species. Whether long- and short-distance migrants adapt to climate change will be crucial for their continued survival. Above average weather continued across much of the province until the last week of October, after which nighttime temperatures fell consistently below zero.

Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*): Recent studies of the migration phenology of Whooping Cranes found the time these birds spent on the Texas wintering grounds has shortened (1950/1951 to 2010/2011) and time spent in central Saskatchewan during fall migration has lengthened by 20.3 days (1972 to 2021); arriving 12 days earlier (4 September) and departing 17 days later (3 November). No change in trends were found during spring migration in Saskatchewan (mean period of occurrence was 32 days).⁵³ Brian Johns wrote in *BofSk* that the latest fall departure date on record for Whooping Cranes was 28 November 1987 (Blaine Lake) “in a month 5.4C warmer than the long-term November average, allowing some open water to persist.”¹

Common Poorwill (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*): Bob Godwin and Ken Lumbis encountered two birds at separate locations, along roads on the top of the West Block, Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park, approximately 6 km northeast of Fort Walsh National Historic Site, on 7 September 2024, at 20:15 and 20:25 hr (eBird S195013548, S195013782). **Remarks:** Latest fall departure date in *BofSk* is 22 September, of a single bird.

Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*): An anonymous birder reported seeing 33,500 putative Franklin's Gulls on 14 September 2024 at Rowan's Ravine Provincial Park (eBird S195122521). Whether other gull species were part of the flock was not stated. **Remarks:** There are other reports of large flocks of Franklin's Gulls during fall migration, in late August and early September.

Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*): Don Weidl found 16 individuals at the Broadview cemetery on 2 October 2024 (eBird S197292188); a few Dark-eyed Juncos and White-crowned Sparrows were seen nearby. **Remarks:** A regular transient across southern Saskatchewan, but usually seen in smaller numbers.

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*): John Lundgren counted a flock of at least 34 males, females, and immatures in a “drying up beaver pond”, 8 km southeast of Prince Albert on 4 October 2024 (eBird S197542360); and posted seeing 30 birds (“a low estimate as most swam away into hidden channels” – “probably 40 to 50 individuals”) at the same location on 9 October (eBird S198119997). **Remarks:** A high count, especially noteworthy that far north.

American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*): Bruce De Labio made a careful yet conservative count of 1,250 avocets along the north shore of Reed Lake on 21 October 2024 (eBird S199818871; ML625265446); he noted “many small flocks flying west along North side”. **Remarks:** A late date for this large number of birds.

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*): Ryan Dudragne photographed one on 27 October 2024 along the South Saskatchewan River in Saskatoon (eBird S200552957; ML625511178, ML625511179); found by Ryan Bradshaw; several other observers. **Remarks:** Previous latest record 4 October (Saskatoon).

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*): A single bird was found on the open water of Fond Du Lac River at Stony Rapids on 24 November 2024 by Shayna and Scott Cossette (eBird S203505095, S203505096; ML626685504). **Remarks:** A late departure from this northern location.

Sandhill Crane (*Antigone canadensis*): One feeding in irrigation field, with Mallards, Canada Geese, Gray Partridge, and Sharp-tailed Grouse on 16 December 2024, 4 km north of Gardiner Dam at

Cutbank; posted by Stan Shadick (eBird S205640880) and seen by several other observers participating in the area's Christmas Bird Count. **Remarks:** Third winter report of this species on a CBC (previous records: Yorkton 2003, and Cabri 2004–05). This crane may have been injured and separated from its family group during the legal hunting season for Sandhill Cranes (1 September to 16 December), thus causing it to linger past its expected migration date.

Gray Partridge (*Perdix perdix*): Record high numbers of this introduced upland game bird were recorded on many Christmas Bird Counts across the province in 2024.⁵⁴ Covey sizes were large (many with more than eight birds) and were seen in snow-covered fields and near shelterbelts as expected, and even along the shores of Diefenbaker Lake (P Taylor personal observation, 16 December on the Gardiner Dam CBC). **Remarks:** Despite a long-term decline in its population, Gray Partridge “has the highest reproductive capacity of any Saskatchewan game bird” wrote Wayne Pepper in *BofSk*, allowing it to quickly recover when conditions are favourable.

Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*): A single adult seen with three Trumpeter Swans on 28 December 2024 in the river below Crooked Lake by Don Weidl (eBird S206915783), a continuing bird. **Remarks:** One record of four birds overwintering in 2022-23 (Cold River, Meadow Lake Provincial Park).⁴ Occasionally, a few swans may linger where open water is available.

California Gull (*Larus californicus*): On 28 December 2024 a single adult winter plumaged individual was identified and photographed at Wascana Park, Regina, by Zach Greene (eBird S206956835; ML628148801) who stated it was “originally reported as a ring-billed gull”; also seen the same day by Jared Clarke, Dan Sawatzky, Brett Quiring, Annie McLeod, Joel Cherry, and Greg Kratzig. **Remarks:** This species has not attempted to overwinter. One adult in winter plumage was photographed in

Wascana Park, on 12 and 14 December 2022 by Laurie Koepke (eBird S123865379, ML512510531; and eBird S123957355), the latest record for the province and the first within a Christmas Bird Count period.⁵⁵ Other late departures include 15 birds seen on 18 November 2023 below the Gardiner Dam by Jared Clarke and Brett Quiring (eBird S154711841, S154711842) and a single adult below Gardiner Dam seen by Vicki and Warren St. Germaine on 22 November 2023 (eBird S155002095).

Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*):

One female was found on the South Saskatchewan River, by the Queen Elizabeth Power Station, Saskatoon, and reported by LeeAnn Latremouille on 26 December 2024 (eBird206659863); it continued past the month's end, allowing many observers to see and photograph the duck. **Remarks:** There are eight previous winter records in *BofSk*.

Other updates (AOS and SARA & COSEWIC news)

The AOS announced two changes to North American bird taxonomy in 2024 that affect Saskatchewan's avifauna:

1) all redpoll taxa (Hoary Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni*; Lesser Redpoll *A. cabaret*, of Europe) are treated as conspecific with the Holarctic songbird, Common Redpoll and lumped into a single variable and somewhat clinal species, **Redpoll** (*Acanthis flammea*). All redpolls are almost completely undifferentiated genetically and differences in their body size, bill shape, and melanin pigments in their feathers are controlled by "a supergene", allowing the ecotype variations that we are familiar with, to be expressed.⁵⁶ **2)** the second change removed the hyphen from 'night-herons' to Yellow-crowned Night Heron and Black-crowned Night Heron.^{7,57}

Saskatchewan birders saw their records of Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) posted on eBird after 31 October 2024 carry the new species name "American Herring Gull (*Larus smithsonianus*)". The Cornell Lab of Ornithology follows "The eBird Clements Checklist of Birds of the World v2024", supporting efforts to align checklists and taxonomies for more than 11,000 bird

species around the globe.⁵⁸ This differs from the position taken by the AOS in July 2024, when they voted not to split the North American Herring Gull populations from those in Europe (European Herring Gull, *L. argentatus*), central Asia (Mongolian Gull, *L. mongolicus*), and Siberia (Vega Gull, *L. vegae*).⁷

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) recommended to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change Canada, in May 2024, that the status of Long-billed Curlew be revised up from Special Concern to Threatened under Canada's SARA.⁵

Discussion

The Status of Canada's Birds report was released by Environment Canada and Climate Change and Bird Studies Canada in October 2024. It provides information on changes in our bird populations over the past 50 years. Many groups of species continue to decline with grassland birds experiencing the greatest losses (-67 per cent), followed by aerial insect eaters (-43 per cent), and shorebirds (-42 per cent). Long distance migrants, including passerines that winter in the tropical Americas, declined 29 per cent, and arctic bird populations fell by 28 per cent. These statistics are alarming, to say the least. Saskatchewan is a key link for these birds during their annual cycles, providing important habitat for breeding, moulting, migration, staging, and wintering. The phrase, 'Land of Living Skies', (adopted by Tourism Saskatchewan after Becky Pritchard from Tisdale won a licence plate slogan contest in 1997), evokes images of the wild birds that enrich our province.

Observations of unexpected migrant and vagrant birds in 2024. In the **spring**, Tom Hince reported an experience he had looking over the water near the east shore of Cold Lake [campground] in Meadow Lake PP. He was treated to an array of arctic-bound migrants over the lake: Surf Scoter (13), Parasitic Jaeger (1), Sabine's Gull (550, possibly as many as 650), Arctic Tern (9), perhaps phalarope (20), and possibly one Pacific Loon. Encountering this large assemblage of species adds to our information on this migration route

where birds leave their wintering areas on the Pacific Ocean, cross over the Rocky Mountains, and transit Saskatchewan enroute to their northern breeding grounds. In the **fall**, three rare vagrants were found in the community of Stony Rapids in the northern boreal forest. What caused the Tropical Kingbird and Vermilion Flycatcher to turn up at the same time in October in that same remote location is unknown; however, it seems unlikely to be a coincidence. Both species have similar distributions in the southern USA; both species are considered (at least, partial) migrants withdrawing in winter from northern parts of their breeding grounds in Arizona, and to a lesser extent in Texas; and both birds were immatures, making them more prone to disorientation and vagrancy.^{2,4,37} Just prior to the birds appearing in Stony Rapids, several powerful tropical cyclones traveled north from the Gulf of Mexico into southern USA, including 13 September (hurricane Francine), 26 September (hurricane Helene), to 8 October (hurricane Milton). Did these two vagrant flycatchers become entrained in hurricane associated winds that then carried them to Saskatchewan? Additionally, the behaviour of these two flycatchers, perching prominently as they sit and wait for prey, increased the chances of them being found. Then, the appearance of a Short-tailed Shearwater in Stony Rapids in November, almost certainly displaced by strong winter storms from the Pacific Ocean, was extraordinary. Shayna and Scott Cossette are to be congratulated for carefully documenting three remarkable avian discoveries around Stony Rapids, an area difficult to access by birders and ornithologists.^{1,59,60} One can only wonder how many other less conspicuous vagrants found their way to Saskatchewan, but remained undiscovered.

The underlying causes of bird vagrancy are elusive and poorly understood. Tonelli et al identified a new mechanism contributing to avian vagrancy.⁶¹ Birds have internal magnetoreceptor structures, which contain iron, that are believed to be in the upper beak of some birds, like homing

pigeons, and to be connected to their brain by the trigeminal nerve.⁶² Birds rely on these structures for navigation under favourable solar and magnetic conditions “to traverse long distances over often unfamiliar terrain.” Using “data from 2 million captures of 152 landbird species in North America over 60 years”, the 2023 study reported “a strong association between disruption to the Earth’s magnetic field and avian vagrancy during fall migration.” Long-distance migrants were more prone to misorientation than short-distance migrants. However, species breeding at high latitudes were not found to be more sensitive to magnetic disturbances. Some daytime migrants may experience greater vagrancy during periods of high solar activity (periods with greater numbers of sunspots). They found only a weak relationship with birds migrating in spring.

The importance of bird subspecies. Subspecies that are identifiable in the field provide important evidence about a bird’s breeding and wintering ranges, and migration routes, because the entire population is “marked” by characteristic plumages or vocalizations. This compares with most banded birds that have a low probability of being re-encountered and are often difficult to see. These subspecific differences add another valuable dimension to bird study, and have helped determine the natal origins of several vagrant birds that have occurred in Saskatchewan. These include: Eurasian (Bewick’s) Tundra Swan (2007); Glaucous Gull, (subspecies *barrovianus*) from the Bering Sea (2023); Curve-billed Thrasher from the western ‘*palmeri*’ population (2024); western subspecies of Yellow-throated Warbler (2024); the eastern subspecies of Palm Warbler (2024); Lesser Goldfinch from both the eastern (1997) and western populations (2011, 2020); and the Pacific (Hepburn’s) subspecies of Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (2023). Similar information is not readily available from banding. David Sibley’s annotated list of field identifiable subspecies of birds is a good reference on the topic, though the AOU/AOS has updated the taxonomy of many species since its publication.⁶³

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