

# SOUTH DAKOTA Ornithologists' Union

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*Hoary Redpoll*

*Common Redpoll*

*Minnehaha County 1/13/2013*

*Photo: Terry Sohl*

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SOUTH DAKOTA  
BIRD NOTES



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# PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Spring is the high season for bird-watching, field trips, and field research. So it seems appropriate to remind everyone about ethical birding. The following comments are adapted from the American Birding Associations list of Birding Ethics and other online blogs.



**The birds we observe and study are wild animals**, they are not pets. By practicing sound birding ethics, we can protect the integrity of our research and hobby and preserve the well-being of the birds we love. The first rule to follow in order to protect the birds we see, is to remember that the welfare of the bird is paramount. Keep an appropriate distance from all birds. Keep well back from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas and important feeding sites. Disturbing a bird's feeding area or nesting sites can cause unhealthy stress and fear that may drive the bird away, not only out of observation range but permanently forcing the bird to find a safer, less disturbed habitat where we may not be able to observe it. In such sensitive areas, if there is a need for extended observation, photography, filming or recording, try to use a blind or hide, and take advantage of natural cover. Research has shown that using audio recordings alters a bird's behavior and can cause stress. Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, such as feeders, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in the area. Before advertising the presence of a rare bird to the general public, evaluate the potential for disturbance to the bird, its surroundings, and other people in the area, and proceed only if access can be controlled, disturbance can be minimized, and permission has been obtained from private land-owners. The sites of rare nesting birds should be divulged only to the proper conservation authorities.

**Be considerate not just of the birds**, but also of the habitats they live in. Stay on roads, trails, and paths where they exist; otherwise keep habitat disturbance to a minimum. Avoid leaving litter along a birding trail, and do not move dead branches, brush or tree limbs in order to see birds more clearly—move your body instead to find a better angle.

**Finally, respect the rights of others.** Practice common courtesy in contacts with other people. Be a birding ambassador, promoting good relations with non-birders and the general public. Be aware of whether a particular spot is private or public land. NEVER step onto private property without the owner's permission. Note that 'Walk-in Areas' do NOT apply to birding; you need to get explicit permission from the landowner to go there. Avoid aiming binoculars or cameras at people, homes, or livestock. When going out with a group of people, be aware of how your actions affect the enjoyment of others in your group. Avoid any behavior that may disrupt birds or distract other birders. Keep conversation to a minimum, turn off cell phones and avoid using flash photography and audio recordings that may disturb birds or others in the group.

Our exemplary behavior will generate goodwill with birders and non-birders alike and protect the welfare of the birds of South Dakota. Happy birding!

*Nancy Drilling*

## 2012 REPORT OF THE RARE BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE

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The SDOU Rare Bird Records Committee (RBRC) met on 3 June 2012 at Edgemont. The committee did not meet in the fall of 2012, but acted on records via email. The members of the committee were David Swanson (secretary), Ricky Olson, Todd Jensen, J. David Williams, and Jeffrey Palmer. All members attended the spring meeting or voted *in absentia* and all members contributed to electronic review of reports.

Springer (1988. *South Dakota Bird Notes* 40:67-70) outlined the purpose and voting procedures of the RBRC. The RBRC strongly encourages observers of rare or unusual birds in South Dakota to report their observations to the secretary of the RBRC (David Swanson of Vermillion, SD), preferably via email at david.swanson@usd.edu. A *Rare Bird Report Form* is available in electronic format for this purpose from David Swanson, or a form can be downloaded from <http://www.sdou.org/>, by clicking on the *Seasonal Reporting* link and then clicking on the link for the *Rare Bird Report Form*. A summary of the type of information desired by the RBRC in a rare bird report can be found in Swanson (2004. *South Dakota Bird Notes* 56:88-95).

The RBRC requests rare bird reports for species listed as hypothetical or accidental in the state, including species reported from a portion of the state or time of year where that species is listed as accidental. A listing of birds belonging to these categories in South Dakota is provided in the latest version of the checklist of South Dakota birds, accessible at <http://www.sdou.org/> by clicking on the *Seasonal Reporting* link and then clicking on the link for the *South Dakota State Checklist*. Information regarding species listed as accidental for only a portion of the state can be found in Tallman et al. (2002. *Birds of South Dakota*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, SDOU, Aberdeen, SD). The RBRC regularly adds or removes species from the review list, based on current data, and these changes to the review list are reported in the annual reports of the RBRC in *South Dakota Bird Notes*. In addition, reports are requested for observations listed in the "Species Requiring Acceptance by the Rare Bird Records Committee" section in the Seasonal Reports of *South Dakota Bird Notes*. Observers whose records are accepted (Classes 1 and 2) are encouraged to publish these records in *South Dakota Bird Notes*, so details of the observation can be communicated to a wider audience.

Following are the results of the committee's action since the last report in the September 2012 issue of *South Dakota Bird Notes*. The numbers included in parentheses along with some reports indicate the committee's vote. If no numbers are listed, the vote was unanimous (5-0) or 4-0 if a committee member submitted the report. The committee wishes to emphasize that a rating of Class 3 or 4 (non-accepted record) does not imply any personal criticism of the observer. Such a rating only means that the information provided in the report, in the opinion of the committee, did not conclusively eliminate other similar species.

### **CLASS 1 (Accepted - Specimen, photograph, or recording).**

- Fulvous Whistling-Duck. 14 June 2011. One adult at Flight Lake, Potter Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. 3<sup>rd</sup> state record.
- Brant. 22 November 2011. One at Big Stone Power Plant, Grant Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. Accidental migrant.
- Harlequin Duck. 15 December 2011 - 7 April 2012. One juvenile male at Canyon Lake, Pennington Co. Photographed. Jocelyn Baker, Mike Michael, Richard Latuchie, Gene Hess, Lynn Barber, and Dan Ames. SDBN 64:80-85.
- Common Loon. 15 July 2011. Adult with two dependent young near Sica Hollow State Park, Marshall Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. First confirmed breeding record for the state.
- Neotropical Cormorant. 7 June 2011. One first-year bird at Odessa Number 1 Game Production Area, McPherson Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. 3<sup>rd</sup> state record. (4 Class 1P, 1 Class 3).
- Neotropical Cormorant. 8 October 2011. One adult at Flight Lake, Potter Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. 4<sup>th</sup> state record. (4 Class 1P, 1 Class 3).

Neotropical Cormorant. 27 April – 31 July 2012. One first-year bird at Torrey Lake, Brule Co. Photographed. Jocelyn Baker, Lynn Barber, Ricky Olson, Ron Mabie and Kelly Preheim. 5<sup>th</sup> state record. (3 Class 1P, 1 Class 3).

Neotropical Cormorant. 26 July-5 August 2012. One adult at Hughes Co. Photographed. Ricky Olson. 6<sup>th</sup> state record. (4 Class 1P, 1 Class 3).

Tricolored Heron. 15 July 2011. One adult at Hecla, Brown Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. Casual summer resident.

Cattle Egret. 18 June 2011. One at Camp Crook Road, Harding Co. Photographed. Jeff Palmer. Accidental west, 1<sup>st</sup> record for Harding Co.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. 3 August 2010. One juvenile at Blue Blanket GPA, Walworth Co. Photographed. Scott Stolz. (4 Class 1P, 1 Class 2). Casual migrant and summer visitor.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. 29 July 2012. One juvenile near New Holland, Douglas Co. Photographed. Kelly Preheim, Scott Stolz and Ricky Olson. Casual migrant and summer visitor.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. 29 July 2012. One juvenile at Collins Slough, Hand Co. Photographed. Scott Stolz and Ricky Olson. Casual migrant and summer visitor.

Glossy Ibis. 7 November 2011. One juvenile at Hand Co. Photographed. Doug Backlund. Late fall migrant.

Red-shouldered Hawk. 1 September 2012. One juvenile at Farm Island State Park, Hughes Co. Photographed. Doug Backlund. Casual migrant.

Common Gallinule. 15 July 2011. One adult in Marshall Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. Casual summer resident.

Solitary Sandpiper. 16 June 2011. One adult at Potter Co. Photographed. Ricky Olson and Scott Stolz. Casual in June as late spring migrant.

Western Sandpiper. 5 April 2011. One juvenile at Bitter Lake, Day Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. Casual migrant.

Ruff. 12-14 April 2012. One adult female in alternate plumage at Sully Co. Photographed. Ricky Olson. 5<sup>th</sup> state record.

Red Phalarope. 11 October 2011. One adult in basic plumage at Waubay, Day Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. 7<sup>th</sup> state record. (4 Class 1P, 1 Class 3).

Laughing Gull. 2 April 2012. One adult in alternate plumage at Oahe Dam tailrace, Hughes/Stanley Cos. Photographed. Ricky Olson. Casual in spring.

Mew Gull. 18 November 2011. One adult in basic plumage at Big Stone Power Plant, Grant Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. Casual fall migrant.

Glaucous-winged Gull. 18 April 2012. One adult in alternate plumage at Lake Thompson, Kingsbury Co. Photographed. Ricky Olson and Scott Stolz. 3<sup>rd</sup> state record.

Great Black-backed Gull. 7 November-8 December 2011. One first cycle bird at Hughes Co. Photographed. Ricky Olson. 7<sup>th</sup> state record.

White-winged Dove. 31 March 2012. One in Fort Pierre, Stanley Co. Photographed. Ricky Olson. Casual visitor.

Barred Owl. 23 July 2011. One in Yellow Bear Canyon, Bennett Co. Audio recording. Bill Unzen. Accidental west.

Rufous Hummingbird. 6-11 August 2012. First-year male at Armour, Douglas Co. Photographed. Lea Ymker. Casual migrant east.

Lewis's Woodpecker. 27 May 2012. One at Ft. Pierre National Grasslands, Lyman Co. Photographed. Brad Bouldan. Accidental away from Black Hills.

Violet-green Swallow. 11 July 2011. One adult near Hurricane Lake, Roberts Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. Accidental east.

Varied Thrush. 24 January 2012. One adult male at Huron, Beadle Co. Photographed. Lynn Barber and Lyle Swanson. Casual winter visitor.

Sage Thrasher. 16-17 April 2012. One adult in basic plumage at Hand Co. Photographed. Doug Backlund. Accidental east.

Blue-winged Warbler. 15 July 2011. One adult male at Sica Hollow State Park, Roberts Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. Casual summer visitor.

Cassin's Sparrow. 25 June 2011. One at Badlands National Park, Pennington Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. (4 Class 1P, 1 Class 3). Casual summer visitor.

Chipping Sparrow. 26 January 2012. One adult in basic plumage at Piedmont, Meade Co. Photographed. Lynn Barber and Jocelyn Baker. First ever documented January record.  
 Savannah Sparrow. 3 January 2012. One at Lake Andes NWR, Charles Mix Co. Photographed. Ron Mabie, Dick Filby, and Al Levantin. First winter record.  
 Henslow's Sparrow. 12-14 July 2011. One in southwestern Lake Co. Photographed. Jeff Palmer. Casual in summer.  
 McCown's Longspur. 2 July 2011. One adult male at MDU Loop Road, Butte Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. Accidental summer visitor.  
 McCown's Longspur. 3 July 2011. One adult male at East Lemmon Lake Road, Perkins Co. Photographed. Bill Unzen. Accidental summer visitor.  
 Lesser Goldfinch. 17 Jul-16 Sep, 2012. One male and one female at Rapid City, Pennington Co. Photographed. Jocelyn Baker and Renee Bryant. Accidental away from Fall River Co.

**CLASS 2 (Accepted – Satisfactory written description).**

Barrow's Goldeneye. 18 January 2012. One adult male at Ft. Randall Dam, Charles Mix Co. Ron Mabie. Casual fall migrant and winter visitor.  
 Red-shouldered Hawk. 28 September 2012. One adult in Mellette Co. Scott Stolz. Casual migrant.  
 White-eyed Vireo. 19 May 2012. One adult at Sioux Falls, Minnehaha Co. Doug Chapman. Casual spring migrant.  
 Bohemian Waxwing. 28 April 2012. One at Pickstown, Charles Mix Co. Ron Mabie. Second latest spring migrant.  
 Sage Thrasher. 11 September 2012. One at Mellette Co. Scott Stolz. Accidental away from far west.  
 Green-tailed Towhee. 3 September 2012. One adult at Whitney Preserve, Fall River Co. Jocelyn Baker and Lynn Barber. Casual visitor.  
 Lincoln's Sparrow. 29 December 2011. One at Clay Co. Chris Merkord. Accidental in early winter.  
 Harris's Sparrow. 12 June 2011. One adult in alternate plumage at Pickstown, Charles Mix Co. Ron Mabie. 6<sup>th</sup> June record.

**CLASS 3 (Not accepted – Identification possibly correct but description not completely convincing).**

Peregrine Falcon. 4 January 2012. One at Charles Mix Co. The report was brief and did not conclusively eliminate a gray-phase Gyrfalcon, which is also possible in winter. (4 Class 3, 1 Class 2).

**CLASS 4 (Not accepted – Identification probably or certainly incorrect).**

No reports were rated as Class 4.



*Jason Thiele looking for the bird on the South Dakota sage prairie near Edgemont*

*"Those who look for birds, find birds."*

*~Roger Tory Petersen*

*Photos: Doug Chapman*

# SDOU SPRING MEETING 2013

*SDOU 2013 Spring Meeting, Mobridge*

NANCY DRILLING

The 2013 spring meeting of the South Dakota Ornithologists' Union was held 17–19 May 2013 in Mobridge. Forty-six attendees ignored rainy weather forecasts to experience excellent birding, enlightening speakers, and enjoyable camaraderie. The meeting began on Friday night with a round-table discussion of redpoll identification. The consensus was that there is no consensus on identifying the species of the many intermediate-plumage individuals seen in South Dakota this past winter. [See front cover.] The conversation educated everyone on some problems with the species concept and the importance of careful observation of multiple characteristics to identify a bird to species. On Saturday night, Dr. Larry Igl from the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center in Jamestown, ND presented his findings of grassland bird research in the Dakotas. Threats to grassland and wetland bird populations include the conversion of Conservation Reserve Program grasslands and other grasslands to cropland, encroachment of woody vegetation into grasslands, and fragmentation of large grassland parcels. Dr. Igl also talked about Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism in the Great Plains, reporting that Red-winged Blackbird is the most frequently parasitized species. He also noted that this native species has been in the region for a long time and well-intentioned efforts to destroy cowbird eggs or nestlings in host nests may have unintended consequences.

As with all spring SDOU meetings, the bulk of the weekend was spent in the field. Three field trips were offered, ably led by Dave Swanson, Jeff Palmer, Scott Stolz, Ricky Olson and Nancy Drilling. One group headed west across the Missouri River into Dewey County. The first stop was to a spot just north of the town of Whitehorse where Nancy Drilling found a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher during a Friday scouting trip. On both Saturday and Sunday mornings, observers got distant but good looks at two Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, suggesting that there may be a pair which may be nesting. For many people, this was a life or state species and well worth the mucky road to get there. This group also visited a mud flat east of Timber Lake for shorebirds, a prairie dog town along Highway 12 for Burrowing Owls and Long-billed Curlew, and Little Moreau Recreation Area, one of the least-known birding hotspots in West River. Little Moreau produced a long list of migrant warblers, flycatchers, vireos, sparrows, orioles, and tanagers, as well as some waterbirds at the small pond.

The two other field trips went east of Mobridge. Stops at Blue Blanket Lake and other smaller wetlands in the area produced various waterfowl, waterbirds, marshbirds, and shorebirds, including a Black-necked Stilt. Most participants spent at least half a day at Lake Hiddenwood State Park, a well-known migrant songbird hotspot. Highlights of the long list of species seen included Cape May, Golden-winged, Chestnut-sided, and Canada warblers, as well as the sheer number of individuals, with every bush and tree alive with birds. Probably the windy, rainy weather kept these birds from migrating. Groups also traveled to Flight Lake in Potter County. This large lake had both open water and mudflats; highlights included Greater Scaup, Ruddy Turnstone, and Red-necked Phalarope.

Overall, 200 bird species were found during the meeting, a total that will be hard to beat in future meetings. Many thanks to Dave Swanson and Jeff Palmer, who organized the meeting, to the field trip leaders, and to all of the participants who made this a very enjoyable meeting. The SDOU 2013 fall meeting will be held 8–10 November at the Governor's Inn in Pierre.

# 2012 – 2013 SOUTH DAKOTA CBC SUMMARY

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## INTRODUCTION

With this article it is hoped that a summary of the South Dakota Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) will be a regular occurrence in these pages. The last report of South Dakota CBCs was in 2006 (SDBN 58(2):33-41) covering 2005-2006 (107<sup>th</sup>) CBC season. Previous practice was to publish each count's results in tables. With nearly two dozen counts held each year this uses many pages, is a challenge to check that the results are correctly transcribed and leaves no room for commentary or analysis. Beginning with this report the reader interested in viewing the raw data of most SD CBCs is referred to the National Audubon Society's (NAS) CBC web site at <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>. The summaries presented here are based on the data available at the NAS web site or made available by the compiler. The focus here is summary data, interesting observations and notes. For future reports compilers are encouraged to provide any appropriate commentary that helps the reader gain insight into the count's results.

## SUMMARY

This year (2012) 20 counts were reported to NAS and one other count was reported directly to me. Statewide, excluding subspecies, forms, and "sp." etc., 129 species and a total of 172,188 individuals were found this year.

Species found on only one count (27): Mute and Tundra swans, Canvasback, White-winged Scoter, Horned Grebe, Gyrfalcon, Peregrine Falcon, Virginia Rail, Bonaparte's, Franklin's, and Glaucous gulls, Long-eared, Short-eared, and Northern Saw-whet owls, Pileated Woodpecker, Pinyon Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Canyon and Carolina wrens, American Dipper, Spotted and Eastern towhees, Chipping, Fox, and White-throated sparrows, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, and White-winged Crossbill.

Species found on all counts (6): Bald Eagle, Rock Pigeon, European Starling, Common Redpoll, American Goldfinch, and House Sparrow.

**Waterfowl:** The most numerous species reported was Canada Goose (22,355) from Pierre. Canada Goose comprised 24.7% of the total birds reported, Cackling Goose 11.9% and Snow Goose 8%. Greater White-fronted Goose (10 birds on 2 counts) and Ross's Goose (205 birds on 3 counts) were minor contributors to the total. All goose species (5) contributed to 44.7% of the total number of birds recorded. All 25 duck and goose species contributed to 65.8% of the total number of birds counted.

**Grouse – Herons:** Among the 5 gallinaceous species reported, Gray Partridge was recorded on only 3 counts and Greater Prairie-Chicken on 2. Those 2 counts totaled 37 birds compared to 41 on the 2011 Pierre count and 203 at Pierre in 2010, the only reports in those years. Average Sharp-tailed Grouse numbers (40.5) were about half that of last year's and a quarter of the 2010 total. Despite generally cold temperatures and frozen water 3 species of grebes were found: Pied-billed (Hot Springs, Pierre, Yankton), Horned (Yankton) and Western (Pierre and Yankton). Over the years 5 species of grebes have occurred on a total of 47 CBCs. 2010 is the only other year these 3 grebe species were reported and in 1998 a remarkable 4 species (the above 3 and Western Grebe). Eared Grebe, the fifth species, was reported in 1957. Single Great Blue Herons were found on 4 counts widely scattered around the state.



**Hawks:** All 9 of the wintering hawks were reported. Yankton had a noteworthy 75 Bald Eagles. Northern Harrier was typically reported as single birds; the high count was 5 at Sand Lake. Northern Goshawk was found on 4 counts with a high of 2 at Aberdeen. Ferruginous Hawk was reported on 5 counts with Pierre having the high count of 5. All 5 falcon species were recorded. A Gyrfalcon at Shadehill and 1 Peregrine Falcon at Badlands were the only reports of those species. Perhaps the latter was one of the birds released in Rapid City. Prairie Falcon was reported on 3 West River counts and Pierre.

**Rails – Doves:** One Virginia Rail was found on the Spearfish count for the fifth CBC record. The last occurrence was 3 birds in 2007. American Coot numbers were about a third higher than last year. Killdeer (1 – 3) were found on 3 counts and Wilson’s Snipe on 5, Spearfish reporting 10, elsewhere only 1 or 2. Among gulls Yankton recorded 4 of the 5 reported species and the only reports of Bonaparte’s and Franklin’s gulls. Pierre had 3 gull species including the only Glaucous Gull. Madison and Huron recorded high counts of Rock Pigeon. Meanwhile Eurasian Collared-Dove, present on 17 counts, continued its increase showing high counts in Sioux Falls, Yankton, and Madison. Mourning Dove was reported on 10 counts, all but one (Sturgis) in East River.

**Owls – Woodpeckers:** All 6 expected owl species were found. Eastern Screech-Owl was observed on 8 counts in 1s and 2s. Snowy Owl was recorded on 4 counts, all East River. Shadehill had Long-eared Owl (2), Canton had Short-eared Owl (1), and Northern Saw-whet Owl (1) at Pierre for the only reports of those species. Despite widespread frozen water good numbers of Belted Kingfisher were present around the state including the high count of 8 at Rapid City. Lewis’s Woodpecker was recorded only on the Spearfish and Sturgis counts and Red-headed Woodpecker was found only on the Madison and Sturgis counts. Brookings had Pileated Woodpecker (1), its first.

**Shrikes – Waxwings:** Northern Shrike was reported on 18 counts with several counts recording 6 or 7 birds. All 6 of the expected corvids were found. Four of the Black Hills counts reported Gray Jay with Piedmont having the high count of 8. Also in the Black Hills, the Wind Cave count had the only report of Pinyon Jay (35) and Clark’s Nutcracker (4). Black-billed Magpie was found on all 10 West River counts in numbers ranging from 2 (Bison) to 48 (Piedmont). No magpies were found on any East River count. Pygmy Nuthatch was found on 5 counts in the Black Hills. Canyon Wrens (2) on the Piedmont count and Carolina Wrens (2) on the Yankton count were the only reports of those species. The latter species last CBC report was on the 2008 Spearfish count. Single Marsh Wrens were found on 3 counts (Rapid City, Hot Springs, and Pierre). Their previous occurrence was in 2010 on the Spearfish count. The only American Dipper report was 1 on the Spearfish count. Lake Andes and Yankton, as is typical in recent years, had the only Eastern Bluebird reports. Yankton had the only Townsend’s Solitaire outside of West River. Bohemian Waxwing was found only on the Sturgis and Madison counts; both reported new high numbers.

**Longspur – Finches:** Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting continue to be rare on West River counts and once again were found on only the Shadehill CBC. A late Spotted Towhee was found on the Pierre count and Eastern Towhee (1) was observed on the Brookings count. Fox Sparrows (2) on the Pierre count were the first since 2009 and seventh CBC report for the state. Song Sparrow was about equally divided between West and East River counts with Pierre recording the high count (17), more than the rest of the counts combined. Pierre and Yankton recorded the first Swamp Sparrows since 2010 while Sioux Falls had White-throated Sparrow (1), the first since 2008. Harris’s Sparrow was found on 4 counts and White-crowned Sparrow on 3. White-winged Junco was found on 4 of the Black Hills counts. Rapid City had the only West River Northern Cardinal. Western Meadowlark

was recorded on 8 counts. Yellow-headed Blackbird was recorded on the Sand Lake (2) and Sioux Falls (3) counts. Rusty Blackbird was found on 6 counts as was Brewer's Blackbird. Sturgis and Shadehill were the only West River counts reporting Rusty and Brewer's blackbirds, respectively. The Rapid City count reported the only Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches (15). The only West River reports of Purple Finch were from Shadehill and Sturgis. This year's only White-winged Crossbill report was 1 at Huron. Common Redpoll was the only "winter finch" found on all the counts this year. Hoary Redpoll was present on 2 counts this year (a first). Their last occurrence was in 1996.

Table 1. CBCs from W to E, N to S.

1. Spearfish	2. Sturgis	3. Hot Springs
4. Piedmont	5. Wind Cave	6. Rapid City
7. Bison	8. Shadehill	9. Badlands
10. Pine Ridge	11. Pierre	12. Lake Andes
13. Aberdeen	14. Sand Lake	15. Huron
16. Yankton	17. Waubay	18. Madison
19. Brookings	20. Sioux Falls	21. Canton

## COUNT REPORTS

Any count not mentioned here either was not conducted or no report was available. The reports are arranged from west to east, north to south (Table 1).

### WEST RIVER

**Spearfish** — 5 January, Daniel Bjerke, compiler. Eight participants contributed 32 party hours, recorded 56 species and 2,627 individuals. Lesser Scaup reached a new high (12) and was only the fourth time found on the count. Sharp-tailed Grouse numbers (82) were about twice as high as the previous count but about 41% lower than the two years before that. One Great Blue Heron was recorded despite the cold and relatively small area of open water. Bald Eagles (19) were about normal for recent years. Red-tailed Hawk (14) tied two previous years for a high count. Virginia Rail (1) was the fifth CBC record for the state. Eurasian Collared-Dove numbers continue to increase. Two Gray Jays were a high count and only the third occurrence on the count. Black-billed Magpies continue in the area and showed a slight increase in numbers to 32. White-winged Junco numbers were up (23) from the previous two years but still well below the 35 year average (47.9). In comparison Oregon and Slate-colored juncos were near their 34 and 37 year averages, respectively.

**Sturgis** — 15 December, Vic Fondy, compiler. Nineteen participants contributed 34.25 party hours, recorded 48 species and 4,489 individuals. Mallard reached a new high count of 828. Sharp-tailed Grouse numbers were up from last year. Wild Turkey continues its climb back to high numbers although it is still short of the high of 1,562 five years ago. A good count of Rough-legged Hawk (21) was not quite a high count. A single Merlin was the first in seven years. Killdeer was present for the third year in a row and only the seventh record for the count. Eurasian Collared-Dove reached a new high count (302) doubling the previous high count. A lone Mourning Dove was the first official occurrence on the count, the previous record being during count week. Lewis's Woodpecker reached its second highest total (10). The Black-billed Magpie count was 20, about average. New to the count was Pygmy Nuthatch (2). Bohemian Waxwing set a high count (500) and no Cedar Waxwings were reported. Three American Tree Sparrows were lower than usual. Oregon Junco reached its second highest count (23). The White-winged Junco count (44) was the highest in three years. Rusty Blackbird was a new species for the count. Two Common

Grackles formed the fifth count record. A single Purple Finch was reported for the third count day record and fifth record overall. Common Redpoll had a good showing with 73 birds present. American Goldfinch numbers were slightly low (77). The Evening Grosbeak count (23) was about average for recent years.

**Hot Springs** — 22 December, Duane Weber, compiler. Four participants contributed 16.5 party hours, recorded 53 species and 3,410 individuals. Prior to this year no data had been posted to the NAS web site since 1980 so no comparisons are readily made. A single Pied-billed Grebe was the second occurrence for the count, the last being in 1980. The Northern Pintail count of 10 was a good count for the region as were 6 Green-winged Teal. Bald Eagle numbers (4) were notably low. One Prairie Falcon was recorded. Wilson's Snipe (1) was a good find. Ring-billed Gull (21) and Herring Gull (1) were notable for wintering away from the Missouri River. All three nuthatch species were recorded including 6 Pygmy Nuthatches. A single Marsh Wren was found.

**Piedmont** — 14 December, Addison Ball, compiler. Eighteen participants contributed 54 hours, recorded 44 species and 3,136 individuals. Sharp-tailed Grouse numbers (13) were substantially lower than last year (207). In contrast Wild Turkey numbers (707) were about twice as high as last year (377). One Ferruginous Hawk was the second report for the count. Golden Eagle numbered 10, a new high count. One Merlin was only the third report for the count and the first in eight years. Eurasian Collared-Dove reached a new high (154) as did Belted Kingfisher (6). After a five year run Black-backed Woodpecker has not been reported for three years. Northern Shrike and Gray Jay were reported in normal numbers but Pinyon Jay was missed. Perhaps Black-billed Magpie is making a modest comeback. After numbers in the teens and low twenties in recent years 48 is modest increase but not as high as 64 from ten years ago. Pygmy Nuthatch numbers have been variable, 5 were reported this year. Two Canyon Wrens reported is typical. No American Tree Sparrows were recorded for the third year in a row; however 1 White-crowned Sparrow was new for the count. Only 22 White-winged Juncos were recorded, about half that of last year. Pink-sided Junco (6) was also noted. Surprisingly, no Red Crossbills were reported. Common Redpoll (33) was the third occurrence for the count as was Evening Grosbeak (12).

**Wind Cave** — 16 December, Barbara Muenchau, Dan Roddy, co-compilers. Fourteen participants contributed approximately 104 hours, recorded 34 species and 672 individuals. Because no data is available on the NAS web site the observations by the compiler follow: "Some interesting observations/thoughts of this year's count: For one group, no birds were seen or heard until 10:00; First time the Eastern Screech-Owl was documented during the CBC (during early morning owling); This was the lowest count for Wild Turkey = 4 (highest was 193 in 2009); Rock Pigeons tied with 2002 for highest = 30; First time Pinyon Jays have been observed since 1999; Clark's Nutcracker tied with 1997 for highest numbers = 4; First time Pygmy Nuthatches were observed since 2006; Second lowest number of Dark-eyed Junco's = 75 (lowest = 72 in 1996); Common Redpoll tied with 1999 for highest numbers = 20; First time since 1996 that the Northern Flicker was not observed; Highest number of Bald Eagles since 2004 = 14 (20 in 2004); Summer 2012 wildfire (machine caused) burned 10,000 acres in one count area – possible reason for decrease in species and total birds. Comparisons of pre and post fire will be interesting."

**Rapid City** — 16 December, Michael Melius, compiler. Twenty-two participants contributed 75.5 party hours, recorded 64 species and 5,266 individuals. Six Northern Shovelers was a high count for this occasional winter visitor. A single Northern Pintail arrived at Canyon Lake in mid-November and very obligingly stayed for the CBC and beyond. Neither Barrow's Goldeneye nor Harlequin Duck put in an appearance. Gray Partridge was not found for the second year in a row and continues to be sporadic. Sharp-tailed

Grouse numbers were sharply down from the previous two years. One Great Blue Heron was found for the CBC, and up to 3 wintered at Canyon Lake. Red-tailed (20) and Rough-legged (13) hawks combined to produce a good buteo count. American Kestrel (1) and Merlin (1) were the only falcons reported. American Coot had a high count of 67. Fairly typical of recent years was 1 Northern Shrike and 3 Gray Jays. Pinyon Jay continues to elude counters having not been found for twelve years after having been present regularly until the late 1990s. Black-billed Magpie numbers remained similar to those of recent years – low. Pygmy Nuthatch (8) was the same number as last year. The only wren found this year was 1 Marsh Wren, a first for the count. Of the nearly 200 juncos reported only 7 were White-winged Juncos, down from 48 last year. After an absence of sixteen years 111 Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches were recorded and after an eleven year absence 31 Common Redpolls were present.

**Bison** — 18 December, Meghan Dinkins, compiler. Two participants contributed 7 hours recording 27 species and 758 individuals. A dozen Gray Partridges were about average. Sharp-tailed Grouse (50) was low but on this count it appears the numbers are either in the 50 – 60 range or 150 – 225 range. The fourth occurrence of Wild Turkey set a new high, 64. Cooper’s Hawk (2) was the second occurrence on the count as was Red-tailed Hawk (1). Horned Lark (20) had a new low count. Second occurrences for the count were Red-breasted Nuthatch (2) and Cedar Waxwing (39). American Tree Sparrow (5) was new to the count.

**Shadehill** — 14 December, Dan Svingen, compiler. Thirteen participants contributed 26 hours recording 45 species and 15,011 individuals. Ross’s Goose (2) was recorded for the first time. Common Merganser (72) nearly doubled its previous high count. Shadehill had this year’s high count of Sharp-tailed Grouse, 138. Bald Eagle reached a new high, 18, besting the 2011 record by 1. A single Ferruginous Hawk was the first in three years. Merlin, last recorded in 2007, returned with a high count of 2. Gyrfalcon (1) made its third appearance on the count and was the only report for the year. Eastern Screech-Owl reached a high of 2. Long-eared Owl (2) occurred for the second time on the count. It was also the only report in the state for the year. For the fourth consecutive year no American Crows were found. Lapland Longspur numbers were noticeably lower than in previous years, only 5 this year compared to 92 last year and 32 in 2009. American Tree Sparrow (122) nearly matched its 2009 high count (131). One Song Sparrow marked the species first occurrence on the count. Dark-eyed Junco reached a new high of 28, of which 6 were of the Oregon type. Brewer’s Blackbird made its first Shadehill appearance with 3 birds and Red Crossbill did likewise with 7 individuals. Common Redpoll reached a new high of 589.

**Badlands** — 20 December, Eddie Childers, compiler. Seven participants contributed 20 hours recording 31 species and 743 individuals. One Sharp-tailed Grouse was lower than usual but 139 Wild Turkeys were an average count. Bald Eagle, a species present every few years, was represented by 2 birds. Northern Harrier, present in most years, was absent. This year was the fourth occurrence of Ferruginous Hawk. The first Peregrine Falcon was recorded on the count. Two each of Eastern Screech-Owl and Great Horned Owl were noted. Four Northern Shrikes were higher than recent years and tied the previous high count. Black-billed Magpie numbers continue to remain low (4). Red-breasted Nuthatch (1) was observed for the first time on the count. The only juncos noted were 5 Oregon Juncos.

**Pine Ridge Reservation** — 30 December, Peter Hill, compiler. Six observers contributed 40.5 hours recording 36 species and 892 individuals. From the compiler: “The first official Pine Ridge Christmas Count enjoyed sunny, cold weather, a decent variety of species, and generally low numbers of everything.” Canada Goose and Mallard were the only waterfowl found. The count recorded 5 of the 9 expected hawk species and 3 of 5 expected falcon species. Eurasian Collared-Dove has established a modest foothold of 9 birds. The

Black-billed Magpie count (46) was just behind the Piedmont total (48). The most numerous species, American Crow (189) was second to the Spearfish count (210).

## EAST RIVER

**Pierre** — 15 December, Doug Backlund, compiler. Twenty-five participants contributed 86.75 hours recording 88 species and 61,332 individuals. Greater White-fronted Goose (6) tripled the previous high count. Ross's Goose (3) was also a high count. A lone Tundra Swan was the first for the count. Gadwall (21) nearly doubled the previous high count. Green-winged Teal (10) were present for the second year in a row and was a high count. Greater Scaup were a third higher than last year and Lesser Scaup were about a quarter of last year's count. Sharp-tailed Grouse numbers were down for the third consecutive year. The Greater Prairie-Chicken count was down to 25 from 203 two years ago. A Pied-billed Grebe was recorded on the count and a single Western Grebe was recorded during count week. Northern Harrier was a surprising missed species. In contrast to the previous count's high of 13 Ferruginous Hawks, 5 this year was fairly typical. This year's report of 5 was a high count for Merlin. One Glaucous Gull was found. Single Snowy and Northern Saw-whet owls were tallied. Marsh Wren (1) was found for the second occurrence on the count; the first was on the 1994 CBC. No Golden-crowned Kinglets or Townsend's Solitaire's were found. One lingering Spotted Towhee was noted. Two Fox Sparrows were the first since 1978. Nine Harris's Sparrows was a good count and the first since 2007. Two Swamp Sparrows were the first to be recorded on count day; the 1977 record was during count week. White-crowned Sparrow (6) was the fourth occurrence on the CBC and a new high count. Rusty Blackbird (16) was a good bird to have back after a five year absence. One Brewer's Blackbird was found. Purple Finch (1) was usually recorded in double digits. Red Crossbill (26) made its third appearance on the CBC and was a high count. After being present during count week last year Common Redpoll (120) were reported on count day this year.

**Lake Andes** — 21 December, Michael J. Bryant, compiler. Nine participants contributed 16 hours recording 45 species and 6,743 individuals. One Hooded Merganser was noted for the fourth count occurrence. Common Merganser numbers (412) were down about two thirds from recent years. Sharp-tailed Grouse numbers (10) were also down. Greater Prairie-Chicken, not recorded for the past two years, was down to 12 from 138 in 1978. Bald Eagle numbers were down to 12 from 75 last year. Seven Northern Shrikes was a good count, tying the previous high count. Two Red-breasted Nuthatches constituted the third record for the count and Eastern Bluebird (5) set a new high count. Oregon Junco (6) made its third appearance on the count. About average were Northern Cardinal (4) and Pine Siskin (6). Common Redpoll (3) made its first appearance on the count.

**Aberdeen** — 15 December, Gary Olson, compiler. Seven participants contributed 24 hours recording 44 species and 3,684 individuals. Aberdeen held its first CBC since 2005. Snow Goose (6) made its third appearance on the count. Wood Duck was a count first. Bald Eagle made its first official appearance, the previous reports having occurred during count week. Northern Goshawk (2) continues to be reported nearly annually. Between 2005 and this year Eurasian Collared-Dove arrived, totaling 149 birds. A single Red-Bellied Woodpecker was the first since 2002. Northern Shrike and Horned Lark were the first since 2003. Two Northern Cardinals were the first since 2000. Red-winged Blackbird (1,500) set a count high and the sixth highest state total. Common Redpoll (183) set a new high count and Hoary Redpoll (8) was recorded for the third time.

**Sand Lake NWR** — 19 December, William Schultze and Allen Olson, co-compilers. Seventeen participants contributed 31 hours recording 41 species and 5,357 individuals. Not surprisingly with the still water frozen few waterfowl were present – only a few Snow and

Canada geese and Mallard. Sharp-tailed Grouse (7) numbers were low. Wild Turkey (35) was recorded for the second time on the count and slightly more than twice as many as in 2010. Mourning Dove (5) stayed for the CBC, fewer than last year but about the usual number. Two Snowy Owls and 7 Northern Shrikes were present. Surprisingly, no chickadees were reported. Two Lapland Longspurs were noted, the first since 2007. American Tree Sparrow (474) reached a new high. Yellow-headed Blackbird (2), Rusty Blackbird (7), and Brewer's Blackbird (1) were lingering. Sand Lake had the highest Common Redpoll count for the state this year with a count of 1,156.

**Huron** – 14 December, Brent Jamison, compiler. Sixteen participants contributed 35.75 hours recording 42 species and 4,002 individuals. High counts included Canada Goose (224), Cooper's Hawk (3), Rock Pigeon (702), Red-bellied Woodpecker (1), Northern Shrike (6), Lapland Longspur (112), Western Meadowlark (37), and Purple Finch (9). Although 8 Bald Eagles was not a high count it was higher than the usual 2 or 3. Northern Harrier and Cooper's Hawk were missed for the second consecutive year. At fewer than 20, Eurasian Collared-Dove numbers do not appear to be increasing. Two lingering Mourning Doves and 1 Red-bellied Woodpecker were good finds. Six Northern Shrikes tied the previous (2007) high count. Common Grackle (60) was the state high count. A single White-winged Crossbill was the second occurrence in the redefined count circle and the third overall.

**Yankton** — 16 December, Roger Dietrich, compiler. Twenty-eight participants contributed 53 hours recording 27,601 individuals. The compiler reports: "We enjoyed nice weather for the count and much open water in the area." Record numbers of waterfowl included: Snow Goose (13,760), Canada Goose (2,482), Wood Duck (2), Green-winged Teal (22), Greater Scaup (7, and the fourth record), Lesser Scaup (79), and Red-breasted Merganser (9). Waterfowl new to the count were Ross's Goose (200) and White-winged Scoter (2). The Wild Turkey count (367) was twice the previous high count. Among grebes 1 Horned Grebe was the second occurrence on the count (previously in 1999), and Western Grebe (3) was new for the count. American Coot established a new high count of 145. Bonaparte's Gull was recorded for only the third time and Franklin's Gull for the third time (previously in 1989). Eurasian Collared-Dove (248) doubled last year's high count. A single lingering Mourning Dove was found. Red-breasted Nuthatch for the first time reached double digits (18) and White-breasted Nuthatch reached a record (75). Found for the second time only were 2 Carolina Wrens (previously in 1930). New to the count was Townsend's Solitaire (1). Among sparrows the following were notable: Song (3), Swamp (1), Harris's (2), and White-crowned (4). Northern Cardinal set a record with 60 birds counted. Purple Finch (3) was the first in four years and Common Redpoll (2) was the first in five years.

**Waubay** — 18 December, Laura Hubers, compiler. Nineteen observers contributed 32.5 hours recording 37 species and 6,010 individuals. Snow Goose was a first for the count. Canada Goose (2,239) set a new high count as did Mallard (1,056). Single Lesser Scaup and Hooded Merganser (second report) completed the waterfowl report. Sharp-tailed Grouse (77) was noticeably up from last year as was Wild Turkey (211). One Cooper's Hawk was the third occurrence for the count and Merlin (1) put in a rare appearance. A Mourning Dove was a first for the count. For the first time since 2008, Snowy Owl (2) was observed. Few songbird species were present. Of interest was Snow Bunting (752, this year's state high count), Purple Finch (1), Common Redpoll (544, high count), and Red-winged Blackbird (4).

**Madison** — 14 December, Jeffrey Palmer, compiler. Nineteen participants contributed 36 hours recording 48 species and 4,848 individuals. Waterfowl were represented by low numbers of Canada and Snow geese, Mallard (4), and Northern Shoveler (1). High counts of

Bald Eagle (8) and Red-tailed Hawk (15) were the highlight of the raptor presence. Not to be outdone, Rock Pigeon and Eurasian Collared-Dove had high counts of 275 and 169 respectively. One Red-headed Woodpecker was the sixth occurrence and the first since 2009. Blue Jay (88) reached a new high count. Brown Creeper (12) turned in its second highest count. American Tree Sparrow (384), Dark-eyed Junco (259), and Northern Cardinal (10) were all high counts. Two Western Meadowlarks were the first since 2007 and Rusty Blackbirds (10) were a good find. Twenty-five lingering Brewer's Blackbirds were detected. Common Redpoll (170) broke 100 for the first time since 1989.

**Brookings** — 29 December, Nelda Holden, compiler. Twenty observers contributed 41.5 hours recording 48 species and 2,220 individuals. With the still water frozen it was not surprising that a few Canada Geese and Mallards were the only waterfowl found. But given those conditions it was noteworthy that one Great Blue Heron was present. One Sharp-shinned Hawk was typical but no Cooper's Hawk, even during count week, was unexpected. Red-bellied Woodpecker (5) tied the 1960 high count. New for the count was Pileated Woodpecker (1). Also new were lingering Eastern Towhee (1) and Fox Sparrow (1). For the first time since 2000 a Song Sparrow was recorded. Brewer's Blackbird (11) was a near repeat of last year's 12 and only the second report since 1984. Common Redpoll (111) was the highest count since 1985.

**Sioux Falls** — 15 December, Todd Jensen, compiler. Nine participants contributed 50.16 hours recording 49 species and 10,1235 individuals. Eight, while not the high count, was a good count for Snow Goose. Cackling Goose (23) was new for the count as was Mute Swan (3). Mallard and Common Goldeneye were the only ducks reported. One Northern Harrier was a typical number for this occasional species. Likewise 4 each of Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks were not unusual numbers for these occasional species. One Northern Goshawk was a good find, the first since a report from count week 2008 and last on the count in 2003. One Harlan's Hawk was the first since 2006. The Eurasian Collared-Dove (14) count was a new high. A White-throated Sparrow was the first on the count since 1965, although there were count week reports from 1993 and 2010. One Harris's Sparrow was noteworthy. Lapland Longspur tied the 1976 record of 250 birds. Red-winged Blackbird set a new high with 400 birds present. A Western Meadowlark was the first since 2008. But very unexpected were 3 Yellow-headed Blackbirds. The previous occurrence was one in 1994. After being absent since the 2007 count, 2 Common Redpolls were reported this year.

**Canton** — 29 December, Todd Jensen, compiler. Eight participants contributed 31.83 hours recording 40 species and 3,292 individuals. After 1954 no count was held until 2011 thus making comparisons difficult. Also note that approximately half of the count area is in Iowa. Species with high counts included: Horned Lark (628), Brown Creeper (10), American Tree Sparrow (214), Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco (456), Snow Bunting (459), and Common Redpoll (68). Lingered birds included Mourning Dove (8), Harris's Sparrow (2), and Western Meadowlark (4).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Nancy Drilling for the suggestion to undertake this report and Jocie Baker for help in getting reports from compilers and urging them to submit their data to NAS.

## DATA SOURCE

National Audubon Society. 2013. The Christmas Bird Count Historical Results [Online]. Available <http://www.christmasbirdcount.org>. Accessed February 2013.

# SEASONAL REPORTS

## **The 2012-2013 Winter Season**

01 December 2012 to 28 February 2013

Compiled By: Jeffrey S. Palmer

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**T**here were 148 species, including 4 rarities, reported during the season this year. The ten-year (2002-2011) average is 137. Below, I have tried to highlight the more significant sightings (species that have been reported in 6 or fewer of the last 10 winter seasons, early/late dates, and species that are out of range). Finally, at the end is a list of species (18) that were not reported this year and might be expected during the Winter Season. A species is placed on the list if it was not reported this year but had been reported during winter in at least 2 of the previous 5 years. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of consecutive years (up to 4) that the species has appeared on the list during the season.

**Greater White-fronted Goose** reported 31 Dec Charles Mix ND; 03 Jan Grant BJU; 13 Jan Stanley RDO; 07 Feb Charles Mix RM; 25 Feb Brule ND

**Snow Goose** reported 04 Dec Butte JLB; 15 Dec Brown GO; 23 Dec Charles Mix KP; 30 Dec Hughes KM; 13 Jan Stanley RDO; 09 Feb Hughes SS; 14 Feb Charles Mix RM; 16 Feb Minnehaha DC, MRZ

**Ross's Goose** reported 23 Dec Charles Mix KP; 13 Jan Stanley RDO

**Cackling Goose** reported 01 Jan Pennington JLB; 04 Jan Yankton GJS; 13 Jan Stanley RDO; 15 Jan Hughes RDO; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 17 Jan Charles Mix KP; 20 Jan Stanley CA; 16 Feb Minnehaha DC, MRZ

**Trumpeter Swan** reported **08 Dec Lawrence SW; 23 Jan Charles Mix RM**

**Tundra Swan** reported **12 Dec Hughes DB; 01 Jan Stanley RDO**

**Wood Duck** reported 15 Dec Brown GO; 01 Jan Hughes RSL, RDO; 12 Jan Lawrence SW; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 07 Feb Brown GO; 07 Feb Hughes RDO

**Gadwall** reported 01 Jan Stanley RDO; 11 Jan Lawrence SW; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 26 Jan Charles Mix DC, KP, RM

**American Wigeon** reported 01 Dec Edmunds GO; 20 Dec Stanley RDO; 23 Dec Charles Mix KP; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 16 Jan Pennington CLG

**American Black Duck** All Reports: **06 Dec Potter SS; 08 Dec Hughes DB; 03 Jan Grant BJU; 23 Feb Brule KP**

**Blue-winged Teal** Only Report: **16 Dec Yankton KP**

**Northern Shoveler** reported 01 Dec Yankton RM; 15 Jan Pennington JLB; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 15 Feb Hughes SS; 17 Feb Charles Mix KP, RM

**Northern Pintail** reported 13 Dec Hughes DB; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 13 Jan Stanley RDO; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 03 Feb Hughes RDO; 09 Feb Charles Mix KP

**Green-winged Teal** All Reports: 15 Dec Hughes KM; 01 Jan Stanley RDO; 09 Feb Hughes SS; 18 Feb Yankton DS; 22 Feb Meade EEM; 23 Feb Stanley RDO; 25 Feb Brule ND

**Canvasback** Only Report: 16 Dec Yankton KP

**Redhead** reported 01 Jan Stanley and Hughes RSL; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 26 Jan Charles Mix DC, KP, RM; 09 Feb Hughes SS

**Ring-necked Duck** reported 04 Dec Meade JLB; 07 Dec Tripp RAP; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 27 Jan Stanley RDO; 09 Feb Hughes SS

**Greater Scaup** reported 24 Dec Charles Mix RM; 13 Jan Stanley RDO; 22 Jan Charles Mix RM; 11 Feb Hughes RDO; 13 Feb Gregory RM

**Lesser Scaup** reported 16 Dec Yankton KP; 05 Jan Charles Mix KP; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 17 Jan Charles Mix KP; 11 Feb Hughes RDO

**White-winged Scoter** Only Report: **01 Dec Yankton DS, RM**



**Long-tailed Duck** reported 01 Dec Yankton DS, RM; 23 Dec Charles Mix KP; 25 Dec Gregory RM; 16 Jan Gregory RM; 17 Jan Charles Mix KP, RM

**Bufflehead** reported 02 Dec Potter RDO; 16 Dec Yankton KP; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 26 Jan Charles Mix DC, KP, RM; 20 Feb Stanley RDO

**Common Goldeneye** reported 03 Jan Grant BJU; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 13 Jan Stanley RDO; 15 Jan Hughes RDO; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 17 Jan Charles Mix KP; 09 Feb Hughes SS; 16 Feb Minnehaha DC, MRZ

**Hooded Merganser** reported 24 Dec Charles Mix RM; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 15 Jan Hughes RDO; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 09 Feb Hughes SS

**Common Merganser** reported 03 Jan Grant BJU; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 13 Jan Stanley RDO; 15 Jan Hughes RDO; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 17 Jan Charles Mix KP; 09 Feb Hughes SS; 16 Feb Minnehaha DC, MRZ

**Red-breasted Merganser** reported 08 Dec Hughes RDO; 08 Dec Yankton DS; 25 Dec Stanley RDO; 26 Jan Charles Mix DC, RM; 15 Feb Hughes RDO; 15 Feb Yankton KP

**Ruddy Duck** All Reports: 01 Dec Yankton RM; 08 Dec Yankton DS

**Gray Partridge** All Reports: 01 Dec Charles Mix RM; 12 Dec Custer MMM; 22 Dec Gregory RDO; 01 Jan Custer MMM; 20 Jan Pennington RSL; 25 Feb Custer MMM

**Ruffed Grouse** All Reports: **05 Jan Lawrence SW; 13 Jan Lawrence SW**

**Northern Bobwhite** Only Report: **07 Dec Gregory RM**

**Common Loon** Only Report: **01 Dec Yankton DS, RM**

**Pied-billed Grebe** All Reports: **10 Dec Hughes DB; 15 Dec Hughes KM; 16 Dec Hughes DB; 16 Dec Yankton KP; 23 Dec Charles Mix KP**

**Horned Grebe** All Reports: **02 Dec Potter RDO; 04 Dec Davison RAP; 05 Dec Gregory RM; 08 Dec Yankton DS; 16 Dec Yankton KP**

**Eared Grebe** Only Report: **01 Dec Yankton RM**

**Western Grebe** All Reports: 01 Dec Yankton RM; **04 Dec Meade JLB**; 05 Dec Gregory RM; 08 Dec Yankton DS; 16 Dec Yankton KP; 21 Dec Hughes KM

**American White Pelican** Only Report: **05 Dec Hughes DB**

**Double-crested Cormorant** All Reports: 01 Dec Charles Mix KP; 01 Dec Yankton RM; 03 Dec Charles Mix RM; 08 Dec Hughes DB

**Great Blue Heron** reported 08 Dec Charles Mix KP; 17 Dec Meade MMM; 10 Jan Pennington JLB; 12 Jan Lawrence SW; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 19 Jan Charles Mix KP; 10 Feb Gregory RM

**Northern Harrier** reported 04 Jan Douglas KP; 13 Jan Hughes RDO; 13 Jan Lawrence SW; 15 Jan Pennington MMM; 20 Jan Lyman CA; 20 Jan Pennington RSL; 26 Jan Charles Mix KP, RM; 23 Feb McCook JSP

**Cooper's Hawk** reported 01 Jan Lincoln AH; 06 Jan Stanley RDO; 13 Jan Lawrence RSL; 20 Jan Lincoln AH; 23 Jan Douglas KP; 26 Jan Sully KM

**Northern Goshawk** reported 10 Jan Brown GO; 13 Jan Hughes RDO, KM; 16 Jan Brown GO; 26 Jan Hughes RDO

**Ferruginous Hawk** reported 01 Jan Lyman and Jackson RSL; 01 Jan Sully KM; 06 Jan Stanley RDO; 19 Jan Stanley KM; 20 Jan Lyman CA; 26 Jan Pennington JLB; 09 Feb Faulk MMM

**Merlin** reported 15 Dec Brown GO; 30 Dec Shannon RDO; 01 Jan Hughes RDO; 01 Jan Sully KM; 04 Jan Yankton GJS; 26 Jan Charles Mix KP, RM; 05 Feb Douglas KP; 27 Feb Hughes KM

**Gyr Falcon** All Reports: 02 Dec Sully KM; 11 Jan Lawrence SW; 21 Jan Stanley CA; 22 Feb Lyman SS; 25 Feb Jones ND

**Prairie Falcon** reported 19 Jan Kingsbury JSP

**Virginia Rail** All Reports: **08 Dec Lawrence SW; 05 Jan Lawrence JLB**

**American Coot** reported 01 Jan Hughes RSL, RDO; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 13 Jan Stanley RDO; 16 Jan Pennington CLG; 27 Jan Stanley RDO; 09 Feb Hughes SS

**Sandhill Crane** All Reports: **23 Dec Charles Mix KP, RM; 24 Dec Charles Mix RM**

**Killdeer** reported 07 Jan Pennington CLG; 16 Jan Pennington CLG

**Wilson's Snipe** reported 01 Jan Pennington JLB; 12 Jan Lawrence SW; 23 Feb Pennington JLB

**Bonaparte's Gull** All Reports: 01 Dec Yankton RM; 02 Dec Charles Mix KP; 03 Dec Charles Mix RM; 06 Dec Charles Mix RM; 08 Dec Charles Mix RM

**Franklin's Gull** All Reports: **08 Dec Charles Mix KP; 10 Dec Charles Mix RM; 16 Dec Charles Mix RM; 23 Dec Charles Mix KP**

**Mew Gull** All Reports: **22 Dec Charles Mix RDO; 23 Dec Charles Mix KP; 24 Dec Charles Mix RM; 29 Dec Charles Mix RM**

**Ring-billed Gull** reported 07 Jan Charles Mix RM; 13 Jan Pennington JLB; 15 Jan Hughes RDO; 25 Jan Hughes RDO

**California Gull** reported **07 Jan Charles Mix RM; 15 Jan Hughes RDO; 25 Jan Hughes RDO**

**Herring Gull** reported 02 Dec Fall River JLB

**Thayer's Gull** reported 23 Dec Stanley RDO; 07 Jan Charles Mix RM; 15 Jan Hughes RDO; 01 Feb Hughes RDO

**Iceland Gull** reported **01 – 28 Feb Hughes RDO, SS, KM**

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** All Reports: 23 Dec Charles Mix KP; 24 Dec Charles Mix RM; 28 Dec Charles Mix KP; 29 Dec Charles Mix RM

**Glaucous Gull** reported 10 Dec Dewey SS; 23 Dec Gregory KP; 29 Dec Charles Mix RM; 03 Feb Hughes RDO

**Mourning Dove** All Reports: 01 Dec Charles Mix KP; 08 Dec Charles Mix KP; 29 Dec Minnehaha MS; 12 Jan Lincoln AH; 21 Jan Davison CA; 23 Feb Clay GJS

**Eastern Screech-Owl** reported 22 Dec Hughes KM; 30 Dec Shannon RDO; 02 Jan Douglas KP; 24 Jan Charles Mix RM; 04 Feb Meade EEM

**Snowy Owl** reported 04 Jan Pennington JLB; 10 Jan Brown GO; 13 Jan Hughes RDO; 15 Jan Douglas KP; 19 Jan Charles Mix KP; 20 Jan Meade RSL; 16 Feb Harding CEM; 23 Feb Brookings CA

**Short-eared Owl** All Reports: 04 Jan Pennington JLB; 12 Jan Lawrence SW; 21 Jan McCook CA; 27 Jan Hutchinson KP; 21 Feb Custer MMM; 25 Feb Beadle MMM

**Northern Saw-whet Owl** reported 15 Dec Hughes KM; 19 Jan Stanley KM; 24 Jan Meade AKB; 07 Feb Harding CEM

**Belted Kingfisher** reported 04 Jan Yankton GJS; 07 Jan Pennington CLG; 12 Jan Lawrence SW; 24 Jan Pennington JLB; 25 Jan Meade AKB; 28 Jan Charles Mix RM; 16 Feb Minnehaha DC

**Lewis's Woodpecker** All Reports: 01 Jan Pennington JLB; 05 Jan Lawrence JLB; 06 Jan Pennington RSL

**Red-headed Woodpecker** Only Report: **12 Jan Lake JSP**

**Pileated Woodpecker** Only Report: 03 Jan Grant BJU

**Gray Jay** Only Report: 14 Dec Lawrence JLB

**Pinyon Jay** reported 11 Jan Meade AKB; 16 Jan Meade AKB

**Black-billed Magpie** reported 20 Jan Stanley CA; 27 Feb Brown GO

**Pygmy Nuthatch** All Reports: 14 Dec Pennington JLB; 31 Jan Pennington JLB; 15 Feb Pennington JLB

**Canyon Wren** reported 14 Dec Lawrence JLB; 17 Dec Meade AKB; 06 Jan Pennington RSL

**Winter Wren** Only Report: 02 Dec Sully KM

**Marsh Wren** All Reports: **01 Dec Hughes KM; 07 Dec Hughes KM; 15 Dec Hughes KM; 16 Dec Pennington MMM; 21 Dec Hughes KM**

**American Dipper** All Reports: 01 Dec Lawrence MMM; 24 Dec Lawrence EK; 26 Dec Lawrence JLB; 05 Jan Lawrence SW; 17 Feb Lawrence EK

**Eastern Bluebird** All Reports: 01 Dec Charles Mix KP; 01 Dec Yankton RM; 17 Dec Charles Mix RM; 01 Jan Charles Mix RM; 17 Feb Yankton KP

**Mountain Bluebird** All Reports: **02 Dec Hughes KM; 04 Dec Hughes DB; 05 Dec Hughes DB**

**Townsend's Solitaire** reported 20 Dec Edmunds GO; 30 Dec Edmunds GO; 03 Jan Grant BJU; 04 Feb Union DS; 24 Feb Union CA

**Hermit Thrush** All Reports: 17 Dec Pennington MMM; 19 Dec Pennington MMM; 22 Dec Pennington RSL

**Brown Thrasher** Only Report: **02 Dec Hughes KM**

**Bohemian Waxwing** All Reports: 06 Dec Hughes DB; 12 Jan Lawrence SW; 08 Feb Pennington MMM; 15 Feb Pennington JLB; 25 Feb Brown GO

**Yellow-rumped Warbler** All Reports: 01 Dec Charles Mix KP; 02 Dec Hughes KM; 09 Feb Gregory KP  
**Spotted Towhee** All Reports: **15 Dec Hughes KM; 29 Dec Hughes KM; 05 Jan Hughes KM**  
**Fox Sparrow** reported **06 Dec Clay GJS; 13 Jan Hughes KM; 26 Jan Hughes RDO**  
**Song Sparrow** reported 24 Dec Lawrence EK; 01 Jan Pennington JLB; 05 Jan Hughes KM; 18 Jan Hughes KM; 15 Feb Pennington JLB; 23 Feb Stanley KP  
**Swamp Sparrow** All Reports: **01 Dec Hughes and Stanley KM; 07 Dec Hughes KM; 15 Dec Hughes KM**  
**White-throated Sparrow** All Reports: 07 Dec Hughes KM; 24 Dec Minnehaha MRZ; 27 Dec Minnehaha MRZ; 05 Jan Hughes KM; 26 Jan Hughes RDO; 21 Feb Hughes KM  
**Harris's Sparrow** reported 02 Dec Fall River JLB; 09 Jan Marshall GO; 13 Jan Minnehaha CA; 15 Jan Hughes RDO; 20 Jan Stanley KM, RDO; 26 Jan Hughes RDO; 07 Feb Clay DS; 09 Feb Faulk MMM  
**White-crowned Sparrow** reported 02 Dec Fall River JLB; 04 Dec Stanley DB; 15 Jan Hughes RDO; 27 Jan Stanley RDO; 02 Feb Hughes RDO  
**Red-winged Blackbird** reported 03 Jan Grant BJU; 05 Jan Butte JLB; 06 Jan Stanley RDO; 12 Jan Clay DS; 19 Jan Charles Mix KP; 20 Jan Lyman CA; 09 Feb Hughes SS; 10 Feb Douglas LY; 16 Feb Jones RDO  
**Western Meadowlark** reported 05 Jan Butte JLB; 06 Jan Douglas KP; 06 Jan Stanley RDO; 08 Jan Clay DS; 17 Jan Pennington JLB; 19 Jan Kingsbury JSP; 20 Jan Lyman CA  
**Yellow-headed Blackbird** Only Report: **09 Feb Hughes SS**  
**Rusty Blackbird** All Reports: 10 Dec Lincoln AH; 13 Dec Hughes DB; 15 Dec Hughes KM; 15 Dec Lawrence JLB; 09 Feb Hughes SS; 16 Feb Jones RDO  
**Brewer's Blackbird** All Reports: **09 Dec Douglas KP; 10 Dec Hughes DB; 23 Dec Charles Mix KP; 09 Jan Marshall GO; 18 Feb Gregory KP**  
**Common Grackle** All Reports: 02 Dec Potter RDO; 14 Dec Charles Mix RM; 15 Dec Lake JSP; 15 Dec Lawrence JLB; 24 Dec Davison SS; 02 Jan Charles Mix RM  
**Pine Grosbeak** Only Report: **01 Jan Brown GO**  
**Red Crossbill** reported 02 Dec Potter RDO; 30 Dec Edmunds GO; 01 Jan Hughes RDO; 09 Feb Hughes SS  
**White-winged Crossbill** reported **12 Dec Hughes DB; 01 Jan Brown GO; 31 Jan Pennington RSL; 09 Feb Hughes SS; 18 Feb Charles Mix RM**  
**Common Redpoll** reported 12 Jan Lawrence SW; 12 Jan Pennington RSL; 13 Jan Stanley RDO; 15 Jan Douglas KP; 15 Jan Minnehaha MRZ; 18 Jan Hughes KM, RDO; 19 Jan Douglas KP; 19 Jan Edmunds GO; 19 Jan Fall River ND; 19 Jan Kingsbury JSP ... widespread irruption  
**Evening Grosbeak** All Reports: 08 Dec Meade EEM; 14 Dec Pennington JLB; 26 Dec Lawrence JLB; 05 Jan Lawrence SW

**Reports Requiring Acceptance By The Rare Bird Records Committee**

**Barrow's Goldeneye** 26 Dec – 28 Jan Charles Mix and Gregory RM, KP, DC  
**Pacific Loon** 08 Dec Yankton DS  
**Common Raven** 02 Dec Charles Mix RM; 16 Dec Charles Mix RM  
**Purple Finch** 02 Dec Fall River JLB  
**Hoary Redpoll** numerous reports throughout period  
**Lesser Goldfinch** 14 Jan Pennington RSL

**Species Expected But Not Reported**

Greater Sage-Grouse (3), Red-necked Grebe, Dunlin (4), Black-legged Kittiwake, Barn Owl (2), Barred Owl, Long-eared Owl, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, American Three-toed Woodpecker (4), Black-backed Woodpecker, Carolina Wren (4), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (2), Varied Thrush, Gray Catbird (3), Vesper Sparrow, Great-tailed Grackle (2), Brown-headed Cowbird, Gray-crowned Rosy Finch

**Contributing Observers**

CA	Chris Anderson	KM	Kenny Miller
DB	Doug Backlund	GO	Gary Olson
JLB	Jocelyn L. Baker	RDO	Ricky D. Olson
AKB	Anna K. Ball	JSP	Jeffrey S. Palmer
DC	Doug Chapman	RAP	Richard A. Peterson
ND	Nancy Drilling	KP	Kelly M. Preheim
CLG	Canyon Lake Group	MS	Mark Schmidtbauer
AH	Alice Hill	GJS	Gary & Jan Small
EK	Elizabeth Krueger	SS	Scott Stolz
RSL	Richard S. Latuchie	DS	David Swanson
RM	Ron Mabie	BJU	Bill J. Unzen
MMM	Michael M. Melius	SW	Scott Weins
CEM	Charlie Miller	LY	Lea Ymker
EEM	Ernest E. Miller	MRZ	Mick Zerr

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**SDOU SCHOLARSHIPS AND AWARDS COMMITTEE REPORT – 2013**

Jocelyn L. Baker, Chair, Rapid City, SD

**S**cholarships and Awards Committee members: Jocelyn Lee Baker (Chair), Nelda Holden and Galen Steffen.

The Kenneth H. Husmann Memorial Scholarship, first awarded in 1989, is awarded annually to a student attending a South Dakota college or university. Faculty members nominate a deserving graduate student who is majoring in ornithology, ecology or wildlife management. Esther Balla, a Master of Science student in the laboratory of Dr. David Swanson at the University of South Dakota, is this year’s winner of the \$500. scholarship. Ms Balla is a biology student, majoring in the field of avian conservation.

2011-2012 marked the first year of awarding the Mary E. Baylor Memorial Scholarship. The scholarship is awarded to a South Dakota university or college undergraduate student who is in his/her junior or senior year. A biology major with a particular interest in ornithology, ecology, wildlife management, biological education or medicine is a requirement. The recipient of this year’s \$1,200 scholarship is Leah Hiller, a student at Augustana College in Sioux Falls. Nominated by Dr. Amy Lewis and Dr. Carrie L. Hall of the Biology Department, Ms Hiller is a biology student with a special interest in ornithology.

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**Addendum:** The 2012 South Dakota colonial waterbird survey, described in *South Dakota Bird Notes* 65: 8-10, was funded with a State Wildlife Grant, administered by the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks. ~ *Nancy Drilling*

# FLEDGLING TRACTS

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JASON THIELE

## *Summer Birding*

When you receive this issue of *SD Bird Notes*, the summer season will be in full bloom. Generally speaking, I don't think birders look forward to summer with the enthusiasm of schoolchildren, obviously because spring and fall are highly anticipated. That is when the opportunities to see big numbers of species and potential rarities occur, as birds migrate back and forth between breeding and wintering ranges. Winter, especially in South Dakota, may not offer the most spectacular birding, but at least there are Christmas Bird Counts to look forward to and visitors from the north such as Snowy Owls and redpolls. But summer often gets overlooked as a birding season. After all, the same species tend to be seen day after day, the heat, poison ivy, and biting insects can make birding unpleasant, and opportunities for other recreational activities are plentiful. Personally, I think that summer is underrated as a time to go birding, and it may well be the best time to really increase our knowledge of birds and bird behavior. I'd like to briefly highlight a few of the reasons why.

If one is fascinated with bird behavior, there is no better time to observe interesting bird behavior than during the breeding season. Territorial defense, foraging, courtship, nest-building, rearing of young, and more can all be observed at this time. With fewer species present in the summer than during migration, it becomes easier to focus on a particular bird and really watch what it does and truly learn about its habits. Even as I write this in mid-May, I'm finding myself distracted by a Baltimore Oriole flying by my window with nesting material in its bill.

Summer is also a great time to see the effects of climate on birds. Last summer's drought provides a fine example. In 2012, certain birds were found outside of their normal breeding ranges, probably due to lack of moisture in the usual areas. I found last summer to be particularly good for finding Nelson's Sparrows in South Dakota, as I saw and/or heard singing males in several counties during June and July. I suspect that drought throughout their typical breeding strongholds to the north forced them to seek out any suitable habitat available. I also got to witness a Dickcissel irruption in North Dakota, where I was told numbers were much higher than they had been for years. This was possibly also a drought-related phenomenon.

Finally, I think that summer provides excellent opportunities to travel outside of one's usual birding haunts and explore new places. I don't tend to wander very far from home during migration time, since there are usually new birds to see every day and I don't want to miss anything that's happening in my area because I'm on the road. However, once the activity settles down, it's fun to try somewhere new. One of my favorite experiences of last year was birding the Black Hills for the first time. I took a three-day weekend trip to the Hills in July, and although it was miserably hot for much of the trip, I learned about a different avian population and added a handful of species to my life list.

I encourage all birders to explore a new location in the state during the summer, especially in some of the counties that are infrequently visited by birders. It's wonderful that SDOU has been able to complete another statewide Breeding Bird Atlas, but just think of how much more we could learn about the distribution of birds in South Dakota if birders would take a few days each summer to venture away from their usual birding locations. In my experience, there's something in every part of the state to make it worth visiting for a birding trip. I've gotten a little taste of most of the counties, and I know that there are plenty of birding hotspots out there to be discovered.

## TWO ENCOUNTERS WITH BIRDS IN EASTERN CUSTER COUNTY

Michael Melius, 24644 Prairie View Road, Hermosa, SD 57744

### Thrasher Sings Curlew Call

**T**he first Brown Thrasher of the year showed up in my yard on 6 May. The species has nested at my place in northeast Custer County in recent years, and this bird immediately started singing from trees and shrubs around my place.

On 8 May I distinctly heard the thrasher sing a very accurate rendition of one of the Long-billed Curlew's calls. The thrasher had paused in its singing, and when it re-started, it opened with a two-note "tew-tew" sound that was so realistic I thought it might actually have been a curlew. Long-billed Curlews breed in this area, so they are commonly seen and heard hereabouts, especially in April when they are most vocal. But there was no curlew nearby that I could find, and the thrasher was heard to include the curlew's call on two other occasions in the next week.

It is interesting to speculate that this Brown Thrasher learned the call within two days of arriving, especially since the local curlews had become fairly quiet by this time. Perhaps it is a bird returning from last year. In any event, the thrasher had apparently found a mate by 15 May, when both were driven away, presumably to a neighbor's yard, by a Loggerhead Shrike that has been nesting in a chokecherry thicket here since 2 May.

### Burrowing Owl Observed Gathering Cow Chips

**O**n the evening of 16 May I was standing in my yard when a Burrowing Owl flew overhead, carrying some small object. The thing was pale, oddly shaped, and apparently inanimate. The owl carried this to its burrow in a prairie dog town, about 200 meters west of where I stood. There only its head was visible above intervening grass, but it did appear to be manipulating the object somewhat.

As I watched, the owl soon rose and flew back the way it had just come. It landed in a neighbor's cow pasture just east of my place. It walked around a bit, then flew over me again, carrying another object like the one before. The third time this happened, the object was even bigger than the first two; I'd estimate it was about 10 cm long.

It dawned on me that this owl was picking up cow chips to distribute around its nest burrow. This behavior is often mentioned in literature about Burrowing Owls. I had not observed the act of cow chip collection before this year, perhaps because no owls had previously chosen such a direct route to the collection site. My land has no cattle grazing, so owls nesting here would be obliged to visit neighboring pastures for cow chips.

The next day, 17 May, I saw the owl with its mate at the burrow entrance. On 21 May I visited the site. The bare ground around the burrow was fairly covered with small pieces of cow chips. All were much smaller than what I'd seen the bird carrying, so apparently the bird breaks the cow chips into smaller pieces. The bottom of the burrow proper was lined with cow chips as far as I could see into the darkness.

There were several owl pellets outside this burrow. Only one contained hair and bones, the rest consisted of insect remains. Finally, there was also a small mass of long-dead asparagus root, which could have been picked up at only one place--my garden.

## GETTING KIDS HOOKED ON BIRDS

Kelly Preheim, Armour, SD

After playing a “bird riddle game” at lunch, one of my kindergarteners came over to me and said, “I told them it was a bird that starts with 'L' and they said lyrebird, but it was a Lesser Yellowlegs!” Yes, I really have five- and six-year olds in my class that speak of Lesser Yellowlegs and lyrebirds as well as other birds of which many adults remain unaware. One may find this unbelievable, but it is true. As a group, my ten kindergarteners can name over 100 birds and they know the songs/calls of over 25 species. This far exceeds my expected goal of getting young students interested in South Dakota birds.

I have taught kindergarten in Armour, SD, for 20 years and had, up until the last two years, taught a short bird unit at the end of the school year. However, during the last two years, since I’ve become an avid birder, I’ve started teaching a bit about birds nearly each week. It isn’t difficult to do and it correlates perfectly with my required Common Core State Science Standards. I begin by telling them about my birding experiences, which all of us birders love to do if we can find someone who will listen. I show some photos of birds that I’ve seen over the weekend and tell some fascinating facts about them. It is amazing how the children soak up this bird knowledge. At first they were slightly interested, but it wasn’t long until they were hooked.

Early in the year, students received their very own *Backyard Birds of South Dakota* booklet from the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks. These booklets are kept in the classroom for the entire school year, and are one of my best resources in teaching about birds.

I also created a PowerPoint slideshow starting with a few backyard birds, and I continue to add to it throughout the year. I am very thankful for permission to use photos from several of our local South Dakota bird photographers. These photos make a big difference and they are fantastic! I teach about birds with this slideshow on the Smart Board, show bird videos from the Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology, and use photos from my Bird Cam to practice identifying birds.

We go through the *Birds of North America* flashcards that I purchased from a local store and I read many library books about birds. We also play a “Name a Bird” game where they each take turns naming a different bird. This has gotten quite complex lately with birds such as Semipalmated Plover, Wilson’s Phalarope and Gyrfalcon being tossed into the mix.

I have established a “Bird Center” in my classroom with bird booklets, pamphlets, a bird memory game, feathers, the *Bird Identifyer* (a bird song identification device), and a couple of pairs of admittedly faulty binoculars to use at our three huge windows. There is an old field guide that they often look through, too. They love to go the “Bird Center”!

On my kindergarten blog I often post links to bird sites and videos as well as suggestions of where parents could take their children to see birds. I am so happy to hear that the parents are now taking their children birding and hiking. Occasionally the children and I go hiking at our local lake. We record what we see in our *Nature Observation Journal*.

During the owl unit, the students dissected owl pellets and thought it was very interesting. They compared the bones to those on a chart. They really love owls and can identify all of the South Dakota owls. They really like all birds it seems, and they love to talk about them. We often start out each morning discussing our bird sightings. Since spring migration has started, it is not uncommon to have a child march into the classroom in the morning with a big smile and shout: “Life bird!” Then the fledgling birder will proudly share their recent sighting.

My students completed a couple of big projects this year. We have published a twenty page bird book titled *Our Favorite Backyard Birds*, with drawings and text written by these young students. We also teamed up with a high school science class to build four nest boxes to be placed at our local lake.

The highlight of our school year may be in May as we will travel to an area lake for an all-day field trip complete with two birding hikes, a picnic, outdoor classroom, free play and kite flying. I have taken students on this trip each of the last twenty years and it has always been a great time!

I am sharing my experience to encourage people to get children interested in birds. Children are very capable of identifying birds; in fact many seem to have a phenomenal memory for bird names and facts. It is important for children to become more aware of their outdoor world so that they will grow up to respect and care for it.

There are many ways to get children interested in birds, and spending time with them talking about birds and getting them an age-appropriate field guide of their very own would be a good start. Some examples would be: *The Young Birder's Guide to the Birds of North America* by Bill Thompson III or possibly *Birds of the Dakotas* field guide by Stan Tekiela. It is also very important to get children outdoors more often, and one way would be to take them birding or hiking. Point



out birds, other animals, rocks, etc. Keep it low key and fun! Have them bring a friend and do it often.

There is a boy in my class who is really interested in birds, and often at playtime he will bring over the South Dakota bird pamphlet and point to a bird. He asks me to tell about when I saw the bird and what it was like. He just lights up when I tell him my tales, like when I hiked through Union Grove State Park with other birders, hopping across rocks to cross a big stream, getting my foot stuck in the mud, climbing up a small cliff, and getting a bloody arm all to see my first Golden-winged Warbler or the time I drove around with other birders at the Lake Andes National Wildlife Refuge and found more than twenty Snowy Owls in one afternoon!

Another teacher says it's the way that I talk about birds that gets kids excited. She says it's this passion about birds and nature that fascinates them. Many of us have that passion, so now we need to share it with others, and why not share it with kids?



### *The SDOU Board of Directors – 2017?*

*Kelly Preheim's Kindergarten class is really excited by Kelly's obvious enthusiasm for birds and bird study.*

LARGE SPRING MIGRATION OF SANDHILL CRANES  
IN PENNINGTON COUNTY

Gene K. Hess  
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gene@neopaleo.net

On 20 April 2013 about 3:25 p.m. my wife alerted me to Sandhill Cranes calling over our house in Rapid City. Upon going outside we observed several flocks of cranes, totaling about 700 birds, flying north. I called Jocie Baker, made a quick post to sd-birds, then Sally and I departed for Dinosaur Park in hopes of seeing more cranes and obtaining better views of them. We arrived at the park about twenty minutes later and were amply rewarded. Over the course of the next hour from the park and several observation points along Skyline Drive we saw numerous flocks of Sandhill Cranes. I estimated the number of birds to be around 7,000. We noted the birds arriving from the south along and over the hogback and then drifting slightly westwards along the edge of the Black Hills.

We were not the only people in the area to take note of this noisy avian passage. The following reports of this flight were posted on the sd-birds list during and after this wonderful flight:

*“Every Sandhill Crane on the Platte River must have lifted off and headed north! I have had flocks too numerous to keep track of, thousands of birds overhead in the past hour. Awesome spectacle, awesome sound!”* - Caroline Stafford, 3:17 p.m.

*“Several large flocks of Sandhill Cranes just flew over my house in Chapel Valley (3:10 p.m.- Apr. 20), 1/2 mile from Canyon Lake. They were calling so loudly that they woke me up from a nap. They were flying in a northeasterly direction.”* - Jocie Baker, 3:17 p.m.

*“Thanks for posting. I saw your message, ran out on our porch, and heard and saw them for almost 15 minutes. I think there had to be 10,000 of them!”* – Dick Latuchie, 3:56 p.m.

*“Today (20 April), [at] about 1600MDT, what I would estimate to be thousands of Sandhill Cranes passed north of my house, just off Nemo Road (W of Rapid City) in a number of groups. They were heading roughly 330° (NNW) through light virga and rain showers. They were in and out of low-lying clouds. All were at altitude, and even with 10X field glasses, I could just make out their long necks. What alerted me to their presence was the “racket” they were making.”* - Chuck Ellington, *vide* Jocie Baker, 4:33 p.m.

*“I was in Rapid City yesterday afternoon. Just before 3 pm, I saw some cranes flying west of the hogback, and some hawks, so I headed up Flormann St. to the overlook on Skyline Drive there. At that time all the cranes were flying west of the hogback, as other observers have reported. At 3:15 pm I started counting with the group that was farthest north, then kept counting until 5:45. I tallied 12,500 Sandhill Cranes. I was careful to keep track of the flocks as they passed my point, to prevent double-counting. The first 8000 birds were west of the hogback, observed there until about 4:30. Then some flocks flew over my site, and the last 4500 birds were east of the hogback, visible as far east as the RC airport. At that time there were no cranes that I could see west of the hogback.” - Michael Melius, 21 April, 10:28 a.m.*

Melius’s observations probably encompassed the bulk of the flight. His count of 12,500 cranes should be considered a reasonable minimum number. Melius comments (pers. comm.), “The flocks of cranes varied in size from dozens of birds to several hundred. I counted the birds ten or fifty at a time, depending on the size of the flock. Several times I checked on the accuracy of this estimate-counting method by estimating an entire flock then carefully counting individual birds. My estimate was usually slightly lower than the careful count.”

Sandhill Crane spring migration near the Black Hills has been noted in previous years (SDOU database). There are few spring reports that approach this number of cranes observed (Table 1).

Table 1. Spring observations of 500 or more Sandhill Cranes in Pennington County.

Date	Location	Number	Observer (source)
28 March 2007	West Rapid City	500	Baker (SDOU database)
31 March 2007	Lower Spring Creek Road	400-500	Melius (SDOU database)
2 April 2011	Rapid City, Skyline Drive	6500	Hess & Melius (pers. obs.)
3 April 1993	Rapid City, Skyline Drive	1000s (“continuous flight of cranes all day long”)	Esther Serr, et al. (Melius, pers. comm.)
3 April 2011	Cedar Butte Road	1500	Lautchie (SDOU database)
4 April 1982	over New Underwood		reported by B. Egger, fide Esther Serr (Melius, pers. comm.)
5 April 1982	eastern Pennington County	1000	Baker (Melius, pers. comm.)
6 April 2013	Badlands National Park, Wall area	1000s	Baker (SDOU database)
7 April 2013	Sage Creek Road	2000	Lynn Barber (pers. comm.)
10 April 2009	Rapid City, Rt. 79	“waves”	Hess & Shelton (pers. obs.)



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