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South Dakota Bird Notes

South Dakota Ornithologists' Union

Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher, Custer County, June 2026 Photo Credit: *Doug Backlund*

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Vol. 78 **SUMMER 2026** **No.2**

SOUTH DAKOTA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

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President's Page

Chris Anderson



Greetings everyone,

As most of you know, a good portion of South Dakota is considered to be part of the Prairie Pothole Region. This area of the continent is known for its many wetlands; some large and some less than an acre in size, some with year-round water while many are ephemeral. This region is also known as the "duck factory," providing nesting habitat for 60% of North America's duck populations, not to mention all the other wetland-dependent species.

On July 24, 2026, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began seeking public input about rules governing where agricultural drain tile pipe could be installed near lands protected by conservation easements. Currently, per a 2024 regulation, the setbacks dictating drain tile placement are determined on a case-by-case basis based on a review of the soils, topography, and hydrology of the land in question to best protect the wetland. Depending on the feedback, USFWS could alter or eliminate that approach, likely standardizing the setback distance and allowing drain tile to be installed closer to these easement areas. This could significantly reduce the amount of water making it into these wetlands, threatening to destroy them without ever touching them.

Public comments about the rules were accepted until August 7. This 14-day period was much shorter than the typical 60- or 90-day comment periods often used for legislative proposals. The brevity of that window did not deter respondents, as 219,000 comments were submitted. A joint letter from major waterfowl organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and various state waterfowl groups, as well as separate letters from a bipartisan group of Congress members also urged the agency to keep current rules in place.

After the comment period closed, USFWS thanked the 200,000+ commenters and stated that "no further action is planned as we review the information received." It remains to be seen if that means the agency is not pursuing any regulatory changes due to the public backlash or simply taking its time defining any impending changes. Hopefully the public outcry will be heard.

This drain tile issue is hardly the only one with conservation and environmental implications to arise in the last two years. Here are a few other examples:

- In February 2026, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) repealed the 2009 legal finding that served as the basis for regulating pollution from vehicles and power plants, such that there are no longer federal restrictions on U.S. vehicle emissions.
- The National Science Foundation will award 30% fewer new research grants this fiscal year compared to last year, which is the lowest since the early 1980s, attributed largely to the withholding

of over $1 billion of the $8.8 billion budget line item for the "Grand Research Challenges" focused on advanced materials and artificial intelligence. (Garisto)[1]

- Federal science agencies lost about 20% of their staff in 2025, due to firings or buyouts, affecting climate-related agencies like the EPA and NASA. (Kozlov et al)[2]
- In January 2025, for the second time, the U.S. withdrew from the 2009 Paris Agreement on climate governance and cooperation (effective 2026), while also deploying an executive order titled 'Reinvigorating America's Beautiful Clean Coal Industry' to promote coal and accelerate production, partly to meet data center power demand. This has also brought increased auctioning of federal lands for drilling and mining, some of which are designated as environmentally or culturally protected. (Pitterle)[3]
- The Endangered Species Act was amended to change the definition of "harm." Beginning in mid-September 2026, "harm" will only apply to animals of a listed species but not the habitat they occupy. In other words, development activities can occur in such areas as long as they do not injure/kill the endangered animals directly. Designation of critical habitat now requires the government to weigh economic burdens and national security interests before being granted, and areas can be exempt from being designated critical habitat if they will not specifically cause the extinction of the species. (USFWS)[4]

This is hardly a comprehensive list, but frankly, it's difficult to keep up. I thank the members of SDOU – especially Nancy Hilding of the Prairie Hills Audubon Society – who bring issues and proposed legislation to our attention. Sometimes it takes a team to organize a response. While at times it may feel like we can't do much to intercede in some of these conservation matters, I encourage everyone to try to stay informed and engaged rather than feel detached or helpless. Voice your opinion – submit comments during public review periods, sign letters of support/opposition, and contact your elected officials so they know where their constituents stand. And if those elected officials – at any level of government – are not acting in accordance with your values and priorities, vote for someone who will.

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3. Pitterle, Ben. "Trump administration to auction lands near Carrizo Plain for oil drilling." *Santa Barbara News-Press*, 10 July 2026, https://www.newspress.com/2026/07/10/trump-administration-to-auction-lands-near-carrizo-plain-for-oil-drilling/

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Announcements

The Fall 2026 South Dakota Ornithologists' Union meeting is coming to Yankton, November 6-8, while the Spring 2027 meeting will be in the Pickstown area. View details on our web site (sdou.org/meetings) and on social media. All are welcome, bring a non-member birder friend to enjoy a weekend of birding and learning!

Significant Breeding Records in South Dakota in 2026

Nancy Drilling, Rapid City

Summer 2026 had a number of interesting breeding records, with owls and colonial waterbirds leading the way.

Owls

Burrowing Owls (*Athene cunicularia)* nest in abandoned mammal burrows, such as those created by prairie dogs, ground squirrels, or coyotes. They are relatively common in prairie dog colonies in the western part of the state but rarely found in the east because of a lack of burrows (Drilling *et al*. *2018)*. But this summer saw at least two nests East River. Clay County had its first modern day nesting record; see the photo essay by Cathy Logue in this issue of *Bird Notes* for details. In July, birders found a nest with chicks in western Minnehaha County, the first breeding record since 2008.



Following summer 2025's first East River breeding record (Drilling 2025), Long-eared Owls (*Asio otus) again* nested East River, this time at Pelican Lake State Park in Codington County. The birds had been seen in the area all winter, which often leads to the birds staying to nest. On the other hand, Long-eared Owls were not documented breeding in their usual areas along the Missouri River or Custer National Forest in Harding County in 2026. As with many medium-sized owls, the abundance of voles is the determining factor in where Long-eared Owls occur. Possibly the ongoing drought, especially severe throughout West River, impacted this species. Photo of the Codington County Long-eared Owl fledgling taken July 3, 2026, by Devin Pitts.

Breeding Northern Saw-whet Owls (*Aegolius acadicus)* have been monitored in a Harding County nest box project since 2009 (Miller 2010, 2015). Numbers of nests fluctuate widely, depending on the availability of deer mice, the main prey of Saw-whets. Summer 2026 was the second-best year on record, with 41 successful nests (out of 48 attempts) producing 191 fledglings. In addition, a record four Eastern Screech-owl *(Megascops asio)* pairs nested in the nest boxes as well as three American Kestrel pairs.

Colonial Waterbirds

Northeastern South Dakota hosts some spectacular breeding waterbird colonies, but locations, numbers, and species diversity depend on water levels. During summer 2026, drought impacted all but the far northeastern corner of the state, and colonial waterbird breeding reflected this reality. Summer 2025's biggest breeding colony, Collins Slough in Hand County, was completely dry in 2026.

The drought probably has positively impacted Bitter Lake in Day County. Falling water levels have created islands for ground-nesting waterbirds, particularly American White Pelicans. Since at least the 1950s, Bitter

Lake has competed with Chase Lake (North Dakota) and Salt Lake (Utah) for the nation's largest white pelican breeding colony (Drilling et al. 2007). Rising water levels in the 2010s at Bitter Lake eliminated their island breeding habitat but numbers have rebounded with the creation of three new islands in the southwest part of the lake. Although difficult to count from the shore, there were an estimated 14,000 birds on the three islands in May, probably representing around 10,000-12,000 nests. Pelican colonies in the Canadian prairie provinces usually have hundreds of thousands of nests, dwarfing all the American colonies combined!

Larger waterbird species, such as Great Blue Heron and Double-crested Cormorant, usually nest in trees on islands. Cormorants, which also nest on the ground, make up the majority of the nests on these islands. In 2026, the top counties for cormorants were Day (2500 nests in 6 colonies), Brown (900 nests in 2 colonies), Codington (750 nests in 2 colonies), Clark (500 nests in 1 colony), and Marshall (225 nests in 3 colonies). Roscoe Lake (Edmunds County) and Oakwood Lakes (Brookings County) also hosted both tree- and ground-nesting waterbirds.

The final group of breeding colonial waterbirds in South Dakota is composed of those that nest in marshes, including gulls and terns, grebes, ibis, and small herons and egrets. Each of these species has quite specific habitat requirements so different marshes have different species assemblages. As an example, for decades, Claremont Slough in Marshall County has been the state's best spot for breeding grebes but not most of the other marsh-breeding species. In mid-July 2026, the slough hosted about 440 Western Grebe broods and 180 Eared Grebe broods. This is average for this location but far surpassed the state's next-largest 2026 colonies: Roscoe Lake in Edmunds County (40 Eared Grebe broods), and Hecla Ponds (40 Western Grebe broods) and Sand Lake (50 Western Grebe broods) in Brown County. For the rest of the marsh-breeding species, Sand Lake (Brown County) seemed to be the only marsh with significant numbers of White-faced Ibis, all three egret species, and Black-crowned Night-herons. Franklin's Gulls, with the most specific habitat requirements (a lot of cattails but not too many, in clumps), did not seem to breed in the state in 2026.

Sage Thrasher

Sage Thrashers *(Oreoscoptes montanus)* nest in sagebrush-dominated open habitats. As this type of habitat is very rare in South Dakota, this species is a rare breeder in the state, with known breeding areas located west of Edgemont (Fall River County) and northwest of Belle Fourche (Butte County). Thus, it was a surprise that nesting Sage Thrashers were found in western Custer County, far from any sagebrush (Backlund 2026). Sage Thrashers are known as a 'sagebrush obligate' species, meaning that they do not occur away from sagebrush (Reynolds et al. 2020). But these birds were nesting in skunkbush sumac *(Rhus trilobata)*, a common plant in the Black Hills (and elsewhere). Also unusual was the late date – early July for a nest with eggs. This species usually begins nesting in late April, with birds fledging in late May. This species can produce two broods in a season; perhaps this observation was of a second brood. Up to nine Sage Thrashers were seen by multiple observers in the area through the month of July.

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Observations of Burrowing Owls in Clay County, South Dakota

Cathy Logue, Wakonda

One day in May I was excited to read in the eBird rare bird alert email for Clay County that a Burrowing Owl was spotted about 25 miles from where I live in Wakonda. The Burrowing Owl is one of my "spark" birds that got me into birding. Upon my retirement in 2023 I started to make trips each summer with my photography/birding friends to the Badlands to photograph the Burrowing Owls there. Watching the male and female owls feeding their young was the highlight of those trips.

Over the course of this summer, from May 28th to August 8th, I was able to observe Burrowing Owls close to home. A pair nested on the Greenfield Road near Vermillion. I am assuming their burrow was an abandoned badger hole. And when I say it was on the Greenfield Road, it was literally right at the edge of the asphalt continuing under the road.

These owls were resilient and survived multiple incidents that I thought might have caused them harm; such as ditch mowing, the resurfacing of the road with both chip seal and then asphalt, and heavy car traffic. I only observed two chicks; others have reported seeing three at one time.

The following is a chronicle of what I observed. Their story is mainly told through the photos.

May 28 – Male and female observed. I assume the female is the darker owl and the male is the lighter owl. Female is in the cornfield closest to the burrow.





July 13 – Observed two chicks and what I assumed was the adult female (the darker colored owl). Lots of whitewash on the road near the burrow.



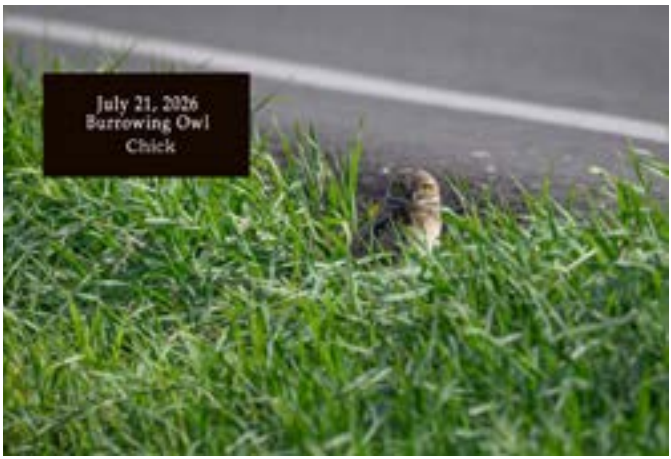
July 13 – This photo shows how close the burrow and the owls were to the road. If you look closely, you can see the whitewash on the road, indicating they spent some time directly on the pavement.



July 17 – Observed both adults but no chicks. Male had a small rodent.



July 21 – Observed one chick.



July 28 – Observed one chick. The male had a small rodent.







August 1 - Observed two chicks. This was the first time I saw the chicks flying.





There were sibling squabbles over their favorite fence post to perch on.





This pair of photographs demonstrates how quickly their habitat (the cornfields) changed over the summer.



Notable Sightings: June 2026 - July 2026

Ricky D. Olson, Ft. Pierre

There were several scattered reports of Sandhill Cranes this summer, including a few reports of chicks. This species appears to be expanding its breeding in South Dakota. Photo of Sandhill Crane family taken July 2, 2026, in Codington County by Brent Hoffman.

Very unexpected, because it was out of range and arrived during an atypical time, was a June observation of a Green-tailed Towhee just north of Pierre.

An observation and photo of a Crested Caracara near Tyndall was posted on Facebook. Alas, it was a one-day

wonder and was not found the next day with several people looking.

The continued breeding of Mississippi Kites in Sioux Falls is great news.

Otherwise, it seemed to be a quiet summer bird-wise.



Summer Season Bird Photos

Compiled by Kelly Preheim, Armour

Another sampling of all the great bird photography happening in South Dakota! All photos printed with permission of the photographers.



Trumpeter Swan family, Deuel County, 8/2/2026. Photo by Christian Begeman



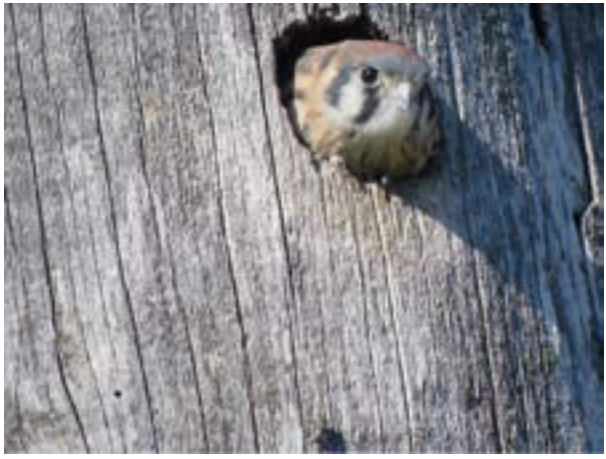
Broad-winged Hawk, northern Black Hills, 8/9/2026. Photo by Brittany Kahl



Swainson's Hawks, Haakon County, 8/2/2026. Photo by Diana Olivier



Red-tailed Hawks, Meade County, 7/15/2026. Photo by Joel Schwader



American Kestrel nest, Outdoor Campus, Rapid City, 6/26/2026. Photo by Judy Hengen



Eastern Screech-Owl chicks, Redfield, 7/4/2026. Photo by Megan Christensen



Burrowing Owls, near Elm Springs, Meade County, 7/20/2026. Photo by Joel Schwader



Lewis's Woodpecker, Custer State Park, 7/12/2026. Photo by Chantal Taunton



Red-naped Sapsucker, Custer State Park, 7/23/2026. Photo by Chantal Taunton



Western Kingbird nestlings, Minnehaha County, 7/12/2026. Photo by Sarah Koss



Clark's Nutcracker, Hot Springs, 8/20/2026. Photo by Wendee Pettis



Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Brookings County, 6/9/2026. Photo by Dan Kemp



Black-capped Chickadee, Sturgis, 7/12/2026. Photo by Teresa Denke



Sage Thrasher, Pennington County, 7/10/2026. Photo by Amy Schmidt



Yellow Warbler, Bon Homme County, 6/16/2026. Photo by Randy Hoeck



Evening Grosbeak, Custer, 7/23/2026. Photo by Claudia VanZetten



Baltimore Oriole at nest, Dewey Gevik Nature Area, 6/16/2026. Photo by Bob Fritz



Blue Grosbeak, Palisades State Park, 8/21/2026. Photo by Rod Mastbergen



Indigo Bunting, Union County, 7/21/2026. Photo by Casey Sherrard



Summer Tanager, Sioux Falls, 6/21/2026. Photo by Scott Leuning

The 2025-2026 Winter Season

01 December 2025 to 28 February 2026

Compiled By: Chris Anderson, Sioux Falls

There were 135 species, including 1 rarity (late Vesper Sparrow), reported during the 2025-2026 winter season. The ten-year (2016-2025) average is 138. In the following report, I have not included all reported species but have tried to highlight the distribution of expected winter-only species, unusual early/late dates, species that are out of range, and 5 new county records (found in bold). If there were fewer than 7 reports of a species, all reports are included. Otherwise, the number of reports and counties are listed to show the prevalence of reports of that species across the state. In some cases, if a particular bird or group of birds were observed in the same county repeatedly during the season, those dates and observations have been summarized to represent the length of stay. At the end is a list of 20 species that were not reported this season but might be expected during the Winter Season. A species is placed on the not-reported 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 that the species has appeared on the list during the previous 5 winters.

At the end of this report is a list of additional validated species reported to eBird during the season, including species that were not reported to the SDOU online database or were otherwise noteworthy.

Snow Goose 56 reports across 17 counties (2 West River, 8 East River, 7 Missouri River) 01 Dec – 28 Feb
Ross's Goose 16 reports across 8 counties (Buffalo, Charles Mix, Douglas, Hughes, Lake, Spink, Stanley, Yankton) 01 Jan – 27 Feb

Greater White-fronted Goose 45 reports across 20 counties (1 West River, 10 East River, 9 Missouri River) 04 Dec – 28 Feb

Cackling Goose 65 reports across 19 counties (3 West River, 8 East River, 8 Missouri River) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

Trumpeter Swan 26 reports across 5 counties (Deuel, Hamlin, Hughes, Stanley, Yankton) 04 Dec – 15 Feb

Tundra Swan 7 reports from Yankton County 04 Dec – 13 Feb

Wood Duck All Reports: 01 Dec – 23 Feb Pennington CLG; 27 Feb Lake JSP

Blue-winged Teal Only Report: 15 Feb Roberts CV

Northern Shoveler 9 reports across 5 counties (Charles Mix, Hughes, Lake, Stanley, Yankton) 07 Dec – 27 Feb

Gadwall 62 **r**eports across 11 counties (Charles Mix, Grant, Hughes, Lake, McCook, Minnehaha, Pennington, Spink, Stanley, Turner, Yankton) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

American Wigeon 30 reports across 11 counties (Charles Mix, Grant, Lake, Lyman, Minnehaha, Pennington, Roberts, Spink, Stanley, Turner, Yankton) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

Northern Pintail 24 reports across 13 counties (Brule, Charles Mix, Hughes, Lake, Lincoln, McCook, Minnehaha, Pennington, Spink, Stanley, Sully, Turner, Yankton) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

Green-winged Teal 31 reports across 9 counties (Charles Mix, Hughes, Lake, Pennington, Roberts, Stanley, Sully, Turner, Yankton) 05 Dec – 27 Feb

Canvasback 7 reports across 5 counties (Buffalo, Lake, Minnehaha, Pennington, Yankton) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

Redhead 58 reports across 13 counties (Charles Mix, Grant, Hughes, Lake, Lyman, McCook, Minnehaha, Pennington, Spink, Stanley, Sully, Turner, Yankton) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

Ring-necked Duck 47 reports across 9 counties (Charles Mix, Haakon, Hughes, Lake, Minnehaha, Pennington, Stanley, Turner, Yankton) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

Greater Scaup 34 Reports across 10 counties (Buffalo, Charles Mix, Codington, Grant, Hughes, Lake, Lyman, Stanley, Turner, Yankton) 15 Dec – 27 Feb

Lesser Scaup 40 reports across 14 counties (Buffalo, Charles Mix, Codington, Edmunds, Hughes, Lake, Lyman, McCook, Minnehaha, Pennington, Spink, Stanley, Turner, Yankton) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

Surf Scoter All Reports: 22 Dec Charles Mix KP; 01 Jan Charles Mix KP

Black Scoter 17 reports from Stanley County 31 Jan – 28 Feb

Long-tailed Duck 20 reports across 5 counties (Charles Mix, Gregory, Hughes, Lyman, Yankton) 08 Dec – 16 Feb

Bufflehead 50 reports across 10 counties (Buffalo, Charles Mix, Haakon, Hughes, Lake, Lyman, Minnehaha, Pennington, Stanley, Yankton) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

Common Goldeneye 105 reports across 17 counties (1 West River, 7 East River, 9 Missouri River) 01 Jan – 28 Feb

Barrow's Goldeneye All Reports: 31 Dec Lyman ND; 02 Jan Stanley KM; 03 Jan Charles Mix KP; 04 Jan Stanley RDO; 06 Jan Buffalo RDO; 26 Jan Charles Mix KP

Hooded Merganser 68 reports across 9 counties (Buffalo, Charles Mix, Hughes, Lake, Lyman, Minnehaha, Pennington, Stanley, Yankton) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

Common Merganser 98 reports across 15 counties (2 West River, 6 East River, 7 Missouri River) 01 Dec – 28 Feb

Red-breasted Merganser 35 reports across 6 counties (Buffalo, Charles Mix, Hughes, Stanley, Sully, Yankton) 04 Dec – 28 Feb

Ruddy Duck Only Report: 08 Feb Yankton KP

Pied-billed Grebe Only Report: 08 Dec Yankton RND

Horned Grebe All Reports: 08 Dec Yankton RND; 21 Feb McCook CA

White-winged Dove Only Report: **03 Feb Hand DGP (first county record)**

Mourning Dove 8 reports across 7 counties (Brown, Clay, Codington, Fall River, Lake, Minnehaha, Pennington) 04-20 Dec

Virginia Rail Only Report: 03 Feb Fall River KP
American Coot 48 reports across 7 counties (Grant, Haakon, Hughes, Lyman, Pennington, Stanley, Yankton) 01 Dec – 27 Feb
Killdeer Only Report: 21 Dec Stanley RDO
Wilson's Snipe All Reports: 20 Dec – 06 Feb Pennington OCW; 12 Jan Fall River MMM; 12 Feb Fall River MMM
Black-legged Kittiwake Only Report: 01 Jan Hughes KM
Bonaparte's Gull 17 reports across 2 counties (Charles Mix, Stanley) 02 Dec – 06 Jan
Short-billed Gull 24 reports across 3 counties (Hughes, Stanley, Yankton) 11 Dec – 26 Feb
Ring-billed Gull 70 reports across 7 counties (Charles Mix, Douglas, Hughes, Stanley, Sully, Turner, Yankton) 02 Dec – 28 Feb
California Gull 8 reports across 2 counties (Hughes, Stanley) 02 Dec - 24 Feb
American Herring Gull 42 reports across 6 counties (Charles Mix, Hughes, Lyman, Stanley, Sully, Yankton) 02 Dec – 26 Feb
Iceland Gull 19 reports from Stanley County 19 Dec – 26 Feb
Lesser Black-backed Gull 26 reports across 2 counties (Hughes, Stanley) 02 Dec – 28 Feb
Glaucous Gull 25 reports across 3 counties (Hughes, Stanley, Yankton) 17 Dec – 28 Feb
Double-crested Cormorant All Reports: 04 Dec Yankton RND; 05 Dec Hughes KM; 08 Dec Yankton RND; 09 Dec Charles Mix KP; 13 Dec Stanley KM; 09 Jan Yankton RND; 24 Jan Yankton DS
Great Blue Heron 15 reports across 4 counties (Day, Roberts, Pennington, Stanley) 01 Dec – 23 Feb
Golden Eagle 25 reports across 19 counties (11 West River, 4 East River, 4 Missouri River) 10 Dec – 23 Feb
Northern Harrier 37 reports across 23 counties (4 West River, 12 East River, 7 Missouri River) 01 Dec - 27 Feb
Sharp-shinned Hawk 64 reports across 14 counties (Brown, Clay, Day, Douglas, Edmunds, Hughes, Jackson, Lake, Minnehaha, Pennington, Roberts, Stanley, Turner, Yankton) 01 Dec - 27 Feb
Cooper's Hawk 20 reports across 11 counties (Beadle, Brookings, Clay, Codington, Day, Douglas, Hughes, Lake, Minnehaha, Stanley, Sully) 04 Dec – 04 Feb
American Goshawk All Reports: 02 Dec Stanley RDO; 14 Dec Brown GO; 14 Dec Hughes KM; 01 Jan Sully KM; 19 Jan Roberts CV; 21 Jan Hughes KM
Rough-legged Hawk 81 reports across 31 counties (6 West River, 16 East River, 9 Missouri River) 02 Dec – 26 Feb
Ferruginous Hawk 15 reports across 11 counties (Corson, Dewey, Haakon, Hyde, Jackson, Jones, Lyman, Pennington, Stanley, Sully, Tripp) 01 Dec – 10 Feb
Eastern Screech-Owl 18 reports across 7 counties (Brown, Codington, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha, Roberts, Stanley) 03 Dec – 24 Feb
Barred Owl Only Report: 20 Dec Minnehaha CA
Long-eared Owl 8 reports across 5 counties (Codington, Fall River, Hughes, Lincoln, Stanley) 02 Dec – 13 Feb
Short-eared Owl 20 reports across 17 counties (13 East River, 4 Missouri River) 14 Dec – 26 Feb including **29 Jan Clark ND (first county record)**
Northern Saw-whet Owl 12 reports across 5 counties (Codington, Jackson, Lincoln, Stanley, Sully) 02 Dec – 20 Feb
Belted Kingfisher 34 reports across 10 counties (Brookings, Brule, Charles Mix, Douglas, Haakon, Lawrence, McCook, Pennington, Stanley, Yankton) 01 Dec – 23 Feb
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker All Reports: 29 Dec Stanley KM; 03 Jan Lincoln CA, RND; 28 Jan Stanley KM, RDO
Lewis's Woodpecker All Reports: 01 Jan Lawrence RDO; 04 Feb Custer KP; 08 Feb Meade ND
Pileated Woodpecker Only Report: **03 Feb Moody CA (first county record)**

Merlin 33 reports across 22 counties (4 West River, 11 East River, 7 Missouri River) 02 Dec – 27 Feb
Prairie Falcon 17 reports across 7 counties (Charles Mix, Douglas, Harding, Hughes, Kingsbury, Meade, Stanley) 01 Dec – 13 Feb
Northern Shrike 27 reports across 13 counties (Day, Hughes, Jackson, Marshall, Meade, Minnehaha, Pennington, Roberts, Sanborn, Stanley, Sully, Turner, Walworth) 04 Dec – 27 Feb
Canada Jay Only Report: 04 Jan Lawrence RDO
Black-billed Magpie 13 reports across 8 counties (Custer, Fall River, Harding, Hughes, Jackson, Meade, Pennington, Sully) 06 Dec – 10 Feb
Ruby-Crowned Kinglet All Reports: 11 Dec Hughes KM; 05 Jan Hughes KM
Golden-crowned Kinglet 34 reports across 10 counties (Brown, Clay, Douglas, Hughes, Lawrence, Lincoln, Minnehaha, Stanley, Turner, Yankton) 04 Dec – 26 Feb including **06 Dec Turner CA (first county record)**
Red-breasted Nuthatch 200 reports across 23 counties (4 West River, 10 East River, 9 Missouri River) 01 Dec – 28 Feb
Pygmy Nuthatch 14 reports across 2 counties (Fall River, Pennington) 05 Dec – 27 Feb
Brown Creeper 52 reports across 11 counties (Beadle, Brown, Fall River, Hughes, Lake, Lincoln, Minnehaha, Pennington, Roberts, Stanley, Turner) 02 Dec – 28 Feb
Winter Wren Only Report: 14 Dec Hughes KM
Marsh Wren All Reports: 06 Dec Fall River MMM; 15 Jan Fall River MMM; 12 Feb Fall River MMM; 15 Feb Fall River MMM
American Dipper All Reports: 04 Jan Lawrence ND; 07 Jan Lawrence RDO
Eastern Bluebird 18 reports across 6 counties (Charles Mix, Douglas, Gregory, Hughes, Kingsbury, Yankton) 09 Dec – 28 Feb
Mountain Bluebird All Reports: 14-15 Dec Stanley KM; 01 Jan Jackson ND, RDO; 04 Feb Jackson KP
Townsend's Solitaire 55 reports across 11 counties (Brown, Buffalo, Custer, Fall River, Faulk, Hughes, Jackson, Lawrence, Pennington, Stanley, Sully) 01 Dec – 27 Feb
Varied Thrush All Reports: 10 Dec Hughes KM; 21 Feb Hughes KM
Hermit Thrush 8 reports across 2 counties (Lincoln, Stanley) 08 Dec – 11 Feb
Bohemian Waxwing All Reports: 25 Dec Day ND; 30 Jan Brookings JSP; **04 Feb Codington DGP (first county record)**
Evening Grosbeak Only Report: 02 Jan Lawrence RDO
Purple Finch 146 reports across 18 counties (12 East River, 6 Missouri River) 01 Dec – 28 Feb
Redpoll 9 reports across 6 counties (Brown, Day, Faulk, Hughes, Roberts, Stanley) 05 Dec – 14 Feb
Red Crossbill 10 reports across 5 counties (Custer, Harding, Lawrence, Meade, Pennington) 14 Dec – 08 Feb
Pine Siskin 75 reports across 9 counties (Brown, Clay, Edmunds, Hughes, Lake, Lawrence, Roberts, Stanley, Yankton) 01 Dec – 28 Feb
Lesser Goldfinch Only Report: 02 Jan Fall River RDO
Lapland Longspur 29 reports across 19 counties (5 West River, 11 East River, 3 Missouri River) 01 Dec – 27 Feb
Snow Bunting 21 reports across 14 counties (Brown, Charles Mix, Day, Faulk, Hyde, Kingsbury, Lake, Marshall, Minnehaha, Roberts, Stanley, Tripp, Turner, Walworth) 01 Dec – 22 Feb
American Tree Sparrow 103 reports across 27 counties (3 West River, 17 East River, 7 Missouri River) 01 Dec – 28 Feb
Fox Sparrow All Reports: 02 Dec Clay GJS; 20 Dec Minnehaha CA
Dark-eyed Junco 291 reports across 29 counties (5 West River, 17 East River, 7 Missouri River) 01 Dec – 28 Feb
White-crowned Sparrow 11 reports across 5 counties (Charles Mix, Clay, Hughes, Kingsbury, Stanley) 07 Dec – 16 Feb
Harris's Sparrow 19 reports across 4 counties (Clay, Codington, Minnehaha, Stanley) 01 Dec – 14 Feb

White-throated Sparrow 27 reports across 2 counties (Pennington, Roberts) 01 Dec – 17 Jan
Song Sparrow 16 reports across 4 counties (Brown, Codington, Minnehaha, Pennington) 05 Dec – 17 Feb
Spotted Towhee Only Report: 29 Dec Stanley KM
Yellow-headed Blackbird Only Report: 15 Feb Roberts ND
Western Meadowlark 21 reports across 12 counties (Charles Mix, Clay, Day, Douglas, Hughes, Lake, Marshall, Moody, Pennington, Stanley, Turner, Yankton) 01 Dec – 27 Feb
Red-winged Blackbird 59 reports across 21 counties (3 West River, 12 East River, 6 Missouri River) 02 Dec – 28 Feb
Brown-headed Cowbird All Reports: 28 Dec Clay GJS; 17 Jan Clay DS; 19 Jan Clay DS; 22 Jan Sanborn ND; 27 Feb Turner ND; 28 Feb Clay GJS
Rusty Blackbird All Reports: 01 Dec Clay DS; 03 Dec Roberts CV; 04 Dec Clay DS; 06 Dec Brookings JSP; 12 Dec Kingsbury JSP; 23 Dec Clay GJS; 30 Dec Brown GO
Common Grackle 21 reports across 9 counties (Beadle, Brown, Clay, Codington, Douglas, Hughes, Kingsbury, Pennington, Stanley) 12 Dec – 27 Feb
Great-tailed Grackle Only Report: 08 Feb Butte ND
Yellow-rumped Warbler 13 reports across 4 counties (Charles Mix, Hughes, Stanley, Union) 01 Dec – 14 Feb

Species Expected But Not Reported

White-winged Scoter, Gray Partridge (2), Franklin's Gull, Snowy Owl, Common Loon (2), Western Grebe (3), Great Black-backed Gull (4), American White Pelican (4), Red-headed Woodpecker (2), American Three-toed Woodpecker (4), Black-backed Woodpecker (4), Gyrfalcon, Clark's Nutcracker (2), Canyon Wren (4), Carolina Wren (2), Northern Mockingbird (3), Brown Thrasher, Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch, White-winged Crossbill, Swamp Sparrow

Reports Requiring Acceptance By The Rare Bird Records Committee

Vesper Sparrow: 12 Dec Kingsbury JSP (third-latest winter observation; already approved by committee)

Additional Notable Reports from eBird:

Pinyon Jay: 23-23 Dec Custer C. and J. Gehrman; 31 Dec Custer M. and T. Pflugrad; 06, 27 Feb Fall River B. Muenchau
Common Raven: 08 Dec Custer C. Wood; 16 Feb Custer S. Stolz
Pacific Wren: 03-04 Jan Pennington J. McCafferty

Contributing Observers

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RND	Roger N. Dietrich
ND	Nancy Drilling
MMM	Michael M. Melius
KM	Kenny Miller
GO	Gary Olson
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KP	Kelly M. Preheim
DGP	D. George Prisbe
GJS	Gary & Jan Small
DS	David Swanson
CV	Cheryl Vellenga



Clark's Grebe, Farm Island, May 2026 ***Photo Credit: Doug Backlund***

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