

Mid-November to mid-January: Surely one of the biggest bird stories of this period was an incursion of northern owls into the Great Lakes region. Large numbers of Great Gray Owls were on the move, from northern Minnesota to southeastern Ontario, penetrating as far south as Boone County, Iowa, by mid-January. In parts of the region, smaller numbers of Boreal Owls and Northern Hawk-Owls were evident, as well. This column can't accurately assess the full scope of the phenomenon; for one thing, it is difficult to distinguish the actual number of owls from the number of reports, which may be inflated by the fact that many observers headed to the region to reap the bounty. Even harder would be to explain the event, since these three owl species differ somewhat in distribution and ecology. But, no question, the invasion has produced great winter birding, and the long-term effect will surely be to enhance our understanding of the habits of northern owls. We look forward to reading an analysis in a future issue of *North American Birds*.

While there was nothing in the irruptive-finch department to compare to last winter's incursion of redpolls into the East, a number of species put on respectable showings. In Kansas, where the species is rare, small flocks of Pine Grosbeaks were news in late November, concurrent with a notable flight of Bohemian Waxwings. A Common Redpoll was reported from Siskiyou County, northern California, in late November, and the Austin, Texas, hotline carried reports of Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, and both crossbill species in early December. Also in early December, an Eastern Towhee was reported from Red Lodge, Montana; we received few details, but the sighting was described as a first state record if acceptable. Notable was a Le Conte's Sparrow that lingered along the Santa Cruz River near Marana, Arizona. A male **McKay's Bunting**, that restricted-range, taxonomically problematic Alaskan relative of the Snow Bunting, lingered in Vancouver, British Columbia, for more than a month, followed by a female McKay's (or perhaps a Snow Bunting x McKay's Bunting hybrid). Basically restricted to the western Alaska mainland in winter, this species occurs casually at best on the West Coast south of Alaska.

Rio Grande Valley always produces outstanding birds at this season. This year the real corker was a **Social Flycatcher**, found at the World Birding Center at Bentsen State Park in early January. Resembling a miniature Kiskadee (though in a different genus), this species is resident at lower elevations on both the East and West Slopes of Mexico and has never before been satisfactorily documented in the U.S. That little gem, the Frontera Audubon sanctuary in Weslaco, Texas, produced a **White-throated Robin**, for which there are only a scant handful of previous acceptable U.S. records (all, as far as we know, from winter, and all from South Texas). Also at Frontera were continuing **Crimson-collared Grosbeaks**, a species also reported at a couple of other Valley locations. A **Golden-crowned Warbler** was reported from the lower Rio Grand Valley in early January, and from upstream near Laredo came reports of a **Blue Bunting**

and a **Gray-crowned Yellowthroat**.

A first for Pennsylvania, if acceptable, will be a MacGillivray's Warbler that turned up on the Allentown CBC. Outside of our usual reporting area, a **Kirtland's Warbler** was an outstanding CBC find on Bermuda, and a first for that island. We are unaware of any winter reports away from this warbler's known wintering grounds in the Bahamas. In Chester County, Pennsylvania, a Gray Kingbird was a startling find in mid-December and if acceptable will furnish a first state record for this species, which occurs casually north to Canada's Maritimes. A **Northern Lapwing** was photographed at Mackay Island NWR in North Carolina in late December. A **Baikal Teal** near Seattle, Washington, and a **Falcated Duck** near Eugene, Oregon, were the most notable waterfowl reports we received (the origins of both will undoubtedly receive scrutiny). Notable gull reports included a Little Gull in Douglas County, Colorado, in mid-November, a juvenile Western Gull photographed near Nampa, Idaho, and an immature California Gull on Nantucket island, Massachusetts (the first fully documented record for the Bay State).

An odd late-season spate of American White Pelican reports came from the Northeast, where this species is a casual and apparently increasing visitor, beginning with multiple reports from Massachusetts in early and mid-December and continuing as scattered sightings southward along the coast; one bird persisted in Rhode Island at least into the middle of January. Also in the Northeast, the annual autumnal visitation by Cave Swallows persisted into December, the last report we noticed being from southern New Jersey on 12 December. A **Redwing** lingered in Olympia, Washington, through late December and at least into mid-January.

A first state record, if acceptable, was a Costa's Hummingbird in Ada County, Idaho, first observed back in October and present at least through the end of the year. Arizona scored its first Ruby-throated Hummingbird, ID'd in the hand in Tucson in early January. A **Green Violet-ear** was photographed in Santa Fe County, New Mexico, in mid-November. And an immature female Black-chinned Hummingbird, documented in the hand in St. Francois County, Missouri, in early December, will be a state first if acceptable,

as will a Calliope Hummingbird banded and photographed in Prince George's County, Maryland.



Great Gray Owls were on the move in the Great Lakes region. Photo: Bill Schmoker