

HEARD ON THE BIRDLINE  
Winter (December 15-March 15)

All reports are considered hypothetical until documented and approved by the records committee.

The appearance of two western montane species within three weeks of each other highlighted the early winter reports, while GREAT GRAY OWLS and a FERRUGINOUS HAWK created excitement in late winter.

An immature PINYON JAY was first noticed visiting the feeder of Lloyd and Gaylan Crim in northeast Boone County on November 30. The Crims graciously hosted many birders, including a number from out-of-state, as the bird was still in residence through mid-March. And in Mills County, a CLARK'S NUTCRAKER was also viewed by many as it hung around the Pony Hollow area from December 19 through January 5.

There were many fewer than normal gull reports, as extremely cold weather in December chased them out of the state, but on the Mississippi River in Lee County, a MEW GULL was below Lock & Dam #19 at Keokuk on December 30, and a BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE was at Montrose on January 5. Unusual waterfowl reports were likewise limited, with up to six OLDSQUAWS near Montrose in the little remaining open water there during January and February, and a WHITE-WINGED SCOTER at Lake Rathbun on January 22.

Christmas Bird Counts on December 22 produced sightings of a gray phase GYRFALCON at Bettendorf, and a PINE GROSBEAK at Big Creek State Park. Other December reports included a SPOTTED TOWHEE that visited a feeder in Rock Falls during the last ten days of 1996, and a VARIED THRUSH at Forest Park Museum at Perry from Christmas eve through January 11. Another feeder bird was a male EVENING GROSBEAK reported on the Marshalltown CBC on December 21, that remained through the end of January.

There was only one report of a single COMMON REDPOLL, which along with two RED CROSSBILLS, was visiting a feeder near Ames in December and January. Other RED CROSSBILL reports came from Ames, Oxford, and Van Meter.

SNOWY OWLS were rather widely sighted in northern parts of the state during January and February, with reports from Clay, Emmet, Palo Alto, Kossuth, Humboldt, Cerro Gordo, and Clayton Counties. Likewise, single PRAIRIE FALCONS were observed in Dallas, Hardin, Cerro Gordo, Clay, and Sioux Counties. Not many NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWLS were found with reports during January and February from Johnson (Hawkeye Wildlife Area), Iowa (Amana Woods), Plymouth (Five Ridges Paririe), and Van Buren (Lake Sugema) Counties.

On February 22, a TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE was spotted in a cedar grove in Cherokee County just west of Washta. However, the place to be in February was Cerro Gordo County, as GREAT GRAY OWLS and a FERRUGINOUS HAWK, as well as the aforementioned PRAIRIE FALCON and SNOWY OWL were all being seen. For the second winter in a row, GREAT GRAY OWLS were in the state. The first report came on February 8 from Pam and Reid Allen at the Clay Banks Forest area, and two were subsequently seen there by many through March 7.

Other unconfirmed reports of GREAT GRAY OWLS came from north of Mason City, and Des Moines. The immature FERRUGINOUS HAWK, originally discovered by Lowell Washburn, was regularly seen in an area northwest of Thornton for most of February.

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