

Dispatches from Magnolia

Birds

Bird field guides usually include a range map that shows in which parts of the province you are likely to find specific birds. The ranges shown have been established by ornithologists through lifetimes of bird observation, cross referencing with documentation and eagerly accepting birder reports. To the best of their knowledge, at the time of publication, the ranges were correct.

However, birds fly. Just one hundred pairs of European Starlings were released in New York in 1890, and have spread to every habitable area of North America. On more modest scales, some species of birds are extending their ranges due to growing populations, the widespread availability of plentiful food in bird feeders, and probably climate change.

Birds that are out of their generally accepted range may be vagrants, also known as accidental birds. They can be blown out of their range by storms, getting separated from flocks, or who knows - maybe just interested in what is over the horizon. Three such birds have been seen in the Magnolia area recently, a common grackle, a lazuli bunting (both photographed) and a black goose known as a brant. None were reported in the area before sightings and have not been seen since. However, some birds that were not historically present at Magnolia, are now being seen regularly.

One species that probably can be claimed as having extended its ranges to the Magnolia area is the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*). The turkey vulture, photo 1, was identified at Magnolia three years ago and photographed, but the certainty of the photographic identification was not clear. Since then, it has been identified by other experienced birders, and reported to be nesting west of the Pembina. The photo below was taken on September 21st of this year. It appears that the turkey vulture has extended its range from east of Edmonton to the Magnolia area.

The white patch on the right wing is a wing tag, possibly from a tagging program at the University of Saskatoon.



Photo 1: Turkey Vulture photographed at Magnolia

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