

YUKON BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER

- SPRING 1993 -

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE YUKON BIRD CLUB (Vol 1, No 1), c/o Site 16, Comp. 44, RR#1, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 4Z6

Welcome to The Yukon Bird Club!

On March 5th, 1993, over 30 people packed the meeting room at the Whitehorse Public Library to discuss the formation of a Yukon bird club. It very soon became apparent that many people have been "waiting for this to happen for a long time". Participants at the meeting indicated a desire to learn more about birds, to share their knowledge with others, and to make a special effort to involve youth members. A strong emphasis was placed on field trips and birding work shops. Participants also indicated that a bird club should act as an important advocate for bird conservation. Public education and increased awareness of the health and survival of Yukon's wild bird communities were outlined as a long term goals. Participants overwhelmingly voted to initiate a bird club independent of existing clubs or societies, and that the geographic scope of the club should include the entire Yukon Territory. The *Yukon Bird Club* was chosen as an appropriate name pending government approval. Finally, an 8 member executive committee was elected and assigned the tasks of officially registering the club, and organizing club activities. This first newsletter outlines the establishment of our club and highlights the birding activities that have been planned. Welcome to the Yukon Bird Club!

1993 Board of Directors

President:	Cameron Eckert
Secretary:	Wendy Nixon
Treasurer:	Jeremy Baumbach
Field Trip Coordinator:	Pam Sinclair
Events Coordinator:	Dave Mossop
Newsletter Editors:	Cameron Eckert Tracie Harris
Youth Coordinators:	Greg Kubica Sam White
Special Projects:	vacant



Proposed Mission Statement

On March 12th, the Board of Directors met and drafted a Yukon Bird Club "Mission Statement". All members are invited to comment.

"The objective of the Yukon Bird Club is to promote awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Yukon birds and their habitats".

FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

Participants at the March 5th organizing meeting indicated that getting out and watching birds should be our primary goal at this point. For the Bird Club's first spring season we have lined up an exciting series of walks and hikes led by experienced birdwatchers. Here is a chance to learn some new birds, discover some new places, and share the thrill of spring migration with others. Everyone is welcome, especially beginners - and bring a friend! For more information call Pam at 667-4630.

EVENING WALKS - casual bird walks on Tuesday and Thursday evenings in the Whitehorse area. Bring sturdy walking shoes or boots, warm clothes, and binoculars.

Tuesday 6 April. *Dippers at MacIntyre Creek.* Watch these unusual birds walk under water, and hear their spectacular song. Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 5:30 or at the Kopper King at 5:45. Leader: Cameron Eckert.

Thursday 15 April. *Spring Owl Hoot.* Listen for the Grand Duke! Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 7:00 or at the Porter Creek Super A Store at 7:15. Leader: Helmut Grunberg.

Thursday 22 April. *Swans at M'Clintock Bay.* Celebrate the migration of these beautiful birds! Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 5:30 or at the Yukon River Bridge at 6:00. Leader: Jim Hawkings.

Tuesday 27 April. *Takhini Hot Springs.* Look for Mountain Bluebirds and other early spring migrants. Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 5:30 or at the Porter Creek Super A Store at 5:45. Leader: Pam Sinclair.

Tuesday 4 May. *MacIntyre Creek/Fish Lake Road.* Spring arrivals! Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 7:00 or at the Kopper King at 7:15. Leader: Gavin Johnston.

Thursday 13 May. *Shallow Bay.* Shorebirds, waterfowl, pipits, and longspurs! Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 6:00 or at the Porter Creek Super A Store at 6:15. Leader: Wendy Nixon. Bring rubber boots.

Tuesday 18 May. *Takhini River Ponds.* Shorebirds in high breeding plumage! Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 6:00 or at the Porter Creek Super A Store at 6:15. Leader: Lee Kubica.

Thursday 27 May. *Yukon River Trail.* Riparian specialties - warblers, vireos, and thrushes! Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 7:00 and we will proceed from foot from there. Leader: Wendy Nixon.

WEEKEND DAY TRIPS - these trips will start in the morning and go a little farther afield. Bring your lunch, rubber boots, warm clothes, binoculars, and a spotting scope if you have one.

Saturday 1 May. *Tagish/Carcross.* A wonderful birding tour! Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 9:00 or at the Yukon River Bridge at 9:30. Leader: Helmut Grunberg.

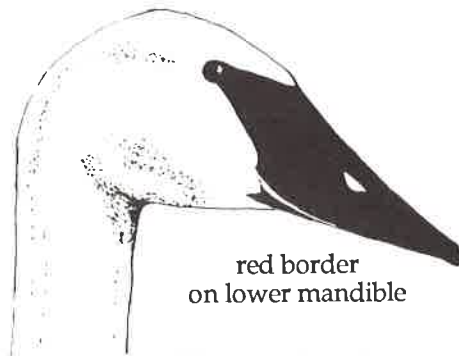
Saturday 8 May. *Shallow Bay.* Experience some of the Yukon's best birding. Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 10:00 or at the Porter Creek Super A Store at 10:15. Leader: Dave Mossop.

~~Saturday~~ ^{Sunday} 16 May. *Sheep Mountain.* Mammals and birds! Meet at the S.S.Klondike at 8:00 or at the Porter Creek Super A Store at 8:15. Leader: Lee Kubica.

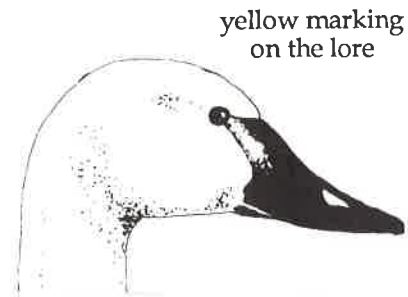
Sunday 30 May. *Haines Junction Hot Spots!* A chance to harness post-Bird-a-Thon energy! Explore birding "hotspots" around the Junction with a local expert. Meet at the Mountain View Restaurant in Haines Junction at 11:00. Please call Pam at 667-4630 by May 27th if you are planning to go on this trip. Leader: Todd Heakes.

Spring Swans in the Southern Yukon

Trumpeter



Tundra
(Whistling)



(Swan graphic courtesy of the Trumpeter Swan Society)

The first Trumpeter Swans of spring will be arriving in the Yukon by the time you read this. Trumpeters are the first waterfowl to arrive in the spring, with the exception of a few hardy Common Goldeneye and Common Mergansers. Trumpeters normally arrive at Tagish Narrows and M'Clintock Bay late in March or in the first few days of April. Last year was exceptional, however, in that Art Smith reported that 3 Trumpeters arrived at Tagish on Feb. 29 and 9 were there by March 2.

The numbers of Trumpeter Swans will rise steadily as April progresses, and they will be joined by Tundra Swans beginning shortly after the middle of the month. The numbers of swans at M'Clintock Bay usually peak April 22-28 at about 2,500. The accompanying graphs show the numbers of swans at M'Clintock Bay during the last 2 springs. The second curve on each graph is the number of Trumpeter Swan cygnets, which are clearly visible in good light as greyish rather than white coloured. The Tundra Swan cygnets, in contrast, have already assumed a white plumage which is virtually indistinguishable from older birds. Trumpeter cygnets will still be in family groups composed of 1 to 5 cygnets and 2 parents. Many cygnets appear to have been frozen in on the breeding grounds in Alaska last fall during the early cold snap, so the numbers of cygnets this spring may be quite low compared to other years. You can probably expect to see about 5 to 10 cygnets (grey) for every 100 adult Trumpeter Swans (white) this spring.

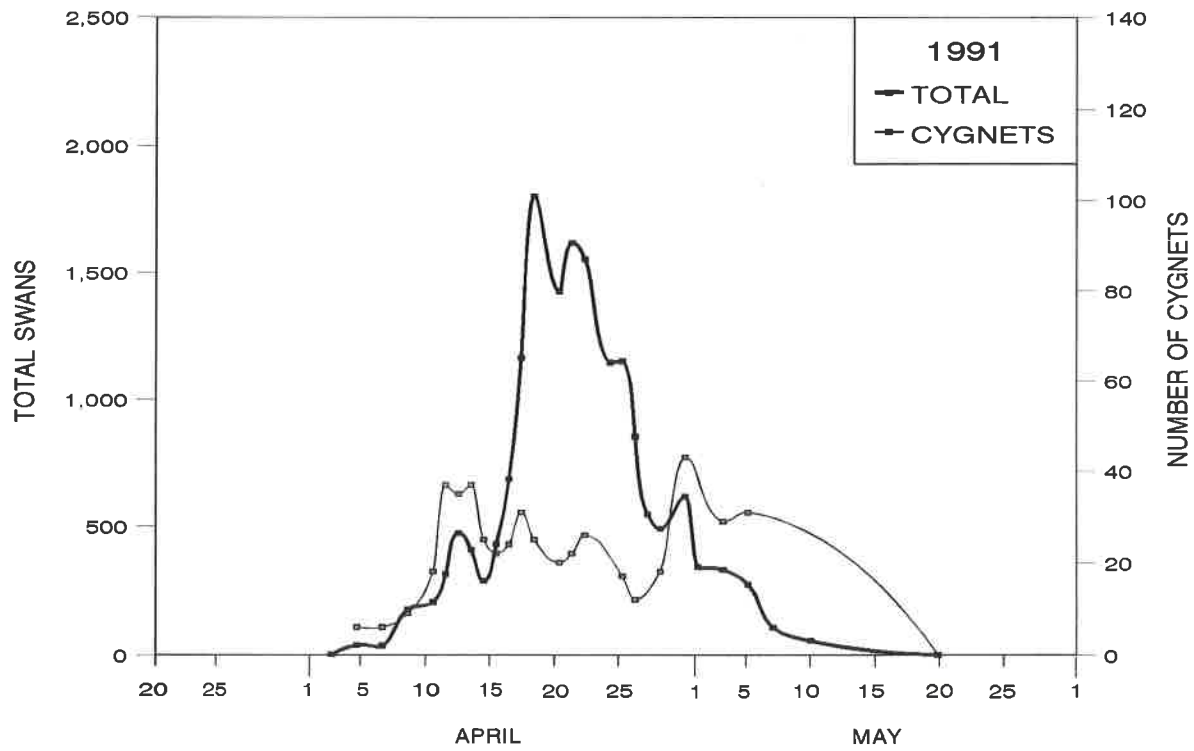
The Trumpeter Swans passing through Whitehorse are destined for breeding areas in central Alaska, although as many as a few hundred do breed in the Kluane area. The Tundra Swans are believed to be headed for breeding grounds in the Kotzebue area of Northwestern Alaska.

These swans can be viewed easily by driving south on the Alaska Highway to the North M'Clintock road. Turn right off the highway and drive until you see a small viewing stand on a short turnoff to the left. This is shortly before you get to the very end of the road. This viewing stand is a good place to view the swans, and Renewable Resources has an interpreter, scopes and other materials on hand during the evening and weekends for much of April to help you out. Contact the Wildlife Viewing Biologist (667-8291) for details.

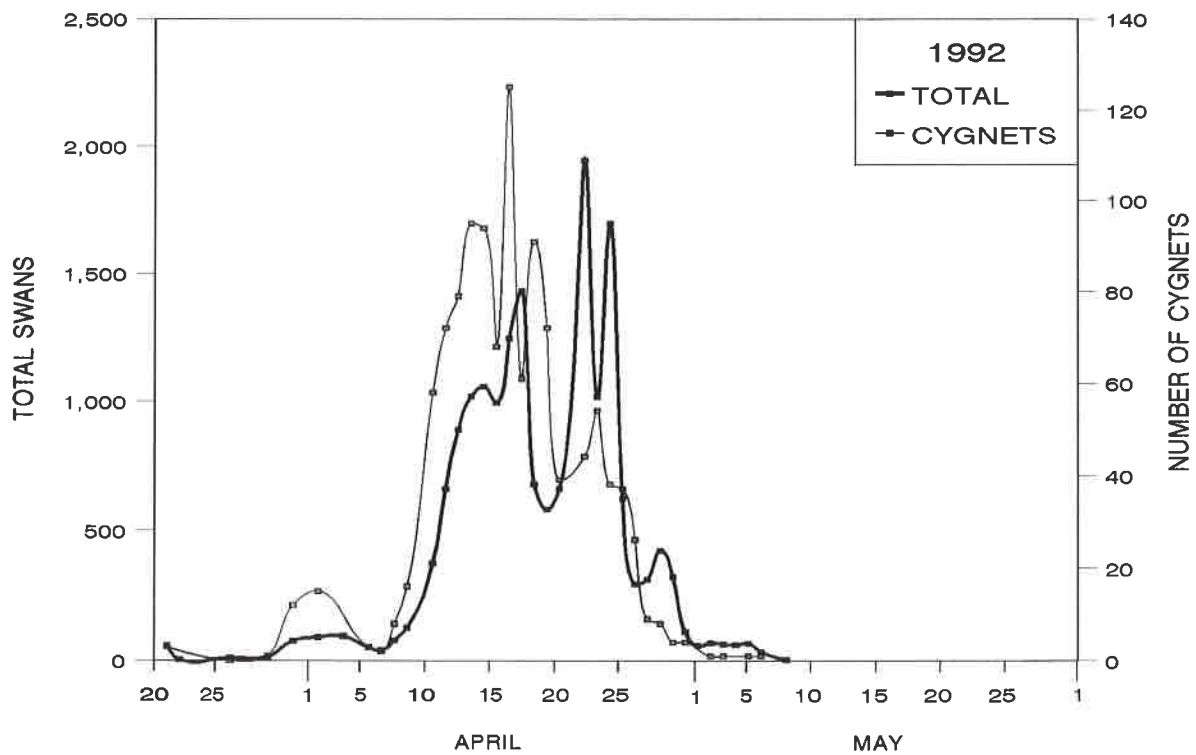
Both Trumpeter and Tundra Swans have been marked with coloured plastic neckbands to help discover the wintering grounds and migration routes of these birds. If you should happen to see one of these, please record the species, age, location, date, colour of the band, and numbers marked on the band, and pass this information on to Canadian Wildlife Service at 668-2285, or to the interpretive biologist at M'Clintock Bay.

Jim Hawkings

Trumpeter Swans at M'Clintock Bay



Total numbers of swans and Trumpeter Swan cygnets counted at M'Clintock Bay, Yukon during spring migration 1991.



Total numbers of swans and Trumpeter Swan cygnets counted at M'Clintock Bay, Yukon during spring migration 1992.

A Name For the Newsletter

We need a name for this newsletter! While the title "Newsletter" is very functional, it lacks charm. Bird clubs often use names which reflect their interest in birds - "The Wandering Tattler", "Blue Jay", and "Che-beck!" are a few examples. Please submit your ideas for a suitable name for our newsletter. A vote on proposed names will be held at a future meeting and an appropriate prize will be awarded to the member who suggested the winning name.

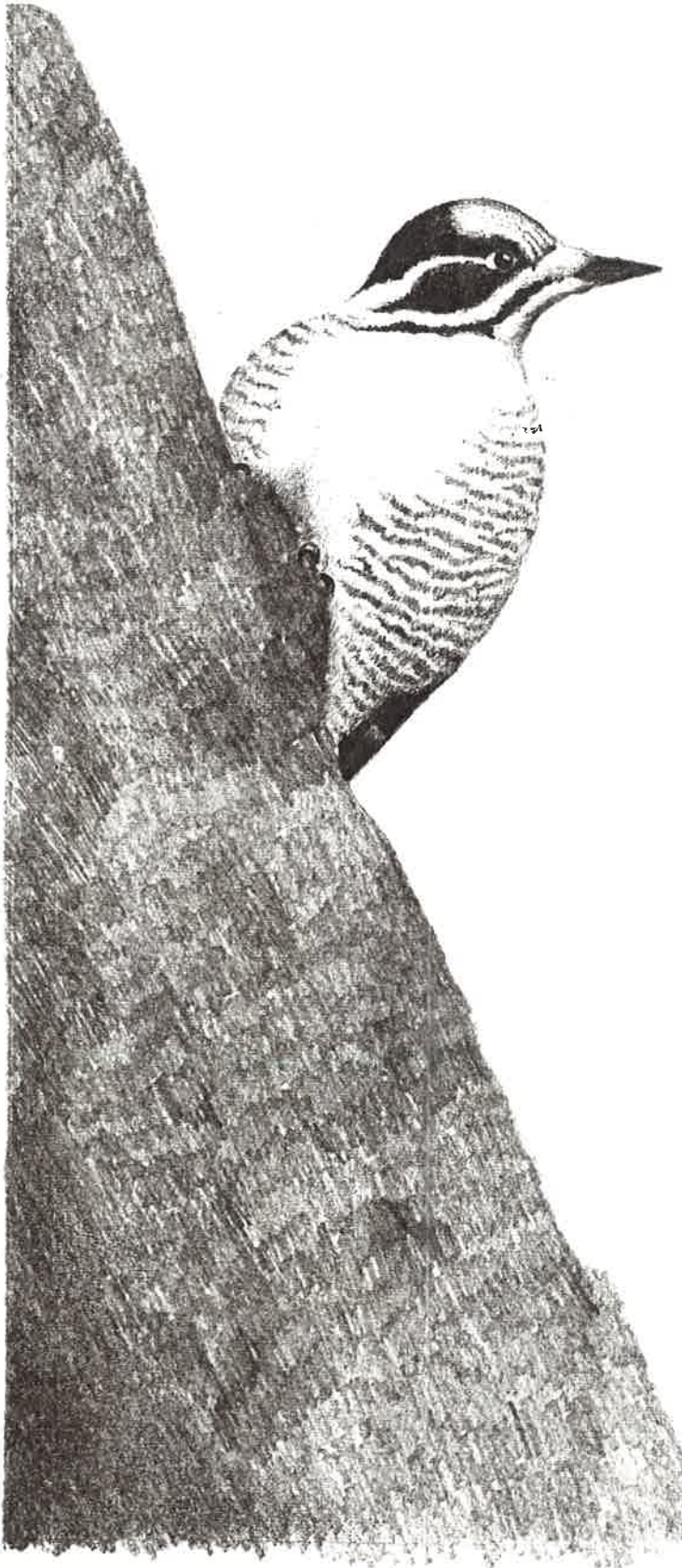
Also, the Newsletter needs writers! The Newsletter will be published quarterly on a winter, spring, summer, fall schedule. We will publish information and articles of interest to YBC members and the best way to do that is to have a wide variety of members write articles. Articles may highlight special birding locations, notable observations, biology and natural history, identification, bird projects and research, conservation, stories and poetry. Pen and ink drawings would also be quite welcome. Please consider writing articles, or drawing pictures for the newsletter and contact Cameron (Ph.667-4630) or Tracie (Mobile Phone: Laberge 2M-4554) with your ideas.

Read the classifieds!

We will publish ads and notices of interest to YBC. Members and non-profit or non-commercial organizations may submit non-business-related ads at no charge. Business-related ads will be published at a yet-to-be-determined rate.

Please send your submissions to:
Cameron Eckert, 14-11th Ave.,
Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 4H6

Northern Three-toed Woodpecker
By Pam Sinclair



FOCUS ON: *The American Dipper*

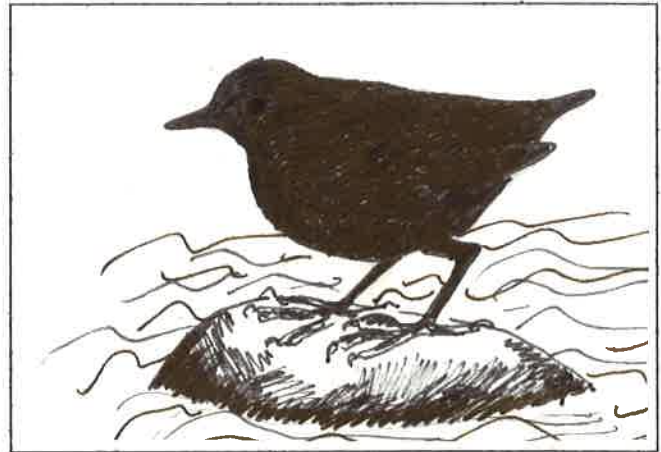
"Focus On" will be a regular feature of the YBC Newsletter, highlighting aspects of identification, behaviour, biology, and habitat for species which occur in the Yukon. This feature will also indicate where birders can observe the species. All members are encouraged to write for this feature. This inaugural issue *focuses on* the American Dipper.

The American Dipper (*Cinclus mexicanus*), also known as the water ouzel or just "dipper", is a stout, wren-like bird about the size of a small robin with a very short tail. Its plumage is almost entirely slate-grey with a brownish head. Most interesting is a white membrane which flashes over the eye when the dipper blinks. Dippers are found along the edges of lively and rapid hill and mountain streams where they typically walk, bobbing up and down, on rocks in search of benthic prey or small fish. Dippers are grouped in the genus *Cinclus* which is derived from the Greek word *kinkles*, a word used by Aristotle for a bird that bobs its tail up and down. The Dipper brings both shock and delight to first time observers as it plunges into ice cold water disappearing into foaming river rapids, seemingly lost to torrential waves and undercurrents only to suddenly pop up on a rock with a small worm in its beak!

The dipper's nest is an oven-like weave of mosses, leaves and grasses often tucked into a crevice or hole of a log or rock. They generally initiate nesting in late March, probably later in the Yukon, typically hatching 4-5 eggs. Both parents feed the young. Young in the nest may be very conspicuous as they extend their open bills exposing their bright orange gape. Fledgling dippers leave the nest at 18-25 days and can dive and swim before they can fly.

The dipper's year-round song is a brilliant rich series of musical runs and trills. It frequently utters a shrill "bzzreeet!" when flushed. Few birds inspire such lyrical prose as the dipper. In 1917, Florence Meriam Bailey wrote that "in December, one crisp, clear morning when the still pools were frozen over and there was ice along the edges of the streams and iced spray on the bushes, my ear was caught by a beautiful

song, and following upstream, discovered an ouzel sitting on a cake of ice in the bright sun singing as gayly as a bobolink in June".



Yukon birders can expect to observe dippers throughout most of the Yukon in appropriate habitat. Dippers have been observed in the Kluane area, along the Dempster as far north as the Ogilvie Mountains, on the North Slope's Babbage River and as far east as Coal River. During winter, relatively high concentrations of dippers may be observed around open streams. For example, dippers are frequently observed from the observation platform at the Whitehorse Fish Ladder just downstream from the generating dam. Another excellent winter location near Whitehorse is the stream which flows between the Polar Sea fish farm and the Haul Road just off the Fish Lake Road. Check the Haul Road, a few hundred metres south of the Fish Lake Road, where the stream overflows the Haul road. Listen for the brilliant song. In summer, dippers move to higher elevations and may be hard to find in their typical winter locations.

Cameron Eckert

Birding in Yukon's Communities

The Yukon Bird Club is very interested in becoming active in communities outside of Whitehorse. We know that there are very active birders in Dawson, Watson Lake, Haines Junction, Faro, and Teslin and we are very keen to involve birders from all Yukon communities. Contact with birders throughout the Yukon will certainly benefit Yukon's "birding community" and open up a whole other world for field trips. Members are encouraged to pass on information about our club to birders in Yukon's communities.

Feeder Watcher's Report

This winter has been very exciting for Yukon feeder watchers who have reported very high numbers of Common Redpolls and Pine Grosbeaks. Single Hoary Redpolls and White-winged Crossbills also made appearances at a few feeders.

Sometimes bird feeders attract *bird feeders* ... On January 18 an immature Northern Shrike buzzed a flock of redpolls at a feeder in Teslin, and on Feb 23 an adult Northern Shrike tried its luck at a Porter Creek feeder.

Most suet feeders have attracted at least the odd woodpecker this winter. One female Downy and a male Hairy Woodpecker have been visiting a feeder at Shadow Lake.

A Gray Jay, one of our earliest nesters, was observed collecting nest material in a Porter Creek yard on Feb 22.

A flock of 40 Bohemian Waxwings fed on berry laden Mountain Ash trees in Porter Creek through late December. A male American Robin, present at a Teslin feeder through January, has survived temperatures as low as -55 Celsius.

Black-capped and Boreal Chickadees were observed visiting most southern Yukon feeders through the winter. Much rarer was a Mountain Chickadee visiting a Teslin feeder since Jan 26. The Mountain Chickadee closely resembles the Black-capped Chickadee, however, feeder watchers should look for the Mountain Chickadee's short white "eye brow". Small numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches, rare in

winter, have been frequenting some suet feeders in the Whitehorse area.

Extremely unusual was a Golden-crowned Sparrow reported visiting a feeder at Cowley Lake in early December. The only Dark-eyed Junco reported was an adult male present at a Porter Creek feeder since November.

Two male Rusty Blackbirds have been feeding at a seed pile behind the Tutshi Building on Second Avenue in Whitehorse, through the winter.

A Whitehorse feeder had a nearly frozen male House Finch, very rare in the Yukon, in mid-December.

Evening Grosbeaks have staged a relatively spectacular invasion this winter. A large flock of Evening Grosbeaks has visited a number of feeders in Watson Lake since mid-November, and a smaller flock of 10 Evening Grosbeaks has also been visiting a Teslin feeder since mid-November. Single Evening Grosbeaks have also been observed at a number of Whitehorse area feeders.

"Grey-crowned" Rosy Finches have been reported coming to feeders in both Watson Lake and Teslin.

Feeder watchers are encouraged to record their sightings and report any interesting, unusual or rare birds to the bird club. Also, if a bird visiting your yard is presenting an identification problem then don't hesitate to call Cameron (Ph. 667-4630).

Participate in the Bird-a-Thon!

What's a Bird-a-Thon?!? Well, it's sort of like a dance-a-thon except you use binoculars ... Initiated in 1985 by Jim Hawkings, the Yukon Conservation Society's bird-a-thon is a 24 hour birdwatching blitz and conservation fundraiser. Participants collect sponsors on a dollars-per-species basis in their quest to observe as many species as possible in a 24 hour period. Birders can participate as individuals or in teams. Whether you spend all day scouring the landscape for sparrows and all night hooting with the owls, or just spend a few hours at your favorite birding location, your participation is important and will be appreciated!

The Bird-a-Thon has significantly added to our knowledge of Yukon's birds. A few spectacular finds during last year's bird-a-thon included Hudsonian Godwit, Cinnamon Teal, Sora, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Song Sparrow, Hammond's Flycatcher, and Wilson's Phalarope! Participants have raised as much as 2000 dollars and last year one team set a new record of 94 species!

This year's Bird-a-Thon will start at 17:00 hrs on **Friday May 28th** and finish at 17:00 hrs on **Saturday May 29th**. A post-bird-a-thon potluck will be held at the Wolf Creek Campground.

Spring Alert!

Many birders have noticed Black-capped Chickadees and Pine Grosbeaks erupting into lively song over the past few weeks. Also, have you noticed that the redpolls are getting redder? Redpolls do not actually molt into breeding plumage. In fall and winter the base of a redpoll's breast feather is brighter red than the tip. Therefore as the feathers wear over the course of the winter and into spring they appear brighter red. This allows redpolls to don a breeding dress without the need to molt.

The first spring flocks of Snow Buntings were spotted on March 13th along the Carcross Road. Can longspurs, sparrows and warblers be far behind?

YUKON BIRD CLUB CLASSIFIEDS

A Bird Course!

Whitehorse City Dept. of Parks and Recreation is offering a spring birdwatching course. Call Parks and Rec for more information (668-8327).

YCS Bird-a-Thon

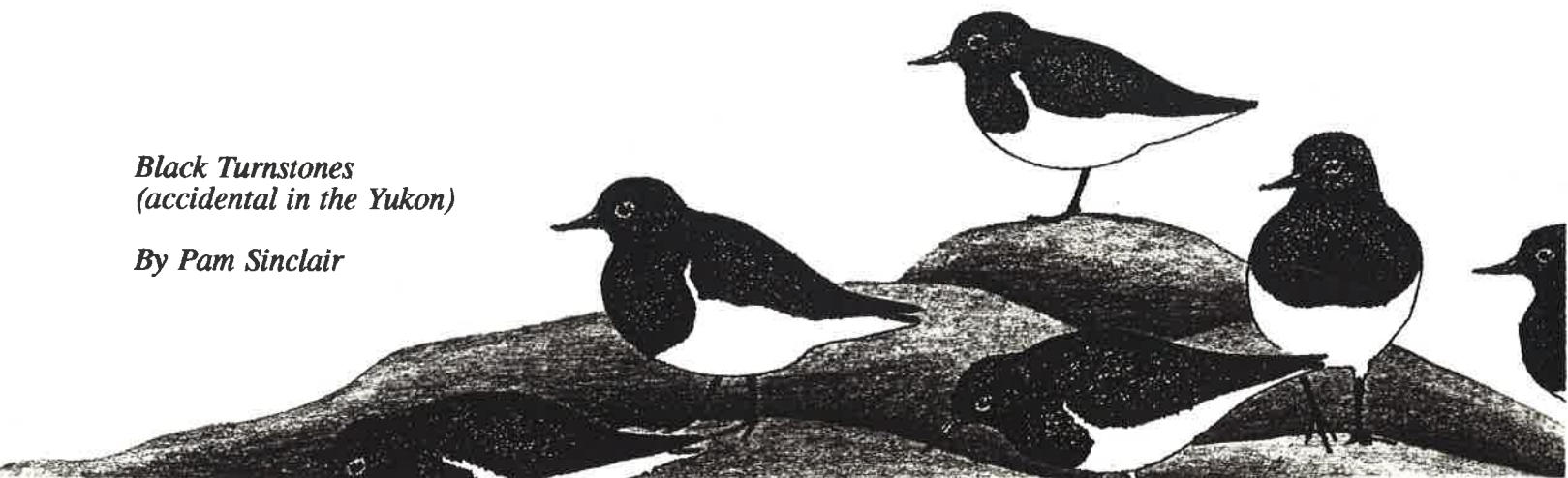
Friday May 28th @ 17:00 hrs through Saturday May 29th @ 17:00 hrs. Followed by potluck and prizes at Wolf Creek Campground.

Bluebird Trails!

Birders interested in building bluebird boxes and establishing bluebird trails should contact Tracie Harris (Mobile Phone: Laberge 2M-4554). The first Mountain Bluebirds will be arriving in mid-April!

*Black Turnstones
(accidental in the Yukon)*

By Pam Sinclair



IMPORTANT NOTICE ABOUT THE BIRD-A-THON!

This Year's Bird-a-thon will be a joint Yukon Bird Club - Yukon Conservation Society Event! The proceeds will be split between the 2 groups. The Yukon Bird Club thanks YCS for sharing this important fundraising event with us!

Features to watch for in the next Newsletter!

Discovering Yukon's special sparrow - The Timberline Sparrow.

Birders for Birds - Breeding Bird Surveys and Christmas Counts.

The surprises of spring - oddballs and overshoots!



Membership in the Yukon Bird Club is open to everyone!

\$10.00 for individuals.
\$25.00 for families.
\$5.00 for full time students
and individuals 65 years of age or older.

For more information contact:
The Yukon Bird Club, Site 16, Comp.44,
RR#1, Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 4Z6

YUKON BIRD CLUB CONSTITUTION

The Board of Directors met on March 12th to establish a Yukon Bird Club constitution. Wendy Nixon will have a draft of the constitution ready for the March 26th general meeting and members are welcome to read it and make suggestions.

BIRDING ETHICS AND A CODE FOR YUKON BIRDERS

As the number of birders grows and areas for watching birds becomes more limited a code of ethics governing the behaviour of birders and bird photographers becomes increasingly important. The American Birding Association has an excellent code of ethics, and with their permission, we have modified it slightly and propose that The Yukon Bird Club officially adopt this code of ethics in our constitution. We invite all members to comment on its content.

Yukon Bird Club proposed Code of Ethics

We, the membership of the Yukon Bird Club, believe that all birders have an obligation at all times to protect wildlife, the natural environment and the rights of others. We therefore pledge ourselves to provide leadership in meeting this obligation by adhering to the following general guidelines of good birding behaviour.

I. Birders must always act in ways that do not endanger the welfare of birds or other wildlife.

- 1) Observe and photograph birds without knowingly disturbing them in any significant way.
- 2) Never chase or intentionally flush birds.
- 3) Only sparingly use recordings and similar methods of attracting birds and not use these methods in heavily birded areas.
- 4) Keep an appropriate distance from nests and nesting colonies so as not to disturb them or expose them to danger.
- 5) Never handle birds or eggs unless engaged in recognized research activities.

II. Birders who attract birds to their yards or property, either through feeders or nest boxes, should provide a safe environment for the birds.

- 1) Always ensure that winter feeders provide an uninterrupted supply of feed.
- 2) Nest boxes must be cleaned and maintained on an annual basis.
- 3) Place feeders and nest boxes to minimize a bird's exposure to predation and other risks.

III. Birders must always act in ways that do not harm the natural environment.

- 1) Stay on existing roads, trails, and pathways whenever possible to avoid trampling or otherwise disturbing fragile habitat.
- 2) Leave all habitat as it was found.

IV. Birders must always respect the rights of others.

- 1) Respect the privacy and property of others by observing "No Trespassing" signs and by asking permission to enter private or posted lands.
- 2) Observe all laws and the rules and regulations which govern public use of birding areas.
- 3) Practice common courtesy in our contacts with others.
- 4) Always behave in a manner that will enhance the image of the birding community in the eyes of the public.

V. Birders in groups should assume special responsibilities.

1) *As group members, we will*

- a) Take special care to alleviate the problems and disturbances that are multiplied when more people are present.
- b) Act in consideration of the group's interest, as well as our own.
- c) Support by our actions the responsibility of the group leader(s) for the conduct of the group.

2) *As group leaders, we will*

- a) Assume responsibility for the conduct of the group.
- b) Learn and inform the group of any special rules, regulations, or conduct applicable to the area or habitat being visited.
- c) Limit groups to a size that does not threaten the environment or the peace and tranquility of others.
- d) Teach others birding ethics by our words and actions.