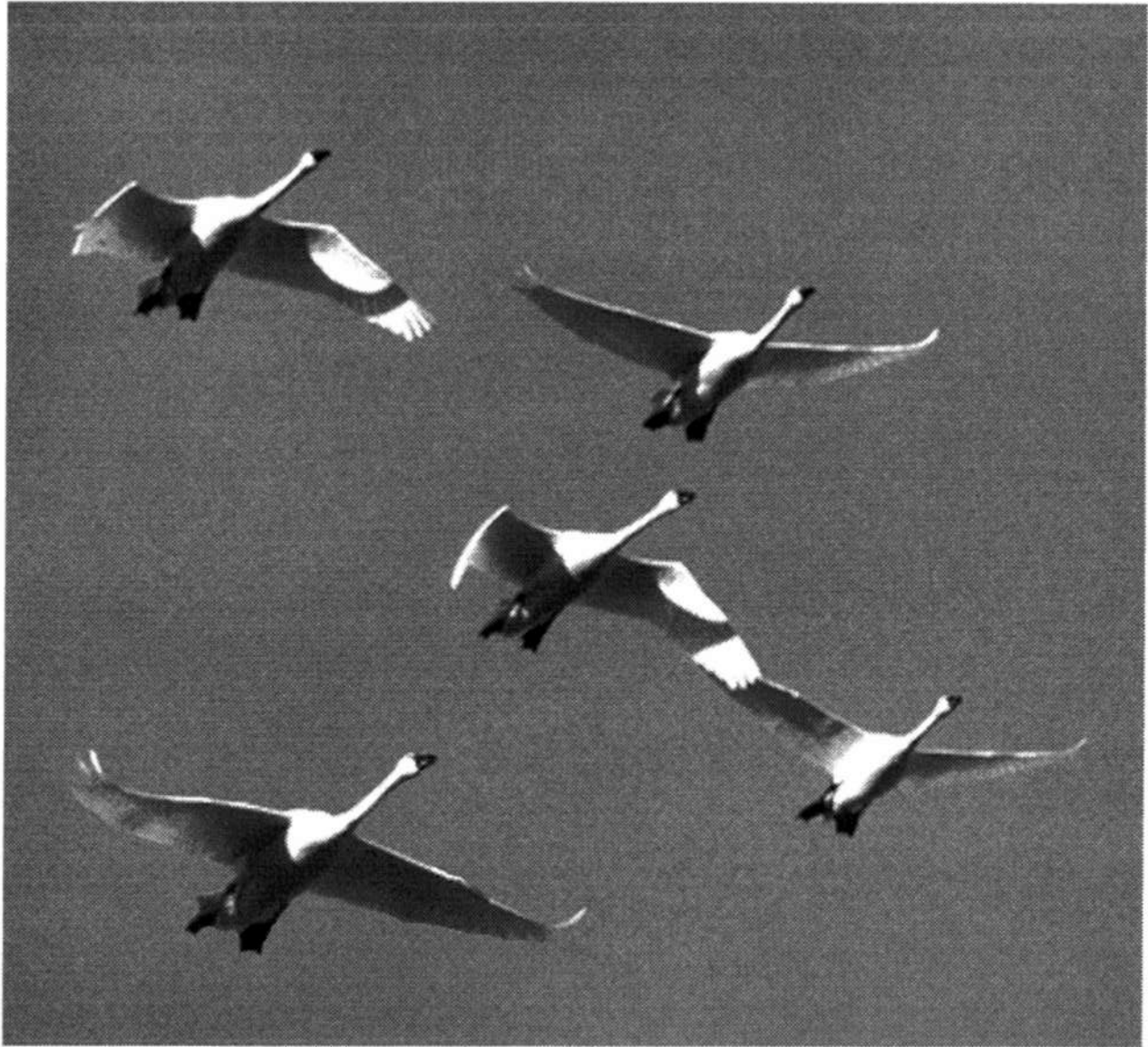


Y u k o n **WARBLER**



Newsletter of The Yukon Bird Club - Spring 1995



The Arrival of Spring on the Wings of Swans! Photo by Cameron Eckert

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Spring Field Trips and Events

WEEKDAY and WEEKEND OUTINGS: Dress for the weather, bring binoculars and wear appropriate footwear. For more information or to arrange a ride call Pam (667-4630).

Friday 31 March. *Spring Owl Prowl!* Have you ever heard the eerie tremolo of the Boreal Owl or the resonant voice of the Great-horned Owl? These night sounds are what we will be listening for on this outing. **Meet at the SS.Klondike at 8:00 pm.** Leader: Helmut Grünberg.

Wednesday 12 April. *Celebrating Birds at MacIntyre Creek!* This special outing in search of swans, ducks, geese and the first shorebirds of spring will celebrate Canada's National Wildlife Week. **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 6:00 pm.** Leader: Lee Kubica.

Thursday 27 April. *Spring Migration at Shallow Bay!* Catch waterfowl migration in full swing! Last year's highlights were Ruddy Duck, Merlin and Mountain Bluebird. Wear rubber boots. **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 7:00 pm.** Leader: Wendy Nixon.

Saturday 29 April. *The Annual Tagish Birding Tour!* One of the premier birding trips of the spring, this popular tour will explore a variety of habitats between Whitehorse and Carcross. Bring a Lunch. **Meet at the SS.Klondike at 9:00 am.** Leader: Helmut Grünberg.

Thursday 4 May. *Discover a New Side of M'Clintock Bay!* This outing will seek out the fascinating diversity of songbirds and waterbirds which can be found off the beaten track at M'Clintock Bay. **Meet at the SS.Klondike at 6:00 pm.** Leader: Pam Sinclair.

Saturday 6 May. *The Birds of Sheep Mountain!* This popular day trip stops at a variety of rich birding sites on the way to Kluane, and culminates in a special opportunity to view Dall's Sheep at the peak of lambing season on Sheep Mountain. Bring a lunch. **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 8:30 am.** Leader: Lee Kubica.

Wednesday 10 May. *The Astonishing Shorebirds of Lewes Marsh!* Experience the peak of southern Yukon's shorebird migration. Lewes Marsh specialties include Hudsonian Godwit, Whimbrel, Baird's Sandpiper, American Golden-Plover and perhaps a Dunlin or White-rumped Sandpiper. **Meet at the SS.Klondike at 6:00 pm.** Leader: Cameron Eckert.

Saturday 14 May. *Spring Waterfowl at Shallow Bay!* View a variety of ducks while learning about their biology and behaviour. Bring a lunch and wear rubber boots. **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 10:00 am.** Leader: Dave Mossop.

Thursday 18 May. *Songbirds at Paddy's Pond!* Discover the diverse world of songbirds in the height of their spring migration - *right in Hillcrest!* Wear rubber boots or water-happy footwear. **Meet at the SS.Klondike at 7:00 pm. or at Hillcrest Drive and Chalet Cres. At 7:15 pm.** Leader: Mary Whitley.

Tuesday 23 May. *The Annual Bird Song Workshop!* This outing to MacIntyre Creek will provide a warm-up session for Breeding Bird Survey participants. Other birders interested in learning the songs and calls of birds are welcome. **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 6:00 pm.** Leaders: Cameron Eckert and Pam Sinclair.

More Spring Field Trips ...

More Spring Field Trips ...

Wednesday 24 May. *The Birding Treasures of Mary Lake!* Explore one of Whitehorse's best kept birding secrets in search of Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, warblers, flycatchers, sparrows and thrushes. **Meet at the SS.Klondike at 7:00 pm.** Leader: Wendy Nixon.

Tuesday 30 May. *Migration Finalé at Judas Creek!* This area offers a fantastic diversity of habitats and birds including Short-billed Dowitcher, Least Flycatcher, Belted Kingfisher, and Bonaparte's Gull. **Meet at the SS.Klondike at 5:30 pm.** Leader: Jim Hawkings.

Thursday 8 June. *Birds along the Yukon River Trail!* Breeding songbirds, Arctic Terns, Spotted Sandpipers and perhaps a Bald Eagle with interpretation provided in French and English will make for an enjoyable outing.. **Meet at the SS.Klondike at 7:00 pm.** Leader: Julie Lefebvre.

Winter Field Trip Report

by Pam Sinclair

An enthusiastic crowd of seven birders managed to scrounge 12 species on the January 21st Tagish Birding Tour (it's always impressive to have more birds than birders in the winter!). Highlights were a flock of 15 Bohemian Waxwings fluffed up against the cold, a cooperative male Ruffed Grouse feeding in the woods at M'Clintock Bay, and a grand total of 31 ducks (Common Goldeneye and Common Mergansers) in the open water areas.

The February 18th Feeder Hopping Tour was good fun, and definitely the right way to watch birds at -25°C. A dozen birders joined Wendy Nixon to view the feeder fare - lots of redpolls and Pine Grosbeaks, and even a Red Crossbill, always scarce in winter but especially this year when there are so few crossbills in the Whitehorse area. A moment of high drama occurred a few minutes too early when a Northern Shrike buzzed through one large feeder flock just before the group arrived. One hundred terrified redpolls made themselves scarce for quite a while after that.

It's one thing to promise ptarmigan on a field trip; it's another thing to actually find them at the crucial moment. Cameron Eckert managed just that on the Ptarmigan Quest of March 4th, as a small flock was spotted peering out from a patch of willows beside Fish Lake. Other birds braving the cold included a dipper plunging into Fish Creek in search of food, a pair of Three-toed Woodpeckers drumming on a gnarly snag, and a Gray Jay carrying a twig to its nest-in-progress (sure signs of spring!).



*The rewards of a successful quest on March 4, 1995
Willow Ptarmigan at Fish Lake. Photo by Cameron Eckert*



Festivities of Spring

Celebration of Swans 1995!

April 22nd and 23rd at Swan Haven

Don't miss Swan Haven's second annual *Celebration of Swans!* This annual event celebrates the arrival of spring on the wings of thousands of migratory birds. Great flocks of Trumpeter and Tundra Swans grace the waters of M'Clintock Bay and are joined by numerous species of ducks, shorebirds and gulls during April and early May.

The organizers need your help to make the *Celebration of Swans* a success. We are in great need of volunteers to help provide information to the public during the two day event. ***If you like to talk about birds and have a few hours you would be willing to spend at Swan Haven then please call Julie at 667-8291.*** An orientation session will provide you with the information necessary to answer all questions.

Join the celebration on April 22nd and 23rd!

Participating organizations of the 1995 *Celebration of Swans*: Ducks Unlimited Canada, Folk Music Society, Girl Guides of Canada, YTG Renewable Resources, The Yukon Bird Club

Catch the Bird-a-Thon Spirit!!

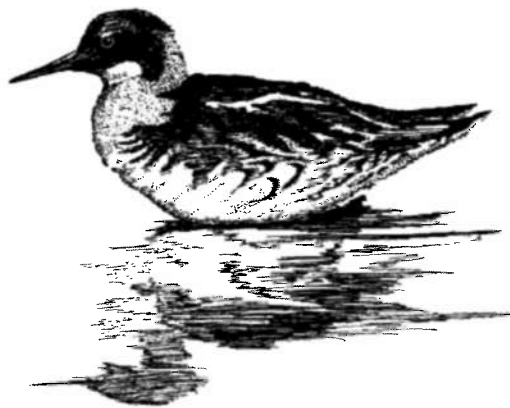
Friday May 26th - Saturday May 27th

The Bird-a-Thon is the Yukon's longest running and most successful conservation education fundraiser and 1995 marks the 11th year for this annual 24 hour birdwatching festival. Participants collect sponsors on a dollars-per-species basis in their quest to observe as many species as possible anywhere in the Yukon within the specified 24 hour period. The Yukon Bird Club and the Yukon Conservation Society share the proceeds. Pledges are tax-deductible.

Your birding experience is not important and ***beginners are most welcome!*** Whether you spend all day hiking for pipits and all night hooting for owls, or just spend an hour at your favorite birding spot, your participation is important! Birders can participate as individuals or in teams. Birding with others is socially enjoyable and fewer birds go unnoticed! If you would like to join a team then call René Carlson (668-5293). Whether you are keen to bird all day or just a few hours, René can match you with suitable partners.

The Bird-a-Thon has significantly added to our knowledge of Yukon bird life. Each year the Bird-a-Thon provides a snapshot of diversity and abundance during the peak of bird activity in the Yukon. The group total for all participants is usually about 130 species! The Bird-a-Thon is a very fun and casual event and a variety of prizes ensures that a good time is had by all. Birders with small children can look forward to the *Toddlers in Tow Award!* Birdwatch by foot or bike in a quest for the *Enviro-birder Award!*

This year's Bird-a-Thon will start at **5:00 p.m.** on **Friday May 26th** and finish at **5:00 p.m.** on **Saturday May 27th** with a post-Bird-a-Thon potluck Bar-B-Que at Wolf Creek Campground (just south of Whitehorse on the Alaska Highway). Lots of prizes, good food, and fun! For more information, sponsor sheets, or to join a team, call René (668-5293). *Happy Birding!*



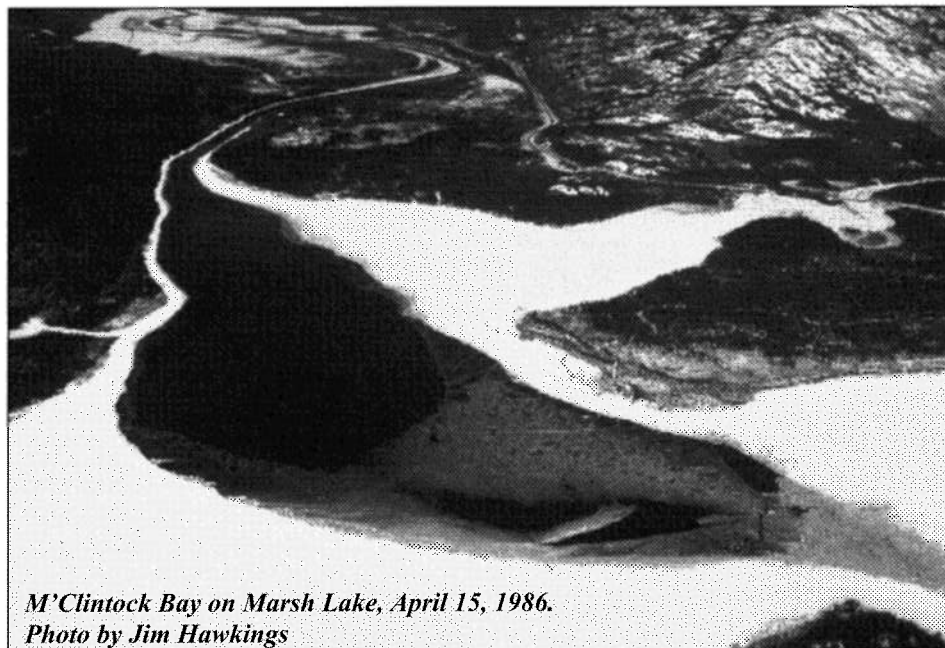
Red-necked Phalarope by Jennifer Staniforth

Trumpeter Swan Cygnets Rebound in 1994

by Jim Hawkings and Nancy Hughes

A number of large lake outlets in southern Yukon are important spring migration areas for waterfowl because they offer open water before any other wetlands have melted. M'Clintock Bay, located at the north end of Marsh Lake near Whitehorse, is one of the primary staging areas for Trumpeter Swans of the Pacific Coast Population. Here, thousands of Trumpeters stop to feed during April as they journey north to breeding grounds in eastern and central Alaska.

This lake outlet opens at least six weeks before breakup of the entire lake. M'Clintock Bay offers excellent feeding to the swans and early migrating ducks because of the close proximity of the lake outlet to the M'Clintock River delta (entering the lake from the upper right hand side of the photo) and its associated bed of aquatic vegetation. M'Clintock Bay is a prime candidate for becoming a protected area, primarily for Trumpeter Swans though many species would benefit.



*M'Clintock Bay on Marsh Lake, April 15, 1986.
Photo by Jim Hawkings*

Open water can be found at M'Clintock Bay most of the winter, and the first swans to arrive in spring are assured of at least a place to rest that will not freeze even when the night temperatures dip to -25° C. At first, as in the April 15th photograph, most of the rich feeding areas in the shallows of the M'Clintock River delta are still ice-covered, but they rapidly melt as April progresses. Trumpeter and Tundra swans and ducks feed in the shallows as the ice recedes. Often swans can be seen struggling through the rotting slush ice in an effort to be the first to feed on the pondweeds beneath.

Young Trumpeter Swans retain their grey plumage until their second summer, whereas young Tundra Swans moult to white plumage prior to the second summer. We use the ratio of grey to white swans in April as an indication of Trumpeter Swan productivity as long as there are no Tundra Swans present. Once Tundra

Swans arrive in significant numbers, we can no longer assess the ratio of yearling and adult Trumpeter Swans. Cygnet to adult ratios in April provide a measure of the recruitment of young birds into the adult population, an important component of population growth. Although Trumpeters do not breed until they are at least two years old, their survival rates after the first year are much closer to those of breeding adults.

Every year is different at M'Clintock Bay. In spring 1993 there were two distinct peaks in the migration, the first for Trumpeter Swans and the second for Tundra Swans. Very few yearling Trumpeters were present, reflecting poor production and survival of cygnets (young swans) during the previous 10 months. In 1994 the Trumpeters came early and stayed late, overlapping with the Tundra Swan migration. There were abundant yearling Trumpeters, indicating good breeding success and overwinter survival. This is good news for a species which once perched on the brink of extinction.



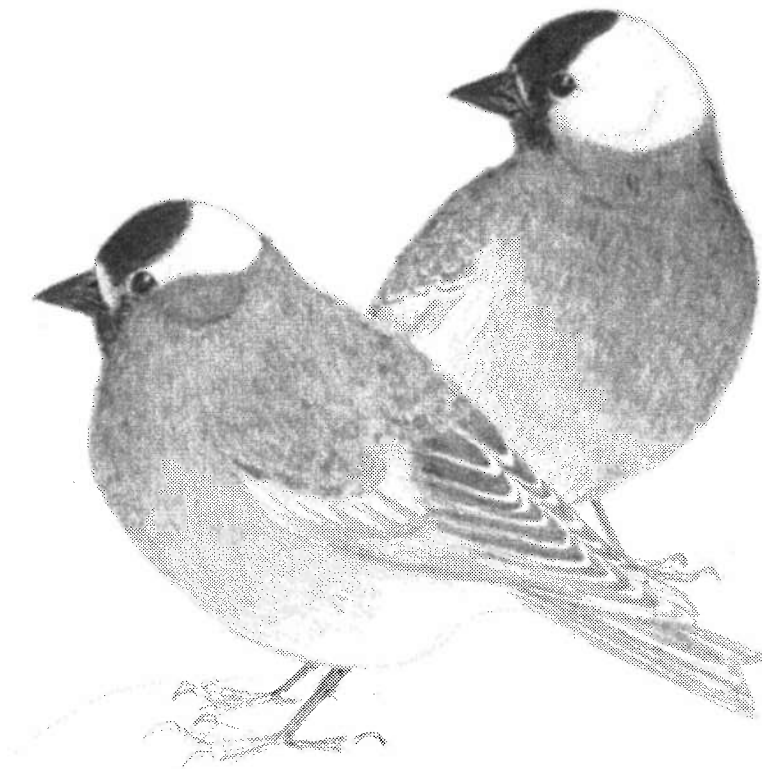
Focus on

The Yukon's Little-known Rosy Finch

by Pam Sinclair

The Rosy Finch occurs throughout most of the Yukon, yet we hardly ever see this species. In the summer, this striking bird breeds near snow patches far above treeline, with White-tailed Ptarmigan and Snow Buntings for company. Rosy Finches are seldom seen during migration in the Yukon, and in winter they disappear except for the odd individual seen at a feeder every few years.

Rosy Finches breed from central Asia, Eastern Siberia, and Japan to Alaska and down through the Rockies to California and New Mexico. Recently, the Rosy Finch was split into several species. It is the Gray-crowned Rosy Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) which breeds in the Yukon, and in the Yukon this



“Gray-crowned” and “Gray-cheeked” Rosy Finches
by Pam Sinclair

new species includes two races which are distinctly different. The *littoralis* subspecies or “Gray-cheeked” Rosy Finch breeds in the coastal mountains, and has an almost entirely grey head. The *tephrocotis* subspecies is truly “Gray-crowned”, and breeds in the Yukon’s interior mountains; its head is mostly rich brown, with a grey crown. I have seen the “Gray-cheeked” race on Montana Mountain near Carcross, and the “Gray-crowned” race at MacMillan Pass in the MacKenzie Mountains. Exactly where in the Yukon these two races meet is unknown.

The Gray-crowned Rosy Finch is a striking bird because its plumage has such unusual colours. In the breeding-plumage male, the body is mostly a solid rich, ruddy brown, and the wings flash bright pink with a ghostly white wing lining in flight. Together with the

handsome black bill and forehead, smooth ashy grey crown and/or face, and pink belly, these colours make for a beautiful bird. The breeding-plumage female is a less boldly marked version, and juveniles are mostly solid brown with buffy feather-edges on the wings.

Birds of America (T.G. Pearson *et al.*, 1917) says of Rosy Finches, “They are optimistic little creatures living the gospel of ‘come storm or sunshine all is well.’ When it is cold and stormy they will seek out some sheltered spot and quietly wait for better weather. With the coming of the sun, out they scatter again, just as happy as ever.” During the nesting season, the hardy Rosy Finch inhabits the high alpine. They build their bulky nests of grass, roots, and feathers in crevices in rocky cliffs, and venture to nearby meadows to gather insects for their young. You won’t see a Rosy Finch with a bill overflowing with bugs, though. The adults develop a special pouch below the floor of the mouth, which they fill with insects.

Continued on page 7

A Jewel of the high alpine ...

A foraging adult will return to the nest with a bulging throat, and “cough up” the delicious snacks for its nestlings.

In southern Canada and the U.S., Rosy Finches nest in the high alpine and head downhill for the winter, and in some areas are often seen at feeders. Not so in the Yukon. We don't know where our Rosy Finches go in the winter, but they likely migrate to southern British Columbia and Alberta. Why don't we see more of them during migration? Several of our alpine species make themselves scarce before and after the breeding season - how often have you seen

Smith's Longspurs or Horned Larks in migration? These species may fly from mountaintop to mountaintop, seldom coming down to prime birdwatcher habitat at low elevations, or they may simply make the long flight out of the Yukon without touching down.

Anyone who sees this mysterious Yukon bird can contribute to our understanding of its movements and habits by making a note of the subspecies (Gray-cheeked or Gray-crowned), as well as the location and date of the sighting, and sending the information to our sightings coordinator.

More Tricky Word Puzzles for Birders

by Jeremy Baumbach

These word puzzles challenge birders to identify various Yukon birds by the following clues. For example: “polar twist” - Arctic Tern.

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Smooth flutist | 11. Big gulp |
| 2. Carrot top | 12. Crazy door |
| 3. Fitness centre fight | 13. Holy humour |
| 4. Extruda - prod | 14. Battle distortion |
| 5. Typical nut | 15. Never having to say you're ... |
| 6. Senior female | 16. Gnat grabber |
| 7. Garden variety pot-shot | 17. Owner of Bic lighter |
| 8. Liberal survey | 18. Resin lollipop |
| 9. Tarp return | 19. Do it on the donkey |
| 10. Cat alarm clock | 20. Loot (a) hotel. |

See page 16 for solutions.



Bald Eagle by Cameron Eckert



Watson Lake a Gateway to Eastern Songbirds!

by Cameron Eckert

For adventure seeking “*Cheechakos*” travelling the Alaska Highway, Watson Lake is the gateway to the magical and mysterious north. However, for Yukon birders a trip east to Watson Lake marks the beginning of a different kind of adventure - a journey into the spectacular world of “*eastern*” songbirds. Much of southeastern Yukon has yet to be explored by birdwatchers and the area holds great potential for discovery. The riparian forests along the Liard River are primarily composed of White Spruce and Balsam Poplar. Further from the river Black Spruce becomes prevalent and continuing to the dryer upland sites Lodgepole Pine and Trembling Aspen are dominant. It is the lowland White Spruce and Balsam Poplar forests edged with deciduous shrubs that are preferred breeding habitat of a remarkable diversity of songbirds.

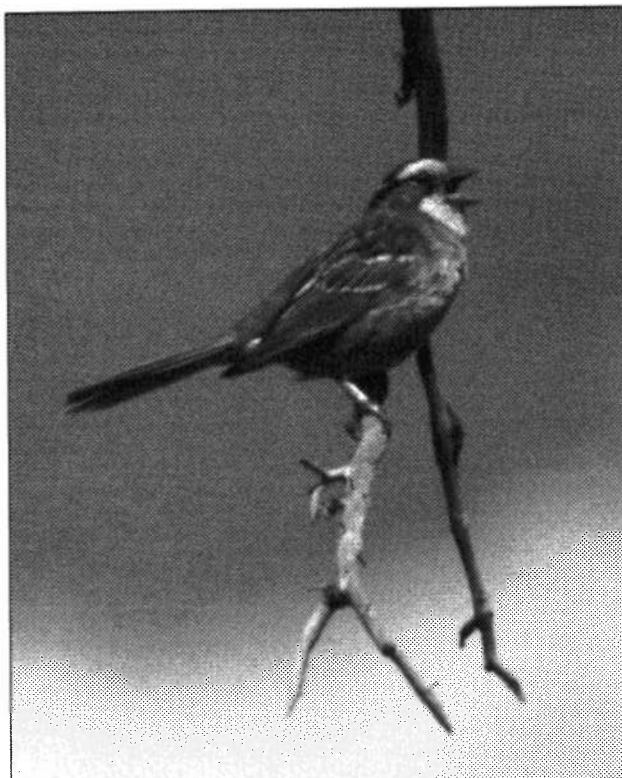
For the past two summers Pam Sinclair and I have explored the Liard River northwest of Watson Lake between Tom Creek and the Meister River. We quickly realized that the bird life along the Liard River is very different from what we were familiar with around Whitehorse. Our wanderings through the dryer shrubs along the river revealed that the White-throated Sparrow was perhaps the most common songbird in that habitat. Its plaintive whistled song “*Oh sweet Canada Canada*” became the signature song of the dry shrubs. On July 19, 1994 we confirmed its breeding status when we observed a very short tailed fledgling White-

throated Sparrow being fed by an adult bird. In the Yukon, the White-throated Sparrow has never been observed west of Teslin!

Another sparrow rarely seen further west in the Yukon, the Swamp Sparrow, was relatively common in the reedy oxbow lakes and sloughs along the Liard River. This lively bird has a distinctive rust crown, white throat and grey breast with a dark spot in the centre. It is reminiscent of an American Tree Sparrow behaving like a Lincoln’s Sparrow. Its song is a liquid trill similar to the Dark-eyed Junco.

The potential for discovering birds never before seen in the territory adds to the excitement of birding along the Liard River. On July 14, 1993 in a mixed forest on the river’s edge we spotted a bold flash of yellow, black, grey and white. Quickly locating the bird we were stunned by the sight of the first Magnolia Warbler ever recorded in the Yukon! The Magnolia Warbler, a male, disappeared into the shrubs collecting insects in its beak and returned to feed its three downy fledglings which were calling from the dense brush. We had thus confirmed the breeding status of a species upon its first discovery in the Yukon! Returning to the Liard River in June of 1994 we found that the Magnolia Warbler was one of the most common warblers in the riparian forest.

The American Redstart is one of our most charismatic warblers. Its French Canadian name, *Fauvette Flamboyant*, conveys the rococo behaviour of this delightful bird. On July 11, 1993 we observed our first pair of Redstarts on the Meister River Delta and within the next four days we found 8 more breeding pairs along the Liard River.



White-throated Sparrow in full song!
June 20, 1994, Liard River, YT, by Cameron Eckert

Continued on page 9

Exploring the Liard River's rich riparian forests ...

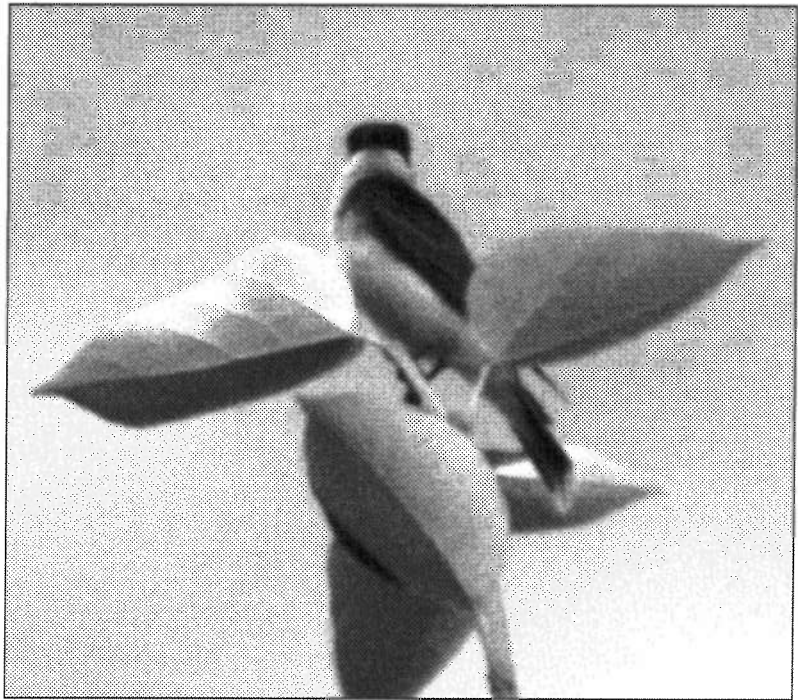
This was another species which had only rarely been seen before in the Yukon. We were beginning to understand the very special nature of the forests along the Liard River. In June, 1994 we found that the American Redstart was the *most common* warbler in the riparian forest edge. The rich riparian forests are the preferred breeding habitat for a variety of warblers and flycatchers. Alder Flycatchers, Yellow, Tennessee and Wilson's Warblers, Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat and Lincoln's Sparrow were common birds of the dense shrubs. The songs of the Least and Hammond's Flycatchers, Warbling Vireo and Swainson's Thrush drew us into the magnificent Balsam Poplar forests. Here, the irregular drumming of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers reverberated through the trees.

The mature White Spruce forests are the foundation of the rich river delta areas. Within these forest are birds only rarely encountered elsewhere during the breeding season. We became very familiar with the thin song of the Golden-crowned Kinglet which rises with 3 or 4 high notes and then drops off in a quiet gurgle. Following light tapping sounds we often observed Three-toed Woodpeckers flaking bark off older trees and snags in search of grubs for their young. Without warning wheeling flocks of White-winged or Red Crossbills would land in the spruce tops - deftly opening cones with their oddly configured bills and removing the seeds. On June 11, 1994 while walking in an old-growth White Spruce forest a sharp chip note caught our attention. We waited quietly on a moss-covered log until the skulking bird popped out of a toppled root base. In front of us perched the first Winter Wren we had ever seen in the Yukon! The bold voice of this little wren is unparalleled - a flowing series of tumbling warbles with soaring musical trills. The song of the Winter Wren drifting through these beautiful forests was truly inspiring.

July 29, 1994 was the final day of our second season on the Liard River. As we packed our camp on the Meister River delta, great dark anvil-shaped storm clouds began building low on the horizon. We kept a watchful eye on the storm and soon realized that this one would not pass us by. The wind swung around to the south and rapidly cooled. Suddenly the storm was upon us - a powerful wall of wind and rain with a lively orchestra of thunder and lightning. We struggled to hold down our cook tent and note the direction that unsecured kitchen utensils were tracking across the beach.

The storm passed quickly. As we collected stray pieces of our camp we were suddenly captivated by a large flycatcher hawking insects from the top of a Balsam Poplar - a

species that we had never seen along the Liard! In a frantic moment we fumbled for our binoculars which we had carefully stashed during the storm. We watched as the black and white bird in buoyant flight settled back on the poplar. Its white breast caught the sunlight in a sharp contrast to its black cap and back. Its long black tail was trimmed with white. *An Eastern Kingbird!* A rare visitor to the Yukon which we had hoped to see during our summer on the Liard River. The Eastern Kingbird's stay on the Meister River Delta was no longer than the storm that brought it there. Within moments it took flight and disappeared beyond the most distant forests. It was a spectacular finalé to a summer of birding in one of the Yukon's great wild spaces.



*Eastern Kingbird, July 29, 1994, Liard River, YT.
Photo by Cameron Eckert*



Christmas Bird Count Report for 1994/95

Whitehorse Count

Compiled by Wendy Nixon

On December 26th, eighteen hardy people braved -23° C weather on Boxing Day to seek whatever feathered creatures could be seen or heard. A total of 22 species and 1653 individuals were observed; Common Ravens were highest at 712, Rock Doves were estimated at 400, and Pine Grosbeaks were the third most common with 180 (71 at feeders). As usual, feeder watchers contributed to the total with observations of two Dark-eyed Juncos and a Red-breasted Nuthatch. The number of species observed by counting teams ranged from zero to twelve. Notables were the first Black-backed Woodpecker and Steller's Jay ever on a Whitehorse count, a high number of American Dippers (7), and a complete lack of crossbills. Special thanks goes out to those participants who saw less than 2 birds for their efforts!

Marsh Lake - Yukon River Count

Compiled by Helmut Grünberg

On December 18th, close to the shortest day of the year, eight observers spent up to five and a half hours walking, driving and swimming (the latter unintentional and without negative consequences - except a lot of teasing) to tally birds. Temperatures were reasonable hovering at about -15° C. A total of 14 species (265 individuals) were encountered which was higher than last year (12 species and 242 individuals). Highlights were a Downy Woodpecker (new to the count), an amazing 11 Ruffed Grouse (10 in one group) and 92 Pine Grosbeaks. A very low count (only 3) of White-winged Crossbills was consistent with a lack of crossbills elsewhere in the Whitehorse area this winter. Participants met at Swan Haven, pre-warmed for the occasion by Julie and Mike, for lunch. It was here we watched the only Red-breasted Nuthatch of the day. Christmas Bird Counts are always a highlight of the season, and participants are usually amazed by how many birds are around in the dead of winter. Thanks to all Christmas Count birders!

A New Kluane Lake Count

Compiled by the Arctic Institute

This year a new count was conducted in the Kluane Lake area. The traditional count which centered near the south end of Kluane Lake was not conducted. Instead a new count centered at the point where Christmas Creek crosses the Alaska Highway was conducted on December 21st. Highlights were a Boreal Owl, higher numbers of White-winged Crossbills than were found in the Whitehorse area, and a Golden-crowned Kinglet.

1994/95 Yukon Christmas Bird Counts			
Species	KL	ML-YR	WH
Common Goldeneye			1
Common Merganser		1	
Bufflehead			2
Spruce Grouse	4		2
Ruffed Grouse	2	11	1
Rock Dove			400
Great Horned Owl			1
Boreal Owl	1		
Downy Woodpecker		1 (1f)	
Hairy Woodpecker		1 (1f)	3 (2f)
Three-toed Woodpecker	12	2	1
Black-backed Woodpecker	1		1
woodpecker sp.		2	
Gray Jay	19	9	15 (4f)
Steller's Jay			1 (1f)
Black-billed Magpie	4	20 (3f)	71
Common Raven	7	47	712
Black-capped Chickadee	8	19 (8f)	60 (20f)
Boreal Chickadee	33	31 (21f)	43 (13f)
chickadee sp.		13 (6f)	
Red-breasted Nuthatch		1 (1f)	1 (1f)
Golden-crowned Kinglet	1		
American Dipper	1		7
Bohemian Waxwing			33
Pine Grosbeak	6	92 (77f)	180 (71f)
White-winged Crossbill		3	
Common Redpoll		12 (12f)	86 (55f)
Hoary Redpoll			3 (3f)
Dark-eyed Junco			2 (2f)
Note: f = the subtotal observed at feeders.			

Little Brown Birds

White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows

by Wendy Nixon

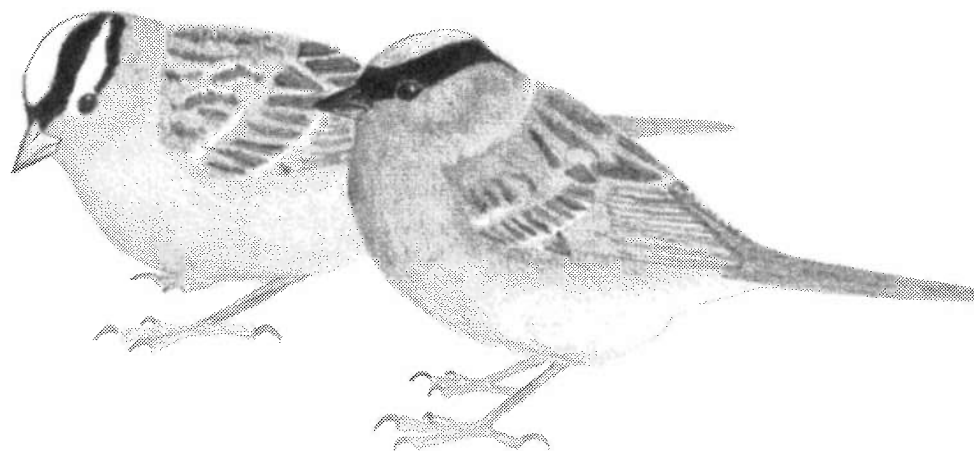
Let's start with what these two little brown birds have in common. Both sparrows have grey breasts with no streaking or spotting, grey on the side of the head as well as the nape, both have white wing bars and backs streaked with brown, and both have brown tails. The striking difference between these two birds is in the head. The adult White-crowned Sparrow has distinct black and white striping on the head starting with a black stripe through the eye, white just above the eye, and a black stripe on either side of a white crown. The adult's bill is pale yellow/orange or pinkish and the throat may be whitish blending into the grey neck. The adult Golden-crowned Sparrow has a thick black stripe above the eye and a bright, broad yellow stripe on the top, turning to grey at the back. The bill is dark but may be pale coloured below.

Who can these two be confused with? The Golden-crowned is pretty unique with its head pattern and colour, so if you get a look at its head you should not have much trouble making a positive identification. The White-crowned Sparrow could be confused with the White-throated Sparrow if you are in southeast Yukon. Watch for the yellow lores (the patch between the bill and the eye) and a distinct white throat

patch on the White-throated Sparrow.

Sorting out the young of these two species is another matter. Young White-crowned Sparrows have less contrast in their head striping - the dark stripes are reddish brown rather than black and the lighter stripes are buffy rather than white. The pale coloured bill is also a feature in young White-crowned Sparrows. The young Golden-crowned Sparrow does not have obvious head stripes. In fact, it is very much a "*little brown bird*". If you get a good look at the forehead you may note some yellow, otherwise the head is flecked overall with brown.

The White-crowned Sparrow is commonly seen and heard in lowland shrubby areas in spring and summer. The song starts with sweet whistles ascending on three notes followed by a buzzy note. The Golden-crowned Sparrow nests in shrubby areas near or beyond treeline, but can be seen in shrubby sites at low elevation on migration. The Golden-crowned has a beautiful voice and is one of those birds who says its name with its song (if you have imagination) - listen for a clear, melancholy, descending whistle, sometimes ending in a weak trill; it sounds like it is saying "*gol-den-crown*".



The subtle beauty of adult White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows
by Pam Sinclair



The Yukon's First Wintering Barrow's Goldeneye

by Cameron Eckert

On February 5, 1995, Helmut Grünberg called me and related his observation of three "orange-billed" female goldeneye associating with a loose flock of Common Goldeneye at the Tagish River. An orange bill on a female goldeneye generally indicates a Barrow's Goldeneye, but there were no previous documented winter records for this species in the Yukon. This would be a first documented winter record!

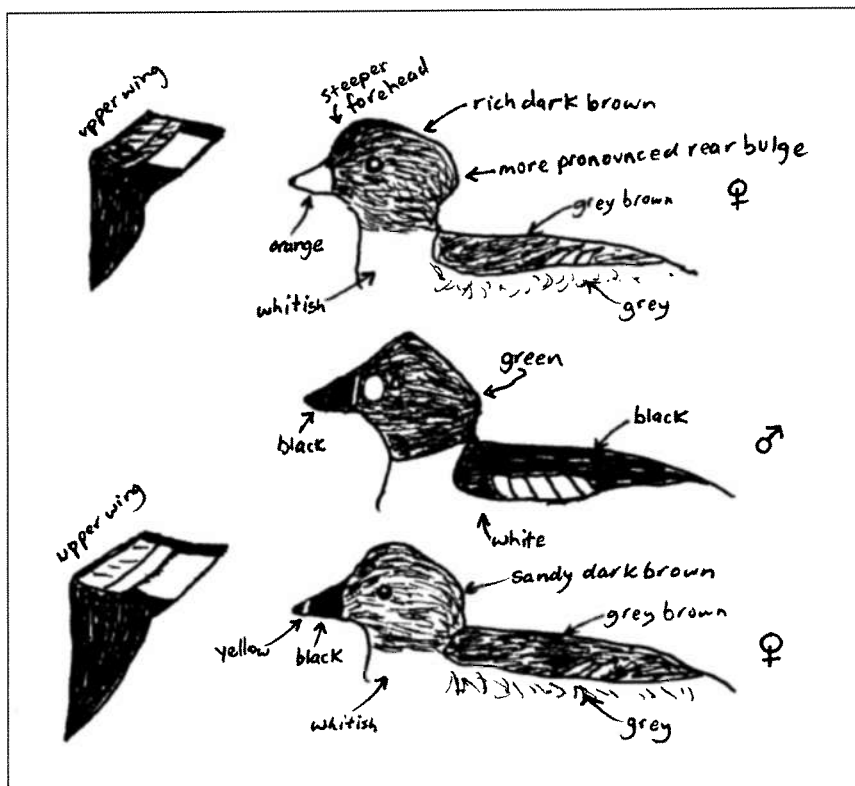
On February 11, 1995, Helmut and I went to the Tagish River to study the birds more closely. We soon found a group of 12 goldeneye including 6 female goldeneye and 6 adult male Common Goldeneye. The males were distinctive with their green head, round white spot in front of the eye, black bill, white breast and sides and black back. Three of the females had black bills with a rather small yellow mark near the tip, and the other three had bright orange bills darkening slightly at the base. We had relocated the "orange-billed" goldeneye!

While the orange bill colour of the three female goldeneye suggested Barrow's Goldeneye, we were interested in the more subtle features which would support this identification. We noted that the orange-billed females had shorter, stubbier bills than the black-billed females. The overall head shape was also

different. The orange-billed females had steeper rounded foreheads, with a flatter top on the head. The black-billed females had a distinct triangular "cone-head" shape similar to the adjacent male Common Goldeneye. The back of the orange-billed females' heads appeared to "puff out" more than the black-billed females. After viewing the birds at different angles and lighting, the head colour of the orange-billed females appeared consistently as a darker richer brown than the black-billed females.

Occasionally a preening bird would stretch its wings. The wing pattern of the orange-billed females was distinctly different from that of the black-billed females. The upperwing of the orange-billed female had a bright white patch in the secondaries but was only dull grey on the upperwing coverts. The black-billed female had the same bright white patch in the secondaries but the upperwing coverts were also white.

Various field guides indicate that the female Barrow's differs from the female Common Goldeneye in having a steeper more rounded forehead, less pointed head profile and a puffier back of the head, darker brown head colour, a shorter stubbier bill, less white in the wing and an orange bill. These characteristics were consistent with our three orange-billed birds. *We had documented the Yukon's first winter record of Barrow's Goldeneye!*



Goldeneye observed at the Tagish River on February 11, 1995.
Female Barrow's Goldeneye (top), male Common Goldeneye
(middle) and female Common Goldeneye (bottom).

Field sketch by Cameron Eckert

Add Your Sightings to the Yukon Bird Club's *FieldNotes*

by *Helmut Grünberg*

The *Yukon Warbler's FieldNotes* column highlights observations made by birders over the past season. As the Yukon Bird Club's sightings coordinator I encourage all birders to report their Yukon sightings to the bird club. We are interested in all sightings - not just "unusual" birds. Hearing from more birders helps us gain a better picture of the activities of the Yukon's bird life - for both the unusual and more common species. For example, the Blue-winged Teal is a regular but not particularly abundant spring migrant. However, if every birder reports 200 this spring then we know that something unusual is happening! Alternatively, it would be unusual if no one reported any Blue-winged Teal. All sightings are valuable and we pass on all our records to the Canadian Wildlife Service for inclusion in the *Birds of Yukon Project*.

Here are some guidelines for reporting observations. Reports may be descriptive, for example: "*The first Bald Eagle of the season, an adult, was observed flying north along the Yukon River on March 10, 1995. (Jane O'bserved and Joe Birder).*" Another way is to provide a very brief account, for example "*adult Bald Eagle, 1, Whitehorse, March 10/95, (J.O'bserved, J.Birder).*" These two different reports both contain the essential details: species, number seen, location, date, observers.

Occasionally we are lucky enough to observe rare species. You may be birding by your favorite beaver pond when you observe a very unusual bird that you have never seen there before! You suspect that it is a Pied-billed Grebe. Try to note as many details as possible about the observation in your note book. Write a good description of the bird. Note any vocalizations or behaviours you observe. This will help you identify the bird when you consult the field guides. As well, your field notes provide excellent documentation for the occurrence of the bird. If you are birding in the Whitehorse area you can use the new "*Checklist of the Birds of Whitehorse*" to confirm that the species is unusual. Finally, I encourage you to call other birders right away when you find a rare or unusual bird. Try calling myself (667-6703) or Cameron Eckert (667-4630).

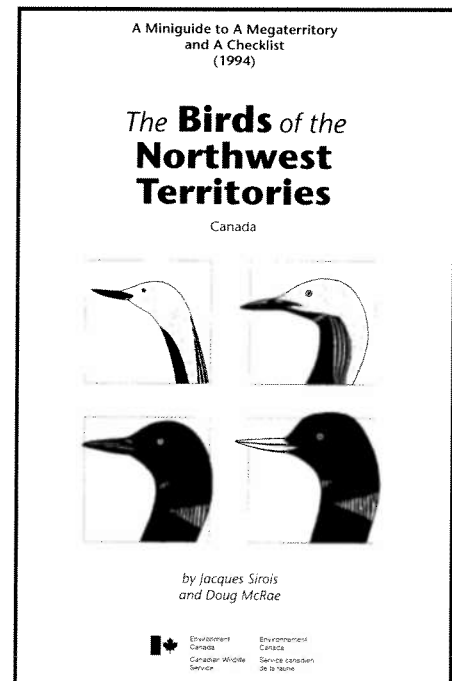
I would like to thank everyone for taking the time to report their sightings. It is an extremely effective way to increase our basic understanding of the Yukon's bird life.

A New Bird Checklist for the Northwest Territories

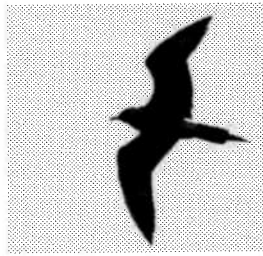
The title of the NWT's new checklist says it all - "*A Miniguide to a Megaterritory*". Authors Jacques Sirois and Doug McRae tackled the formidable task of concisely describing the seasonal and regional occurrence of the 314 species of birds recorded in NWT. The result is a remarkable checklist which is informative, attractive and humorous!

A companion booklet on the birds of Great Slave Lake is similarly titled "*A Miniguide to a Megalake*". This guide lists the 237 species that have been recorded within 50 km of one of Canada's largest lakes (29,000 km²). Some of the area's more unusual occurrences are fascinating - "*A large nest with 26 eggs incubated by two hens at the same time, one Lesser Scaup and one Greater Scaup, was found in the North Arm in 1993.*"

To order either of the Miniguides contact: Ecology North, 4897 49th St., Suite 8, Yellowknife, NT, X1A 3T5



FieldNotes: *Observations from the Field*



Please send your sightings to YBC's sightings coordinator, Helmut Grünberg, (807 Wheeler, Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2P8). This report contains both documented and undocumented sightings. Whenever possible include details such as date, location, number of birds, sex and age, and observers' names. Highlight observations that you think are interesting and include descriptions of rare species. Please send your sightings according to the following seasonal schedule:

Winter:	December 1 - February 28 (report by March 5)
Spring:	March 1 - May 31 (report by June 5)
Summer:	June 1 - July 31 (report by August 5)
Fall:	August 1 - November 30 (report by December 5).

The Winter Season

The winter season in the southern Yukon was relatively mild with a few minor cold spells and little snow. A total of 43 species was recorded including the first documented winter records for three species.

Common Goldeneye were seen regularly at Tagish (CE,HG,PS,YBC), irregularly in Whitehorse (JB,HG) and Johnson's Crossing (HG) and at Kusawa Lake (CE,PS) with a maximum of 39 tallied along the Tagish River on Feb 11 (CE,HG). The first documented winter **Barrow's Goldeneye** sighting was made when three females were carefully studied and described at the Tagish River on Feb 5, 11, 12 (CE,HG,PS). A **Bufflehead**, casual in winter, survived the season on the Yukon River in Whitehorse (JB, m.ob.). Up to four **Common Mergansers** were recorded irregularly on the Yukon River below Lewes Dam (CE,HG,PS,YBC) and in Whitehorse (HG), at Tagish (HG,YBC), Johnson's Crossing (HG,WN,PS) and three were at Kusawa Lake on Jan 29 (CE,PS).

An adult **Bald Eagle** was in Whitehorse on Dec 3 (CE,PS), another was reported from Miles Canyon in early January (KK), and an immature **Bald Eagle** was reported from Teslin (DD). A **Golden Eagle** was seen near Aishihik Lake area in February (DD). **Northern Goshawk** sightings included one at the Ticam River on Dec 19 (GK,LK), an adult at Horse Creek on Jan 14 (HG), an immature bird along the Alaska Highway north of Whitehorse on Jan 29 (CE,PS), an adult along the Takhini River Road on Feb 11 (CE), and one on the south side of Teslin Lake in February (DD). A **Gyr Falcon** was spotted at the Haines Summit, B.C., on Dec 19 (GK,LK), and one was seen on the south side of Teslin Lake in February (DD).

Two **Spruce Grouse** were seen in Whitehorse on Dec 26 (DM) and another was spotted along the Takhini River Road on Jan 7 (CE,PS). A group of 18 **Willow Ptarmigan** was encountered at Fish Lake on Feb 25 (CE,PS). Unidentified **ptarmigan** were seen regularly from the air in the Teslin area (DD). A group of 10 **Ruffed Grouse** was observed along the Alaska Hwy. by Marsh Lake on Dec 18 (GK,LK). Two **Ruffed Grouse** were perched in willow bushes eating buds along the Hotsprings Road on Dec 10 and Jan 27 (CE,PS).

A record count of 401 **Rock Doves** was made in Whitehorse on Dec 17 (HG). Single **Great Horned Owl** were observed near Kluane Lake on Dec 19 (EH), in the Whitehorse area on Dec 26 (DM), in Teslin in December (DD), and at Caribou Lake on Feb 3 (SW). A **Northern Hawk-Owl** which provided the second documented winter record for Swan Lake on Dec 11 was seen again on Dec 15, and two were there on Feb 12 (HG). Single **Northern Hawk-Owls** were seen at the Takhini River Ponds on Dec 15, and at the Blanchard River on Dec 21 (GK,LK). A **Boreal Owl** which started calling on Feb 3 at Caribou Lake was heard several times after that (SW).

Downy Woodpeckers were reported from a variety of locations including a female at a feeder at M'Clintock Bay on Dec 18 (CE,PS), a male at a feeder in Teslin through the winter (LU), and a pair at

FieldNotes: More Observations from the Field ...

another Teslin feeder (DD,ED,JD,PD). **Hairy Woodpeckers** were observed through the winter at most feeders in Whitehorse (m.ob.), Teslin (DD,ED,JD,PD) and Watson Lake (LE). **Three-toed Woodpeckers** were recorded regularly in the southern Yukon. A **Black-backed Woodpecker** reported from Fish Lake on Dec 26 (DM), and another well described individual at Swan Lake on Feb 26 (HG) provided the first Whitehorse area winter record for this species.

Gray Jays were common throughout the season. Reports of two different **Steller's Jays** which arrived during the September invasion, came from observers in Hillcrest and at Lake Laberge (LC,DD,THa). **Black-billed Magpies, Common Ravens, Black-capped and Boreal Chickadees** were commonly observed throughout southern Yukon (m.ob). A pair of **Mountain Chickadees** visited a feeder at Marsh Lake through the winter (RM). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were seen at a Wolf Creek feeder until Dec 20 (WN), at a Pilot Mountain feeder through the winter (LM,RM), at Crestview on Dec 26, and one was at the Swan Haven feeder through the winter (MC,JL,m.ob.). While wintering **American Dippers** can be expected at most flowing open water areas, a count of 13 at Klukshu Village on Dec 21 was likely a record high (GK,LK). Seven **American Dippers** were tallied in Whitehorse on Dec 26 (CBC).

The Yukon's first documented wintering **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were described on Feb 12 - "*saw one Golden-crowned Kinglet and heard another. Saw a yellow crown and a white line above the eye...these birds were recognized by a high-pitched two note call ... this bird was definitely smaller than the chickadees that were present*" (THe). These notes show how a simple description can effectively document an unusual sighting. An **American Robin** stayed at a feeder in Teslin till January (DD,ED,JD,PD). A **Varied Thrush** reported from another Teslin feeder was unusual (CA). **Bohemian Waxwings** were seen in downtown Whitehorse through the winter with a high count of 180 on Jan 8 (HG). **Bohemian Waxwings** were also reported from Teslin (LU), and a flock of 10 **Bohemian Waxwings** was seen along the Takhini River Road on Feb 5 (CE).

A **Northern Shrike** scattered redpolls at a Takhini River Road feeder on Feb 15 and 18 (CE,PS). This winter's only reported **European Starling** visited a Lake Laberge feeder at least through January (THa). The Yukon first documented wintering **Fox Sparrow** was at a Lake Laberge feeder at least into early January (THa) was photographed on Jan 5 (CE). A **White-crowned Sparrow** reported from a Teslin feeder through the winter was unusual (LU). A lone **Dark-eyed Junco** was seen several times at a Whitehorse feeder through the winter (BS,BS), up to three were regular at a Hillcrest feeder (LC), up to five were regular at Teslin feeders (LU,DD,ED,JD,PD), and two were noted in Watson Lake (LE). A flock of 10 **Snow Buntings** was in Teslin through February (DD,LU), and a flock of 15 was near Kluane Lake on Feb 17 (SA).

Pine Grosbeaks were observed in high numbers throughout the season with high counts of 180 in Whitehorse on Dec 26 (CBC), and 92 at Marsh Lake on Dec 18 (CBC). Up to 60 were visiting a Teslin feeder (DD,ED,JD,PD), and up to 60 were at a Watson Lake feeder (LE). Up to three **Red Crossbills** were seen at Riverdale feeders in early December and again from mid-January (AS,DH,SH). One was at a Pilot Mountain feeder on Feb 19 (WN,YBC). **White-winged Crossbills** were extremely rare in the Whitehorse area this winter. A count of 40 **White-winged Crossbills** was made near Kluane Lake on Dec 21 (FD). **Common Redpolls** were common in the Whitehorse area, rare in the Teslin area from mid-February (LU,DD,ED,JD,PD), and absent in Watson Lake (LE). A few **Hoary Redpolls** were observed in most Common Redpoll flocks in the Whitehorse area through the winter (m.ob.). Five, and later four male **Evening Grosbeaks** frequented a Watson Lake feeder through the winter (LE,RF,MG).

Observers: Carolyn Allen, Susan Antpoehler, Jeremy Baumbach, Linda Cameron, Mike Carter, Doug Davidge, Denny Denison, Emily Denison, Jessica Denison, Patty Denison, Cameron Eckert, Lois Everett, Rob Florkiewicz, Mary Gamberg, Helmut Grünberg, Tracie Harris (THa), Todd Heakes (THe), Dave Hobus, Sandy Hobus, Elizabeth Hoefler, Katherine Kennedy, Greg Kubica, Lee Kubica, Julie Lefevbre, Dave Mossop, Richard Mueller, Lawrence Murkett, Robert Murkett, Wendy Nixon, Aron Senkpiel, Pam Sinclair, Barbara Studds, Bob Studds, Len Usher, Stu Withers. **Abbreviations:** CBC = Christmas Bird Count, m.ob. = many observers, YBC= Yukon Bird Club



THE YUKON BIRD CLUB

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The goals of the Yukon Bird Club are to promote awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Yukon birds and their habitats.

The Yukon Bird Club is a registered non-profit group and membership is open to everyone!

Membership fees are as follows:

Individual	\$10.00
Family	\$15.00
Senior/Student	\$5.00
Contributing	\$25.00
Supporting	\$50.00
Institutional	\$20.00

Note: Family memberships cover 2 or more members living at one address. Foreign or American members should pay with a Canadian dollar money order.

YBC will publish ads or notices of interest to its members. Members and non-profit groups may submit *non-commercial ads at no charge*. A reasonable rate is applied to commercial ads.

For more information contact:

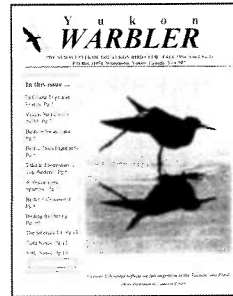
**The Yukon Bird Club, Box 31054, Whitehorse,
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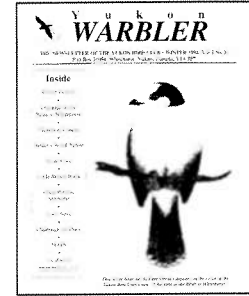
Yukon Warbler Classics!

Back-issues of Yukon Warbler are for sale. Please indicate which issues you would like and send \$2.50 per issue to the Yukon Bird Club. The following issues are still available:

Fall 1994



Winter 1994



Solution to Birder's Word Puzzle

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Sandpiper | 11. Purple Martin |
| 2. Redhead | 12. Nuthatch |
| 3. Sparrow | 13. Godwit |
| 4. Longspur | 14. Warbler |
| 5. Common Loon | 15. Sora |
| 6. Oldsquaw | 16. Flycatcher |
| 7. Common Snipe | 17. Flicker |
| 8. Redpoll | 18. Sapsucker |
| 9. Canvasback | 19. Pintail |
| 10. Kittiwake | 20. Robin |

Thanks Paul!!

Paul Mantle of Keyline Graphic Design kindly scanned many of the graphics for this issue of Yukon Warbler. As well, his layout tips were much appreciated!

Birders are invited to submit articles, stories, or drawings to the newsletter.

**Please send your submissions to:
Cameron Eckert, Site 19, Comp 6, RR#2,
Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 5A5
Phone/Fax: 403-667-4630
e-mail: ceckert@yknet.yk.ca**