

# Y u k o n *WARBLER*



Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club - Winter 1996/97

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Short-eared Owl at Swan Lake - October 19, 1996  
Photo by Helmut Grünberg

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**Winter Events ♦ Wood Sandpiper! ♦ Alaskan Seabirds ♦ Yukon Gullery**

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## Winter Events and Field Trips

**WEEKEND DAY TRIPS:** Dress for the weather, wear appropriate footwear, bring a lunch and binoculars. For more information or to arrange a ride call Stuart Alexander at 633-5193.

**Sunday 19 January. *Tagish Birding Tour - Frigid Edition!*** Helmut Grünberg cuts through the ice fog to show you the Yukon's finest wintering waterfowl. **Dress warmly, bring a lunch, and meet at the S.S. Klondike at 10:00 am.**

**Sunday 9 February. *February Feeder Round-up!*** This trip is a great chance to see Yukon's winter birds in air-conditioned comfort and to get a wealth of tips on setting up your own backyard bird feeders. Highlights last year included Mountain Chickadees, cakes, and hot chocolate. **Dress warmly and meet at the S.S. Klondike at 11:00 am.** Leader: Linda Cameron.

**Saturday 1 March. *Winter Ptarmigan Quest!*** Nothing warms you like the sight of ptarmigan padding gently across the snow on a late-winter's day. This trip takes you on a short and easy-paced jaunt in the Fish Lake area, one of the most accessible places near Whitehorse frequented by ptarmigan. **Bring snowshoes, skis, or high winter boots, a lunch and dress for the weather. Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 10:30 am.** Leader: Cameron Eckert.

### Evening Events at the Whitehorse Public Library

**Thursday 23 January. *Everything you wanted to know about Yukon Frogs ... but were afraid to ask!*** Join Brian Slough for an evening of frog talk and herpetological ponderings - How do frogs survive -40? **Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.**

**Thursday 6 February. *The Mysteries of Migration at Long Point Bird Observatory.*** This slide-illustrated presentation by Greg Kubica will explore many of the migration mysteries encountered at Long Point on Lake Erie - one of North America's premier bird observatories. **Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.**

**Thursday 20 February. *The remarkable recovery of Peregrine Falcons in the Yukon.*** Yukon's falcon expert, Dave Mossop will highlight the Peregrine Falcon's return from the edge of extinction. **Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.**

**Thursday 27 February. *Spring Projects Meeting:*** This meeting will plan and organize YBC spring projects. Please call Pam Sinclair (667-4630) to put your project ideas on the agenda. All members are welcome! **Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.**

**Tuesday 4 March. *Birding adventures on the Arctic Coast.*** Journey with Cameron Eckert to the Yukon's Arctic Coast - a striking and remote natural area which is home to a unique Arctic community of birds and wildlife. **Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.**

**Thursday 20 March. *New members welcome: Birdwatching in the Whitehorse Area.*** Lee Kubica will take us on an illustrated tour of Whitehorse's best birding hotspots. This special event will introduce new members to the Yukon Bird Club and provide a great chance to meet other Yukon birders. All are welcome! **Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.**

**Monday 7 April. *Identification Workshop I - A Bird in the Hand!*** One of last year's most talked about events is happening again! Pam Sinclair will help us learn about bird identification using study skins. **Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.**

**Wednesday 23 April. *Identification Workshop II - From Gizz to Gee Whizz!*** Just in time for spring - Cameron Eckert's very popular workshop will help us get ready for a new season of identification challenges. **Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.**

## YBC News and Notes

### Report on the 1996 AGM

YBC's 1996 Annual General Meeting on October 16 highlighted a very exciting year. Pam Sinclair chaired the meeting and in her president's report noted YBC's efforts to protect the McIntyre Creek Wetlands. Pam also introduced YBC's new Breeding Bird Database project.

Jeremy Baumbach's treasurer's report indicated that the club's finances are healthy. Field Trip coordinator, Stuart Alexander described a very successful year with 25 field trips - exciting new trips were run and participation was excellent with people coming from as far as California to enjoy an outing. Stuart would very much appreciate hearing from anyone interested in leading trips this year. Helmut Grünberg has done a tireless job as Sightings Coordinator and the results of his efforts always make for interesting reading in the *Yukon Warbler*. Helmut encourages all members to record their observations and send them in for the sightings report. Lee Kubica reported on YBC's Checklist Committee - a new Yukon checklist will hopefully be ready for spring. Participants at the meeting voted in favour of providing funds for both a Yukon Checklist and an updated Whitehorse Checklist. Dennis Kuch noted the success of YBC on the McIntyre Wetlands issue and reported that the City of Whitehorse is now undertaking a terrain analysis and wetland assessment. Dennis attended the grand opening of the new Whitehorse Sewage Lagoon.

Greg Kubica ran the election of the new 1996/97 Board of Directors. All Board members were re-elected to their current positions as noted on page 24 of this newsletter. Youth Coordinator and Birdathon Coordinator are open and any members interested in assuming these positions should call Pam Sinclair (667-4630). Finally, Quiz-Master, Cameron Eckert tested participants with the annual YBC trivia quiz. In the end it was Stuart Alexander who knew the most answers to such questions as "where is no-point goat point?" and "how many tail feathers does a Black Tern have?" Thanks to all participants who took the time to attend the AGM and provide direction to the Yukon Bird Club.

### Thanks René!

For the past two years René Carlson has done a superb job as coordinator of the Yukon Birdathon. Participation and funds raised are at an all time high and the post-Birdathon Bar-B-Que has continued as one of the highlights of spring for the Yukon's birding community. René's dedication has helped ensure the future success of this important event which support of conservation education in the Yukon. *Thanks René!*



### Call for Field Trip Leaders



Got a favourite birding haunt you would like to share with others? Interested in raising awareness about birds and other wildlife in your neck of the

woods? Think about leading a trip for the Yukon Bird Club. We are especially in need of leaders for trips outside the Whitehorse area and would like to encourage members in other communities to consider leading a trip. Trips are very informal and leaders require little more than a few hours and an interest in birds.

For more details or to lead a trip, contact:  
Stuart Alexander (633-5193)  
14 Oak Street, Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 4B1  
Email: [stuarta@yknet.yk.ca](mailto:stuarta@yknet.yk.ca)



**All are invited to attend a special public lecture ...**

**Understanding Wildlife-Habitat Relationships: Habitat Selection of the Brewer's Sparrow**

**Friday 24 January 1997 at 3:00 pm.**

**#10 Burns Road - Renewable Resources Wildlife Management Meeting Room**



## Fall field trip highlights

by **Stuart Alexander**

**Fall migration at Swan Lake.** Raptors are often the highlight of the fall excursion to Swan Lake and this year's trip on September 15 was no exception. More than 14 raptors were identified to species, including a male Northern Harrier, a male Sharp-shinned Hawk, an immature Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk, two Rough-legged Hawks, and more than nine American Kestrels. In Swan Lake itself, there were five species of waterfowl, including two Horned Grebes, approximately 40 Green-winged Teal, several scaup, a female-type Surf Scoter, and a female Bufflehead. The remaining 10 or so species were passerines, including common species like Black-capped Chickadees, Dark-eyed Juncos, and Yellow-rumped Warblers, although all in surprisingly low numbers (i.e., less than four birds each). The exceptions were Rusty Blackbirds (approximately 40) and Common Ravens (11). Helmut Grünberg notes in his book *The Birds of Swan Lake, Yukon* that Rusty Blackbirds are normally common and abundant at Swan Lake in fall. Other passerine treats included five Varied Thrushes (a high fall count for the Swan Lake area) and two Red Crossbills.



**Haines Junction woodpecker rendezvous.** The October 5 trip out of Haines Junction had 10 participants led by Todd Heakes. En route to the Jarvis River, the group spotted two Rough-legged Hawks and a Northern Hawk-Owl. At the Jarvis were six Mallards, three Gray Jays, a Black-billed Magpie, a Rusty Blackbird, and a Muskrat. The next stop took them to km 1686 on the Alaska Highway, where they walked for about two hours through one of the Arctic Institute of North America's old hare research grids. The species list included two Golden Eagles, a Northern Harrier, one Ruffed Grouse, four Three-toed Woodpeckers, two Gray Jays, a Common Raven, eight Boreal Chickadees, an American Pipit, six American Tree Sparrows, and a Dark-eyed Junco. On the way back to town, Dennis, one of the participants, almost ran over a male Spruce Grouse. At Pine Lake the group was treated to a flight of about 100 Tundra Swans overhead. On the water were eight Mallards, seven Horned Grebes, four Common Goldeneye, 12 or so Bufflehead, 20 Oldsquaw, and a few American Wigeon and White-winged Scoters. Also at the lake were two Rusty Blackbirds and a Common Raven.

**Fall birding in Haines, Alaska.** The October 13 trip in Haines Alaska led by Pam Sinclair turned up an abundance of birds despite wet weather. The group explored the rich coastal habitats around Haines and observed 40 species. Of course, the emphasis was "*Coastal specialties*" and on that theme we had views of 3 Pelagic Cormorants, 2 Marbled Murrelets, 6 Common Murres, 250 Glaucous-winged Gulls and 4 adult Black-legged Kittiwakes. Other waterbirds included 4 Pacific and 2 Common Loons, 6 Horned Grebes, a Great Blue Heron, approximately 250 Bonaparte's and 250 Mew Gulls and a lone Herring Gull. Waterfowl were abundant and the group studied various plumages among the 200 Barrow's and one Common Goldeneye, 200 Surf and 20 White-winged Scoters, 9 Green-winged Teal, 60 Mallards, 4 American Wigeon, 20 Bufflehead, 20 Greater Scaup, 8 Red-breasted Mergansers and one Harlequin Duck. A walk around Haines turned up 10 Chestnut-backed Chickadees, 2 Winter Wrens, 2 Song Sparrows, 2 American Tree Sparrows, 6 Dark-eyed Juncos, 12 Steller's Jays, 20 Northwestern Crows, 30 Varied Thrushes, 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches and 6 Golden-crowned Kinglets. Particularly pleasing was the very cooperative views provided by single late lingering Wilson's and Orange-crowned Warblers. The winter build up of Bald Eagles along the Chilkat River was well underway and one scan late in the day turned up 400 eagles. It was very fine birding and well worth the trip!

**Yellow-billed and other loons in October.** The October 20 loon outing attracted 10 birders eager to view the Yukon's rarest loon species - the Yellow-billed Loon. The group did not have long to wait for a chance to study their first loon, a winter plumage Pacific Loon on the Yukon River at the SS.Klondike. An American Pipit foraging among the grasses under the great river boat was also a subtle delight. At Schwatka Lake, a Common Loon on the far side of the lake but provided a mediocre view. Then, while part of the group was occupied with a Horned Grebe, a spectacular winter plumage Yellow-billed Loon surfaced just a few meters from the lake's edge. It was a moment of great excitement as all participants shared excellent views of the obliging loon. Thus had three of the Yukon's four loon species been tallied

**Totals for all species seen during the Yukon Bird Club's October 20, 1996 Loon trip.**

SPECIES	S.S. Klondike	Schwatka Lake	Lewes Marsh	M'Clintock Bay	Army Beach	TOTAL
Pacific Loon	1					1
Common Loon		1				1
Yellow-billed Loon		1			1	2
Horned Grebe		1				1
Red-necked Grebe		1				1
Tundra Swan				4		4
Trumpeter Swan				1		1
Mallard	2					2
Greater Scaup		3	3			6
Lesser Scaup			8			8
White-winged Scoter			1			1
Common Goldeneye		1	20			21
Bufflehead	1	30	40	200	2	273
Red-breasted Merganser	5	4		1		10
Bald Eagle					2	2
Northern Goshawk					1	1
Golden Eagle					172	172
Ruffed Grouse		1				1
Rock Dove	2					2
Three-toed Woodpecker		1				1
Gray Jay					1	1
Black-billed Magpie			1			1
Common Raven	1				30	31
Black-capped Chickadee				6		6
Boreal Chickadee				3		3
American Pipit	1					1
Ruby-crowned Kinglet					1	1
American Tree Sparrow				1		1
Fox Sparrow				1		1
Dark-eyed Junco		1		6	3	10
Snow Bunting	20					20
Rusty Blackbird	4				1	5
Common Redpoll	20					20
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>612</b>

within the first hour. Ultimately, the Red-throated Loon would prove to be elusive. Relatively high numbers of Bufflehead were observed at each stop on the loon trip. Other waterfowl observed at Lewes Marsh included eight Lesser and three Greater Scaup, and a lone White-winged Scoter. A variety of small passerines including an American Tree Sparrow, a Fox Sparrow, and six Dark-eyed Juncos visited the feeder at Swan Haven. The group also heard a single Trumpeter Swan and saw four Tundra Swans. While the excitement of seeing a Yellow-billed Loon was a highlight for all, the participants who lingered at the last stop, Army Beach on Marsh Lake, were treated to a most astonishing natural spectacle - an unparalleled southward movement of Golden Eagles (see Table). While the species total at the end of the day was quite respectable at 33, the word is already out that next year's trip will include 4 species of loon.

**The Fourth Annual November Feeder-Hopping Extravaganza!** More than 128 birds were tallied on this year's November 23 feeder hop, and all this despite the -28°C. The first stop was at the Sinclair-Eckert Seed and Feed Emporium in Porter Creek where participants witnessed the unveiling of the awesome *Pagoda Aves*, a bird feeder of extraordinary dimension and beauty. It must have been the dazzle, however, that made the group miss the usual mid-morning feeding bout by Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, although they didn't miss the Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees, Pine Grosbeaks, Common Ravens, and Black-billed Magpie. At MacPherson Subdivision the highlight was a couple of Ruffed Grouse, although one of them was unfortunately more like a roughed grouse, apparently not faring the winter too well. At Horse Creek a flock of 17 Pine Grosbeaks took the prize for the largest congregation of one species. Burma Road brought out the day's only Gray Jays, and not just one but four.

continued page 6...





**Last stop on the feeder hop ...**

The finalé at Pilot Mountain Subdivision included not only the highest count (37 birds) but also two new species, Hoary Redpolls (3) and Red Crossbills (7). Nine redpolls defied classification while one was the hoariest of Hoarys. All together throughout the trip, there were 10 species, the most common of which were Pine Grosbeaks (45 birds at 5 locations), Common Redpolls (27 or so at 4 locations), and Black-capped Chickadees (22 at 5 locations). Boreal Chickadees were seen at three locations but only in small numbers (6 total). A special thanks to Linda Cameron for organizing and leading the trip and to Cameron Eckert, Pam Sinclair, Nigel Sinclair-Eckert, Dennis Kuch, Dave Neufeld, Joy Waters, Katie Ostrom, Bev Coombs, Bob Murkett, and Liz and Lauren Bradley for their generous hospitality.

## Yukon Discoveries Crossword

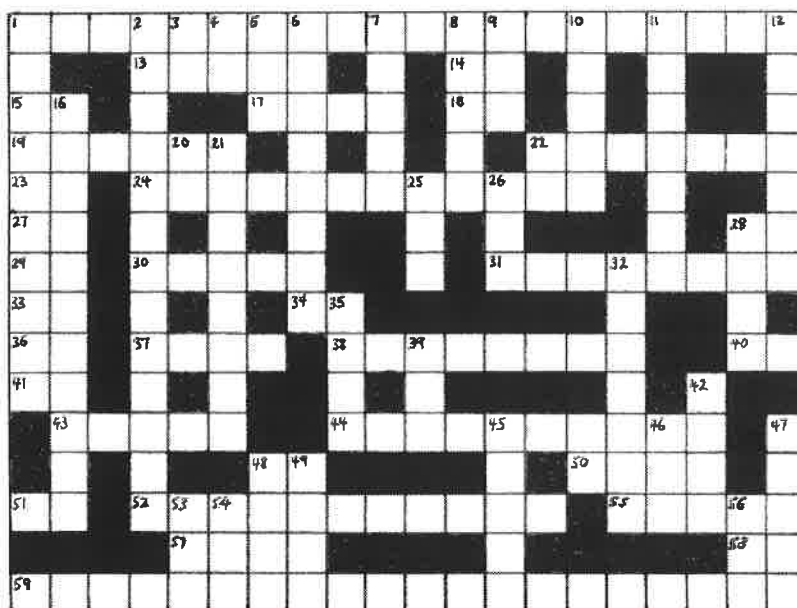
by **Jeremy Baumbach**

### Across

1. A 1996 s. Yukon first at Judas Creek (5-6,9).
13. The consummate down (5).
14. Toddler vocabulary (2).
15. Next in the sequence is "c" (2).
17. Gray Jay's tail (4).
18. Canada's industrial heartland (2, abbr.).
19. La Biche River warbler species (6).
22. Relative of 11 Down, at Hidden Lake, summer 1995 (7).
23. Bluegrass State (2, abbr.).
24. La Biche River species of 6 Down (4-8).
27. Disease on the increase (2, abbr.).
28. Bleeder status in winter (2).
29. Adjective suffix indicating "move" (2).
30. Polynesian greeting (5).
31. Another La Biche warbler species (8).
33. Concerning (2, abbr.).
34. Beginning school level (2, abbr.).
36. Alternative to "yes" or "no" (2, abbr.).
37. Gradually become smaller (4).
38. Another La Biche discovery (8).
40. Winter home of 19 Across, for one (2, abbr.).
41. Older mode of transportation (2, abbr.).
43. Shades of colour (5).
44. Summer 1995 Whitehorse feeder discovery (5,5).
48. Family doctor (2, abbr.).
50. Secretive marsh bird (4).
51. Basic (and base) drives (2).
52. 1994-95 Whitehorse winter visitor (8,3).
55. Kinds (5).
57. Field trip sustenance (4).
58. Direction to La Biche R. from Whitehorse (2, abbr.).
59. A La Biche R. treasure (5-3-5,7).

### Down

1. 1996 Blind Lake discovery (5,5).
2. 1995 summer invaders (5,8).
3. Probably some bird of prey's call (2).
4. Educational disadvantage (2, abbr.).
5. Serpent-like creature (3).



6. Large finch (8).
7. US symbol (5).
8. Stomach response to tension (5).
9. Verb suffix indicating "the act of" (3).
10. Do this lightly in fragile habitat (5).
11. 1996 Birdathon's kingbird species (7).
12. 1995-96 winter visitor, species of 6 Down (7).
16. Another La Biche warbler (3-8).
20. First musical symbol (2).
21. Effect of discovery on birder (8).
22. Perseveration of the 5<sup>th</sup> letter (2).
25. Southern US cuckoo relative (3).
26. Male turkey (3).
28. Responsibility (4).
32. A 1995 southern Yukon first at Judas Creek (3,4).
35. Classy (4).
39. Now raised in Canada for its meat (3).
42. Winter birding lip effect (4).
45. Rub out (5).
46. Call (3).
47. Surgery technique to improve birders' eyes (5).
48. Small valley (4).
49. 10 Down when tired (or in hipwaders) (4).
53. Alaskan community (3).
54. Period in history (3).
56. Between east and southeast (3, abbr.).

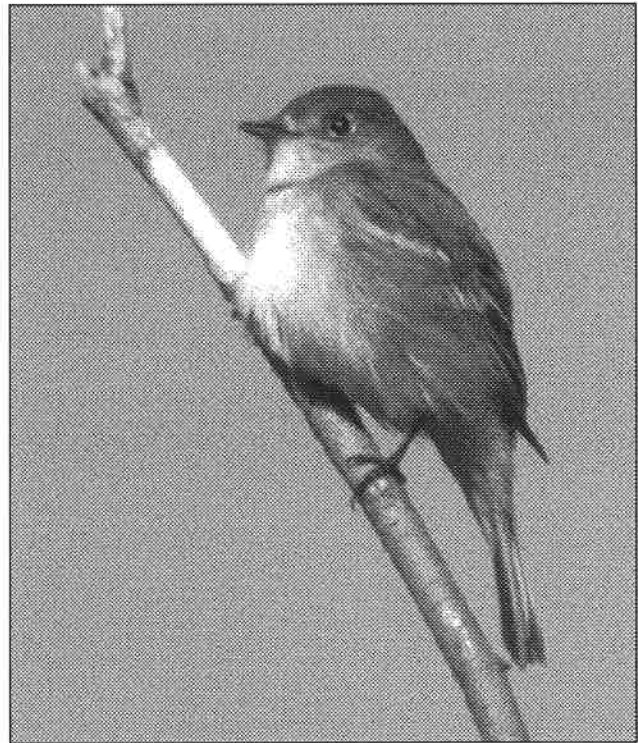
## Identifying birds by their behaviour: What was it doing when I saw it?

by *Jeremy Baumbach*

For both novice and experienced birder, consideration of a bird's behaviour can do much to assist in its identification. Like silhouette, behaviour can generally be observed in poor light conditions and without binoculars, and in that sense it provides more robust clues than, for instance, plumage characteristics (especially in fall/winter or immature birds!). Birds are most often observed either perching, flying or searching for food. Different families of birds (e.g., woodpecker, nuthatches) have characteristic mannerisms or ways of performing these activities and indeed, sometimes a particular bird can be identified by its behavioural characteristics alone: Nothing but a nuthatch walks down a tree headfirst!

The way a bird holds itself or moves when perching, flying or on the ground (even that it is on the ground) can be very revealing. For example, flycatchers sit very straight with their tails hanging down, and some tend to flick or pump their tails repeatedly. Other birds of roughly the same size perch quite differently. Similarly, even if you are not close enough to be confident about size or wing and tail shapes, flying style will differentiate large gulls (powerful, deliberate) from smaller gulls and terns (buoyant). Whether a bird hops (e.g., sparrows) or walks (e.g., pipits) on the ground can also be a useful clue. Other specific behavioural quirks, such as the Spotted Sandpiper's constant bobbing of its rear end or the way some birds (e.g., coots, doves, or blackbirds) pump their heads forward as they move, can be very helpful when viewing birds from a distance.

Birds' behaviours as they search for food can often be diagnostic. For instance, identification of shorebirds can be made easier (relatively speaking!) by paying careful attention to the bird's feeding behaviour. Yellowlegs stride through



An Alder Flycatcher sits and waits. Photo by Cameron Eckert

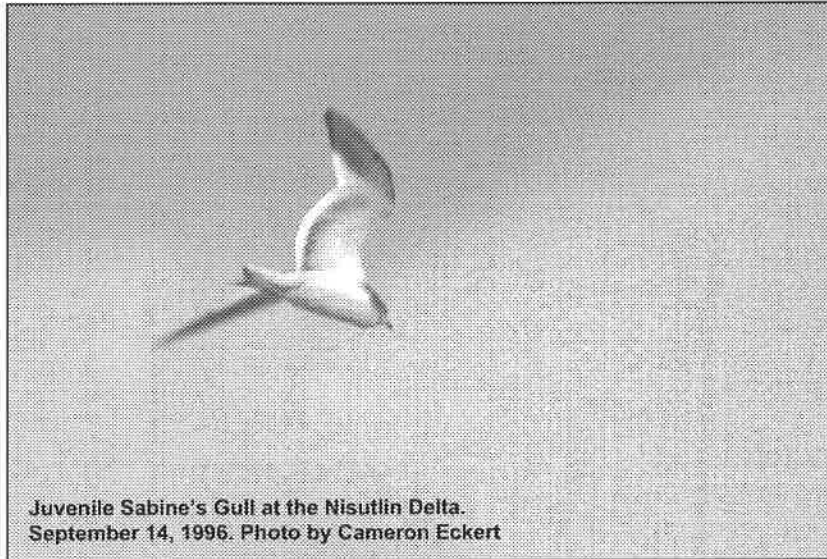
shallow water, changing direction frequently and making little dashes to stir up insects. Dowitchers use their long bills like sewing machine needles, moving them rapidly up and down in shallow water. Plovers run along the edge of the water, and then pause, and then run on. Phalaropes twirl around like tops on the surface of the water to stir up tiny edible morsels. Feeding behaviour also gives clues to the bird's diet and in that way may help in identification (e.g., seed-eater versus insect-eater).

Combining your own careful observations of behaviour with the field guide's behavioural notes will help you to build a "picture" of each species' way of being, enhancing your identification efforts and your pleasure. In time, different species' behaviour will become as typical and defining of them as are the various behavioural quirks and mannerisms of the people in our lives.

### References

- Lentz, J.E. and J.Young. 1985. Birdwatching: A guide for beginners. Capra Press, Santa Barbara.  
Robbins, C.S., Bruun, B., and H.S. Zimmer. 1983. A Guide to Field Identification: Birds of North America. Golden Press, N.Y.





Juvenile Sabine's Gull at the Nisutlin Delta.  
September 14, 1996. Photo by Cameron Eckert

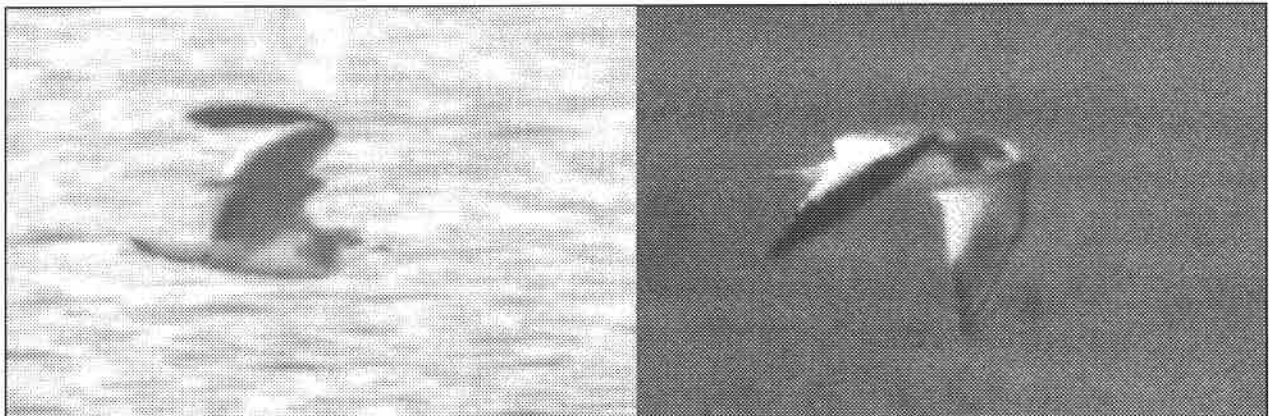
**Sabine's Gull:  
a southern Yukon first at Nisutlin Delta**  
*by Cameron Eckert*

The Nisutlin Delta near Teslin is one of southern Yukon's richest wetlands and offers a variety of rich habitats which attract many thousands of shorebirds and waterfowl during migration. In September, Helmut Grünberg, Pam Sinclair and I made four trips to the Delta and on each trip we were startled by the numbers and variety of birds, especially considering how quiet fall migration had been in the Whitehorse area - just 150 km to the northwest.

On September 14, Helmut and I were scanning the Delta's expansive mudflats when I spotted a small whitish gull with bold black primaries in buoyant

flight at the distant edge of the mudflats. Despite the great distance I recognized the very distinctive wing pattern to be that of a Sabine's Gull. However, moments later the bird settled on the water and was lost among the many thousands of ducks. We continued to scan the area in the hopes that the bird would reappear. Our patience was soon rewarded as the small gull suddenly appeared just a few hundred meters away and flew directly towards us. I scrambled for the camera and had only taken a few photos when the true wonder of the Nisutlin Delta revealed itself to us - we watched in awe as two light phase Parasitic Jaegers seemed to materialize from nowhere to pursue the Sabine's Gull in a spectacular acrobatic chase - having only just evaded the two jaegers the small gull then had to dodge a swipe by a passing Merlin!

While Sabine's Gull has been reported from the Yukon's North Coast as a rare migrant and very rare breeder, there have been no published observations of this species elsewhere in the Yukon. It seemed ironic that having recently returned from a trip to Herschel Island where I spent many hours watching (without success) for this unique gull species, I would find one so close to home.

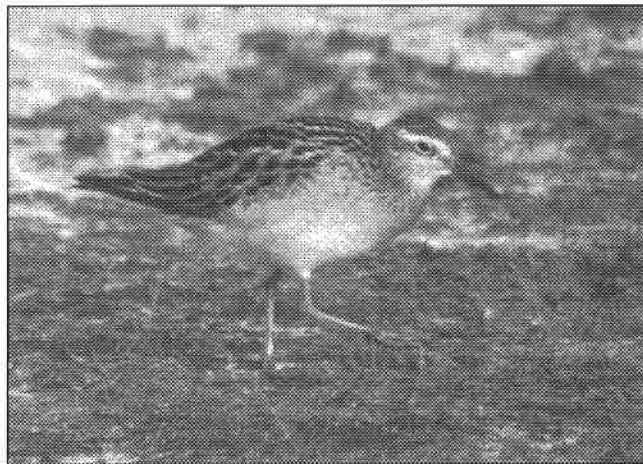


Juvenile Sabine's Gull showing its bold wing pattern. September 14, 1996 - Nisutlin Delta. Photos by Cameron Eckert.



## Fall migration at Nisutlin Delta

While the Sabine's Gull was a wonderful thrill, it was the abundance of birds and spectacular scenery that inspired our return trips through September. Among the 50 species we observed, I was most impressed by the variety of shorebirds. In contrast to the Whitehorse area's lackluster fall shorebird migration, we had many opportunities to study the subtle beauty of fall shorebirds at the Nisutlin Delta. Our tally of 12 shorebird species included unusual species such as Sanderling and Western Sandpiper and relatively high numbers of Black-bellied Plovers and Pectoral Sandpipers. The rich buffy tones of two juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, one of the Yukon's rarest shorebirds, were relatively easy to spot among a flock of 250 Pectoral Sandpipers on September 21.



Immature Sharp-tailed Sandpiper a rare find at Nisutlin Delta - September 21, 1996. Photo by Cameron Eckert

For these migrant waterbirds the benefits of the Delta's rich habitats were clearly worth the omnipresent risk of becoming a prey item for a hungry raptor. On September 21, three Peregrine Falcons were on the Delta and in a most dramatic moment we watched as one Peregrine suddenly left its perch and generated unbelievable speed as it accelerated over the Delta to grab a Mallard out of the air. As the falcon struck the duck, the size difference between the two seemed insignificant and the Peregrine's descent with its prey looked like an out-of-control free fall.

The extraordinary value of the Nisutlin Delta to migrant birds was recently recognized when it was declared a National Wildlife Area. While sport hunting is still permitted, the area will benefit from protection against human activities which would threaten the Delta's diverse habitats.

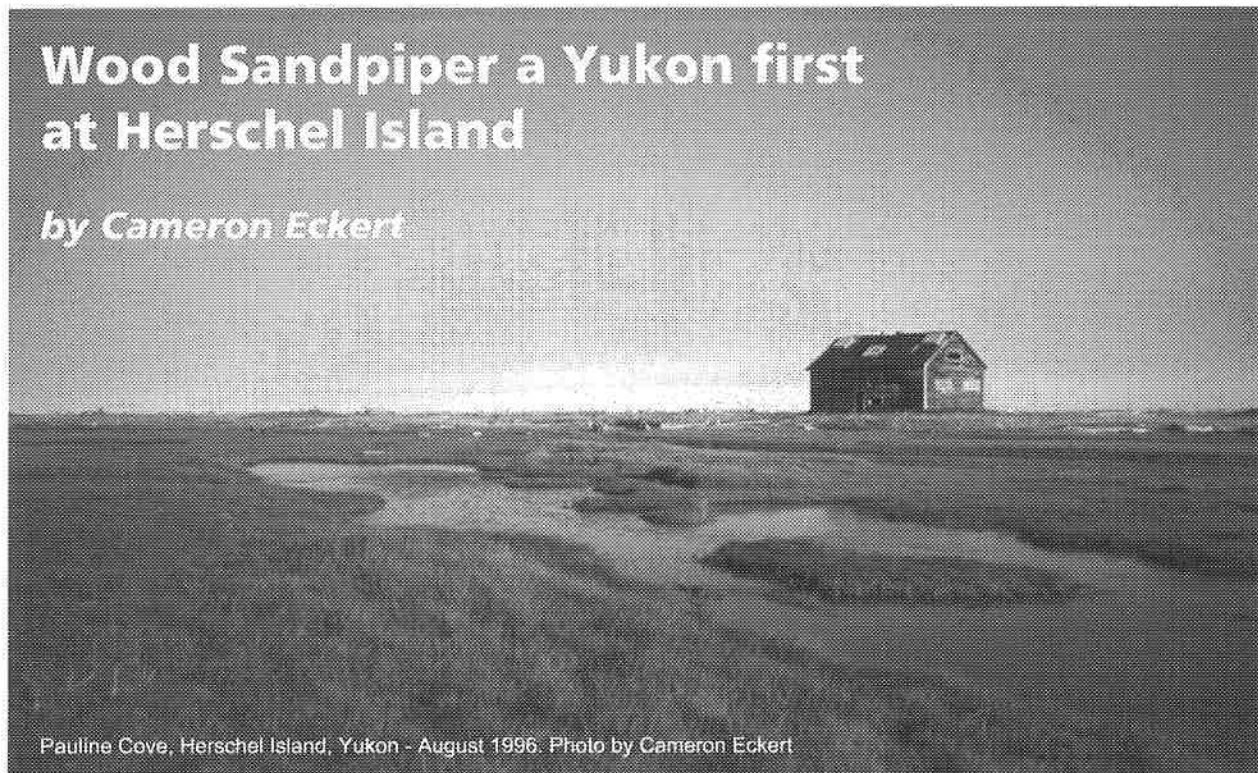
### Daily totals for all species observed on four outings to the Nisutlin River Delta, Yukon in September, 1996.

SPECIES	September			
	14	15	21	28
Common Loon	11	4	1	3
Red-necked Grebe	2			
Tundra Swan	11	some	most	most
Trumpeter Swan	some	some	some	11
swan sp.	15	20	175	750
Total for all swans	26	20	175	761
Gr. White-fronted Goose	15			
Canada Goose	700	500	400	70
Green-winged Teal	500	1700	1000	N/A
Mallard	500	1700	1000	500
Northern Pintail				1
Northern Shoveler	10			1
American Wigeon	50	1700	1000	1000
Barrow's Goldeneye		14		
goldeneye sp.			3	2
Bufflehead	10			20
Common Merganser	10	4		6
Bald Eagle	2	1	1	9
Northern Harrier	6	1	3	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk		1		
Merlin	2			1
Peregrine Falcon		1	3	
Spruce Grouse			1	
Ruffed Grouse	1			
Black-bellied Plover	17	14	14	11
American Golden-Plover	1	1	6	
Semipalmated Plover	2			
Lesser Yellowlegs	1			
Sanderling	1	3		
Semipalmated Sandpiper	1			
Western Sandpiper		1		
Baird's Sandpiper	5	3		
Pectoral Sandpiper	150	70	250	230
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper			2	
Long-billed Dowitcher	45	3		56
Common Snipe			2	
Parasitic Jaeger	2			
Herring Gull	14	14	15	12
Thayer's Gull	1	2	2	
Sabine's Gull	1	1		
Belted Kingfisher	1			
Black-billed Magpie	6		2	
Common Raven	12	1	1	4
Black-capped Chickadee	2	4		3
Boreal Chickadee	12	2	7	6
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	15		1	1
American Pipit	2	1	30	6
Yellow-rumped Warbler	10	1		
Savannah Sparrow	6		6	
Dark-eyed Junco	25	6	1	
Lapland Longspur	75	10	30	1
Rusty Blackbird	1		5	40
Redpoll sp.			1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2253</b>	<b>5783</b>	<b>3962</b>	<b>2745</b>



## Wood Sandpiper a Yukon first at Herschel Island

by Cameron Eckert



Pauline Cove, Herschel Island, Yukon - August 1996. Photo by Cameron Eckert

**H**erschel Island lies just off the Yukon's Arctic Coast and is known to the local Inuvialuit as Qikiqtaruk <kee keek ta ruk> which means "it is island". The island was given its English name on July 17, 1826 by Sir John Franklin in honour of British chemist and astronomer, Sir John Herschel. In 1890, the island hosted up to 1500 whalers who had come to the Beaufort Sea in search of Bowhead Whales which had been hunted to near extinction in waters further south. The whalers were followed by Anglican missionaries in 1893 and the Northwest Mounted Police in 1903. By 1907, the whaling era was over and the non-native population dwindled. The R.C.M.P continued to breed sled dogs on the Island until 1964 when they permanently closed the post. Today, Inuvialuit continue to hunt and fish at Qikiqtaruk, now a Yukon Territorial Park, and visitors from all parts of the world travel to the island to experience its very special natural character.

On August 5 1996, Pam Sinclair, Linda Cameron, Helmut Grünberg and I flew from Inuvik, Northwest Territories to spend eleven days on Herschel Island observing the fall passage of birds. Our camp was located at Pauline Cove on the southeast side of the island - the site of the old whaling settlement and the current park station. In fall, most of the westward movement of birds passes through Workboat Passage between Herschel Island and the mainland which is about 10 km southwest of Pauline Cove. As such we did not expect to observe large numbers of fall migrants at Pauline Cove but felt that the location's diverse habitats and position at the outer edge of the Yukon coast would make for interesting birding. This proved to be the case.

During our eleven days on Herschel Island we observed 49 species with a daily average of 25 species (see Table on page 13). Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs and a family group of 10 Rock Ptarmigan foraged among the huge driftwood logs, brought north on the MacKenzie River from southern forests, which defined the high water line on Pauline Cove's rocky beaches. On August 8 the distinctive high call of a single Yellow Wagtail captured our attention. While Yellow Wagtails are a fairly common breeder along the Yukon's mainland coast, this was only the second fall observation. From our camp we scanned the Arctic waters of the Beaufort Sea where small flocks Arctic Terns, Red-necked Phalaropes and the occasional Red Phalarope moved northwest past Pauline Cove. A few Parasitic Jaegers could generally be seen foraging offshore and on August 8 a Pomarine Jaeger stopped briefly at Pauline Cove. Most

interesting was a pair of Long-tailed Jaegers which we observed feeding their two fledged young each day near our camp. On August 9 and 10 the behaviour of the adult birds changed as they took to calling incessantly while flying high over the juvenile birds at dusk. On August 11 one adult and one juvenile left the area, and on August 12 the second adult and juvenile left the area. On August 9 all four Yukon loon species could be seen from our camp. For the most part, Herschel Island is bordered by steep mud cliffs which provide nesting sites for several pairs of Rough-legged Hawks and Peregrine Falcons. Pauline Cove is home to the Western Arctic's largest breeding colony of Black Guillemots which nest in the old Anglican mission house. While the guillemots were often seen perched on the Anglican mission house, on August 12 a very different shape caught my eye. Quickly moving the scope onto the bird I was startled to see the buffy yellow face of a female Yellow-headed Blackbird!



Yellow-headed Blackbird at Pauline Cove on Herschel Island, Yukon. August 12, 1996. Photos by Cameron Eckert

The marshes at Pauline Cove provided food and cover for small flocks of shorebirds which touched down on the island each day. On August 9, after a rather long hike along the north side of the island, I decided to check the marshy ponds by the Anglican mission house before returning to camp. Just past the first pond I flushed a small shorebird which immediately reminded me of a Solitary Sandpiper. I knew that Herschel Island was rather far north for this species and as the bird flew high out over the ocean I hoped for a better look. The shorebird circled and flew straight back toward the ponds and as it prepared to land just a few meters away I focused directly on its rump and tail. I was shocked to see that its white tail was marked only with fine lateral bars. Once on the ground the bird actively bobbed its tail until it settled in to feed. Clearly visible were its dull yellow legs and a distinctive whitish supercilium. I suspected right away that the bird was a Wood Sandpiper. Despite the fact that I was carrying my camera I decided that it would be better to alert my companions rather than risk flushing the bird again. Clearly, I made the right choice. After my frantic dash back

to the camp Pam, Helmut, Linda and I returned to the ponds and were joined by the Frank Elanik, Herschel Island warden and local bird expert. We quickly relocated the bird and riding a wave of excitement we carefully studied, photographed and thoroughly enjoyed the Yukon's first Wood Sandpiper. We searched Pauline Cove the following day but the bird had left the area and was not seen again.

The Wood Sandpiper at Pauline Cove on August 9, 1996 was the Yukon's first and Canada's second documented occurrence of this species. Canada's first Wood Sandpiper was observed on November 3-9, 1994 at Massett on the Queen Charlotte Islands, BC (Hamel and Hearne 1994). While the Wood Sandpiper is relatively common in spring on the central and outer Aleutians (Armstrong 1995) it is considered accidental in the Beaufort Sea area (Johnson and Herter 1989). There are two Wood Sandpipers records from Point Barrow, Alaska: one on 20 July 1957 (Pitelka 1974 in Kessel and Gibson 1978), and one on 20 June 1975 (Kessel and Gibson 1978).

*continued page 12...*



## Leaving Herschel Island

The Yukon's North Coast is a striking landscape which rewards visitors with an opportunity to experience a unique Arctic community of birds and wildlife. During our stay on Herschel Island we had many occasions to observe Muskox, Porcupine Caribou, Grizzly Bear, Red Fox, Ringed Seal, Beluga and Bowhead Whales. On our departure flight we flew around the island before returning to Inuvik and as we rose above Pauline Cove, the magnitude of that spectacular natural world expanding around us, we began planning our next trip to Herschel Island.

## Acknowledgments

We are very grateful for the warm welcome we received from Herschel Island park wardens Lee John Meyook, Richard Gordon, Frank Elanik and Colin Gordon. Frank Elanik and Elizabeth MacKenzie kindly shared their considerable knowledge of Herschel Island's birds and wildlife. This article first appeared in *Birders Journal* (5:5).

## References

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### Wood Sandpiper field description:

In general appearance this small *Tringa* was similar in size and shape to a Solitary Sandpiper, but with a slightly longer-legged look. While actively foraging it showed a longish neck which was not evident when the bird rested and held its head close to its body. Just before taking flight and after landing the bird would actively bob its tail. When I first flushed the bird it flew with swift wing beats high out over the ocean but when flying short distances between ponds it exhibited a more fluttery flight. Its flight behaviour was similar to a Solitary Sandpiper.

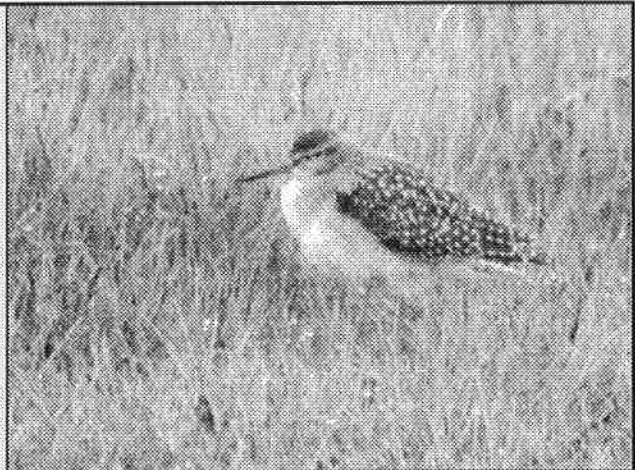
**Head and upperparts:** It had a dark brown crown and a distinct buffy-white supercilium which extended from the base of the bill to well past the eye. Its dark eyeline ran from the base of the bill, to well past the

eye. It had a very thin broken white eye ring. The rest of the face was pale greyish-brown with slightly darker brown ear coverts. The nape was paler brown than the crown. The back was medium to dark brown covered with very fine whitish-buff spots. The folded wings were similarly brown and patterned with lines of off-white spots on the feather edges. At rest, the wingtips extended just to the end of the tail. In flight its flight feathers appeared dark brown and it clearly showed a white rump and white tail marked with many fine lateral dark bars. The underwing was medium to dark grey, paler grey at the base and becoming darker toward the outer wing.

**Undersides:** The throat, breast, belly and undertail were whitish. A greyish-buff wash extended from the neck on to the sides of the upper breast.

**Bareparts:** Its dull yellowish legs were unlike the relatively bright legs of a Lesser Yellowlegs. Its bill was straight and approximately the same length as its head. The bill colour was mostly black with a greyish base suggesting that the bird was a juvenile (Jonsson 1992; Paulson 1993).

**Voice:** The bird only called once when initially flushed. Its call was a high pitched and sharp "twee twee" reminiscent of a Solitary Sandpiper but distinctly different from a Lesser Yellowlegs.



Wood Sandpiper at Pauline Cove on Herschel Island, Yukon. August 9, 1996. Photo by Cameron Eckert

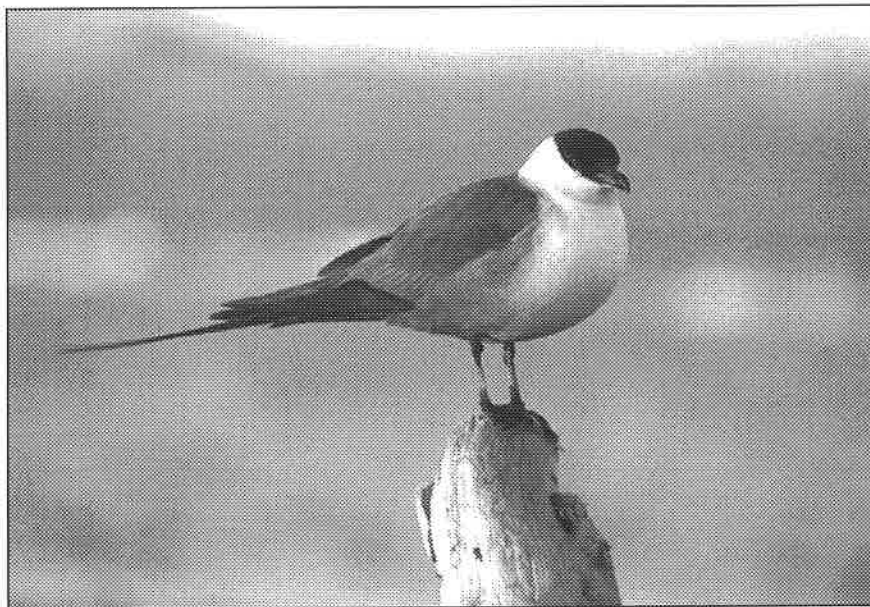


**Daily totals for all species observed from August 5-15, 1996 on Herschel Island, Yukon. A mean daily total for each species was calculated using the number of days each species was observed (Mean=Total/Days).**

SPECIES	August															Total	Days	Mean
	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15							
Red-throated Loon	5	3	3	5	6	3	6	5	3	3	5	47	11	4.3				
Pacific Loon		3	3	4	4	1				5	2	22	7	3.1				
Common Loon					1							1	1	1.0				
Yellow-billed Loon					2							2	1	2.0				
Tundra Swan											8	8	1	8.0				
Mallard			7			4		2				13	3	4.3				
Northern Pintail	3	2		8	5			3		1		22	6	3.7				
Common Eider	36		10	30	40	120		5	9	20	7	277	9	30.8				
eider sp.										100		100	1	100.0				
Harlequin Duck							1	1				2	2	1.0				
Oldsquaw	40	12	15	20	75	13	25	20	10	14	10	254	11	23.1				
Surf Scoter		8		1								9	2	4.5				
White-winged Scoter		10		13			6					29	3	9.7				
Northern Harrier				1			2			1	1	5	4	1.3				
Rough-legged Hawk	1	1	1	2	4	4	1			4	1	19	9	2.1				
Merlin									1			1	1	1.0				
Peregrine Falcon	1	2		6								9	3	3.0				
Rock Ptarmigan				10	1		13			10		34	4	8.5				
Sandhill Crane		1			11	1	2	2	1	1		19	7	2.7				
Black-bellied Plover									1			1	1	1.0				
American Golden-Plover		5	5	6			40	6	20	25	1	108	8	13.5				
Semipalmated Plover				1					1	1		3	3	1.0				
Wood Sandpiper					1							1	1	1.0				
Ruddy Turnstone	6	7	8	6	4	7	4	4	1	3	1	51	11	4.6				
Semipalmated Sandpiper	8	5	6	8	10	4	4	12	5	2	8	72	11	6.5				
Pectoral Sandpiper	6	5	40	15	4	6	6	20	25	15	30	172	11	15.6				
Stilt Sandpiper		1										1	1	1.0				
Long-billed Dowitcher		1	16	15	1	2	7	35	12	40	1	130	10	13.0				
Common Snipe								1			1	2	2	1.0				
Red-necked Phalarope	8	1	6	80	120	12	20	80	400	100	20	847	11	77.0				
Red Phalarope							1	1		1	5	8	4	2.0				
phalarope sp.				20	60				150			230	3	76.7				
Pomarine Jaeger				1								1	1	1.0				
Parasitic Jaeger		2		4	1		4	1				12	5	2.4				
Long-tailed Jaeger	8	6	10	9	4	4	4	2				47	8	5.9				
Mew Gull										1		1	1	1.0				
Herring Gull										1		1	1	1.0				
Glaucous Gull	8	22	15	15	20	10	25	25	20	25	12	197	11	17.9				
Glaucous x Herring Gull					1					1	2	4	3	1.3				
Arctic Tern	4			8	3	12	3					30	5	6.0				
Black Guillemot	20	20	29	40	30	20	30	30	50	40	40	349	11	31.7				
Short-eared Owl	1		1	1		1	2					6	5	1.2				
Horned Lark		7		5	4	2	10	2	5	5	3	43	9	4.8				
Common Raven									1			1	1	1.0				
Yellow Wagtail				1								1	1	1.0				
American Pipit		2			2			2	4		3	13	5	2.6				
American Tree Sparrow				1					1		1	3	3	1.0				
Savannah Sparrow	12	5	5	12	6	12	6	10	15	15	20	118	11	10.7				
Lapland Longspur	8	10	10	15	10	8	200	10	10	15	15	311	11	28.3				
Snow Bunting	20	15	30	25	8	8	8	12	10	15	7	158	11	14.4				
Yellow-headed Blackbird									1	1	1	3	3	1.0				
Common Redpoll	8	10	15	15	6	6	2	6	1		2	71	10	7.1				
<b>Total</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>3869</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>351.7</b>				
<b>Species total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24.8</b>				







## Images from Herschel Island

by Cameron Eckert



### *Long-tailed Jaeger*

Visitors from all parts of the world travel to Herschel Island to observe this graceful seabird on its nesting grounds. This is Herschel Island's most common jaeger species.

### *Long-billed Dowitcher*

Herschel Island's rich wetlands at Pauline Cove provide critical feeding and resting areas for migrant shorebirds.



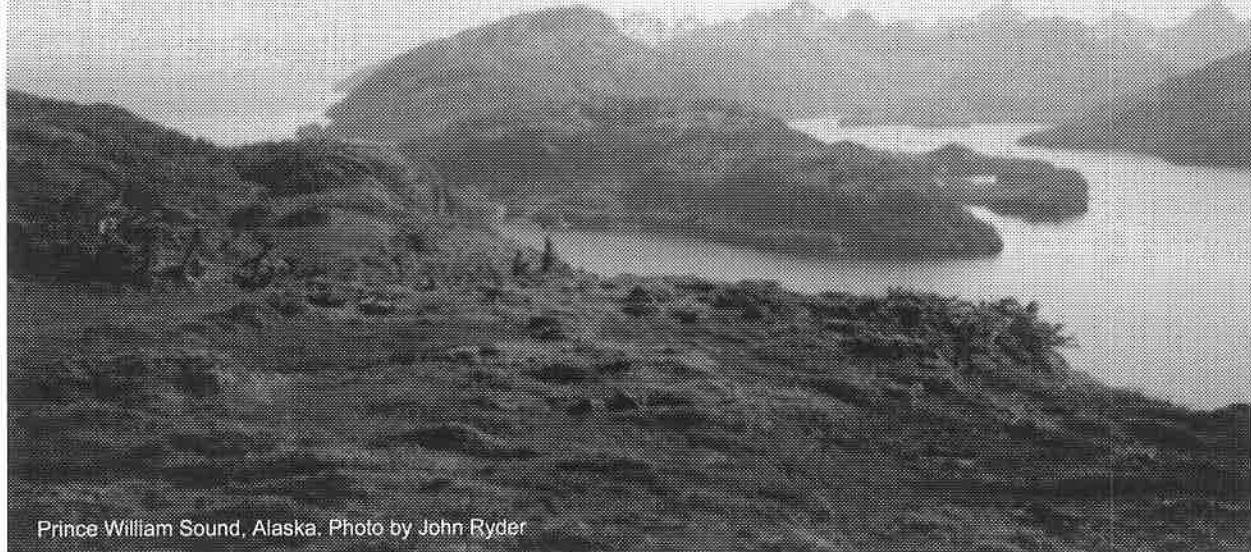
### *Black Guillemot*

Herschel Island is home to the Western Arctic's largest breeding colony of Black Guillemots which have chosen the old Anglican Mission house as their favoured nesting location.



## The seabirds of Prince William Sound, Alaska: life after Exxon Valdez

by John Ryder



Prince William Sound, Alaska. Photo by John Ryder

If someone had told me in April of 1995 that the following month I would find myself living in a remote field camp in central Prince William Sound, Alaska, studying Pacific seabirds for the University of Alaska Fairbanks, I would have thought that person crazy. As a soon to be graduate of UAF, seabird research was one avenue that I had never even considered, and I certainly had not garnered a lot of seabird exposure growing up in the Yukon. An opportunity to study Black-legged Kittiwakes arose at the end of the semester, and I responded on a whim. The next thing I knew, I was on my way to Anchorage to prepare for what would become a two season involvement in a multi-agency seabird research project. Our mandate was to investigate why seabirds were failing to recover from the Exxon Valdez oil spill at an acceptable rate.

The origins of this research provide an interesting starting point. For many, our first introduction to Prince William Sound came about following the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill and the flood of media exposure that followed it. Subsequent to all this attention and in the wake of lawsuits submitted by the United States and the State of Alaska, a settlement reached in 1991 required Exxon Corporation to pay \$900 million over ten

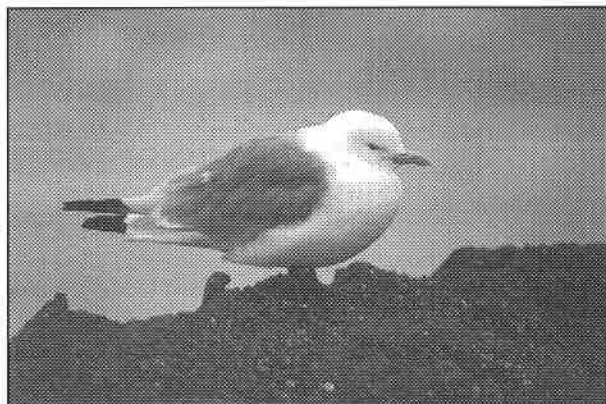
years to restore resources damaged by the spill. From this settlement, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council was set up in order to allocate funds for various projects that would help to achieve this goal. One of the projects that was approved for funding in 1995, organized by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Biological Service and UAF, was a pilot study on three species of seabirds that were relatively easy to work with and had all been damaged by the spill: Pigeon Guillemot, Tufted Puffin, and Black-legged Kittiwake. Of these, the Pigeon Guillemot was the only species listed in the trustee council's "not recovering" category, while the status of the other two was unknown. The other seabird species in Prince William Sound listed as "not recovering" were Common Murre and Marbled Murrelet.

Black-legged Kittiwakes were studied at two sites in the Sound. One field camp was located just outside of Valdez at Shoup Bay where the largest colony of kittiwakes, approximately 3000 pairs, is located. I was working at the other camp located in the central part of the Sound at Eleanor Island. This area is home to a number of small kittiwake colonies, and we worked at four of them over the

*continued page 16 ...*



## Black-legged Kittiwake a colonial breeder at Prince William Sound



Adult Black-legged Kittiwake. Photo by Cameron Eckert

course of two field seasons. The first thing that struck me when I arrived at our main study site off Eleanor Island in 1995 was the exposure to the elements that the birds had. The colony was situated on two small rock islands approximately one kilometre offshore, and both were very barren looking. Kittiwakes nested along the side of the rock face, and had built nests of mud and grass in cracks and crevices that did not look like they could support the structures for very long. Some pairs nested very close to each other in clumps, and others were off by themselves. All of the nests looked precarious and a few of the nests at the bottom of the cliff face were constructed only a few feet above high tide, and many were later wiped out by storms. In all, there were 180 active nests in 1995 and 285 nests in 1996. On top of both of these rock islands, Glaucous-winged Gulls were found nesting in low numbers. Their presence, however, created quite a challenge in accessing kittiwake nests after the Glaucous-winged Gull chicks had hatched. Glaucous-winged adults are very aggressive when defending their nests, and they often swooped down to smack us in the back of the head with their legs. One actually hit me so hard last summer that I ended up walking around in a daze for about fifteen

minutes. Pelagic Cormorants were usually roosting at the colony in the early morning, but were extremely wary of intruders. They would leave in unison as we approached, and being fairly bulky, required a lot of ocean runway before they finally became airborne.

All of the kittiwake nests at these rock islands were relatively accessible, and we required very little technical climbing to access nests. Generally, each nest contained one or two light brown, black-spotted eggs, although we did encounter a couple of three egg nests. Most of the eggs hatched in early July. By the time the chicks were a couple of weeks old, many nests had been reduced to one chick. Older chicks often kicked their younger sibling out of the nest, presumably when there was not enough food being delivered for both chicks, or in some cases, by accident. If chicks managed to survive to between 30-36 days of age, then this was generally the time that they fledged from the nest. It was often difficult to determine when the chicks had left the nest because they often returned after a brief flight around the colony, leaving doubt as to when their first flight may have taken place. In early August of this year, any remaining chicks that had not fledged yet became Peregrine Falcon bait. Two immature Peregrine Falcons made their presence known one day in August, and in a matter of two weeks had wiped out the remaining thirty chicks at the colony.

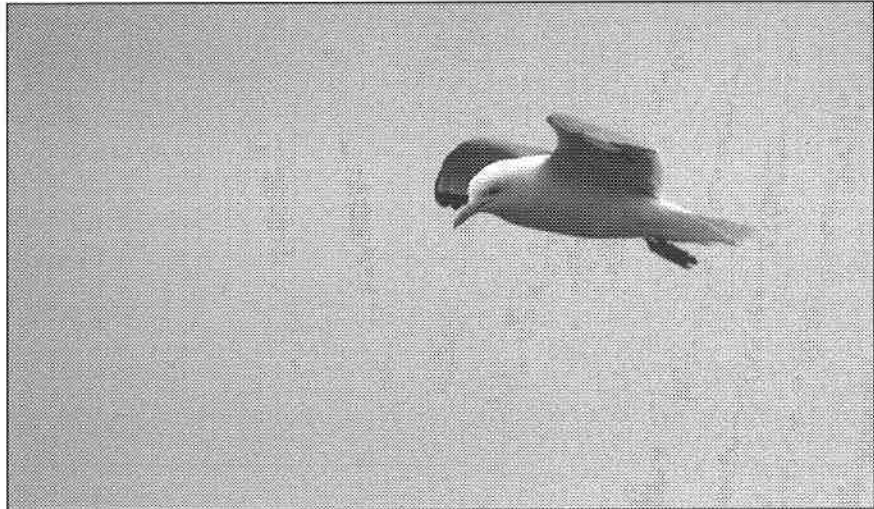


Black-legged Kittiwake colony at Prince William Sound. Photo by John Ryder.



## Feeding frenzy...

One of the most exciting research activities for me was following adult kittiwakes by boat after they had left the colony to find out where they were feeding. We often encountered many species of birds concentrated in large foraging flocks where dense schools of fish could be found. Sometimes the size of these flocks numbered in the thousands. Large flocks of kittiwakes would often circle back and forth over a hot feeding area and individual birds would plunge from great heights to capture fish such as herring which were balled-up on the ocean surface. Glaucous-winged Gulls fed in a similar manner, but often landed on the water and fed on the fish scattered around them. Marbled Murrelets were frequently encountered in large numbers on the ocean surface as well, and could be seen diving in pursuit of fish. Colourful Tufted and Horned Puffins were also very common and often returned from diving with bills so full of fish they were literally spilling out the sides. Pigeon Guillemots were seen in lesser numbers, but often returned from diving with fish in their bills that were so large that it was difficult to believe they could get them down. On a couple of occasions, I saw Pigeon Guillemots fly away carrying huge sculpins which are a spiny, bony fish and I felt very sorry for the chick that was going to be the beneficiary of the meal. Other bird species that we encountered less frequently in foraging flocks included Parakeet Auklets, Common Murres, Pacific Loons, and Pelagic Cormorants. In general, the larger foraging flocks that we encountered were very vibrant and dynamic, and were constantly moving across the ocean as fish schools changed location and depth. The level of feeding activity in some instances was very intense; birds



An adult Black-legged Kittiwake takes flight. Photo by Cameron Eckert

in the air would plunge into the ocean repeatedly to catch fish while the diving birds would be surfacing all over the place with fish protruding from their bills.

A popular misconception with the seabird research that is currently being undertaken in the Sound is that this effort is solely in response to the large scale seabird mortality caused by the Exxon Valdez oil spill. In fact, the basic premise of this study is that low food abundance in the Sound may be leading to decline of both seabird and marine mammal populations. Many seabird populations were declining in the Sound several years before the spill occurred, and while the oil spill certainly exacerbated this decline, it was not the initial cause. Interestingly, the past two seasons in the Sound have been fairly productive for many seabird species, including the Black-legged Kittiwake. Finally, one of the most commonly asked questions is whether there is still oil present in some areas of the Sound. The beach in front of our camp was one of the most heavily oiled areas in the Sound, and while oil is not readily observable now, if one were to dig down into the gravel at the high tide line some traces of oil and black sludge can still be seen. Also, oil sheens routinely appear in many intertidal pools if you walk through them at low tide.

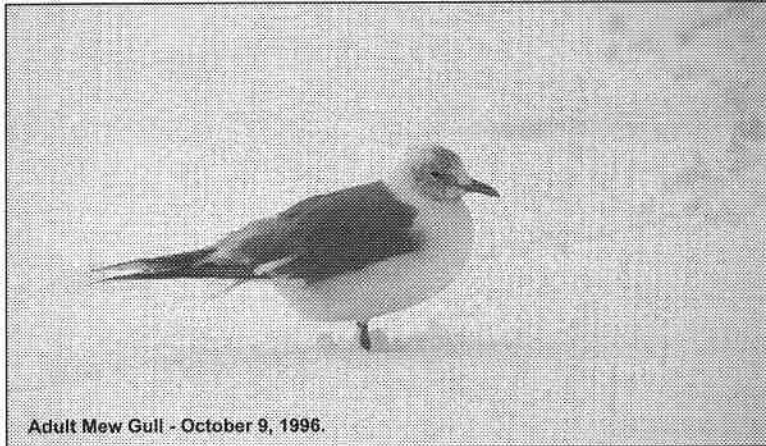


Horned Puffins in Prince William Sound. Photo by John Ryder



## Yukon Gullery - Fall 1996 migration in Whitehorse

by Cameron Eckert

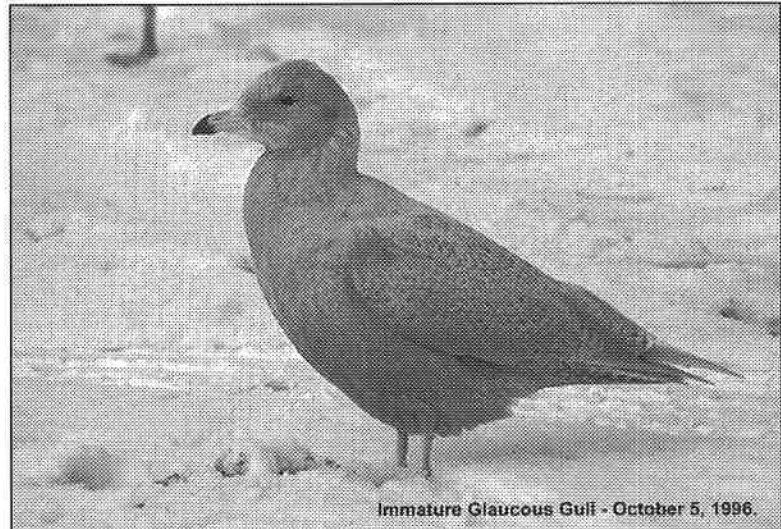


Adult Mew Gull - October 9, 1996.

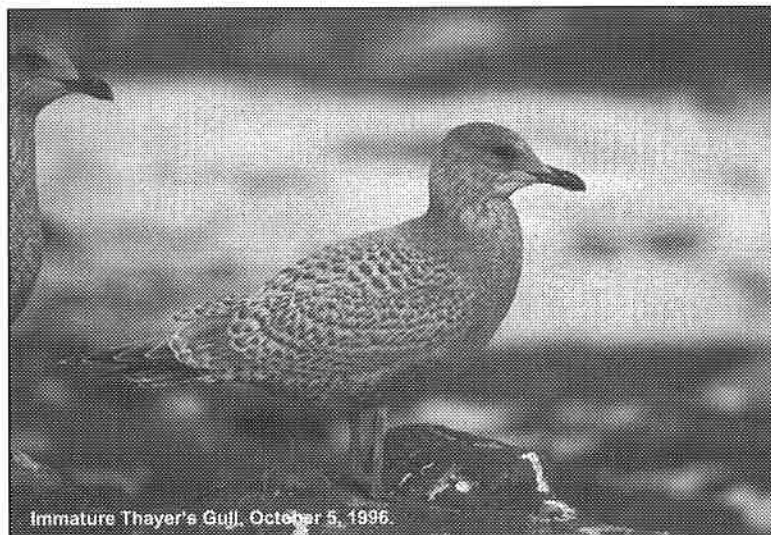
These images highlight the 1996 fall gull watching season in Whitehorse. While most Mew Gulls leave the territory in August, a few occasionally linger into September. This adult Mew Gull set a new record late date for the species when it arrived in Whitehorse on October 4 and stayed until October 10. The bird's flight feathers were in very rough shape and the dark feathering on its face indicated that it was molting into winter plumage.

Immature gulls are notorious for the identification challenges they present. However, the combination of this bird's distinctive bicoloured bill, pale flight feathers, and overall chunky shape points to an immature Glaucous Gull.

While the Glaucous Gull is a common breeder along the Yukon's North Coast, this species occurs in southern Yukon as a rare spring and uncommon fall migrant. The bird shown here is one of this year's young making its first trip south for the winter.



Immature Glaucous Gull - October 5, 1996.



Immature Thayer's Gull, October 5, 1996.

It was only relatively recently that the annual fall passage of Thayer's Gulls through the Whitehorse area was recognized. While immature Thayer's Gulls are very similar to immature Herring Gulls, their smaller body size, smaller and more delicate bill, and pale edges of their primary flight feathers help confirm a positive identification.

Like the immature Glaucous Gull (above), this immature Thayer's Gull is one of this year's young and will likely spend the winter somewhere on the Pacific Coast.



## FieldNotes: Observations from the field



Please send sightings to Helmut Grünberg, (807 Wheeler, Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2P8). Please include details such as date, location, number of birds, sex and age, and observers' names. Highlight interesting observations and include descriptions of rare species. This report contains documented and undocumented sightings. Please send sightings according to the following seasonal schedule: Spring (March 1 - May 31), Summer (June 1 - July 31), Fall (August 1 - November 30), Winter (December 1 - February 29).

### The Fall Season

This report covers August 1 - November 30, 1996. While fall migration initially appeared sluggish in the Whitehorse area, some species eventually passed through in relatively high numbers; there were notable movements of Golden Eagles, Short-eared Owls and American Robins. Some of the sparrows were perhaps two weeks later than normal. The weather was normal until a cold spell hit in mid-November with temperatures of  $-36^{\circ}\text{C}$  in Whitehorse, and below  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  in Dawson City.



Winter plumage Yellow-billed Loon on Schwatka Lake, October 18, 1996. Photo by C. Eckert

north of Whitehorse on November 1 (CE,PS). A winter plumage **Yellow-billed Loon** first discovered at Schwatka Lake on October 17 remained there until October 23 (CE).

Six **Trumpeter Swans** were reported from the Teslin River at Johnson's Crossing on October 18 (LE). Up to 20 **swans** were on Teslin Lake off the Cottage Lots on October 20 (MGI). Two **Tundra Swans** were associated with eight **Gadwall**, extremely rare in the Yukon in fall, at the Yukon River in Whitehorse on October 7 (RC,MGr). An immature **Trumpeter Swan**, a female **Oldsquaw**, three female **Greater Scaup** and two male **Common Goldeneye** were observed at Lake Laberge on November 11 (CE,PS). A flock of 30 **Oldsquaw** was on Schwatka Lake on October 6 (RC). On September 20, a flock of 250 **Canada Geese** was flying over Willow Acres at Haines Junction (TH); a flock of ten was flying overhead west of Whitehorse on October 12 (BS). A relatively high number of 400 **Mallards** was estimated at Kathleen Lake on October 5 (RC,AN). A raft of 400 **American Wigeon** was at the south end of Kluane Lake on September 4 (TH). On September 29 a flock of nine **Redheads** provided the highest and second only fall record for Swan Lake (HG). Up to ten **Greater Scaup** were reported from Schwatka Lake on October 6-18 (RC). For the fourth year in a row a female **Harlequin Duck** was on the Yukon River in Whitehorse, from September 29 to October 12 (JB). A flock of 13 **White-winged Scoters** was flying south over Dezadeash Lake on October 12 (CE,PS). Two **Common Mergansers**, a male and female, were on the Yukon River in Whitehorse on November 27 (CE).

A **Northern Harrier** was observed hunting **American Pipits** in Whitehorse on October 21 (RC). A **Bald Eagle** was at Chapman Lake on the Dempster Highway on September 28 (GK,LK). One **Bald Eagle** was observed in Whitehorse on September 29 and two immatures on October 2 (BS). On August 9 a juvenile **Bald Eagle** was perched on the edge of a nest at Pine Lake flapping its wing into the wind (TH). A **Swainson's Hawk** was encountered at km 271 of the Dempster Highway on August 3 (HG). **Golden Eagle** sightings included one at km

A **Red-throated Loon** at Fish Lake on September 22 was the only one reported this fall (CE). A **loon** was observed at the Nisutlin River bridge in Teslin until November 26 (DD). A **Pacific** and two **Common Loons** were at Kathleen Lake on October 5 (RC,AN). A winter plumage **Common Loon** was noted on the Yukon River at Burma Road



## The Fall Season

150 on the Dempster Highway on August 3 (CE,PS); one at Fox Lake on September 24 (GK,LK); one at Braeburn on September 29 (GK,LK); one at Kusawa Lake on October 5 (RC,AN); one near Whitehorse on October 5 (RC,AN); and at Marsh Lake, 172 were seen on October 20 (CE,YBC) and 10 there on October 21 (RM). Two **Sharp-shinned Hawks** and two **Rough-legged Hawks** were seen from Dome Hill near Dawson City on September 25 (GK,LK). A single light phase **Rough-legged Hawk** was near the Salt Ponds, 40 km west of Whitehorse on October 12 (CE,PS). A sensational "raptor day" was a highlight for birders at White Mountain on October 6; eight species were recorded including two **Northern Harriers**, three **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, three **Northern Goshawks**, two **Red-tailed Hawks**, two **Rough-legged Hawks**, 22 **Golden Eagles**, one **American Kestrel** and one **Gyr Falcon** (GK,LK). A single **Northern Goshawk** was in Whitehorse on November 25 (NH,AM,WN). When an observer spotted a small flock of **Canada Geese** flying north over Porter Creek on September 22 the question arose as to why the birds were not heading south? The answer was found when the observer's gaze fell upon a **Peregrine Falcon** in swift pursuit of the wayward geese (CE). A grey phase **Gyr Falcon** was spotted in Whitehorse on September 30 (CE).



Male Spruce Grouse on Teslin Lake, September 1996. Photo by M. Garolitz.

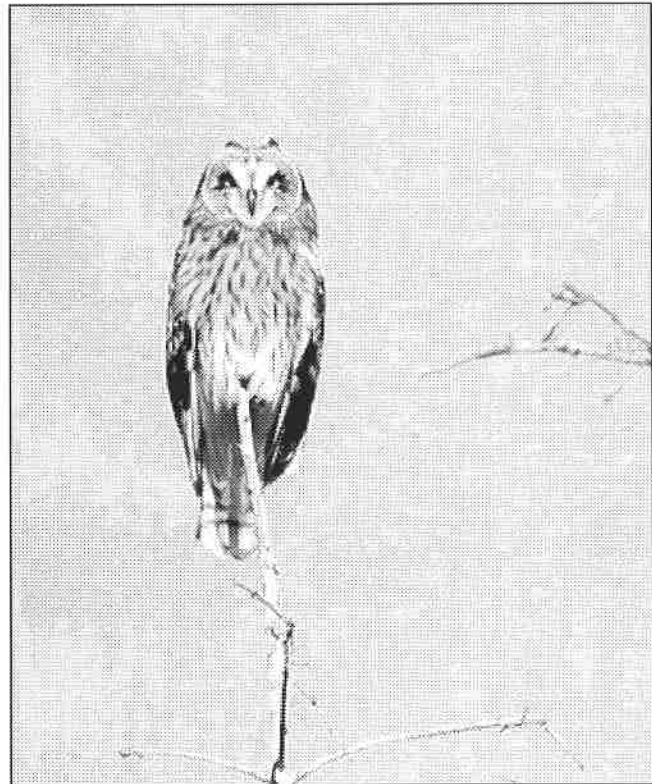
Five **Willow Ptarmigan** were at km 87 on the Dempster Highway on August 3 (CE,PS). Two **Ruffed Grouse** were observed at a Hillcrest feeder on November 17 (LC); one was on the Atlin Road on October 8 (MGI). A male **Spruce Grouse** was present in Teslin in September (MGI). Three **Greater Yellowlegs** were foraging at an oxbow along the Yukon River just south of Lake Laberge on September 1 (CE,PS). A **Western Sandpiper** was spotted at Judas Creek with a **Least Sandpiper** on August 25 (HG). A juvenile **Baird's Sandpiper** was at the Yukon/NWT border on August 4 (LC,CE,HG,PS).

Four adult **Long-tailed Jaegers** were just north of Glacier Creek on the Dempster Highway on August 3 (CE,PS). In fall, **Bonaparte's Gulls** disappear rather suddenly from the Yukon - two juveniles at Judas Creek on August 31 established a record late date for this species (CE). An adult **Glaucous-winged Gull** in Whitehorse on August 1 provided a first Yukon fall record (CE). Four juvenile **Mew Gulls** at the Whitehorse Landfill on September 13 appeared set to provide this year's latest fall record but were overshadowed by a record late **Mew Gull**, an adult molting into winter plumage, which appeared at the landfill on October 4 and was last seen on October 10 (CE). The first **Glaucous Gull** of fall, an adult, appeared at the Whitehorse landfill on August 18, and a high count of eight birds (1 adult and 7 juveniles) was recorded there on October 1 (CE). The first **Thayer's Gull** of fall, an adult, arrived at the Whitehorse Landfill on August 21 (CE); the fall movement of **Thayer's Gulls** through southern Yukon appeared to peak on September 23 with a tally of 32 adults and 70 juveniles in Whitehorse (CE). Perhaps anticipating the November cold spell, most if not all gulls exhibited a remarkably early departure from the Yukon this fall. The last reported observation in the Whitehorse area was of a flock of 30 gulls on October 18 which included 4 immature **Glaucous Gulls**, 12 adult and 2 juvenile **Herring Gulls** and 12 juvenile **Thayer's Gulls**.

On November 19 it was -38°C at Willow Acres near Haines Junction when a male and a female **Great Horned Owl** were heard hooting (TH). **Northern Hawk-Owl** sightings included one west of Whitehorse on October 12 (CE, PS), one at Kathleen Lake in southwest Yukon on October 12 (HG,LR), and three along the Alaska Highway between the Duke and Donjek Rivers on October 14. (TH). Birdwatchers were thrilled by an unprecedented movement of **Short-eared Owls** through southern Yukon in mid-October; on October 19 a count of 8 was made at Swan Lake (HG), and 11 were tallied between Whitehorse and Teslin (PS); a single bird was along the Yukon River in Whitehorse on October 21 (CE). Unfortunately there were also reports of numerous **Short-eared Owl** deaths along the highway.

Very rare in fall was a male **Rufous Hummingbird** at Pilot Mountain near Whitehorse on September 15 (YS). Three **Alder Flycatchers** were singing at Moose Creek Campground on August 3, and two were noted in Porter Creek on August 18 (CE,PS). A **Western Wood-Pewee** at Schwatka Lake on August 28 was the latest reported this fall (CE).

A single **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** seen along the Yukon River south of Lake Laberge on September 1 was the latest reported this fall (CE,PS). **Hairy Woodpecker** sightings included one in Whitehorse on October 6 (BS), and two at a Watson Lake feeder through November (LE); and on November 2, a female demonstrated an exercise in futility at a Whitehorse feeder - she would take a sunflower seed from the feeder, try to open it between a tree and her belly, lose the seed, fly back to the feeder, get another seed (JB). **Downy Woodpecker** sightings included one at Kathleen Lake on October 5 (RC,AN), a female at Teslin on October 20 (MGI), two at a Watson Lake feeder through November (LE), and a male at a Porter Creek feeder through the fall (CE,PS). The Watson Lake **Downies** were particularly interesting as there are few records of this species from southeast Yukon. Six **Three-toed Woodpeckers** were near Hungry Lake, southwestern Yukon on October 4 (TH); single birds were at Kathleen Lake on October 5 (RC,AN), and in Dawson City on November 2 (DM). Two **Black-backed Woodpeckers** were at km 1675 along the Alaska Highway on October 14 (TH). A **Northern Flicker** at Schwatka Lake on October 17 was the latest reported this fall (CE). An immature **Horned Lark** was at the Whitehorse airport on August 3 (BS), and a single **Horned Lark** was seen flying south over Whitehorse on September 13 (CE). Two **Gray Jays** were feeding on a fresh road-killed **Spruce Grouse** just south of Haines Junction on October 12 (CE,PS).



Short-eared Owl rides a wave at Swan Lake, October 19, 1996.  
Photo by Helmut Grünberg



Boreal Chickadee at Teslin, October 9, 1996. Photo by Margaret Garolitz

Two **Mountain Chickadees** were at a Teslin feeder until November 26 (DD). **Boreal Chickadees** were present in Dawson City through the fall (DM), and four were at a Teslin suet feeder on October 21 (MGI). Single **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were in Whitehorse on September 11 (JB), and at Marshall Creek in southwest Yukon on September 11 (TH). A **Red-breasted Nuthatch** which was noted in Porter Creek on August 30, did not linger in the area (CE,PS). An **American Dipper** was observed in the Dezadeash River near Marshall Creek on November 2 (LA). Twenty **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** were still present at McIntyre Creek on September 12 (CE). A **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** was observed at Willow Acres on October 14 (TH), and one was in Porter Creek on October 21 was the latest reported this fall (CE,PS). A **Northern Wheatear** was along the side of the road at km 125 of the Dempster Highway on August 3



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(HG). Two **Mountain Bluebirds** were in Whitehorse on September 7 (BS). A wave of **American Robins** which swept through the Whitehorse area in early October included a flock of 27 feeding on Saskatoon berries in Porter Creek on October 4 (CE), seven in Whitehorse on October 4 (LD), 15 in Whitehorse on October 5 (BS), approximately 60 at Lake Laberge on October 5 (CE,PS), 70 in Whitehorse on October 6 (BS), and five at Yukon College on October 23 (JG). Two **American Robins** were rummaging through a compost at Marshall Creek on October 27 (LA). One stayed in Teslin until November 13 (DD). A **Varied Thrush** was heard calling in Porter Creek on September 21 (CE,PS); one was observed in Whitehorse on October 6 (BS); and the latest report was of one at a feeder in Porter Creek on November 2 (MGr).

A flock of 15 **American Pipits** was at the south end of Dezadeash Lake on October 12 (CE,PS). **Bohemian Waxwing** sightings included a flock of 62 at Braeburn on October 25 (GK,LK), seven in Hillcrest on October 29 (LC), 16 in Porter Creek on November 24 (RC), and a single bird was in Teslin until November 30 (DD). It was a scene of high drama in Porter Creek on September 12 when an adult **Northern Shrike** picked off a **White-crowned Sparrow** only to have its prey claimed by a **Black-billed Magpie** moments later (CE). A juvenile **Northern Shrike** was seen catching and eating a butterfly at Chadburn Lake in Whitehorse on September 18 (JB); one visited a Marshall Creek feeder on October 18 (KA,LA); and one was noted in Teslin on November 19 (DD). The only **European Starling** reported was one traveling with two **Rusty Blackbirds** near the SS.Klondike in Whitehorse on October 23 (CE). A **Yellow Warbler** in Porter Creek on August 18 was the latest reported this fall (CE,PS). A **Northern Waterthrush** was observed in Whitehorse on August 20 (BS). Migrant warblers in Porter Creek on September 1 included an immature **Blackpoll Warbler**, an **Orange-crowned Warbler**, two **Wilson's Warblers** and 15 **Yellow-rumped Warblers** (CE,PS). Foraging among the shrubs at McIntyre Creek on September 12 were six **Yellow-rumped Warblers** and eight **Common Yellowthroats**. A **Yellow-rumped**



Fox Sparrow in Porter Creek, September 9, 1996. Photo by C. Eckert



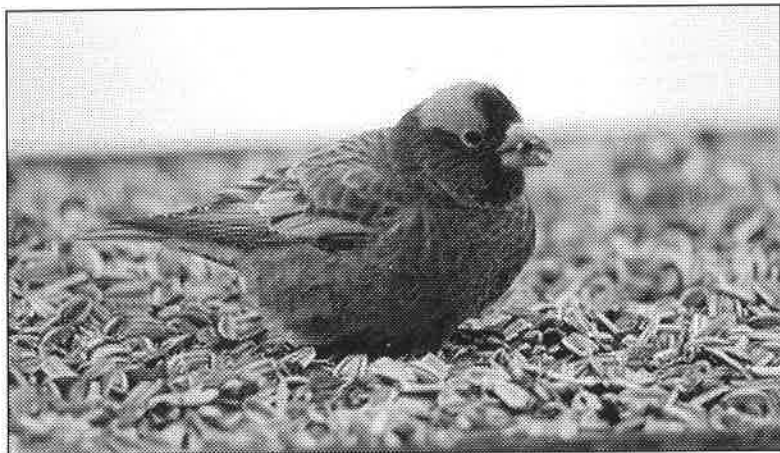
Dark-eyed Junco at a Porter Creek feeder. Sept. 9, 1996. Photo by C. Eckert

**Warbler** was still present in Porter Creek on September 22 (CE). A **Wilson's Warbler** was at Teslin on October 19 (PS), and the last reported warbler of fall was a **Wilson's Warbler** in downtown Whitehorse on September 30 (PS).

A **Savannah Sparrow** foraging in a weedy field in downtown Whitehorse on October 31 provided a record late date (CE). A hungry **Fox Sparrow** actually landed on a birdwatcher's hand to obtain a snack in Haines Junction on October 4 (SO). A **Lincoln's Sparrow** frequented a Porter Creek feeder on October 21-24 (CE,PS). **Dark-eyed Junco** sightings included a flock of 20 in Whitehorse on October 6 (BS), four at a Hillcrest feeder

on November 14 (LC), three at a Marshall Creek feeder until at least November 14 (LA), and three at a Teslin feeder until November 20 (DD). High numbers of sparrows encountered in Haines Junction on October 12 included one **Savannah Sparrow**, two **Fox Sparrows**, four **White-crowned Sparrows** and 60 **Dark-eyed Juncos** (CE,PS).





Gray-crowned Rosy Finch at Horse Creek, Oct. 26, 1996. Photo by K.Ostrom.

on October 21 (CE). A flock of 100 **Rusty Blackbirds** was at the Whitehorse landfill on September 5 (CE); five were in Whitehorse on October 18 (JB), and three lingered at a Teslin feeder until November 20 and one until the end of November (DD). A **Brewer's Blackbird** was reported from Dawson City, September to November (DM,HB). A male **Purple Finch** was observed at a Porter Creek feeder until September 22 and provided a record late fall date for this species (CE,PS). Eight **Red Crossbills** were in Golden Horn on November 17 (AS). A string of sightings of a single male **Gray-crowned Rosy Finch** ("gray-crowned" race) raised questions as to the number of birds involved; one visited a Burma Road feeder on October 26-28 (BC); one at a nearby Horse Creek feeder on November 7-11 (KO); and one appeared at a Hillcrest feeder on November 30 (LC). **Pine Siskins** were plentiful at Marshall Creek until September 15 (LA). **Evening Grosbeak** is now considered a regular winter bird in Watson Lake; three males and two females were at a feeder there on October 31 - November 21 (LE). Even the most mundane can be cause for excitement in the right location: a female **House Sparrow** in Whitehorse on August 1 was the first well documented Yukon record (CE).



A female-type Purple Finch at a Porter Creek feeder - September 9, 1996. Photo by Cameron Eckert



Female House Sparrow in Whitehorse, August 1, 1996. Photo by Cameron Eckert

An immature **White-crowned Sparrow** at a Marshall Creek feeder on October 28 was the latest report this fall (LA). A flock of 75 **Lapland Longspurs** was at the Nisutlin River Delta on September 14 (CE,HG), and six were at Swan Lake on September 29 (HG). Reports of **Snow Buntings** included three at Tombstone on the Dempster Highway on September 28 (GK,LK); flocks of 10 and 50 along the Alaska Highway between Whitehorse and Haines Junction on October 6 (BS); on October 12 small flocks included 20 near Kusawa Lake, 22 at Marshall Creek, and 20 at km 217 of the Haines Road (CE,PS); a flock of 11 was in Whitehorse

**Observers:** Ken Anderson, Libby Anderson, Henk Barendse, Jeremy Baumbach, Linda Cameron, René Carlson, Bev Coombs, Denny Denison, Lee Dickson, Cameron Eckert, Lois Everett, Jim Gilpin, Margaret Garolitz, (MGI), Marilyn Greeley (MGr), Helmut Grünberg, Todd Heakes, Nancy Hughes, Greg Kubica, Lee Kubica, Angela Milani, Dawne Mitchell, Richard Mueller, Amy Newton, Wendy Nixon, Steve Osborne, Kate Ostrom, Lena Radziunas, Pamela Sinclair, Ardy Smith, Yammy Stote, Barbara Studds.





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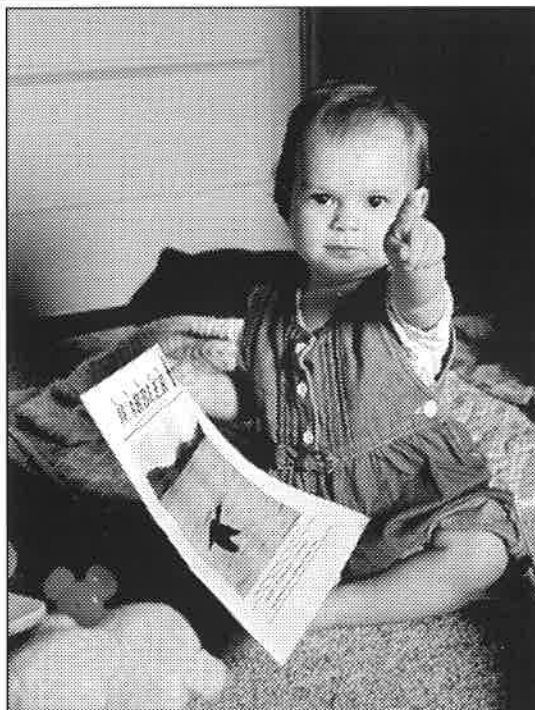
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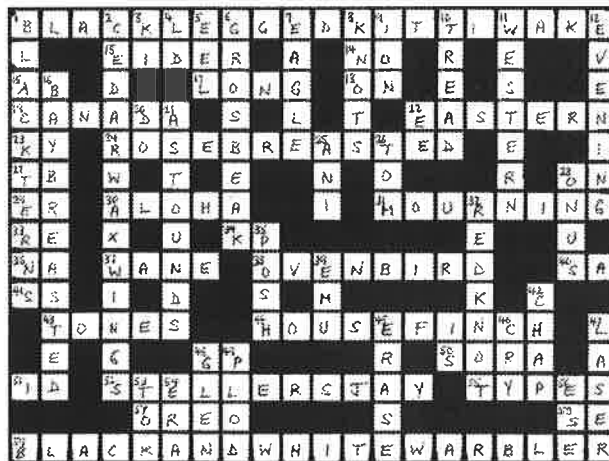
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**Cameron Eckert, 1402 Elm Street**  
**Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 4B6**  
**Phone/Fax: 403-667-4630**  
**Email: ceckert@yknet.yk.ca**