

Yukon Warbler

Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club - Winter 1997



Swainson's Hawk in Whitehorse on September 1, 1997
Photo by Cameron Eckert

Winter Field Trips and Events

WEEKEND OUTINGS - Dress for the weather, wear appropriate footwear, bring a lunch and binoculars. For more information or to arrange a ride call Dennis Kuch at 633-2377.

Saturday 13 December. *Early Winter on the Kathleen River!* Join Todd Heakes for a trip along the Kathleen River in search of American Dippers, Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers. Meet at the Weigh Scales in Haines Junction at 12:30 PM. Call Rita Jux at (867) 634-2402 for information.

Saturday 17 January. *Tagish Birding Tour - Winter Edition!* Helmut Grünberg leads you through a winter wonderland in search of Yukon's finest wintering waterfowl. Dress warmly, bring a lunch, and meet at the S.S. Klondike at 10:00 AM.

Saturday 7 February. *February Feeder Hopping Tour!* This trip is a great chance to see Yukon's winter birds in a variety of settings around Whitehorse and get a wealth of tips on setting up your own back-yard bird feeder. Dress warmly and meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 10:00 AM. Leader: Linda Cameron.

Saturday 7 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 an 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.

WINTER EVENTS CALENDAR

The following evening presentations will take place at the Whitehorse Public Library meeting room starting at 7:00 in the evening and are from 1 to 2 hours long. All are welcome - bring a friend!!

Wednesday 14 January. *Yukon Wildflowers!* An extraordinary slide show to thaw the winter chill. Lee Kubica will present his wildflower slides - some you may be familiar with from publications featuring Lee's photographs. Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.

Thursday 29 January. *A Visual Experience of Yukon Bird Life!* Wilhelm Harms has been making stunning photographs of birds and other wildlife in the Yukon for many years. This is the first presentation of his work to the Yukon Bird Club. Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.

Tuesday 10 February. *How Fire Shapes the Face of Yukon Forests!* At least one hundred species of Yukon birds make their home in Yukon forests at various stages of the forest's life. Shawn Francis will present his work on the role of fire in creating variety in forest structure and age. Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.

Wednesday 18 February. *Turn West at the Takhini River!* Dave Mossop will present the migration picture through the Whitehorse area as viewed from the top of Haeckel Hill. Waterfowl and raptors have an interesting pattern of migration through this area. Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.

Wednesday 25 February. *Waterfowl Studies on the Old Crow Flats!* Nancy Hughes and Debbie Van de Wetering have interesting stories to tell about the biology of waterfowl on the Old Crow Flats in northern Yukon - and stunning slides as well! Learn why thousands of birds use the wetlands of the Flats, and some of the secrets of their migration. Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.

Thursday 5 March. *Bats in the Yukon!* Brian Slough will talk about Yukon's flying mammals - where to find them, what they eat, and how little we really know about them. Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.

Wednesday 11 March. *What are bugs doing in Yukon Forests!* From the Spruce Bark Beetle that Yukon woodpeckers know and love, and beyond: Join forest entomologist Ed van Randen and learn about the fascinating lives of bugs and how they shape our forests. Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.

Spring Bird Identification Workshop Series

This three-part series on bird identification is an excellent way to get set for the many exciting challenges of spring birdwatching. All are welcome from beginners to experts - bring a friend!

Wednesday 25 March. Bird Identification Part 1: A Bird in the Hand! Pam Sinclair will present the ever popular Bird Identification workshop using Yukon College's teaching collection of bird specimens. Get there early! Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.

Thursday 2 April. Bird Identification Part 2: The annual Gizz to Gee Whizz Workshop! Don't miss Cameron Eckert's annual spring primer - renowned for its stunning visual presentation and careful attention to the myriad details of bird identification. Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.

Wednesday 15 April. Bird Identification Part 3: Spring Tune-Up! Wendy Nixon will present a workshop on bird song identification using all the audio tools available - this will be a "tuning" session for those who want to brush up for the return of songbirds and an introduction to bird song for those who just starting. Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.



News and Notes

Birdathon Report 1997

The Yukon Birdathon was again a great success. Nineteen eager participants went birdwatching from 5 pm on Friday, May 30th to 5 pm on Saturday, May 31st, tallying as many bird species as they could find and identify. An astonishing 250 donors generously contributed a total of \$3289.15. After expenses, **the Birdathon raised an impressive sum of \$3027.35!** As usual, the funds raised will go towards conservation education projects of the Yukon Bird Club and the Yukon Conservation Society. Bird Club projects include production of our upcoming Checklist of Yukon Birds, as well as providing subscriptions to the *Yukon Warbler* to schools and libraries across the territory. Further, Birdathon funds provide for Yukon Bird Club's very popular internet web site (<http://www.yukonweb.wis.net/community/ybc/>)

After a grueling 24 hours of birding (or leisurely few hours, depending on each participant's preference and inclination!), participants and their families met at the Wolf Creek campground for a pot-luck barbeque. Stories were shared, and some lucky participants received prizes for their efforts.

The Novice Birdathoner award (a copy of *Birds of Swan Lake*) went to Katie Hayhurst, who as first-time Birdathoner tallied 12 species. The Enviro-birder award (an attractive bird house made of recycled materials rendered by Cameron Eckert) was claimed by Jeremy Baumbach, who found and identified 55 species while travelling on foot. The prize for Highest Total number of species (an exquisite bird house crafted by Bob Murkett) went to Helmut Grünberg and Bruce Bennett, who birded as a team and rounded up an impressive 95 species. And of course our lovely soapstone bird carving was passed on to this year's Feature Birder, Jim Hawkings.

A good time was had by all! Thanks to all participants and sponsors. The Yukon Electrical Company kindly donated \$200 to cover expenses. Many thanks to the Birdathon Coordinator, Linda Cameron and the Birdathon Committee, including Cameron Eckert, Bob Murkett, Sheila Serup, and Pam Sinclair, for organizing the event this year. Volunteers interested in helping with this exciting event should contact Sheila, who will be taking over as Birdathon Coordinator for 1998.

... see you all in May '98!



Fall Field Trip Report

by Dennis Kuch

Fall Migration at Swan Lake

The September 14 trip to Swan Lake departed from the S.S. Klondike dock on a bright and shining Sunday morning with the helpful guidance of Helmut Grünberg and Lee Kubica. Following the newly-rebuilt *Supersewageway* on the roadbed of the Livingstone Trail, the group stopped off en route at Whitehorse's newest wetland, *Lac LaSludge*, also known as the Whitehorse Sewage Lagoon. Proceeding rapidly upwind of the main intake pond, visually-oriented birders found the downstream ponds to be holding hundreds of waterfowl of various species, including a Green-winged Teal, 200 Lesser Scaup, 20 goldeneye and 45 Bufflehead; a Horned Grebe, an immature Bald Eagle and a Common Raven were also observed there. The final pond has yet to fill, promising even greater habitat in future years when the full 300 hectares of the site is flooded and fertilized.

Moving on down the road and out of the city to Swan Lake, the group set up scopes on the lakeshore and found a number of waterfowl species in small groups scattered about the lake including 12 American Wigeon, 50 Lesser Scaup, 2 Surf Scoters, 5 Barrow's Goldeneye and a Bufflehead; a Horned Grebe and 2 Red-necked Grebes were also there. A walk around the south shore of the lake through the shrubs and marsh grasses failed to turn up any new species, until on return through the "Mallard Sloughs" we were treated to a great display by a Northern Harrier hunting just over the grasses on the marsh. Other species observed on the trip included a Golden Eagle, an American Kestrel, a Common Snipe, 3 Gray Jays, 3 Common Ravens, 5 Boreal Chickadees, 3 American Tree Sparrows and 3 Savannah Sparrows, most bidding farewell to Swan Lake until springtime once again brings life to the wetlands.

Loons in October

Destined to be renamed "Golden Eagles in October", this year's Loon trip was *nearly* loonless, with loons outnumbered by eagles five to one. A good day of birding, with over 200 birds of 26 species sighted, including two Common Loons. The trip began auspiciously, with a Snow Bunting landing on Jeremy's car at the S.S. Klondike before departure. Moving upriver to Schwatka Lake, we were greeted by a muskrat with no loons to report, though Bufflehead, Horned Grebe, Surf Scoters, goldeneye and Canvasbacks were scattered over the surface of the lake. A dozen White-winged Crossbills and a juvenile Herring Gull were also sighted.

Further upriver at the Yukon River bridge, the low lighting of the autumnal sun provided a good opportunity to practice waterfowl identification by silhouette while downstream of the dam a distant merganser inspired a heated debate over the distinguishing characteristics of Common and Red-breasted Mergansers. While heated, the debate was not sufficient to keep us warm, so we regained the cars and drove upriver to M'Clintock Bay, where a hundred Bufflehead and a few other floating fowl were spied in the still loonless waters.

Our final stop at Army Beach on Marsh Lake found us still loonless as Golden Eagles flew overhead on their annual migration along the lakeshore. Singly winging their way over the trees, some 11 eagles flew by during our brief stay on the beach, where we also saw Three-toed Woodpeckers working on the backshore trees. Over the river and through the woods, we broke out onto the beach in time to catch two Common Loons swimming offshore, making this once again a marvelous "Loons in October" outing. The wonders of birding!

A Visitor from Ecuador

by Pam Sinclair

Sure, there are lots of people in the world who live their whole lives without ever knowingly laying eyes on a shorebird. But anyone who happened to stroll along one of Marsh Lake's larger beaches during the long weekend in May last spring surely can't have helped but notice the shorebird event happening there.

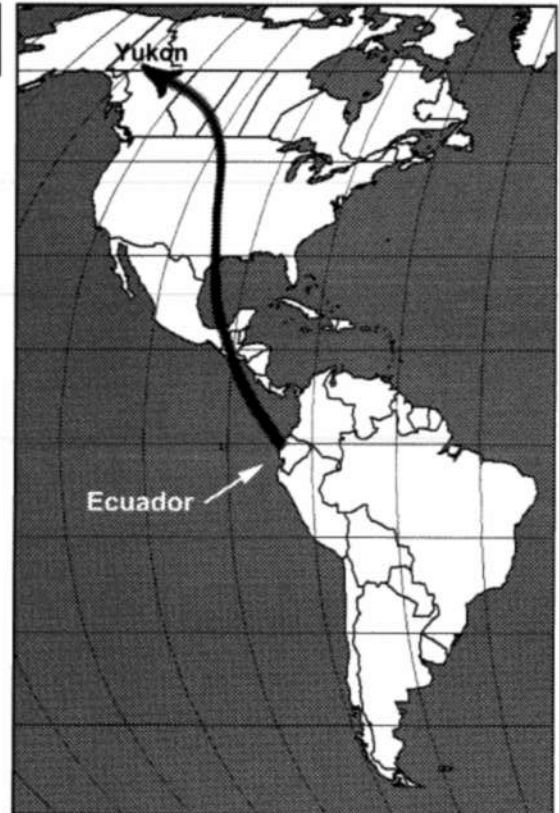
After a rather slow spring for shorebirds in the Whitehorse area, we experienced a "fallout" on the May long weekend, the likes of which we will probably not see again for a decade or more. At *Swan Haven* on M'Clintock Bay, the mudflats were swarming with thousands of shorebirds, including almost 2000 Pectoral Sandpipers. A total of 23 shorebird species were seen in the Whitehorse area that weekend. Along with other rarities were the Yukon's first ever Little Stint, as well as our first Marbled Godwit. Rather late in the evening of Monday, May 19th, Cameron Eckert and I were straining to get a better look at the Little Stint which was darting about in a flock of 200 Semipalmated Sandpipers at the mouth of Judas Creek. The plumage differences between the two species are fairly subtle, so we were carefully examining all of the peeps we set eyes on.

One of the "Semi's" stood out because it had coloured bands on one leg, with small plastic tabs extending from the bands. There was a regular aluminium band on the right leg, and two colour bands on the left: a pale bluish-green band with a "flag" pointing forward, and below it a red band with a "flag" pointing backward. It took some time to determine exactly what colour was where on the fast-moving bird, but finally we were sure that we had it right, and recorded the details.

In the excitement over the Little Stint, we promptly forgot about our decorated Semi. It was months later when I sent our description off to Dr. Cheri Trevor-Gratto of Canadian Wildlife Service in Saskatoon - Canada's authority on Semipalmated Sandpipers. She promptly forwarded my description to a bander in South America. I soon received a note from Ben Haase of Ecuador. Mr. Haase has been banding shorebirds at Mar Bravo, Santa Elena Peninsula, Ecuador since 1991 in order to study the wintering ecology of these birds.

Mr. Haase has had five previous reports of sightings of his colour-banded Semi's. Two were spring records, both from Beaverhill Lake near Edmonton, on 13 May 1994 and 12 May 1996. The other three were fall records (fall migration starts early for many shorebirds): two from Juneau, on 5-8 July 1995 and 3 July 1996, and one from the Kenai River, south of Anchorage on 1 July 1996. These few records, along with our Marsh Lake sighting, suggest that Semipalmated Sandpipers in this part of the world migrate inland in spring and along the coast in fall.

Semipalmated Sandpipers nest in northern Yukon, in wet sedge tundra beside the Beaufort Sea. These sparrow-sized shorebirds fly thousands of kilometres to South America each year to spend the winter feeding and preparing for another Arctic nesting season. If you see a bird of any species with colour bands, please take detailed notes on the colour(s) and placement of the bands. This sort of information is extremely valuable in determining the habits and habitat needs of bird populations. CWS in Whitehorse (393-6700) can forward your information and let you know where the bird was banded.



Ecuador to the Yukon: 8000 km (one way)



1997 Birdathon: Feature Birder's Report

by Jim Hawkings

Contrary to what many people might think, I viewed the role of feature birder in the 1997 Birdathon as a serious responsibility as well as a great honour. With this great responsibility in mind, I planned my attack. In the old days, this planning was not so mission-critical, as I always knew I would have the full 24 hours at my complete disposal – the only real decision to be made was how much, if any, to sleep. Things are different now in the “kids era”, and as a conscientious parent-birder I must carefully plan my Birdathon to provide my two eager boys with “appropriate” exposure to this wondrous event. I did this planning well in advance – on Friday afternoon at about 3 p.m. – a full two hours before the starting gun went off. Friday evening would be the deadly serious “adult” birding with my friend Bruce McLean, a guy who is a much keener birdwatcher than even he is aware. Together, we would work the hotspots of metropolitan Whitehorse and rack up 50 or 60 species, leaving all day Saturday to coast to a respectable total of 70 or 80 with the boys variously in tow.

It was a good plan. The weather was cooperative (in other words I think it was O.K., but I can't really remember) as we warmed up our binoculars at the traditional S.S. Klondike starting line. Within seconds we had notched half a dozen species, including some that can be surprisingly hard to catch up with (did you ever notice how hard it is to find a Rock Dove downtown when you really *need* one?). From there it was on to the Whitehorse Rapids Dam (those Herring Gulls are actually nesting across from the Fish Ladder!), Hidden Lake (Three-toed Woodpecker nest!), Beaver Lumber (great for wigeon as well as widgets!), the Marwell marsh (on a good windy day you can make those little dot-ducks into anything you want.....), Range Road dump (apparently a good place to go “parking” if anyone is interested – but you'll get limited privacy on Birdathon eve!), and the Crestview sewage lagoon (we enjoyed perfect conditions to brush up on duck silhouettes.....a bit hard on the

eyes however). Our last stop (now I remember something about the weather – it was frigid!) was McIntyre Creek wetlands near the fish farm. By now it was getting late and with the sun down the light wind was getting a bit beyond refreshing. However we added a few items to our list. And we encountered another posse of Birdathoners who, like us, were attempting to supercool their fingers by looking skyward at the many swallows overhead. Eventually pain forced us to retreat to our vehicle to tally the evening total in relative comfort and warmth. I still remember marveling at the disobedience of my fingers when I instructed them to extract the keys from my pocket and unlock the truck door. By the way, does anyone else find that no matter how painful you think your cold hands are, there is always a brief moment in the warming process that really gets your full attention. When we limped home at 11 pm the toll for the evening was 40 species, not too bad (we told ourselves) considering the cool weather.

Saturday dawned bright and clear (so I was told later in the day when I got up) – a perfect day for birding. I imagine most of the other Birdathoners had notched another 20 or 30 species by the time I got the young would-be junior Birdathoners of our family mobilized (I think it was mid-morning). I was mindful of one of the truisms of parenthood: **If an activity is fun, they will want to do it again. If not, you're toast.** At any rate, I set the sights high enough to keep me happy but low enough to keep the troops entertained. The boys and I headed for Judas Creek – a sure fire winner for all ages. It always has something great to offer. We were only there a few hours, but I got in lots of birding, and the boys had a great time – a little birdwatching, lots of racing around on the beach and mucking in the sand and mud. Here I had the thrill, finally, of taking a long, leisurely, and close-up look at a Ring-billed Gull for the first time ever. Oh, I've seen lots in Ontario, but I never looked at them there. It's a great feeling to get out the field guide and notice all the subtle

differences between a common species and its similar but seldom-seen cousin.

After the kids ran out of gas we went home and enjoyed the rest of the afternoon before rallying for the barbecue at the Wolf Creek campground. This year's get together was the best ever – a fitting wrap-up to the big event. I ended up with 58 species and my son Lee had 20 or so, but we both had a great time. I thoroughly enjoyed the

opportunity to be the celebrated Feature Birder. As the founder of the Yukon Birdathon, I can say that under the guidance of the Yukon Bird Club, the event has really matured and turned into an enjoyable event with very broad appeal. Thanks to all the organizers for doing such a great job! As for next year, WATCH OUT. I am going to compete in the prestigious "Enviro-birder" category. Who wants to give me a run for my money?

YBC 1997 AGM Report

This year's Annual General Meeting, held on Wednesday 22 October and chaired by Pam Sinclair was well attended and a great success. Presentations by various Board members included Pam Sinclair's President's report, Jeremy Baumbach's Treasurer's report, Stuart Alexander's field trip highlights, Helmut Grunberg's sightings report, Linda Cameron's Birdathon report; Dennis Kuch highlighted the Club's involvement in special projects, and Lee Kubica laid out the timeline for the upcoming Yukon Checklist. Fortunately, with all those reports to consider, only one vote was required: Jeremy's excellent and insightful report on the Club's financial state was duly appreciated and accepted.

The main business of the AGM was to elect a Board of directors for the new year, 1997/98. Despite the fact that the United Nations panel of observers missed the meeting, those present still managed to run an orderly election with the following results: Pam Sinclair returns as President, Linda Cameron is Treasurer, Dennis Kuch is Field Trip Coordinator, Wendy Nixon returns as Events Coordinator, Helmut Grunberg returns as Sightings Coordinator, Cameron Eckert returns as Newsletter Editor, Sheila Serup is Birdathon Coordinator, and Lee Kubica returns as Checklist Coordinator.

Finally, Quiz-master Cameron Eckert presented his annual Yukon Bird Club AGM trivia quiz. For those searching for a good reason to attend the AGM - look no further. Just be there next year, with a sharp pencil!

Thanks...

With a new slate of Directors set for 1997/98 we would now like to extend a sincere vote of thanks to those hard-working individuals who served the Board last year and have now moved on to new pursuits, or simply different positions on the Board.

Jeremy Baumbach served as Treasurer since the Club's founding in 1993. His financial accounting of the Club's activities each year at the AGM can only be described as "inspired". Jeremy has done an enormous amount of work over the years and we offer him our sincere thanks for a job well done! Fortunately, Jeremy remains on the Board as Secretary.

Stuart Alexander brought a very fresh approach to the job of Field Trip Coordinator. Stuart initiated many new trips (For example, the very popular Haunka Creek and Jackfish Bay trips!) and his Field Trip Reports in the Yukon Warbler always provided a most enjoyable read. Thank you very much Stuart!

Mary Whitley did an excellent job as Secretary, ensuring that the various media were kept informed on the activities of the Club. Of course, Yukon Bird Club events are open to all the public ... and Mary did a great job of getting the word out. Thanks Mary!

The Birdathon is certainly our most important event and as Birdathon Coordinator, Linda Cameron ensured the success of the 1997 Birdathon with record high donations. As always, the post-Birdathon Barbeque was very enjoyable. Thanks Linda!





The pamphlet's very beautiful cover, by Yukon artist and amphibian researcher Lee Mennell, depicts Yukon's most common and widespread amphibian, the Wood Frog.

Frog Wild: the varied lives of Yukon amphibians

by *Brian Slough*

This fall marked the publication of a very attractive and information-filled pamphlet, entitled *Frogs, Toads & Salamanders: Amphibians of the Yukon and Northern British Columbia*. This pamphlet summarizes what is known about amphibian distribution in our area, describes some basic biology of northern amphibians, and most importantly, requests observations from naturalists. Birders are among the most avid and widely traveled naturalists and are therefore prime candidates for this project. Like birds, amphibians can be identified from their songs. For example, a Wood Frog sounds like a duck with a cold, and a Boreal Chorus Frog's song has been likened to the noise made by running your finger along the teeth of a comb.

In 1991, the Canadian Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Network formed a working group named DAPCAN (Declining Amphibian Populations in Canada) to examine declines in Canadian amphibian populations. As Yukon's DAPCAN coordinator I am compiling a database of amphibian observations which will serve to document baseline populations and provide an ongoing monitoring tool.

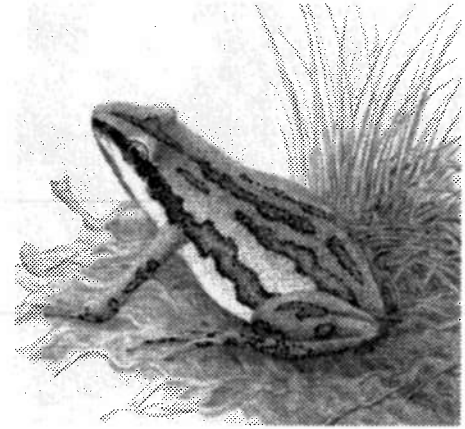
Amphibians are exceptionally sensitive to environmental changes, including those caused by humans. Amphibian population declines are occurring globally. Topics discussed at the 1997 DAPCAN meeting reflect the threats that amphibians are facing. For example;

- Leopard frogs, declining in western Canada for the past 20 years, are now declining in Ontario.
- Limb malformations are appearing in a Tiger Salamander population in an apparently uncontaminated site in the BC interior.
- Independent factors, such as lower pH and increased UV-B radiation, may operate together to disrupt egg and tadpole development.

There are few formal amphibian studies or monitoring projects in the Yukon. The Department of Renewable Resources does not support the monitoring of non-game populations. The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society has conducted biodiversity surveys on several rivers, including the Bonnet Plume and Coal, over the past two years resulting in several amphibian observations. Biologists from the Canadian

Wildlife Service also routinely record sightings, including the Yukon's first documented Boreal Chorus Frogs near the lower La Biche River, Yukon in 1995.

The BC government maintains biodiversity specialists in the regions and funds other programs to monitor biodiversity. Lee Mennell and I conducted a project funded by the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund to monitor amphibians in northern BC. Our study areas included the Tutshi River uplands (on the Skagway Road), Tagish Lake, and the Inklin and Taku Rivers. Lee is also conducting ongoing population studies of Spotted Frogs near Log Cabin, BC, funded by the Northern Research Institute.



Boreal Chorus Frog by Lee Mennell.

Here are some of the highlights from the 1997 field season:

- Further observations of Boreal Chorus Frogs on the lower La Biche River, Yukon.
- Unconfirmed reports of Spotted Frog from Johnson's Crossing and the Coal River.
- Wood Frog documented on the Bonnet Plume River.
- Boreal Toad found on Tagish Lake in BC to within 10 km of the Yukon border.
- No Spotted Frogs found on Tagish Lake, indicating that the Tutshi River population may be isolated, making it more vulnerable to extinction.
- No reports of Long-toed Salamanders.

I thank everyone who contributed sightings in 1997 and urge everyone to keep their eyes and ears open in 1998. For a rare winter amphibian encounter try the Atlin Warm Springs where Boreal Toads begin breeding in February.

Brian Slough
Yukon DAPCAN Coordinator
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Amphibian Art

For those involved in the production of *Frogs, Toads & Salamanders* it must have seemed like a dream-come-true when Lee Mennell delivered his artwork for the pamphlet. In particular, Lee's cover portrait of a Wood Frog, gives us a frogs-eye-view of a boreal forest wetland coloured by Lady-Slipper Orchids, Fritillary Butterflies, and a carpet of green sedge.

Lee's line drawings of amphibian life stages give amphibian watchers a clear picture of what to look for and his portrait of a Boreal Chorus Frog makes me wish that I'd spent a few more hours staring into that La Biche River marsh trying to catch a glimpse of the small calling frog. Great work Lee!

Cameron Eckert



Songbird reconnaissance of selected sites in Southeast Yukon, 1996

by Pam Sinclair

Canadian Wildlife Service

91782 Alaska Hwy, Whitehorse YT, Y1A 5B7

Until very recently, the bird life of southeast Yukon was virtually unknown. In 1993-94, songbird surveys along the Liard and Rancheria Rivers near the town of Watson Lake revealed that forest bird communities there were significantly different from those in the Whitehorse area or elsewhere in the Yukon (Eckert et al. 1997). Several species thought to be rare or non-existent in the Yukon were common along the Liard River. In 1995, songbird surveys along the La Biche and Beaver Rivers in the extreme southeast of the territory showed that the forest bird communities there were different again, and 8 new species were added to the territory's bird checklist (Eckert et al. In prep). The purpose of our 1996 work was (1) to visit two sites between the Liard River and the La Biche/Beaver River area, in order to further assess the distribution of birds across southeast Yukon; and (2) to assess the breeding status of new birds found at the La Biche River in 1995.

Visits were made to three sites in southeast Yukon. South Toobally Lake (60°10'N / 126°25'W) was surveyed on 11-16 June; Blind Lake (60°05'N / 128°30'W) was surveyed on 16-19 June; and the La Biche River (60°05'N / 124°05'W) was surveyed on 26 June-6 July, 1996.

South Toobally Lake and Siwash Creek, 11-16 June 1996

Previous work: There had been no formal surveys of songbirds at Toobally Lakes prior to 1996. Birders had visited the area on only two occasions: 4-25 July 1983 (Grünberg, unpubl. data), and 11-16 July 1992 (Eckert and Sinclair, unpubl. data). In this region, many breeding songbirds stop singing by July and therefore become difficult to observe. Thus it was thought that these two July visits probably gave an incomplete picture of the songbird communities in the area.

Observers: Cameron Eckert, Helmut Grünberg, Pamela Sinclair

1996 Results: We spent 5 days surveying South Toobally Lake, Siwash Creek, and the Smith River. Marshy areas along the edge of the lake at its south end

were found to be very rich with bird life, as were riparian areas along Siwash Creek. A total of 83 species were observed. Highlights included the second Yukon record of Franklin's Gull when two adults were observed on the lake with a group of Mew Gulls on 13 June; as well as a range extension for Bay-breasted Warbler, previously recorded only as far west as the Beaver River, some 80 km from Toobally Lakes. In addition, Cape May and Magnolia Warblers were found to be common, and Tennessee Warblers were abundant along Siwash Creek. Notable by their absence were Le Conte's Sparrow, which could not be relocated at one of two sites where this species was observed in 1983; and Western Tanager, which is abundant at the La Biche River and uncommon at the Liard, but was not observed in suitable habitat along the Smith River and Siwash Creek.



A pair of Franklin's Gulls was a highlight at Toobally Lakes on 13 June 1996. Photo by Cameron Eckert.

Blind Lake, 16-19 June 1996

Previous work: We found no previous reports on the bird life of Blind Lake.

Observers: Cameron Eckert, Helmut Grünberg

1996 Results: Blind Lake is a shallow land-locked lake beside the Hyland River, about 25 km east of the Liard River and the town of Watson Lake. A total of 56 species were found here. The zone of riparian forest

around the lake is quite narrow, the dominant forest type surrounding the lake being mature Lodgepole Pine. The only "southeast" songbirds found at Blind Lake were a few Swamp Sparrows in marshes around the lake's edge, and one observation of a Red-eyed Vireo singing on an island. By far the most outstanding avian feature at Blind Lake was found to be the previously unrecorded colony of about 25 pairs of nesting Black Terns (Eckert 1996). This species had been reported in the Yukon only four times, and none of these reports was well documented. The nearest known colonies are in the vicinity of Fort Nelson, BC, about 300 km to the southeast. At Blind Lake, Black Terns were nesting on dead floating reeds at the edge of the lake, with about 22 pairs in a dense colony at the south end of the lake and about 3 pairs in a satellite colony some 500 m up the east side of the lake. The Black Tern is particularly sensitive to environmental degradation, and populations have declined in many areas in North America.

La Biche River, 26 June-6 July 1996

Previous work: Intensive songbird surveys were conducted in this area in 1995, in response to threats to the area from logging. As a result of those surveys, 8 bird species were added to the Territory's checklist, and the La Biche River area was identified as an extremely rich area for songbirds, with a bird community unique in the Yukon Territory.

Observers: Cameron Eckert, Pamela Sinclair

1996 Results: A total of 75 species were observed, including most of the species discovered in 1995 and adding 3 new species. Species found in 1995 which were not observed in 1996 included Song Sparrow and Marsh Wren, which were thought to be vagrants in 1995, and Canada Warbler, which was uncommon and restricted to an area not visited in 1996. Nesting was confirmed for 18 species, including two new confirmed breeding species for the Yukon Territory: Bay-breasted Warbler and Western Tanager.

Discussion

This survey has added to the growing knowledge of the songbirds of southeast Yukon. It has become increasingly apparent that a number of Yukon songbird species are found at only one or a few productive valley-bottom sites along the southern edge of the territory, from the Liard River east to the Northwest Territories border. The riparian forests of southeast Yukon are therefore very important to the bird life of the Yukon Territory. Due to their restricted range, the species listed below are particularly vulnerable to habitat disturbance at these key sites:

- Four species appear to occur only at the La Biche River: Philadelphia Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Black-and-White Warbler, Canada Warbler.
- A further five species occur at both the La Biche and Beaver Rivers: Solitary Vireo, Ovenbird, Mourning Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Evening Grosbeak.
- A further three species occur as far west as South Toobally Lake or Siwash Creek: Cape May Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, and Le Conte's Sparrow
- A further four species occur at sites west to the Liard River, but not further west: Magnolia Warbler, Western Tanager, Swamp Sparrow, and White-throated Sparrow

Thus these 16 southeast Yukon songbird species are vulnerable to habitat loss, to varying degrees. The first priorities for conservation should be those species which occur only at the La Biche River.

It should be noted that although at the edge of their range, many of these species are quite common at these sites. For example, the Red-eyed Vireo, which apparently nests only at the La Biche River in the Yukon Territory, is abundant there even though it is absent from the Beaver River, 50 km to the west. Species which appear to be vagrants (e.g. Marsh Wren) or which nest only in extremely low numbers (e.g. Eastern Phoebe, one pair nesting at La Biche River bridge) have not been listed here.

Through this survey it has become evident that important bird habitats in southeast Yukon include:

- the south end of Blind Lake
- old growth forests in the La Biche River valley
- riparian spruce forest along Siwash Creek

References

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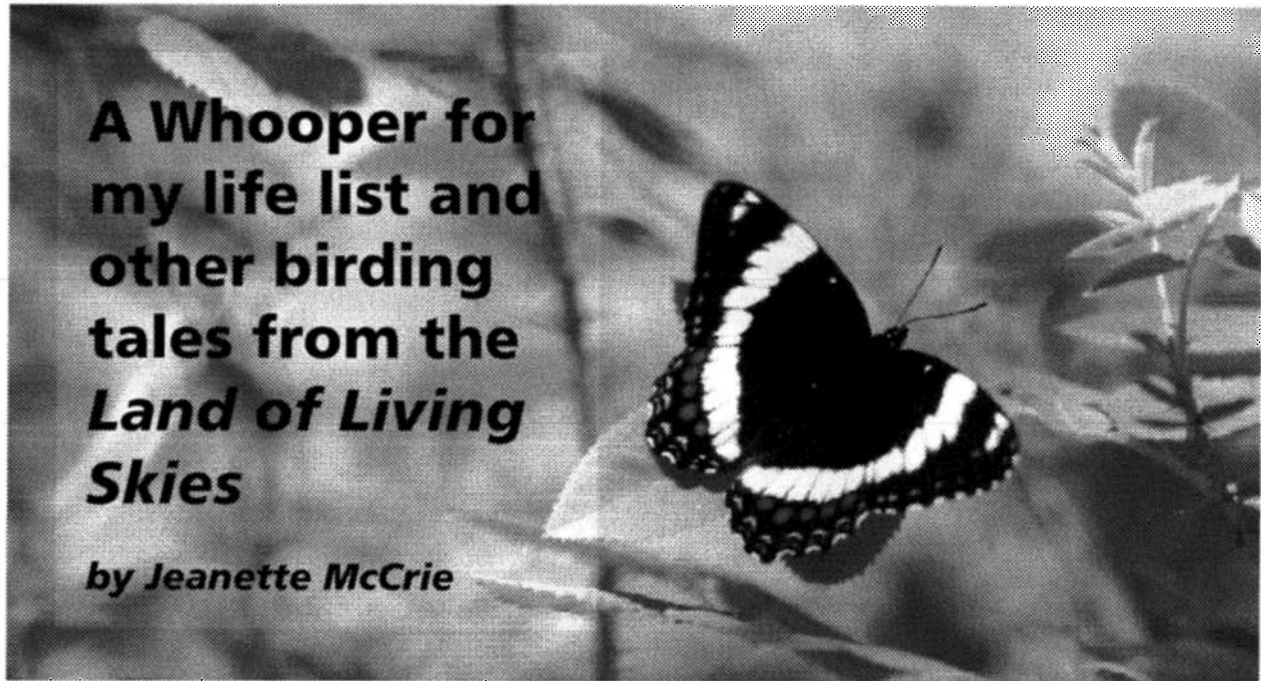
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Canadian Wildlife Service: 107 species observed at three southeast Yukon locations, June/July 1996 including 23 confirmed breeders (N) and 7 probable breeders (n).

Species	La Biche River	Toobally Lake	Blind Lake	Species	La Biche River	Toobally Lake	Blind Lake
Pacific Loon		+	+	Violet-green Swallow	+		
Common Loon		+	+	Bank Swallow	+	+	
Horned Grebe	+		+	Cliff Swallow		+	
Red-necked Grebe		+	N	Barn Swallow	N	N	+
Trumpeter Swan		+		Gray Jay	+	+	+
Canada Goose		+	+	Common Raven	+	+	
Green-winged Teal	N	+	N	Boreal Chickadee	+	+	
Mallard	N	N	N	Red-breasted Nuthatch	+	N	+
American Wigeon	+		+	Winter Wren	+		
Ring-necked Duck	+		+	Golden-crowned Kinglet		+	
Greater Scaup		+	+	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	+	+	+
Lesser Scaup	+		+	Mountain Bluebird	+		
Oldsquaw			+	Swainson's Thrush	+	+	+
Surf Scoter		+	+	Hermit Thrush		+	
White-winged Scoter		+	+	American Robin	N	+	+
Barrow's Goldeneye		+		Varied Thrush	+	+	
Common Goldeneye	+			Bohemian Waxwing	+	+	+
Bufflehead	N	+	N	Cedar Waxwing	+	+	
Common Merganser		+		Warbling Vireo	N	+	
Red-breasted Merganser		+		Red-eyed Vireo	+		+
Osprey		+		Tennessee Warbler	N	+	
Bald Eagle	+	N	+	Yellow Warbler	n	+	+
Sharp-shinned Hawk	+	+	+	Magnolia Warbler	+	+	
Northern Goshawk	+			Cape May Warbler	+	+	
Red-tailed Hawk	+			Yellow-rumped Warbler	n	+	+
American Kestrel	N	+		Bay-breasted Warbler	N	+	
Spruce Grouse		+	+	Black-and-White Warbler	+		
Ruffed Grouse	N	+		Blackpoll Warbler		+	
Sora	+			American Redstart	n	+	
Lesser Yellowlegs		+	+	Ovenbird	+		
Solitary Sandpiper	+	+	+	Northern Waterthrush	+	+	
Spotted Sandpiper	N	+	+	Mourning Warbler	+		
Common Snipe	+	+	+	Common Yellowthroat	+	+	+
Franklin's Gull		+		Wilson's Warbler		+	
Bonaparte's Gull		+	+	Western Tanager	N		
Mew Gull		+	+	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	+		
Herring Gull		+	+	Chipping Sparrow	N	+	N
Arctic Tern		+	+	Le Conte's Sparrow	n		
Black Tern			N	Savannah Sparrow		+	
Great Horned Owl		+		Fox Sparrow	+	+	
Common Nighthawk	+	+	+	Lincoln's Sparrow	n	+	N
Belted Kingfisher	+	+	+	Swamp Sparrow	+	+	+
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	N	+	+	White-throated Sparrow	n	+	
Hairy Woodpecker	+	+	+	White-crowned Sparrow		+	
Three-toed Woodpecker	N	N		Dark-eyed Junco	+	+	+
Northern Flicker	N	+	+	Red-winged Blackbird	+		+
Olive-sided Flycatcher	+	+		Rusty Blackbird		+	+
Western Wood-Pewee	+	+	+	Brown-headed Cowbird	+	+	+
Alder Flycatcher	+	+		Purple Finch	+		+
Least Flycatcher	N	+	+	Red Crossbill		+	
Hammond's Flycatcher	+	+	+	White-winged Crossbill	n	+	
Eastern Phoebe	n			Pine Siskin	+	+	+
Eastern Kingbird		+		Evening Grosbeak	+		
Tree Swallow	N	N	+	TOTAL SPECIES	75	83	56



A Whooper for my life list and other birding tales from the *Land of Living Skies*

by *Jeanette McCrie*

The light was fading fast on an early July evening near Quill Lake, Saskatchewan. My friend, Helen Weigel, and I stood in the back of her brother's half-tonne truck scanning a gully backed by a bluff of trees about half a mile away. The flax crop was about a foot high and wonderfully green but we were looking for something much more interesting.

For about three weeks six Sandhill Cranes and a lone Whooping Crane had been seen several times in this same field. But during my one week visit, all of our trips to the area had given us only one glimpse of the Sandhill Cranes.

The mosquitoes had begun to make in-roads on our patience when suddenly a row of bobbing brown heads slowly emerged from the gully. The Sandhill Cranes, all six of them, ambled slowly along, feeding on grasshoppers. I set up the scope and we enjoyed the sight of such large and elegant birds dining in the last rays of a beautiful day. We felt we would have to be satisfied with what were probably a group of young bachelors out for an evening snack.

I was making my usual "calm" and "refined" statements expressing my disappointment as I was leaving the next day, when suddenly at the far end of the gully, an enormous and very white bird

strolled up. We were ecstatic. It was here after all and giving us a clear view. It was much taller and larger than its Sandhill cousins as it paced through the flax enjoying the grasshoppers.

After feasting our eyes for some time, I attempted a few photos but at that distance, I only have a small white silhouette to act as a record. It was tempting to try and get closer but another group of people, who had walked part way down the field a bit earlier in the evening, had caused the Sandhill Cranes to move rapidly away. This time I would have to be satisfied with long looks through the scope. They are long looks I will not soon forget. The total population of wild Whooping Crane numbers at just 200-300. I never expected to find such an interesting life list species on a trip home to Saskatchewan.

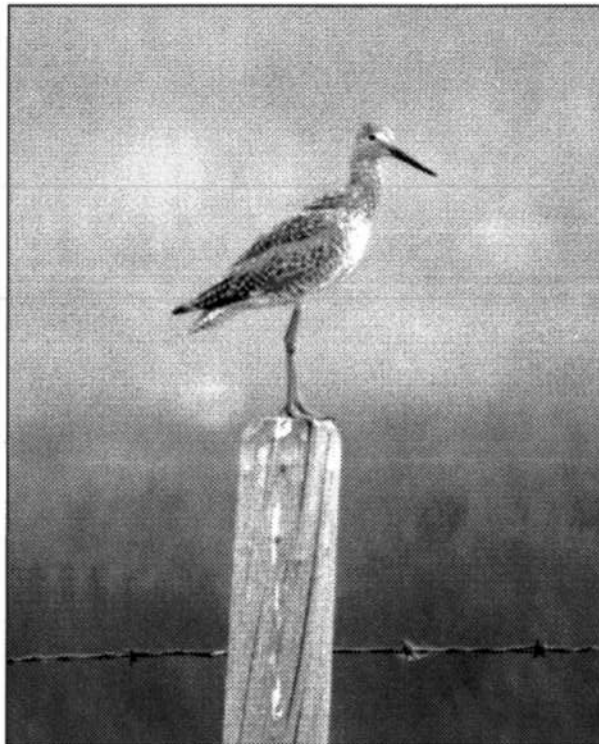
Actually, I added several other birds to my list while at Quill Lake. Black-crowned Night Herons had taken up residence along a small creek and a nearby slough provided a good look at an American Bittern. The Quill Lakes are very large and attract a large number of American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, American Avocets, Marbled Godwits and Willets, as well as numerous ducks and shorebirds. An afternoon expedition by van and a quad-pulled cart, designed by Quill Lake Nature Tours, helped us



get close-up views of some of the more inaccessible shoreline areas near these large prairie lakes.

Another treat was located right in the Weigel farmyard. Four young Merlins were learning to fly and led me to their hide-a-way with their constant screaming, though when I finally got to the right tree, they become totally silent. They never took their bright, black eyes off of me, no matter what I did to blend into the scenery. I also had opportunities to photograph Cedar Waxwings, American Goldfinches, House Wrens, Tree Swallows, and Lark Sparrows in the bush surrounding the farmyard.

The rest of my Saskatchewan holiday seemed a bit anti-climatic bird-wise but I did manage to spend a day at the salt flats near Chaplin, which provided me with my first look at Piping Plovers, which, like the Whooping Crane, are on the endangered species list in Saskatchewan. Their behaviour, which on this particular day consisted of running up and down a busy gravel road, led

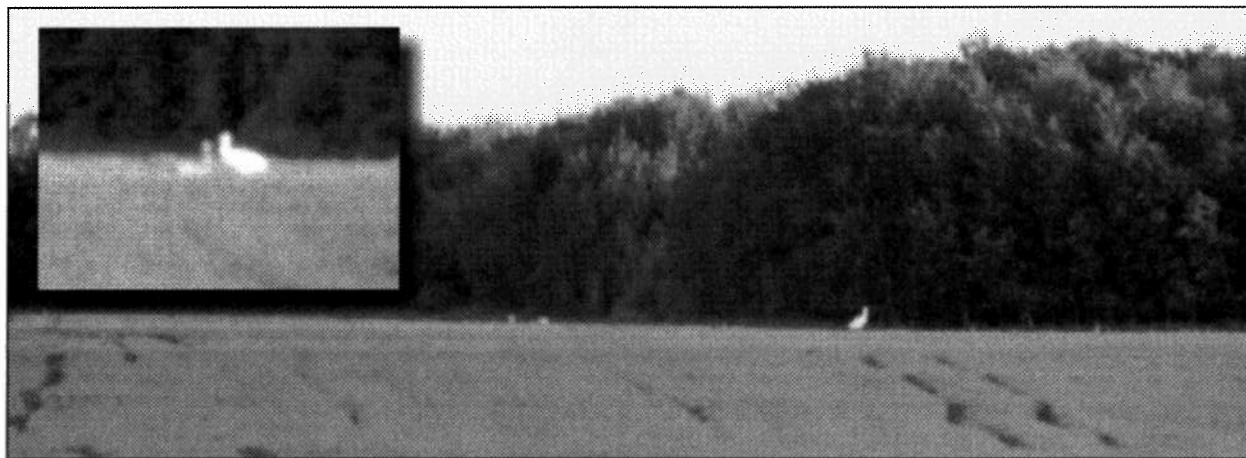


A breeding plumage Willet marks its territory at Quill Lake.
Photo by Jeanette McCrie.

me to believe they already had a death-wish. Despite this, I managed to see six of them within a couple of hours.

The heat at mid-day was 38°C, and the reflection of the salt flats was very intense but it did not seem to deter the numerous American Avocets, Willets, Sanderlings, Marbled Godwits, Lesser Yellowlegs, Franklin's Gulls, and Eared Grebes. As I left, a victim of heat and thirst, I saw, perched on a barbed wire fence, another first for me - a Chestnut-collared Longspur with its distinctive black breast.

Saskatchewan offers many opportunities for observing a wide array of species, due to the variety of habitats found across the province. The Tourism Department and Ducks Unlimited have published numerous brochures highlighting special birding spots, such as the Burrowing Owl site in Moose Jaw, the 600 acre reclaimed Luck Lake Marsh, and the Wadena Wildlife Wetlands. With so many places to go, I look forward to planning my next trip to a Saskatchewan birding hot spot.



While some photos appear to have been taken by an orbiting satellite, they often serve to record extraordinary moments in our birding lives. This Whooping Crane on a Saskatchewan flax field in July is one such image. Photo by Jeanette McCrie.

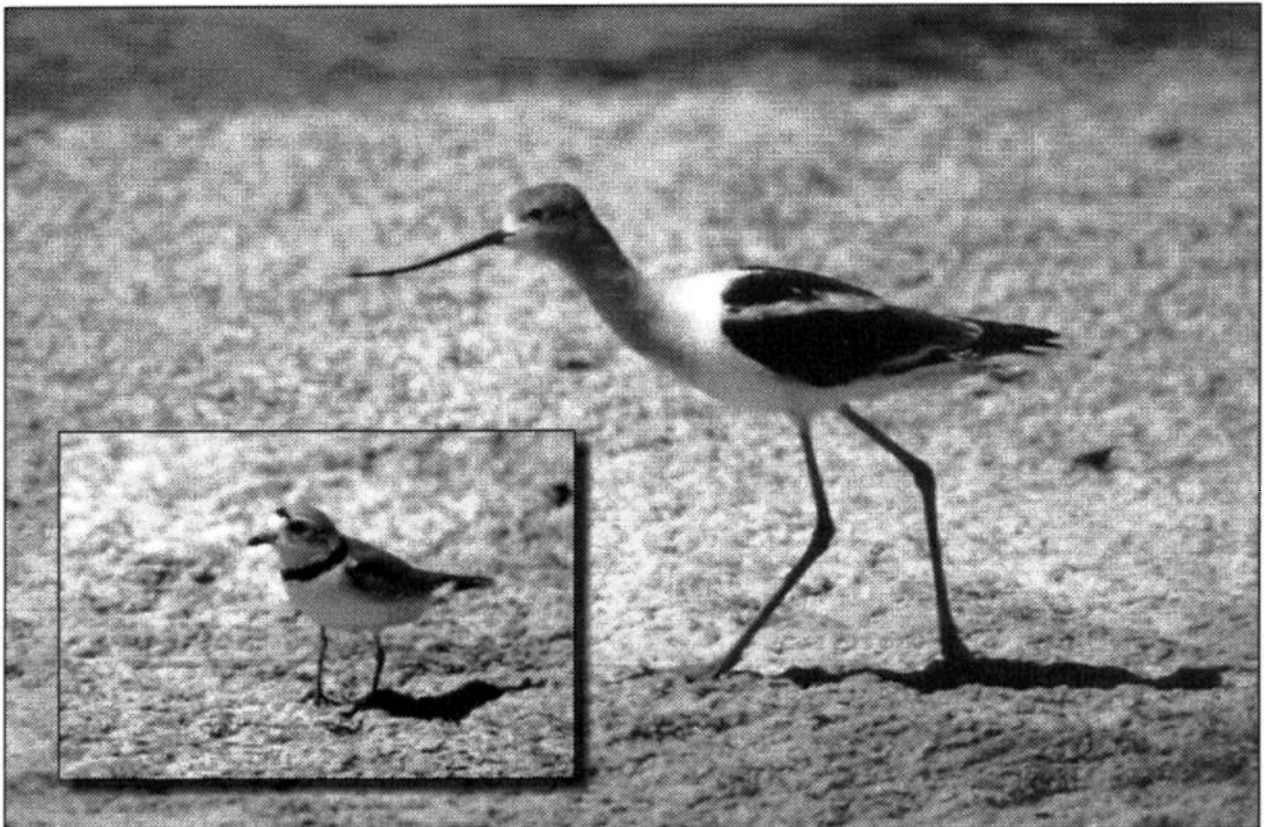
Birding images from Saskatchewan

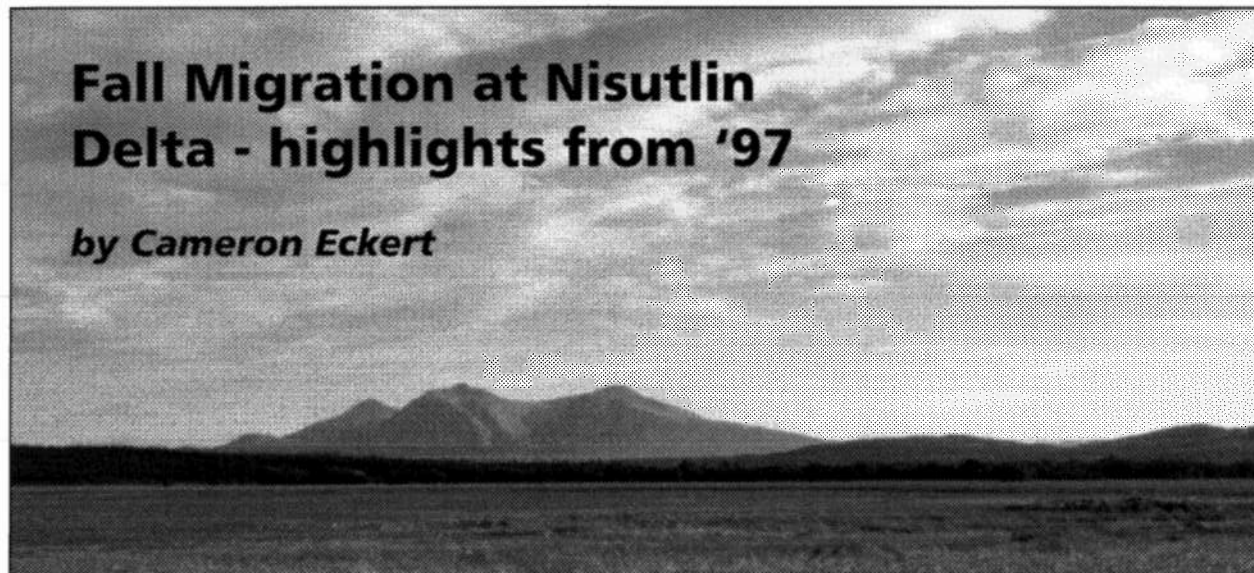
by Jeanette McCrie

Some Quill Lake birds like the **Tree Swallow** (right) would be familiar to most Yukon birders, while others like the **American Goldfinch** (below) may require a quick check of the field guide.



The distinctive upswept bill, rust coloured head and neck and bold black-and-white wings of an **American Avocet** (below) are unmistakable, while the much smaller **Piping Plover** (inset) may inspire a double take as it recalls to the observer a very pale Semipalmated Plover.





Fall Migration at Nisutlin Delta - highlights from '97

by Cameron Eckert

There is little debate that Nisutlin Delta is among southern Yukon's most extraordinary areas for viewing bird life during fall migration. The Delta exists as a mosaic of rich habitats where the Nisutlin River flows into Teslin Lake and it is this diversity of habitats which makes it such an important place for birds and an exciting place for birders.

This past fall, Pam Sinclair and I, joined by other birders on a number of occasions, made the short trip from Teslin to the Delta on eight days from late August to early October. The data presented in the accompanying table (page 18) are not based on a structured survey - they are simply the numbers we noted while birding. As such, the absence of numbers for waterfowl on a few days was not due to a lack of ducks, it was just that we spent the day focusing on other bird life. In fact, Nisutlin Delta has been fairly well studied for waterfowl and our tendency was to focus more on shorebirds and passerines.

The Delta is indeed a special place for shorebirds. Most common among the 18 shorebird species we tallied were Pectoral Sandpipers and Long-billed Dowitchers. In mid-September we were surprised to find a couple of Short-billed Dowitchers hidden in the larger flock of Long-billed Dowitchers. While we likely missed the peak migration of "peeps", which occurs earlier in August, the numbers of Baird's Sandpipers seemed relatively high and a few Western Sandpipers are always

interesting in the Yukon. American Golden-Plovers were noted in relatively low numbers while the few Black-bellied Plovers observed seemed about normal for this scarce migrant. One of the highlights of fall shorebirding is the search for the rare Sharp-tailed Sandpiper among the hundreds of Pectorals. The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is a Eurasian breeder which is considered rare anywhere in North America and is always cause for excitement. This year we were not disappointed as we managed to spot single Sharp-tailed Sandpipers on two occasions. In fact, careful observations of Pectoral flocks have revealed that the Sharp-tailed is a rare but regular fall migrant at Nisutlin. Other interesting finds were a small flock of Stilt Sandpipers, a few Sanderlings, a Ruddy Turnstone, and a Killdeer in early October.

As fall migration progressed, the numbers of passerines dwindled. Yellow and Blackpoll Warblers disappeared quickly after late August, the last Orange-crowned were seen on September 13, while the odd Yellow-rumped Warbler could still be found in late September. In late August, large flocks of American Pipits were the primary food-interest of a Merlin which seemed to sweep the mudflats almost constantly. Small flocks of Lapland Longspurs were also seen on most outings. On September 28, three Mountain Bluebirds were a pleasant addition to the many other birds feeding at the edge of the mudflats.

Perhaps one of our most unusual observations was of the antics displayed by a Belted Kingfisher and a Sharp-shinned Hawk on September 28. As we watched again and again (literally dozens of times), the kingfisher would alight on a perch, the Sharp-shinned would fly over and flush the kingfisher off its perch. The kingfisher would find a new perch a few metres away only to be joined by the Sharp-shinned moments later. It was clear that the interaction had little to do with any sort of predator-prey relationship, rather; the kingfisher seemed merely annoyed while the Sharp-shinned appeared vaguely enamoured.

Birds of prey are a constant presence on the Delta and with them comes the drama of viewing the formidable skills of nature's most powerful avian predators. It seemed a strange luxury to be able to watch a Peregrine dive again and again at flocks of ducks sitting in the shallows - a scene which became truly odd as the thousands of panicked ducks skittered about on the water's surface but

refused to fly. It seems that the ducks have learned that Peregrines hunt most effectively on the wing and that to take flight would mean almost certain death for one bird. It became stranger still when an adult Northern Goshawk threw itself curiously into this confused mix of ducks and falcons. Of course, the falcons had other techniques and on more than one occasion a Peregrine or Merlin would use an unsuspecting birdwatcher as a block for its approach on a flock of shorebirds or pipits. It was also a chance to study both *anatum* and *tundrius* races of Peregrine Falcons and become more familiar with the falcon's more subtle plumage characteristics. On August 31, one falcon's husky build was a clue to its identity - a Gyrfalcon!

While it is nearly impossible for the written word to convey the enormous thrill of laying one's eyes on thousands of birds in one sweep of the mudflats, perhaps these notes will inspire others to visit the Delta and share the experience.



An immature Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Nisutlin Delta on September 7 1997. Photo by Cameron Eckert



Daily totals for 69 species observed on eight outings to the Nisutlin River Delta, Yukon from late August through early October 1997 by C.Eckert and P.Sinclair.

SPECIES	30-Aug	31-Aug	1-Sep	7-Sep	13-Sep	27-Sep	28-Sep	5-Oct
Pacific Loon								3
Great Blue Heron				1				
Tundra Swan					present	most	most	most
Trumpeter Swan	24	25			present	some	some	some
swan sp.					75	150	200	2000-5000
Gr. White-fronted Goose	25	40						
Canada Goose	800	800	200		500	200	hundreds	1000
Green-winged Teal	1000	present			present	present	present	
Mallard	2000	present			present	present	present	
Northern Pintail	1000	present			present	present	present	
Northern Shoveler		present			present	present	present	
American Wigeon	2000	present			present	present	present	
total number of dabblers	6000	6000			10000	thousands	thousands	thousands
Ring-necked Duck		15						
goldeneye sp.						20	10	
Bufflehead		30				10		20
merganser sp.						70		
Bald Eagle	2		1	1	2	2	3	2
Northern Harrier	2	3		2	1		2	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk			1					
Northern Goshawk							1	
Red-tailed Hawk			1					
Merlin	1	1				1		1
Peregrine Falcon	1			1	2	3	1	1
Gyrfalcon		1						
Ruffed Grouse	6				2		5	
Black-bellied Plover					2	1		2
American Golden-Plover		1		5				
Killdeer								1
Lesser Yellowlegs		2						
Spotted Sandpiper	2	2	1					
Ruddy Turnstone				1				
Sanderling				3	1	1		
Semipalmated Sandpiper				3				
Western Sandpiper				1	2			
Least Sandpiper	2			1				
Baird's Sandpiper	15	8		4	5			
Pectoral Sandpiper		45		400	200	20	75	30
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper				1			1	
Stilt Sandpiper		5		3				
Short-billed Dowitcher				2	1			
Long-billed Dowitcher		12		33	60			2
Common Snipe					1			
Red-necked Phalarope	3	3						
Mew Gull		1						
Herring Gull				2	1	2		4
Thayer's Gull				30		1	1	4
gull sp.		2						
Great Horned Owl						1		
Belted Kingfisher	1	1	1	1	2			
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1							
Hairy Woodpecker		1						
Northern Flicker			1		1			
Black-billed Magpie						2	2	
Common Raven	1	4	1	6	3	10	6	6
Black-capped Chickadee	2	6	2				3	
Boreal Chickadee		1	1				2	
Red-breasted Nuthatch			1					
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	8				4		3	
Mountain Bluebird							3	
American Pipit	200	200		6	75	4	4	1

SPECIES	30-Aug	31-Aug	1-Sep	7-Sep	13-Sep	27-Sep	28-Sep	5-Oct
Northern Shrike								1
Orange-crowned Warbler	2				2			
Yellow Warbler	8							
Yellow-rumped Warbler	30	10		6	6	1		
Blackpoll Warbler	3	2						
Common Yellowthroat		1	2		1			
American Tree Sparrow			2		10		2	
Savannah Sparrow	8	17		5	4			
Lincoln's Sparrow		1			1			
Dark-eyed Junco	2		3		100		2	
Lapland Longspur	60	30		40	150		10	
Rusty Blackbird	2	50			2		50	

Pectoral Sandpiper

En route south from its breeding grounds in northern Yukon and Alaska, the Pectoral Sandpiper was the most common migrant shorebird observed at Nisutlin Delta from late August through early October. This individual was photographed on September 7 1997 by Cameron Eckert.



Heading out for a day of birding at the Nisutlin Delta. Photo by Pam Sinclair



Nisutlin Delta: A Learner's Perspective

by **Scott Fraser**

Yukon College instructors Dave Mossop and Bob Jickling led a group of Yukon College students on a weekend trip to Nisutlin Delta on September 19, 1997. Half a dozen Peregrine Falcon encounters held everyone's attention on Saturday afternoon. One Peregrine was observed close enough to be identified as a *tundrius* Peregrine. Other birds of prey such as Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Merlin and Gyrfalcon were observed in action. From a lookout tower earlier in the day, we could see roughly one hundred Trumpeter Swans, three to four thousand Canada Geese and about five thousand ducks. Some Greater White-fronted Geese were also seen on approach to the grand central station while we were having lunch on the mud flats. There were hundreds of Pectoral Sandpipers about that the Peregrine were chasing. Other birds on the Delta included high numbers of American Pipits and Lapland Longspurs. The forest nearby held Ruby-crowned Kinglets and a variety of sparrows. Great Horned Owls were heard calling constantly at night near the camp. A lone Glaucous Gull was seen on the Delta on

Friday night. I was surprised by the large size of this occasional visitor.

Dave took the time to explain how the Nisutlin Delta offers up its food in the fall unlike many other rivers in the Yukon. The river system is not glacier fed and its water level drops low in the fall exposing water plants for the birds to feed on. This makes the Nisutlin Delta one of the most critical staging areas for migratory birds in the region. The water was lower than usual during our visit. The Delta looked like a watery moonscape from all the feeding craters created by the swans and geese. From this fueling station, waterfowl make very long uninterrupted flights on their way to their wintering grounds. The students visited duck traps used by waterfowl biologists to capture ducks for banding - the traps were working well. On Saturday an America Widgeon and three Green-winged Teal were banded. The next day a Green-winged Teal eluded the students grasp and escaped without any jewelry. Another Green-winged Teal and a Northern Pintail were successfully banded. All the ducks caught had hatched this past summer - it seemed that they were more hungry than smart. This was the first time many of us had the opportunity to hold and observe these species at close range. For Yukon College students in the Renewable Resource Programme, Nisutlin Delta offers a tremendous learning experience.



Pectoral Sandpipers form a ribbon of shorebirds at Nistulin Delta. September 7 1997. Photo by Cameron Eckert.

Fall birding on the Yukon's North Coast

by Cameron Eckert



The lower Running River offers unusually diverse habitats for an Arctic landscape. August 22 1997. Photo by Pam Sinclair.

While most visitors to the Arctic rely primarily on small planes to get around, Pam Sinclair and I had long pondered the possibility of travelling to the Yukon's Arctic Coast by boat. In 1996, we met Frank Elanik at Herschel Island where he works as a park warden and learned that he also runs a guiding business called *Four Season's Arctic Adventures*. Early this past summer we contacted Frank in Aklavik and confirmed our plans to make a fall trip, by boat to the North Coast. On August 14, Frank picked us up in Inuvik and after an overnight at Aklavik we headed out to the Coast.

Our destination was Shingle Point on the Yukon's North Coast. The trip from Aklavik along Moose Channel through the Mackenzie Delta to the the Beaufort Sea took about 5 hours (126 km), and from there we travelled another couple of hours (27 km) along the Coast past the Blow and Running Rivers to Shingle Point. The Point itself is four kilometers long and stands out as one of the few irregularities along the Yukon Coast. A few kilometers offshore from Shingle Point lies Escape Reef, which is a long sliver of gravel rising just slightly above the ocean's surface. It is a major nesting site for gulls and terns.

We camped for four days at Shingle Point, travelling on most days to nearby Running River or Escape Reef. Then on August 19, after enduring 24 hours of one of the most dramatic storms I have ever experienced, we moved our camp to Running River. It was clear that Running River, with its rich wetlands and extensive tall shrubs along the river offered a much greater diversity of habitats.

During the ten days we spent on the Coast we observed a total of 54 species (see table on page 23). Birding at Shingle Point and Running River during migration was a very different experience as birds were most certainly on the move. The many flocks of shorebirds heading east along the Coast rarely touched down, but would drop low over the marshes at Running River as if to check out the options and then just keep right on going towards the Mackenzie Delta. As such, we became very proficient at identifying shorebirds on the wing. Most common were American Golden-Plover, Pectoral Sandpiper,



Long-billed Dowitcher, Red-necked Phalarope and Whimbrel. Rarer shorebirds included Black-bellied Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper, Dunlin, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Red Phalarope. Perhaps most surprising was the frequent occurrence of Sanderlings which are generally considered rare in the Yukon.

It was the Ruddy Turnstones which provided us with our greatest source of entertainment. It seems that Ruddy Turnstones have a secret: they are at least as devious as the Parasitic Jaeger in their pursuit of food. Our small pile of bird seed put out at Shingle Point to attract passerines, was

quickly consumed by hungry turnstones and after a few days there was a flock of up to 33 turnstones feeding just a few metres from our tent. At Running River, the turnstones exhibited an equally tenacious appetite for caribou meat - much to the dismay of local hunters.

Despite the fact that migration was in full swing, some species such as Red-throated Loons and Parasitic Jaegers had not yet finished rearing their young. Each day, Red-throated Loons made countless trips from their nesting sites on inland fresh water lakes to feed on the open ocean. Unfortunately for the loons, the challenge of feeding their young only really began after successfully catching a fish. We watched again and again as a loon with a fish in its bill would take off from the ocean only to be mobbed moments later by a hungry Parasitic Jaeger, and after a brief chase, the loon would usually drop its fish. It seemed that a loon's only hope for outrunning a jaeger was to try and increase its acceleration by heading down-wind, thereby making a considerable detour before heading back to its nest site. Of course, the jaegers too had hungry young to feed and this seemed to be their best option.

Our hikes upstream along Running River revealed that a few songbirds had yet to migrate. We encountered Savannah, White-crowned, and American Tree Sparrows foraging in the shrubs, and we were surprised both by a very bright male Yellow Warbler, and a Northern Waterthrush which was still inspired to sing so late in the season. Further along the river, we watched as an immature Northern Shrike proved itself to be an effective predator as it snatched a Common Redpoll from the air.

Throughout our visit we met many kind and generous people and were treated to enormous hospitality. In particular, Frank and Flora Elanik ensured that our trip was safe, comfortable and very enjoyable. Those interested in visiting the area should contact the Hunters and Trappers Association in Aklavik.



Frank Elanik's 18 foot Lund proved to be a very able craft on the trip from Inuvik to Shingle Point. August 25, 1997. Photo by Cameron Eckert



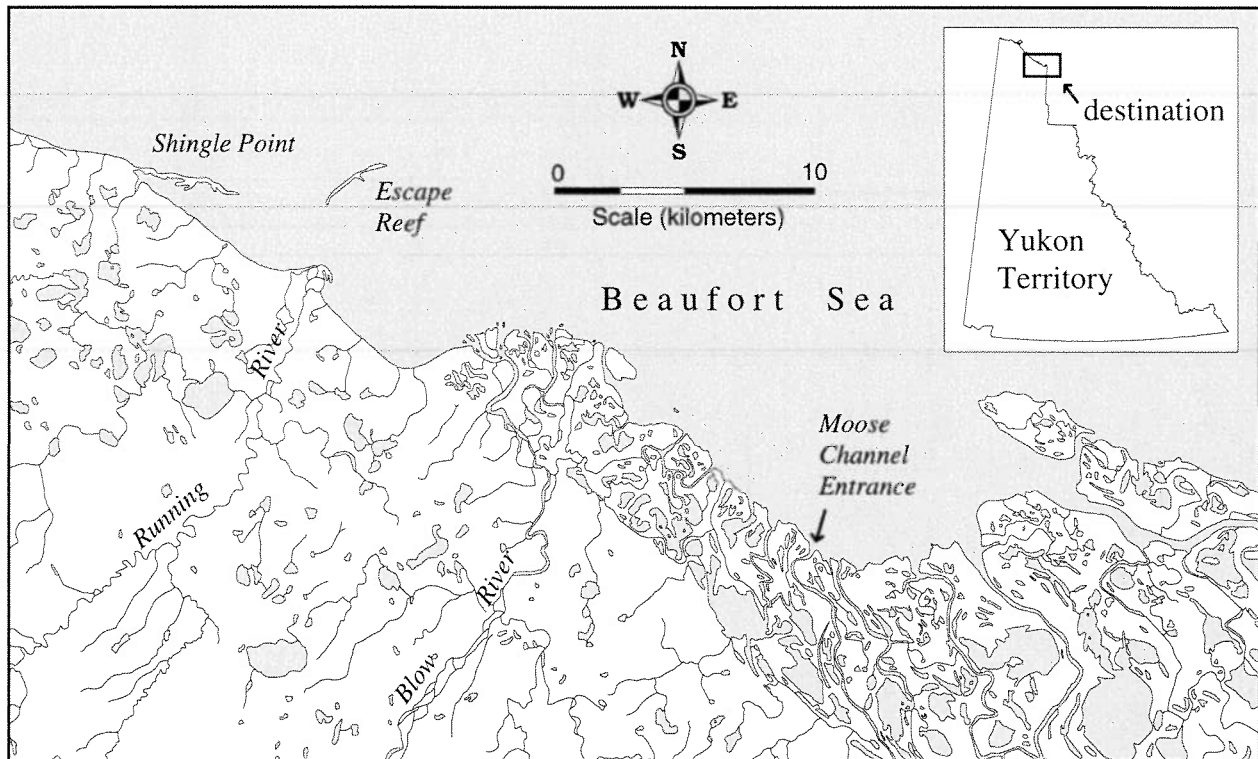
American Golden-Plovers on the move at the Blow River. August 23 1997. Photo by Cameron Eckert

Daily totals for 54 species observed at five North Coast locations from 15-24 August 1997. Locations are Blow River (BR), Escape Reef (ER), Moose Channel (MC), Running River (RR), and Shingle Point (SP). Observers C. Eckert and P. Sinclair.

DAY (August)	15	16				17		18		19		20		21		22		23		24		TOTAL
LOCATION	MC	ER	SP	RR	SP	RR	SP	SP	RR	RR	RR	RR	RR	RR	RR	RR/BR	MC	MC	MC	MC	TOTAL	
Red-throated Loon			4		6		15		4	4	3	8	8		20						72	
Pacific Loon	6					2	2														10	
Common Loon					1		1														2	
Tundra Swan				2						2	2	2	2		32						42	
Gr. White-fronted Goose				65		70	25			115	300	300	200	300	150						1525	
Snow Goose																	1				1	
Brant					34																34	
Green-winged Teal												4	2								6	
Mallard	20																1				21	
Northern Pintail	40		30		70	15	1			10	25	12	12								215	
Northern Shoveler											3										3	
American Wigeon	600				200		50	1		40	30	20	25		4						970	
Greater Scaup																	2				2	
Oldsquaw																3					3	
Surf Scoter					3		300	1													304	
White-winged Scoter	1		60		3		4														68	
Bald Eagle										1	2										3	
Northern Harrier				1						3	6	2	2		1						15	
Rough-legged Hawk			1									1									2	
Merlin										1			1								2	
Peregrine Falcon													1								1	
Gyrfalcon			1		1					1	2		2								7	
Willow Ptarmigan											8		32								40	
Sandhill Crane	13				2		2			2	4	4	2		4						33	
Black-bellied Plover			1										1		7						9	
American Golden-Plover	12					2				15	25	30	70	260	12						426	
Semipalmated Plover														3							3	
Spotted Sandpiper				1																	1	
Whimbrel					1						1		3		25						30	
Ruddy Turnstone		1	12		7	7	33	25		6	6	14	7								118	
Sanderling					2		5				1				17						25	
White-rumped Sandpiper																					1	
peep sp.										1			3		6						10	
Pectoral Sandpiper			2		3	15				6	45	20	50	130							271	
Dunlin							1				1										2	
Buff-breasted Sandpiper						2					1										3	
Long-billed Dowitcher						15				6	30		20	70							141	
Red-necked Phalarope			3		45		6			4	6	6	5	3							78	
Red Phalarope			2		1					2											5	
phalarope sp.			8									4									12	
Pomarine Jaeger																	1				1	
Parasitic Jaeger	4		4	2	12	1	6	4			2	2	2	15							54	
Mew Gull			10	6	6		6	4	3	8	6	6	4								59	
Herring Gull	1				1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2							13	
Glaucous Gull	2	120	70	60	60	30	40	40	40	40	80	60	190								832	
GlaucousxHerring Gull					1								2								3	
Arctic Tern	2	12	8		10		6	3		2											43	
Common Raven			1	1	1		1	2	1	2	4	2	8								23	
Northern Shrike													2								2	
Yellow Warbler											1										1	
Northern Waterthrush											1										1	
American Tree Sparrow											1		2								3	
Savannah Sparrow	1			2			3				4	4	6	2	1						23	
White-crowned Sparrow			1								3		2								6	
Lapland Longspur			6		6		5	40			80	6	50	30							223	
Snow Bunting			4		3		5	2						1							15	
Common Redpoll											10		10								20	
TOTAL	702	133	228	342	277	212	467	126	259	656	523	602	1147	164	5838							



Destination: The Yukon's North Coast



Shelter from the storm: Our well protected camp during the height of the August 18th blow at Shingle Point.
Photo by Pam Sinclair.

Tundra Swan Migration

The following abstract entitled “*Migration Behaviour of Tundra Swans from the Yukon-Kuskokwin Delta, Alaska*” is from a 1994 study which was presented by Craig R. Ely et. al. at the 7th Alaska Bird Conference, December 1997, Anchorage.

In 1994, Tundra Swans fitted with satellite transmitters on the outer coast of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Alaska, migrated eastward across the Delta in late September, and stopped at wetlands on the west side of the Alaska Range during early October. After crossing the Alaska Range, swans stopped briefly on the Susitna Flats of Upper Cook Inlet. They then migrated

eastward into the Yukon, and from there flew southward, paralleling the Wrangell Mountains through the interior of the Yukon to a staging area in north-eastern British Columbia. They gradually migrated through central Alberta and southwest Saskatchewan, and across Montana to a staging area in southeastern Idaho. They remained in southeastern Idaho from mid-November until early December when they migrated across Nevada to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta of California. Spring migration routes were similar to those used in autumn. Swans stopped only briefly (<3 days) at staging areas in Alaska and northern Canada, but lingered at migration stop-overs in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Idaho.

Whitehorse Winter Birding Word Puzzle

by Jeremy Baumbach

Grab a pencil and bird by unscrambling these jumbles:

1. V A N E R

--	--	--	--	--	--
2. G I P E A M

--	--	--	--	--	--
3. S K I C H E A C E D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
4. D O L E S P R L

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
5. T H A T C H U N

--	--	--	--	--	--	--
6. K O O V C R E D

--	--	--	--	--	--	--
7. D E L G A B A L E

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

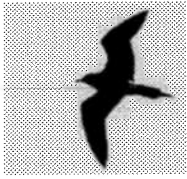
Rearrange the boxed letters to identify the relevant seasonal ritual:

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Solutions on page 36



FieldNotes: Observations from the field



Please send sightings to Helmut Grünberg, (807 Wheeler, Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2P8). Include details such as date, location, number of birds, sex and age, and observers' names. Highlight interesting observations and please 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).

Fall 1997

Red-throated Loon sightings included 20 at the Running and Blow Rivers on August 23 (CE,PSi), one at Lake Laberge on September 27 (LC,YBC), two winter-plumage birds at Daughney Lake, 8 km north of Alaska Highway between Rancheria and Swift River, on September 27 (RM,BB), and one at Schwatka Lake on September 28 (HG). **Pacific Loon** sightings included six along Moose Channel, in the Mackenzie Delta, Northern Yukon on August 15 (CE,FE,PSi), five at Daughney Lake on September 27 (RM,BB), and 3 at Nisutlin Delta on October 5 (CE,PSi). A count of 17 **Common Loons** was made at Lake Laberge on September 27 (LC,YBC), while 13 were at Daughney Lake on September 27 (RM,BB), two winter-plumage birds were at Army Beach on October 18 (CE,YBC), and one winter-plumage bird was at Lake Laberge on November 16 (CE). A winter-plumage **Yellow-billed Loon**, rare but regular in fall in the Whitehorse area, first discovered at Lake Laberge on November 16 (CE), was still present there on November 22-23 (CE,HG). A **Double-crested Cormorant** was at "seagull island" on Lake Laberge (the only Yukon location where this species is regularly observed) on August 19 (WK,GW). A tally of 22 **Horned Grebes** was made at Schwatka Lake on August 28 (HG), and one was still there on November 11 (CE). Twelve **Red-necked Grebes** were at Schwatka Lake on August 28 (HG), and two were at Daughney Lake on September 27 (RM,BB).

Three **Trumpeter Swans** were at Gravel Lake along the North Klondike Highway on August 12 (CE,PSi), and 17 adults were at Daughney Lake on September 27 (RM,BB), four adults and two juveniles were reported from the Yukon River near Strawberry Lane, and three families totaling 16 individuals were there as late as November 7 (LG,JH). An impressive concentration of at least 2000 swans (and perhaps as many as 5000), mostly **Tundra** but with some **Trumpeters**, was noted at Nisutlin Delta on October 5 (CE,PSi). Six **Tundra Swans** (a family group with two adults and four juveniles) were spotted at Quartz Road marsh on October 9 (CE,PSi). A single **Tundra Swan** was on Schwatka Lake on October 12, and 40 were flying over Whitehorse on October 17 (HG). Up to two adult swans were at the confluence of McIntyre Creek and Yukon River in Whitehorse through late November (CE,LK). Two immature swans were at Lake Laberge on November 23 (CE,HG,PSi). One **Greater White-fronted Goose** was with four **Canada Geese** at the Beaver River on August 19 (BB), and 300 **Greater White-fronts** were



A family group of Tundra Swans at the Quartz Road Marsh, Whitehorse, October 1997. Photo by Jeanette McCrie.

at Running River on 20-23 August (CE,PSi) A lone **Snow Goose** at the Search and Rescue cabin at the entrance to Moose Channel, Mackenzie Delta, Yukon on August 24 was the only fall report (CE,FE,PSi). Twenty-five **Canada Geese** were in Whitehorse on September 22 and about 150 on October 1 (BS). A flock of 100 **Canada Geese** was flying over Watson Lake on September 28 (LE). A count of 600 **American Wigeon** was made along Moose Channel, Yukon on August 15 (CE,FE,PSi). An adult male **Canvasback** and two **Ring-necked Ducks** were at Carcross on November 9 (CE,PSi). Six **Greater Scaup** were at Schwatka Lake on September 28 (HG), and five were at Lake Laberge on October 18 (CE,HG). At least 300 **Lesser Scaup** were on the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on September 14 (HG,YBC). A winter-plumage male **Oldsquaw** was spotted at Three-Guardsmen Lake, Haines Summit, BC on October 11 (CE,PSi). Six were on Schwatka Lake on October 12 (HG), and a female at Lake Laberge on November 16 provided a record late date for the Whitehorse area (CE). A count of 300 **Surf Scoters** was made at Shingle Point on August 18 (CE,PSi), and a male lingered at Carcross on November 29 (RM,BB). A count of 60 **White-winged Scoters** was made at Shingle Point on August 16 (CE,PSi). A female **Common Merganser** with three grown juveniles was encountered at Moose Lake, Beaver River on August 13, and a female **Red-breasted Merganser** with five juveniles was at the Beaver River on August 14, one individual was noted at the Beaver River Hotsprings on August 15, a female with five downy juveniles was spotted at the Beaver River on August 16 (BB). About 100 unidentified **mergansers** were at Daughney Lake on September 27 (RM,BB). A **Great Blue Heron** cut a striking figure on the mudflats of the Nisutlin Delta on September 7 (CE) - it had been reported from Teslin earlier in the month (DD,PD,JMa).

Osprey sightings included one at the Beaver River on August 16 and on August 19 (BB), and the one at Teslin Lake on September 27 (CE,PSi) which tied the Yukon's previous record late date. **Bald Eagle** sightings included an adult bringing a fish to a nest with a fully grown juvenile (one that was able to fly) at the Beaver River on August 16 (BB), and an adult was fishing at Lake Laberge on November 23 (HG). A **Northern Harrier** was seen near the Takhini River on October 21 (LA), and one seen in Whitehorse on November 4 was getting late (PSi). **Sharp-shinned Hawk** sightings included one at the Beaver River Hotsprings on August 15 and one at the Beaver River on August 17 (BB), one each at Johnson's Crossing and Teslin on September 13 (CE), one at Porter Creek on September 26 (CE,PSi), an immature bird in Haines Junction on September 30 (TH), and one at Coal Lake Road, Whitehorse on October 4 (CE,PSi). **Northern Goshawks** were very well reported this fall with observations of an immature at the Beaver River on August 18 (BB), an immature at Moose Creek campground along the North Klondike Highway on August 27 (CE), an adult at the north end of Aishihik Lake (TH), one chasing a Spruce Grouse through the trees at Pilot Mountain on September 23 (BM), an immature along the Aishihik Road on October 13 (TH), one at Pelly Crossing October 15 (BB), one adult at km 14 on the Tagish Road on October 26 (CE,PSi), an adult in downtown Whitehorse on October 29 (CE), an adult at Carcross on November 9 (CE,PSi), an immature at Lake Laberge on November 22 (CE), and two throughout the season at Takhini River Road northwest of Whitehorse (DC,DR). It was also a good season for **Swainson's Hawks**: On August 13 two dark-morph birds were seen in the Eagle Plains area along the Dempster Highway, and four dark-morph birds were in that area on August 26 (CE,PSi), an immature was photographed at the Whitehorse airport on September 1 (CE,PSi), and another well-documented bird (or perhaps the same bird as seen on September 1) was in Porter Creek on September 5 (CE). **Rough-legged Hawk** sightings included a light-morph bird at Porter Creek on September 20 (CE,PSi), one at Shallow Bay on September 27 (LC,YBC), one at Teslin Lake on October 5 (CE,PSi), a light-morph bird just west of Squanga Lake on October 5 (CE,PSi), a light-morph bird at Marshall Creek on October 11 (CE,PSi), a light-morph bird soaring over downtown Whitehorse on October 15 (CE), and a dark-morph at Rancheria on October 28 (MGi). Yukon Red-tailed Hawks come in a variety of flavours including: "Harlan's" race (light and dark morphs) and "Red-tail" race (light and dark morphs). In general, light-morph "Harlan's" and dark-morph "Red-tails" are very rare. **Red-tailed Hawk** sightings included a light-morph "Red-tail" just north of Eagle Plains on the Dempster (km 372) on August 13 (CE,PSi), three dark-morph "Harlan's" and one light-morph "Red-tail" at the Beaver River on August 16, one dark-morph "Harlan's" at the Beaver River on August 19 (BB), a dark-morph "Harlan's" at Moose Creek campground on August 27 (CE,PSi), a light-morph "Red-tail" at Schwatka Lake on September 21 (CE,PSi), a dark-morph "Harlan's" at McRae's and another dark-morph "Harlan's" 25 km west of Teslin on September 27 (CE,PSi), a dark-morph "Harlan's" at km 1420 Alaska Highway and a light-morph "Red-tail" just west of Squanga Lake and one dark-morph "Harlan's" at Teslin Lake on October 5 (CE,PSi). Unspecified **Red-tailed Hawks** included one at Lake Laberge on September 27 (LC,YBC), and five at Marsh Lake on October 5 (BB). Eleven **Golden Eagles** moving southeast along Marsh Lake at Army Beach on October 18 confirmed that the location is a reliable one for observing the fall migration of Golden Eagles (CE,YBC). Other reports of this species included one at Swan Lake on September 14 (LK,YBC), one at the Dezadeash River on October 22 (LA), an adult



at Lake Laberge on October 19 (CE,HG), and a juvenile at km 14 on the Tagish Road on October 26 (CE,PSi). Five **American Kestrels** were at Burma Road for several days in early September (BC), and one was a highlight at Swan Lake on September 14 (LK,YBC). A **Merlin** was at Teslin Lake on October 5 (CE,PSi). The Yukon is well known as a great place for **Peregrine Falcons** and this fall was no exception. This species was reported from a variety of locations: One was at Swan Lake on August 3 (CE,PSi), two were at Dawson City for a couple of weeks in August 20 (ML), two rather raucous immatures were at Arctic Red River, NWT on August 25 (CE,PSi), and three were at the Nisutlin Delta on September 27 (CE,PSi). Two **Gyrfalcons**, one light-morph and one dark-morph, were at Running River on the Yukon's North Coast on August 20 (CE,PSi). A gray morph **Gyr** was at Nisutlin Delta on August 31 (CE,PSi). Two gray morph **Gyrs** seemed to be "playing" with a Common Raven at Pilot Mountain on September 23 (BM). A dark morph **Gyrfalcon** was seen 5 km north of the Arctic Circle along the Dempster on October 30 (BB).

Seven **Spruce Grouse** were at Pilot Mountain on August 30 (BM), and 41 was an excellent tally along the Haines Road between Haines Junction and Dezadeash Lake on November 11 (PG,SG,TH). Over 100 **White-tailed Ptarmigan** in groups of 10 to 25 were tallied in the Dezadeash Range on September 13-17 (KA,LA). Smaller numbers of ptarmigan (Willow or Rock) were also encountered there. Eleven **White-tailed Ptarmigan** were near Eagle Plains (km 360, Dempster Highway) on October 29 (BB,DDi), and three were on the alpine slopes at the base of Mount Decoeli, southwestern Yukon on November 4 (TH). Up to four **Ruffed Grouse** were seen through the season at Strawberry Lane (LG,JH), one at Schwatka Lake on October 16 (HG), and three at Haines Junction on November 17 (SG,TH). A lone **Sharp-tailed Grouse** was just north of Willow Creek along the North Klondike Highway (km 623) on August 12 (CE,PSi), and five were near Eagle Plains on October 30 (BB). **Sandhill Cranes** were noted at various locations: 13 were along Moose Channel, Yukon on August 15 (CE,FE,PSi). Thirty were flying south over Hootalinqua on August 19 (WK,GW), 110 were at Partridge Creek Farm, North Klondike Highway on August 27 (CE,PSi), a count of 300 was made just south of Ethel Lake on September 25 (DDa), and 275 (flocks of 103 and 172) were counted at Sidney Creek on October 4 where unspecified numbers were heard all night (RM,BB), one was over Verslucce Meadow in Porter Creek on October 16 for a rare Whitehorse area record (BM), and several flocks totaling 50-75 birds were over Watson Lake on September 10-13 (LE).

Two immature **American Golden-Plovers** were at km 270, Dempster Highway on August 13 (CE), 260 were tallied at the Running and Blow Rivers on August 23 (CE,PSi). A pair of **Upland Sandpipers**, first observed at the Rodeo field just north of Whitehorse in June, was still there on August 12 (CE,PSi), and one was at the 18th hole of the Mountain View golf course in Whitehorse on August 25 (BM). A flock of 40 **Whimbrels** was moving southward along Moose Channel in the MacKenzie Delta, NWT on August 15 (CE, FE, PSi). A count of 33 **Ruddy Turnstones** was made at Shingle Point on August 18 (CE,PSi) - this was the Yukon's second highest count for this species. This species is only casual in southern Yukon and so two in Whitehorse on August 18 (HG,BM) and one photographed at the Nisutlin Delta on September 7 (CE) were notable.

Previously considered casual in the Yukon, **Sanderlings** were regularly seen at Shingle Point and Running River on the Yukon's North Coast from August 15-24 with a high count of 17 on August 23 (CE,PSi). This species is also a regular fall migrant at the Nisutlin Delta with three on September 7 and one each on September 13 and 27 which provide a record late Yukon date (CE,PSi). **Western Sandpiper** sightings included a juvenile at Inuvik, NWT on August 13 (CE), and another juvenile at Nisutlin Delta on September 7 (CE). A **White-rumped Sandpiper** at Running River on August 19 provided one of few Yukon fall records for this species (CE). A count of 15



A Buff-breasted Sandpiper on migration at Running River on August 20 1997.
Photo by Cameron Eckert.



An immature Red-necked Phalarope at Running River on August 20 1997. Photo by Cameron Eckert.

Baird's Sandpipers at Nisutlin Delta on August 30 was relatively high (CE,PSi). A **Pectoral Sandpiper** was at Two Moose Lake on the Dempster on August 26 (CE,PSi). One was at Quartz Road on the Yukon River in Whitehorse at the record late date of November 11 (GW,MW); local shorebird enthusiasts speculate that this bird may have been "blown in" from the southwest by extreme winds the previous day. A juvenile **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**, now considered a rare but regular fall migrant in southern Yukon, was among 400 **Pectoral Sandpipers** at Nisutlin Delta on September 7 (CE), and one was there on September 28 which provided a record late Yukon date (CE,PSi). A juvenile **Dunlin** was noted at Shingle Point on August 18 and one was at Running River on August 20 (CE,PSi). Five **Stilt Sandpipers**, rare in southern Yukon, were at Nisutlin Delta on August 31, and three were there on September 7 (CE,PSi) - these were only the second and third September records for this species. Two **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** touched down at Running River on August 17, and one was there on August 20 (CE,PSi). A juvenile **Short-billed Dowitcher** provided a confirmed breeding record at Swan Lake on August 3 (CE,PSi). Most interesting were two **Short-billed Dowitchers** at Nisutlin Delta on September 7 and one on September 13 which provided the first September records as well as record late dates for this species (CE). A count of 45 **Red-necked Phalaropes** was made at Shingle Point on August 17 (CE,PSi), while 25 were at Two Moose Lake on August 26 (CE,PSi).

A light-morph **Pomarine Jaeger** put in an appearance at Running River on August 23 (CE). **Parasitic Jaegers** were encountered regularly at Shingle Point and Running River from August 15-24 (CE,PSi). Thirty adult and five juvenile **Mew Gulls** were at Fort MacPherson, NWT, 20 adults and 10 juveniles were at Arctic Red River, NWT, and four adults and two juveniles were at the Inuvik landfill on August 13 (CE,PSi); 45 were counted at Aklavik, NWT on August 15 (CE,PSi). An adult **California Gull**, a very rare species in the Beaufort Sea area, was at the Inuvik landfill on August 13 (CE,PSi). Two juveniles were seen there on November 11 (CE). An adult **Herring Gull**, identified among a distant flock of 13 adult gulls at Lake Laberge on November 16 (CE) provided a record late Yukon date for this species. An adult **Thayer's Gull** at the landfill of Inuvik, NWT on August 25 signaled the start of fall migration for this species (CE,PSi). The first adult appeared in Whitehorse on September 2, and a count of 90 adults was made at the landfill on September 8 (CE); 40 adults were at the Whitehorse landfill on September 6 (CE,HG), and a flock of 30 adults was on the move at Nisutlin Delta on September 7 (CE). The first juvenile



Thayer's appeared in Whitehorse on September 10 and by the end of the month 75 juveniles were present at the landfill. Three adults and 50 juveniles were counted at the Whitehorse landfill on October 4, and ten juveniles were there on October 16 (CE). They continued to drop off through October. Three juveniles at the Whitehorse landfill on November 11 (CE) provided a record late date for the Yukon. A gull described and photographed at the Whitehorse landfill on September 21 was cautiously identified as an adult "**Kumlien's**" **Iceland Gull** (CE,HG,PSi). An even more convincing apparent adult "**Kumlien's**" **Iceland Gull** was photographed there on September 25 (CE). The second-summer **Slaty-backed Gull** first discovered in Whitehorse on July 30 and last seen on August 2 (CE) provided Whitehorse-area birders with an extraordinary opportunity to view one of North America's most sought-after gull species - and by all accounts it was glorious! An adult **Glaucous-winged Gull** at the Inuvik landfill on August 13-14 (CE,PSi) may have been the same bird as reported June 16 (RDM). A first-winter **Glaucous-winged Gull**, first discovered in Whitehorse on November 6 (CE), was joined by a second first-winter bird on November 8 (CE,HG) and lingered until November 11 (CE). These were only the second and third documented fall records for the Yukon. A hybrid **Herring x Glaucous-winged Gull** was there as well on November 8 (CE,HG). **Glaucous Gull** reports included 100 at the Inuvik landfill on August 13 and again on August 25 (CE,PSi), an immature at Fort MacPherson, NWT and 20 at Aklavik, NWT on August 15 (CE,PSi); and two along Moose Channel, Yukon on August 15 (CE,FE,PSi). Escape Reef off the Yukon's North Coast is an important breeding location for this species; a count of 120 (including 9 fledglings) was made there on August 16 (CE,PSi). The season's high count for this species in the Whitehorse area was six (three adults and three first-winter birds) at the Whitehorse landfill on October 4 (CE); a second-winter bird lingered there on November 6 (CE), and



A head-shot of the probable "**Kumlien's**" **Iceland Gull** showing its very pale yellow iris. Whitehorse, September 25 1997. Photo by Cameron Eckert.



A probable "**Kumlien's**" **Iceland Gull** in Whitehorse on September 25 1997. Photo by Cameron Eckert.

another (or perhaps the same bird) was seen on the Yukon River in Whitehorse on November 6 (JH). A **Glaucous Gull**, identified among a distant flock of 13 adult gulls at Lake Laberge on November 16 (CE) provided a Whitehorse area record late date for this species. There is one Yukon winter record for this species (Komakuk Dump in the 1970's). Ten **Glaucous x Herring Gull** hybrids were at the Inuvik landfill on August 13, and five were there on August 25 (CE,PSi). Two were noted at the Whitehorse landfill on October 4, and one was there on October 16 (CE). Twelve **Arctic Terns** (including 2 local juveniles) were at Escape Reef on August 16 (CE,PSi).



A Common Nighthawk heading south over Long Lake, August 3 1997. Photo by C. Eckert

near Haines Junction on November 8 (KA). A **Northern Hawk-Owl** first seen at McIntyre Creek on October 31 lingered through the end of November (CE,LK,PSi) and appeared set to spend the winter in the area. A **Great Gray Owl** was noted at Daughney Lake on September 27, and one was observed between Morley Bay and Morley River on September 28 (RM,BB). A **Great Gray Owl** seen 20 km east of Teslin was a highlight on October 27 (MGI,VL). A **Short-eared Owl** was seen at dusk at the Dezadeash Lodge on the Haines Road on October 10, and another one was hunting along the Alaska Highway near Mendenhall on October 29 (TH). **Common Nighthawk** sightings included one at the Beaver River on August 1 (BB), six at Long Lake in Whitehorse on August 3 (CE,PSi), and a late one over the Quartz Road marsh in Whitehorse on September 8 (CE,JMc). A record high count of 100-200 **Common Nighthawks** were swooping back and forth across the road within 8 km east and south of Haines Junction on August 15 (JMc). A **Belted Kingfisher** sighting at Army Beach on September 7 was fairly late for this species (CE).

Providing record late dates for Central Yukon were single immature **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** at Moose Creek campground and Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi). An immature **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Nisutlin Delta on August 30 (CE,PSi) was the only southern Yukon report this fall. Reports of **Downy Woodpeckers** included one at a Watson Lake feeder on October 13 (LE), a male feeding on sunflower seeds in Whitehorse on October 18 (HG), a male at a Porter Creek feeder on November 20 which was joined by a female by the end of November (CE,PSi), and one in Dawson City during the third week of November (ML). **Hairy Woodpecker** sightings included one at a Watson Lake feeder on October 13 (LE), a male at a Pilot Mountain feeder on September 2, and a female there on September 19 (BM), a female at a Porter Creek feeder on November 20 which was joined by a male by the end of November (CE,PSi), a female was at a Wolf Creek feeder from November 11 and on (SR), a male at a Whitehorse feeder from November 16 and on (HG), one in Hillcrest on November 24, and a male there on November 25 (LC), and a female at Strawberry Lane on November 27 (LG,JH). **Three-toed Woodpecker** reports included one at the Beaver River on August 16 (BB), a female at Sidney Creek on October 4 (RM,BB), one at Pilot Mountain on October 1, and one was drumming there for an hour on October 25 (BM), a

A **Great Horned Owl** was calling at Rancheria on September 28 (TH). One or two were calling at Pilot Mountain through late November (BM), and **Great Horned Owls** were calling every night at Silver City (LH), and at MacKintosh subdivision (PG,SG) in November. **Northern Hawk-Owl** sightings included one just west of Mendenhall River on October 11 (CE,PSi), one at km 187 Haines Road on October 11 (CE,PSi), one at Fraser, BC, and one at km 90 (Yukon) on the Skagway Road on October 13 (CE,PSi), one along the Alaska Highway near the Takhini River on October 21 (LA), and one





A Red-breasted Nuthatch at Cowley Creek demonstrates its top-down approach. September 1997. Photo by J. McCrie.



Further variations on a theme at a Cowley Creek feeder, September 1997. Photo by Jeanette McCrie.

(MR,TH), and two at a Wolf Creek feeder through the fall (SRi). A **Brown Creeper** was documented in Haines

male and a female were regular at a Strawberry Lane feeder (LG,JH), a female at Schwatka Lake on November 16 (HG), and a female was an unusual visitor to a suet log in Porter Creek on November 20 (CE,PSi). **Three-toed** and **Black-backed Woodpeckers** are still common in the area of a beetle outbreak in the Klwane area; four **Three-toeds** and two **Black-backed** were at Marshall Creek on November 6 (TH). A **Black-backed Woodpecker** was at Kathleen Lake on October 5 (MGi). A **Northern Flicker** was at Engineer Creek along the Dempster on August 12 (CE,PSi), a dead one with no obvious sign of death was found in Dawson City on August 20 (ML), and one was at Moose Creek campground on August 27 (CE,PSi), a juvenile was at Pilot Mountain on September 1, and one was there on October 13 (BM).

Four **Olive-sided Flycatchers** and an **Alder Flycatcher** were at Swan Lake on August 3 (CE,PSi). Six **Western Wood-Pewees** were at Swan Lake and four at Long Lake on August 3 (CE,PSi). A **Say's Phoebe** was catching insects on a river bar of the Beaver River on August 16 (BB,JSc). A congregation of 150 swallows (approximately half **Bank** and half **Cliff Swallows**) was at Two Moose Lake on August 12, and twelve **Cliff Swallows** were at Aklavik, NWT on August 15 (CE,PSi). A **Black-billed Magpie** was unusual at Watson Lake on October 19 (RF,MGa). Several **Black-capped Chickadees** including one that was banded were visiting a Silver City feeder in November (LH,JSi). Up to six **Black-capped** were frequenting a feeder at Strawberry Lane (LG,JH), and this species was regular at a Dawson City feeder (ML). Up to six **Boreal Chickadees** were at a Strawberry Lane feeder (LH,JH), and this species was regular at a Dawson City feeder (ML).

Does anyone recall that **Red-breasted Nuthatches** were once considered unusual in the Yukon? Well, it seems that things have changed over the past few years: A late but interesting report was of a pair of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** which nested in a nest box at Strawberry Lane last summer (LG,JH): This was the first Yukon breeding record of this species using an a nest box. Nuthatches were regular at a feeder at that location through the fall with a high count of four (LG,JH). Other fall reports of this species included one in Haines Junction on August 10 (BM), two at a Pilot Mountain feeder from August 18 till the end of November (BM), one at Marshall Creek on August 25 (LA), one calling in Porter Creek on August 28 (CE,PSi), three at a Pilot Mountain feeder on October 13 (BM), one at a Schwatka Lake feeder through the fall (CE,HG,YBC), two at a feeder in the Mackintosh subdivision on November 17

Junction on November 21 (TH); subsequent reports indicate that the bird lingered into winter. Two **Winter Wrens** were at the Beaver River on August 14 (BB). A well described **Winter Wren** was reported at Marshall Creek on September 7-8 (LA). These sightings provided the first fall records for the Yukon. **American Dipper** sightings included one at Sidney Creek Crossing on October 4 (RM,BB), three at Otter Falls, one at the confluence of Aishihik and West Aishihik Rivers and two at the pond below the Aishihik dam all on October 21 (LA), one at the Dezadeash River near Marshall Creek on November 4 (LA), and one below the hydro dam in Whitehorse on November 8 (SS).

Five **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were noted in the Beaver River area on August 19 (BB). Three **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** (one adult and two dependent young) provided the first confirmed breeding record for Swan Lake on August 3 (CE,PSi). Other reports of this species included ten at Moose Creek campground and 12 at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), three at McIntyre Creek wetlands on September 6 (CE), one to two seen daily at Pilot Mountain on September 1-12 (BM), a singing bird in Whitehorse on September 15 (HG), and one at Pilot Mountain on September 29 and again on October 11 (BM). Three **Mountain Bluebirds** at Watson Lake on October 12 (RF,MGa) were the latest reported this year. A **Swainson's Thrush** was at Engineer Creek on August 12 (CE,PSi), and a significant number of 35 was tallied at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi). Two **Hermit Thrushes** were at Moose Creek campground on August 27 (CE,PSi), and one was at Pilot Mountain on September 4 (BM). An **American Robin** lingered at Bear Creek near Dawson City on November 7 (MB), and one was reported from M'Clintock Bay on November 30 (JS). A **Varied Thrush** was spotted at Engineer Creek on August 12 (CE,PSi), one was at the Beaver River on August 15 (BB), one was at Sidney Creek on October 4 (RM,BB), two were at Moose Creek campground and a significant number of 15 at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), three were at Watson Lake on October 8 (RF,MGa), and the last report of the season was one in Haines Junction on November 1 (TH).



One of 50 American Pipits tallied at the Whitehorse landfill on September 5 1997. Photo by Cameron Eckert.

Twenty **American Pipits** were at the Whitehorse landfill on August 26 (BM), two were at Two Moose Lake on August 26 (CE,PSi), two were at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), and two were at the Whitehorse airport on September 24 (CE). **Bohemian Waxwing** sightings included a flock of 24 near Wolf Creek on August 26 (BM), ten just north of Dezadeash Lake along the Haines Road on October 11 (CE,PSi), 30 at Quiet Lake on October 11 (RM,BB), and 18 were in Haines Junction on November 1 (TH). Hundreds of **Bohemian Waxwings** made short work of Whitehorse's supply of Mountain Ash berries through November (m.ob.) with a high count of at least 200 on November 30 (JMe). **Northern Shrikes** were widely reported with an immature at Porter Creek on September 20 (CE,PSi), an immature at Shallow Bay on September 27 (LC,YBC), one 30 km southeast of Ross River on September 28 (RM,BB), one at Haines Junction on October 28 (KA), an adult at Nisutlin Delta on October 5 (CE,PSi), and an adult at Army Beach on November 9 (CE,PSi). A single **European Starling** was in Whitehorse on September 10 (CE); another was at a Watson Lake feeder on November 3 (SW,MGa).

An **Orange-crowned Warbler** was at Tombstone campground on the Dempster on August 26 (CE,PSi), two were at Moose Creek campground and one was at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), one was in Porter Creek on September 1 (CE,PSi), one was spotted at Verslucce Meadow, Porter Creek on September 6 (CE), and the latest



report this year was of two at Nisutlin Delta on September 13 (CE). Twelve **Yellow Warblers** were at Engineer Creek on August 12 (CE,PSi), a relatively high count of 100 was made at Inuvik, NWT on August 14, one was at Moose Creek campground and three at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), one was at Verslucce Meadow on September 6, and one was noted at Kishwoot Island in Whitehorse on September 10 (CE). Most unusual was a well-documented **Yellow Warbler** in downtown in Whitehorse on October 22 (CE) which set a record late date by about 3 weeks. A **Magnolia Warbler** was at the confluence of Beaver River and Pool Creek on August 16 (BB). **Yellow-rumped Warblers** reports included three at Engineer Creek on August 12 (CE,PSi), four at Moose Creek campground and 20 at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), two at Verslucce Meadow on September 6 (CE), six at McIntyre Creek wetlands on September 6 (CE), one at Pilot Mountain on September 28 (BM), and the season's last report was of one in Whitehorse on October 6 (CE,PSi). Two **Townsend's Warblers** at Moose Creek campground on August 27 were the highlight of eight warbler species seen in the area on that day (CE,PSi). Two **Blackpoll Warblers** were at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi). A **Northern Waterthrush** was at the Beaver River across from Fantasque Creek on August 19 (BB), one was still motivated to sing at Running River on August 20 (CE,PSi), and one was at Partridge Creek Farm August 27 (CE,PSi). Two **Common Yellowthroats** were at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), and 20 were at the McIntyre Creek wetlands on September 6 (CE,HG). Two **Wilson's Warblers** were at Moose Creek campground and three at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), one was noted at Pilot Mountain on September 4 (BM), and one was at Verslucce Meadow on September 6 (CE).



A partial-albino Dark-eyed Junco at a Whitehorse feeder on October 11 1997. Photo by Helmut Grünberg.

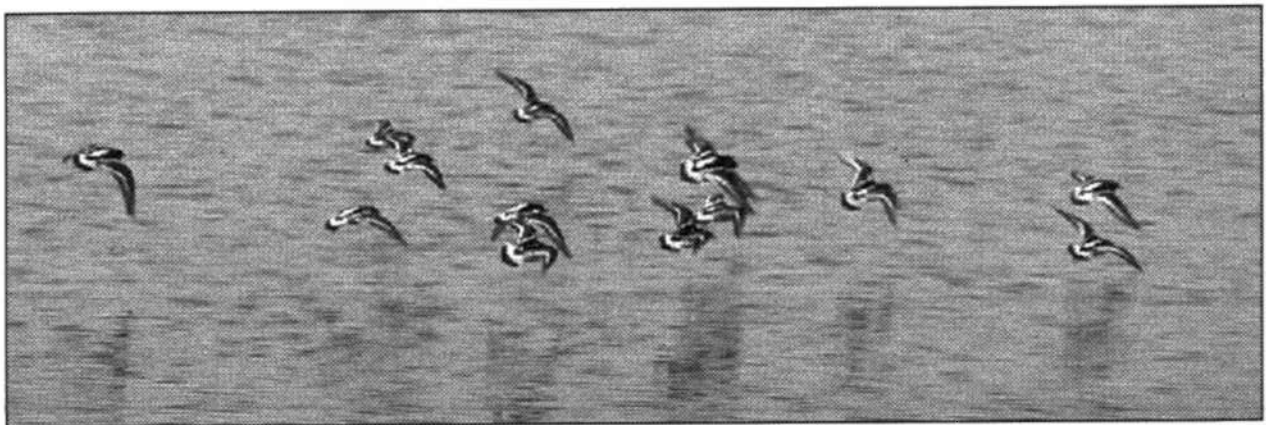
Whitehorse feeder on September 26 to October 21 with two being present September 28 (HG), two immatures were at a Hillcrest feeder on October 3, and one was seen until October 25 (LC), two immatures were reported from Dawson City at the end of October (ML), and the last report of the season was an immature at a Porter Creek feeder on October 27 (CE,PSi). **Dark-eyed Junco** sightings included four at Tombstone Campground on August 26 (CE,PSi), six at Moose Creek campground and 40 at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), ten in Watson Lake on September 22 and again on October 13 (LE), 30 in Whitehorse on September 22 (BS). A record high Yukon count of **700 Dark-eyed Juncos** at Teslin on September 13 was indicative of a significant movement (LC,CE). Also notable were 80 tallied at a Porter Creek feeder on September 22 (CE,PSi); three lingered there until

American Tree Sparrow sightings included six at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), three at Kishwoot Island, Whitehorse on September 10 (CE), six at Teslin on September 13 (CE), two at Pilot Mountain on September 13 (BM), one at Coal Lake Road on October 4 (CE,PSi), three at Sidney Creek on October 4 (BB), six at a Porter Creek feeder on October 5 (CE,PSi), one at a Whitehorse feeder on October 17-18 (HG) and one at Lake Laberge on October 19 (CE). A late **American Tree Sparrow** lingered at a Wolf Creek feeder on November 14-16 (SRi). **Chipping Sparrows** have usually all left the territory by the end of August and so a juvenile at Teslin on September 7 was notable (CE). Six **Savannah Sparrows** were at Running River on August 22 (CE,PSi), and 12 were tallied at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi). A **Fox Sparrow** was at the Beaver River on August 15 (BB), one was at Moose Creek campground and five were at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), one was noted at a Porter Creek feeder on September 20 (CE,PSi), one was reported at a Hillcrest feeder on October 5 (LC), and one was reported from Quiet Lake on October 11 (RM,BB). A **Lincoln's Sparrow** was at Moose Creek campground and two were at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), and one made a late appearance at Whitehorse feeder on October 25-26 (HG). Six immature **White-crowned Sparrows** were at Engineer Creek on August 12 (CE,PSi), two were at Moose Creek campground and six at Partridge Creek Farm on August 27 (CE,PSi), an immature was at a

November 1 (CE,PSi), twelve were at a Pilot Mountain feeder on September 28 and eight on October 13 (BM). Up to 12 were recorded at a Hillcrest feeder throughout October and early November with the latest sighting, a single bird, on November 24 (LC). Up to ten were at a Strawberry Lane feeder with the last sightings in mid-November (LG,JH). One lingered at a Haines Junction feeder on November 19 (TH), and four appeared at a Whitehorse feeder on November 29, and two were still there November 30 (HG). Three **Dark-eyed Juncos** were at a Dawson City feeder till the end of November (ML). One observer noted an apparent decrease in nesting juncos in the Dawson area this year (JF). A partial albino **Dark-eyed Junco** at a Whitehorse feeder on October 11 was eye-catching (HG). Fifty **Snow Buntings** were at km 72 of the Dempster on October 16 (BB). Three were noted at Lakeview Marina on Marsh Lake on October 26 (CE,PSi), and a flock of 15 was in Haines Junction on November 11 (LA).

A **Rusty Blackbird** was feeding in a tiny creek (it wasn't a dipper!) near the Yukon River in Whitehorse on November 22 (HG), and three lingered at Haines Junction through the end of November (TH). A lone **Gray-crowned Rosy Finch**, the only one reported this fall, was a highlight at a Watson Lake feeder on October 13 (RF,MGa). **Pine Grosbeak** sightings included two at a Pilot Mountain feeder on October 1, and 5-8 there through November (BM), up to 30 at a Haines Junction feeder on November 14 (RJ,WJ), the first of the season, a single male appeared at Strawberry Lane on November 1 (LG,JH), two females at a Whitehorse feeder on November 18 (BS), and eight male and three female a Watson Lake feeder on October 13 (LE). Five or six **Purple Finches** frequented a Whitehorse feeder in August (BS); a male at a Porter Creek feeder on September 29 provided a record late date by 7 days (CE,PSi) - the previous record late date (September 22) was set at the same location last year. Ten **Red Crossbills** (including a confirmed breeding record with the observation of one short-tailed juvenile) were seen in Porter Creek on August 11 (CE,PSi). **Red Crossbills** were present at that feeder through the fall with a high count of 30 on October 30 (CE,PSi), a high count of 12 was made at a Pilot Mountain feeder on September 29 with at least one bird lingering through early November (BM), and a high count of 30 was made at a Hillcrest feeder on October 19 (LC). **White-winged Crossbills** were widely reported with six at Yukon College on October 15 (HG), two at a Hillcrest feeder on October 26 (LC), some in Dawson City on November 4 (ML), ten at a Haines Junction feeder on November 14 (RJ,WJ), a flock of 12 in Porter Creek on November 1 (CE,PSi). Fifteen **crossbills**, mostly juveniles, were reported from Burma Road, north of Whitehorse on August 13 (BC). A **Common Redpoll** which visited a Porter Creek feeder on October 11 did not linger; the first ones (3) to stay arrived on 22 November, and by the end of November there were 15 (CE,PSi). A Pilot Mountain feeder had its first **Common Redpoll** on November 4, and numbers increased to six by the end of November (BM). Forty **Pine Siskins** were counted at a Pilot Mountain feeder on August 18; there was a big drop to six individuals on September 3 and the last one seen there on September 27 (BM). Six **Pine Siskins** were the last ones seen at a Porter Creek feeder on October 22 (CE,PSi).

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A flock of Ruddy Turnstones at Shingle Point with an attitude to match their plumage. August 16 1997. Photo by C. Eckert.



THE YUKON BIRD CLUB

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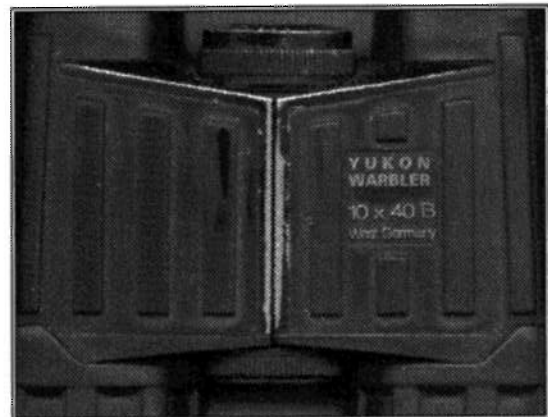
Volume 5 (1997): Spring (Evening Grosbeak)



Word Puzzle Solution

1. Raven
2. Magpie
3. Chickadees
4. Redpolls
5. Nuthatch
6. Rock Dove
7. Bald Eagle

Christmas Bird Count



Birders are invited to contribute to the Yukon Warbler - please send your submissions to:

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