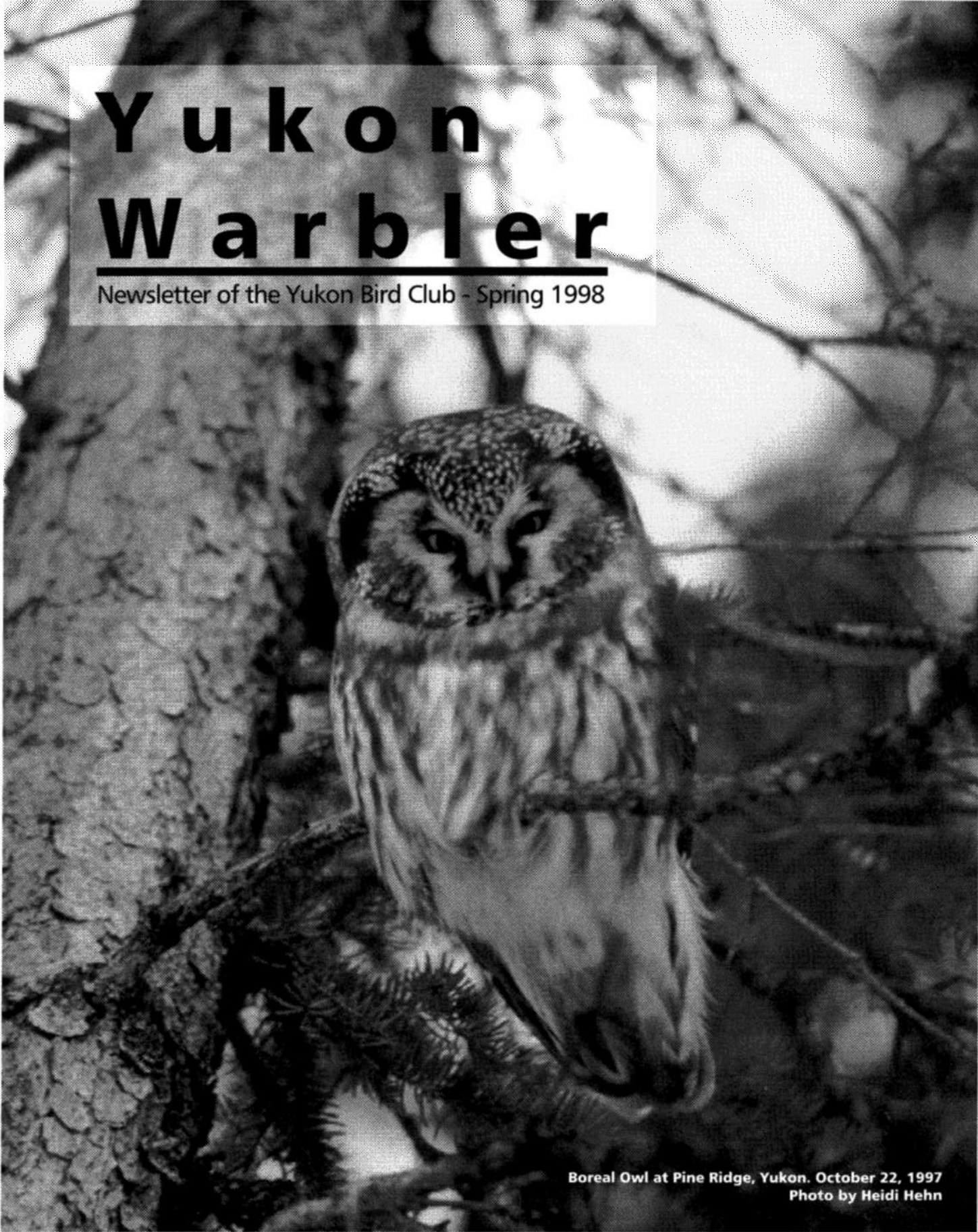


Yukon Warbler

Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club - Spring 1998



Boreal Owl at Pine Ridge, Yukon. October 22, 1997
Photo by Heidi Hehn

———— Winter Sightings ♦ Liard's Threatened Birdlife ♦ Christmas Count Report ————

Spring 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 Pam Sinclair at 667-4630.

Tuesday 28 April. Takhini River Ponds - Early Migration! Expect great views of ducks and grebes in brilliant spring plumage at this cluster of small ponds, as well as a chance to see some birds of prey and early migrant songbirds. **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 6:00 pm.** Leader: Lee Kubica.

Sunday 3 May. The Annual Tagish Birding Tour! A highlight of the early spring, this field trip around the Whitehorse-Tagish-Carcross loop promises to produce many "firsts of the season". Bring a lunch. **Meet at the S.S. Klondike at 9:00 am.** Leader: Helmut Grünberg.

Tuesday 5 May. The Astonishing Waterbirds of Lewes Marsh! Handsome spring waterfowl will be featured on this trip, along with some of the earlier shorebirds and songbirds at this rich birding location. **Meet at the S.S. Klondike at 6:00 pm.** Leader: Carl Burgess.

Saturday 9 May. International Migratory Birds Day -- Spring Migration Count! This annual "spring round-up" provides a snapshot of bird diversity during the peak of migration. If you would like to participate contact Cameron Eckert at 667-4630 (Email: ceckert@yknet.yk.ca).

Wednesday 13 May. The Migration Peak at Jackfish Bay! Wandering Tattlers and an impressive variety of ducks and shorebirds were seen on last year's trip - come and see what turns up this spring at this Lake Laberge hotspot. **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 6:00 pm.** Leader: Linda Cameron.

Thursday 21 May. Frogs and Songbirds at Paddy's Pond! Enjoy the sight and sounds of Wood Frogs as well as a variety of songbirds right here in town at this rich wetland in Hillcrest. **Meet at the Airline Inn at 7:00 pm.** Leader: Mary Whitley.

Saturday 23 May. Bird Song Workshop! Originally a refresher course for Yukon participants in the North American Breeding Bird Survey, this outing is helpful whether you are just beginning to sort out bird songs and calls or simply need to "tune up" after a long winter. **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 7:30 am.** Leader: Pam Sinclair.

Sunday 24 May. The Marshes of Cowley Station! Explore the rich Cowley Lake area with an experienced and knowledgeable guide. A first for the Yukon Bird Club, this trip promises to produce an interesting variety of waterbirds and songbirds. Bring a lunch. **Meet at the S.S. Klondike at 10:00 am.** Leader: Norm Barichello.

Wednesday 27 May. Migration Finalé at Judas Creek! With marsh, creek, mudflats, beach, and lake all side by side, Judas Creek offers a fantastic diversity of bird habitats and this trip usually turns up some interesting surprises. **Meet at the S.S. Klondike at 5:30 pm.** Leader: Jim Hawkings.

Saturday and Sunday 29/30 May. The Yukon Birdathon! A conservation education fundraiser and an annual highlight of spring birding - for more information call Sheila at 633-6674.

Thursday 4 June. The Birding Treasures of McLean Lake! Great birding at a picturesque lake within Whitehorse City limits - what could be better for an evening stroll! **Meet at the S.S. Klondike at 7:00 pm.** Leader: Wendy Nixon.

Sunday 7 June. Lewes Lake - an Exploratory Tour! The spring and summer bird life of this unusual lake off the Carcross Road is apparently unknown (at least nobody we talked to had birded there), so anything is possible - come out and help make some discoveries! Bring a lunch. **Meet at the S.S. Klondike at 10:00 am or at Carcross Corner at 10:30 am.** Leader: Jeanette McCrie.

More Summer Field Trips ...

Saturday and Sunday 13/14 June. Birds and Barbeque at Mendenhall Marsh. George Darbyshire will host an overnight trip to his cabin near Mendenhall Marsh. Enjoy easy-paced hikes on Saturday and Sunday morning. There is room for 4 to sleep in the cabin, and lots of space for tents. Those unable to stay overnight are welcome to come for Saturday birding and barbeque. Please bring food, utensils, and camping and/or sleeping gear. **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 10:00 am on Saturday 13 June.**

Sunday 12 July. Montana Mountain - Alpine Birds and Yukon History! A day trip in search of White-tailed Ptarmigan, Blue Grouse, "Timberline" Brewer's Sparrows and Dusky Flycatchers in the alpine habitat of Montana Mountain, where once miners built crude houses of broken rock and Buddhist monks meditated at treeline. Bring a lunch. **Meet at the S.S. Klondike at 8:30 am.** Leader: Mike Gill.

Saturday 25 July. Hidden Lakes - Riverdale's Birding Hotspot! Enjoy the later part of the nesting season on this stroll around the lakes, looking for duck and loon families and young songbirds. **Meet at the S.S. Klondike at 9:00 am.** Leader: Jeremy Baumbach.

Fall Field Trips

Sunday 20 September. Fall Round-up at Swan Lake! Don't miss this outing to one of Whitehorse's most exciting birding destinations. Expect migrant raptors, songbirds and perhaps the odd shorebird. Bring a lunch, dress warmly and meet at the **SS. Klondike at 9:30 am.** Leader Helmut Grünberg.

Saturday 10 October. Yellow-billed Loons South! There's a good chance you'll see several species of loons on this trip to various points along the Yukon River south to Marsh Lake. Learn the subtle features which make winter plumage loons an exciting birding challenge. Bring a lunch, dress very warmly and meet at the **Porter Creek Super A at 10:30 am.** Leader: Cameron Eckert.

Sunday 25 October. Yellow-billed Loons North! This second trip in search of North America's most sought-after loon will venture northward to Lake Laberge. With any luck we'll turn up a few loon species as well as a variety of other hardy waterbirds and lingering migrants. Bring a lunch, dress very warmly and meet at the **Porter Creek Super A at 10:30 am.** Leader: Cameron Eckert.

Sunday 13 December. Winter Birding At Its Best?!? Join Helmut Grünberg and Cameron Eckert on this outing for the extra-hardy (and fool-hardy). A warm-up (Ha!) and scouting trip for the Whitehorse Christmas Bird Count, we'll check the Yukon River and various downtown feeders for any obvious signs of life. An Ivory Gull would certainly count as such a sign of life. Dress warmly, bring a snack and meet at the **Whitehorse Visitor Centre (2nd Avenue) parking lot at 10:30 am.**



1998 Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 20 October, 1998

7:00 - 9:00 pm at the Whitehorse Public Library

The Annual General Meeting provides an excellent opportunity to meet fellow birders, swap sightings and provide direction to our Club.



THREAT CONTINUES FOR EAR LAKE!

Whitehorse City Council's recent decision to extend a gravel lease adjacent to Ear Lake flies in the face of concerns over the long-term health of the lake. Industrial consumption of water from Ear Lake raises serious questions that must be addressed – especially considering Ear Lake's dramatically low water levels. Ear Lake is well known to Whitehorse area residents as a favoured place for a quiet escape within walking distance of downtown Whitehorse. The lake has been identified by the Official Community Plan as a future park. The continued gravel excavation from the Ear Lake esker will cause enormous damage to this special place. Concerned citizens are urging others to write Whitehorse City Council requesting that they reconsider their decision to extend the lease. The letter to the right provides a draft which can serve as your template for a letter to Council. Even if you lack the time to write your own letter, you can simply make a photocopy of this page, sign it and send it to Council.

Whitehorse City Council
2121 Second Avenue
Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 1C2
Fax: 668-8639.

Re: Gravel Excavation at Ear Lake

Dear Council members,

I am very concerned over the potential damage to Ear Lake that will be caused by eight additional years of gravel excavation. Despite the fact that the environmental impacts are unknown, the majority of Council members seems intent on approving this operation in contravention of our Official Community Plan.

Ear Lake has provided recreation and solace to people in the area for countless years. Families enjoy the lake because of the warm water, the gradual shoreline and the lake's accessibility. It is easy to reach by cycling or hiking and is a haven on a hot day. The continued degradation of the esker which forms Ear Lake through gravel extraction will destroy this special place.

I understand the need for Annie Lake Trucking to carry on its operation. However, if the operators immediately identify another site, the business could be relocated for the 1999 season without negatively impacting its employees.

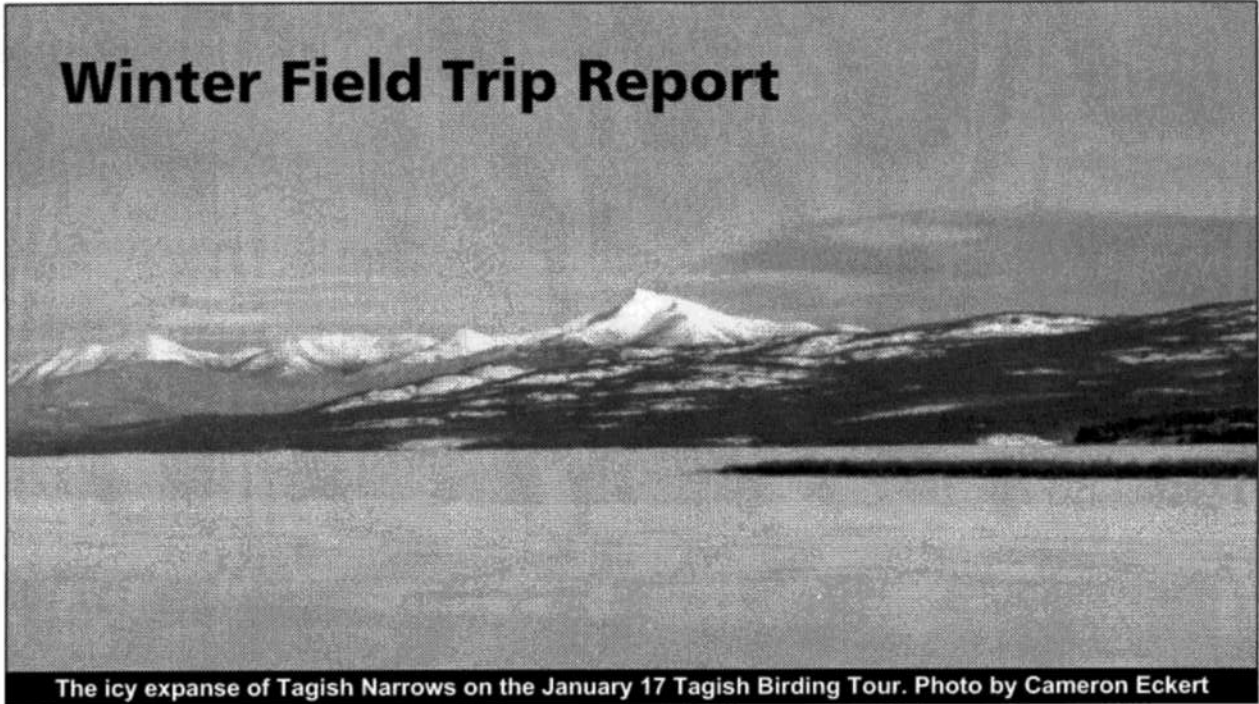
I ask that you reconsider your decision on Ear Lake and save this area for the public good.

Sincerely,



Gravel excavation degrades the esker which forms Ear Lake. Photo by Cameron Eckert

Winter Field Trip Report



The icy expanse of Tagish Narrows on the January 17 Tagish Birding Tour. Photo by Cameron Eckert

Tagish Birding Tour - Winter Edition

Helmut Grünberg led a hardy troupe of birders on the January 17 tour from Whitehorse to Carcross via Tagish. The outing lived up to its billing as a trip through a “winter wonderland in search of Yukon’s finest wintering waterfowl”. Indeed, the landscape could only be described as a “wonderland” as we all wondered if there was any land under all that snow. Further, the aforementioned waterfowl were well represented by Common Goldeneye and Common Mergansers at Tagish Narrows. At the Taku Subdivision near Tagish, Terry Gireaux welcomed us to his feeders where the group enjoyed fine views of Boreal, Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees.

Feeder Hopping Tour

Linda Cameron led the way on the February 7 trek to various bird-rich Whitehorse feeders. The small but inspired group turned up just about everything that one might expect in deep winter at a Yukon feeder. Regular feeder species seen included Black-billed Magpie, Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees, Common Redpolls, a Hairy Woodpecker, Pine Grosbeaks, and Common Ravens. Highlights were three Red-breasted Nuthatches at Cora Grant’s Schwatka Lake feeder

and the “Oregon” Dark-eyed Junco at Helmut Grünberg’s Wheeler Street feeder. Helmut even made a quick stop to tally 300 Rock Doves for the day list.

Tip for feeding birds on a budget: Purchase two pounds of bulk fat at the butcher and hang it in an onion bag. Put the fat out in early September to attract woodpeckers as they settle in for the winter. Species you can expect include Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Gray Jay, Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees and perhaps a Mountain Chickadee or Red-breasted Nuthatch. All this for a total cost of \$1.60!! Sure beats niger seed as the price performer!

Winter Ptarmigan Quest

Cameron Eckert guided a very faithful group on the March 7 Winter Ptarmigan Quest. While the skiing was excellent and the scenery absolutely superb, in the end we all agreed that tracks make very thin soup. The group encountered a smattering of boreal forest birds, however, the ptarmigan were a “no show” this year. Despite the lack of feather-footed grouse, the outing has become a significant winter tradition for Yukon birders and we will be out there again next winter!



Yukon Christmas Bird Count Report - 1997/98



Pam Sinclair scans for ptarmigan on the December 26 Whitehorse Count. Photo by Cameron Eckert

Marsh Lake/Yukon River

Centre location: 0.7 miles northeast of Yukon River origin near M'Clintock Bay (66° 33' N / 134° 30' W) as described in 1980.

Date: December 21, 1997 (9:45 am. to 4:45 pm.)

Thirteen participants tallied 15 species (a new record for the count) and 369 individuals (higher than 1996 at 294 but short of 1995 at 588). Highlights included a slate-coloured Dark-eyed Junco (new to the count), an American Dipper (very rare on this count), and record high totals for Boreal Chickadee (110) and Red-breasted Nuthatch (3). At the traditional lunch time rendezvous at a pre-warmed Swan Haven participants exchanged stories and sightings. Many thanks to participants Michael Beauregard, Bruce Benett, Linda Cameron, Cameron Eckert, Helmut Grünberg, Alysha Kitchen, Greg Kubica, Lee Kubica, Julie Lefebvre, Randi Mulder, Doug Phillips, Jason Phillips and Pamela Sinclair.

Compiled by Helmut Grünberg, 807 Wheeler Street, Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 2P8, Phone/Fax: 867-667-6703. Email: hgrünberg@hypertech.yk.ca

Haines Junction

Centre location: the junction of Alaska Highway and Haines Road (60° 45' N/137° 30' W) as described in 1978.

Date: December 27, 1997 (9:30 am to 4:40 pm.)

Eight observers took to the field and two observers counted at feeders to tally 843 birds of 18 species. An additional three species (Ruffed Grouse, a very rare Mountain Chickadee and a Fox Sparrow which was very rare for the season) were seen during count week but not on count day. Compared to the 1996 count, the total number of birds (242 in 1996) and species (11 in 1996) was up. Most impressive was this year's total for Black-billed Magpie (110) which was much higher than last year's total (29). Other interesting species included Northern Goshawk, Great Horned and Great Gray Owls, Willow Ptarmigan, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Dark-eyed Junco. Many thanks to the participants who made this year's count such a success! *Compiled by David and Suzanne Henry, P.O.Box 2021, Haines Junction, Yukon, Y0B 1L0, Phone: 867-634-2426.*

Whitehorse

Centre location: Top of 2-mile Hill, Whitehorse (60°44'N/135°05'W) as described in 1996.

Date: December 26, 1997 (9:00 am. to 4:30 pm.)

Seventeen observers tallied 2901 individuals of 26 species -- record high for the Whitehorse count. McIntyre Creek wetlands was the site of some exceptional finds including a pair of Bald Eagles, 10 Mallards, and the Yukon's first documented wintering Northern Pintail. Further up the Fish Lake Road was the Yukon's first documented wintering Pine Siskin at a feeder. Totals for Common Raven, Black-billed Magpie, Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees were high. Other highlights were Red Crossbill (new to the count), two Hoary Redpolls on the Fish Lake Road, and the Oregon Junco at Helmut's feeder. Thanks to participants Linda Cameron, Helmut Grünberg, Cameron Eckert, Jim Hawkings, Jeremy Baumbach, Mike Beauregard, Greg Kubica, Lee Kubica, Dennis Kuch, Bruce McLean, Bruce Bennett, Bob Murkett, Dave Mossop, Wendy Nixon, Barb Studds, Pam Sinclair, and Mary Whitley. A special thanks to Lee and Arlene Kubica for hosting the post-count dinner! *Compiled by Wendy Nixon, 17 Dawson Rd., Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 5T6, Phone: 867-668-7572. Email: wendy.nixon@ec.gc.ca*

Yukon Christmas Bird Count 1997/98: Weather and Observer Statistics			
	Marsh Lk. Dec. 21	Whitehorse Dec. 26	Haines Jct. Dec. 27
WEATHER STATISTICS			
Temperature (°C):	-20 to -28	-3 to -5	-14 to -12
Wind (kph):	0-16	NA	0-6
Wind direction	S	NA	W
Snow depth (cm):	18	8	15 to 18
Still water:	frozen	frozen	frozen
Moving water:	partly open	partly open	partly open
OBSERVER STATISTICS			
Total no. of participants:	15	17	10
Field observers:	12	NA	8
Field parties:	8	NA	6
Feeder watchers:	1	NA	2
Hours at feeders:	2.5	NA	3
Total party hours:	25.25	NA	27
Total party miles:	52	NA	49
Hours on foot:	22.75	NA	11
Miles on foot:	31	NA	15
Hours by car:	2.5	NA	1
Miles by car:	21	NA	20
Hours by skis:		NA	8
Miles by skis:		NA	8
Hours by snowshoe:		NA	7
Miles by snowshoe:		NA	6
Hours owling:	0.5	NA	1
Miles owling:	0.25	NA	1

Yukon Christmas Bird Count Totals for 1997/98			
Totals do not include count week ("cw") birds which are seen during count week but not on count day			
	Marsh Lk. Dec. 21	Whitehorse Dec. 26	Haines Jct. Dec. 27
Mallard		10	
Northern Pintail		1	
Bald Eagle		4 (3ad,1imm)	
Northern Goshawk		1	2
Willow Ptarmigan		31	21
Spruce Grouse	6	8	2
Ruffed Grouse	1	1	cw-2
grouse sp.	1		
Rock Dove		456	
Great Horned Owl		cw-1	2
Great Gray Owl			1
Downy Woodpecker	cw-1	2	3
Hairy Woodpecker	1	3	4
Three-toed Woodpecker	2	1	1
woodpecker sp.		1	
Gray Jay	20	31	15
Black-billed Magpie	19	142	110
Common Raven	38	1409	244
Black-capped Chickadee	38	62	80
Boreal Chickadee	110	83	51
Mountain Chickadee			cw-1
Red-breasted Nuthatch	3	1	3
American Dipper	1	5	
Bohemian Waxwing		50	
Fox Sparrow			cw-1
Dark-eyed Junco	1	2	1
Pine Grosbeak	77	100	138
White-winged Crossbill	16	4	45
Red Crossbill		7	
Common Redpoll	17	438	120
Hoary Redpoll		2	
redpoll sp.	18	45	
Pine Siskin		1	
Total number of species:	15	26	18
Total number of birds:	369	2901	843

How to become a Christmas Bird Count participant!

The annual Christmas Bird Count is by far the most popular birding event in the world. In fact the numbers are mind boggling. In 1996 a total of 1650 North American counts were conducted by 45,835 birders who tallied 53,128,122 birds of 626 species. Our Yukon counts are clearly part of a much bigger picture. To participate in the 1998 count simply contact the appropriate coordinator: Wendy Nixon (668-7572) for Whitehorse, Helmut Grünberg (667-6703) for Marsh Lake, and David Henry (634-2426) for Haines Junction. If you would like to start a new count in your community then call Cameron Eckert (667-4630).



New report focuses on Liard's birdlife & habitat loss

A new report entitled "*Breeding Bird Communities in the Forests of the Liard River Valley, Yukon*" by Cameron Eckert, Pam Sinclair and Wendy Nixon presents the results of extensive surveys of forested habitats along the Liard River, northwest of Watson Lake.

The forests of the Liard River Valley are well-known to Yukoners as among the richest in the Territory. In particular, the mature White Spruce forests, which are extremely important to myriad wildlife and plant species are disappearing at an alarming rate through clearcut logging.

The study used "point count" surveys to describe breeding bird communities associated with six different forest types; Balsam Poplar, Trembling Aspen, Lodgepole Pine, White Spruce, mixed forests, and riparian forests. They also surveyed recently harvested clearcuts.

The report describes the unique bird communities associated with different forest types. For example, species most commonly found in Balsam Poplar forests included Least and Hammond's Flycatchers, Warbling Vireo and Swainson's Thrush. A very different community characterizes old-growth White Spruce forests where Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-winged Crossbill, Boreal Chickadee and Golden-crowned Kinglet are encountered most often. Further, White Spruce forests had the highest density of cavity nesters and were the only forest type where Three-toed Woodpeckers were found. Not surprisingly, the study found that clearcuts supported lower densities and diversity of birds than any forest type.

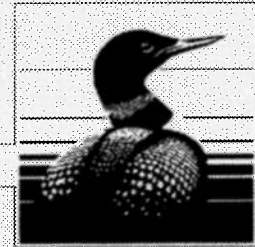
The authors define "generalist" species as those which can use a variety of forest types, while "specialists" are strictly limited to specific forest types. Specialists including species like Golden-crowned Kinglet and Three-toed Woodpecker may entirely disappear from an area if their required habitats are lost.

Breeding Bird Communities in the Forests of the Liard River Valley, Yukon

Cameron D. Eckert
Pamela H. Sinclair
Wendy A. Nixon

Pacific and Yukon Region 1997
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environmental Conservation Branch

Technical Report Series Number 297



Environment Canada
Canadian Wildlife Service

Environnement Canada
Service canadien de la faune

Canada

"The current management regime is likely to have negative impacts on habitat specialists associated with White Spruce forest."

These forests are also home to numerous species which are extremely rare further west or north in the Yukon. American Redstart, Tennessee Warbler, Magnolia Warbler and White-throated Sparrow are all common in the area.

The report, published by Environment Canada as part of its Technical Report Series, is written in scientific/technical style; however, readers should have little trouble understanding the results and implications of the research. Further, birders will enjoy the accounts of various rare bird species observed during the study.

To obtain a free copy of this report contact:
Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada
91782 Alaska Highway, Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 5B7. Phone: (867) 393-6700

The Visitor: My Encounter with a Boreal Owl

by Heidi Hehn

It was a crisp day on October 22, 1997. There was already a good covering of snow on the ground. Something flew past my window that did not have the look of any of my regular feathered neighbours. After a couple of seconds I recognized that what I had seen was the telltale flight of an owl. In my excitement I did manage to get my identification books open to the appropriate sections. I looked into the direction it had flown and was thrilled to see it perched over a large pile of deadfall near the house. I live on the edge of the Yukon River Valley surrounded by old-growth spruce forest. I had never seen this type of owl before so it took me a few minutes to confirm that it was a Boreal Owl.

I grabbed my cameras and started shooting from the window. But the distance was too great. Reading on I discovered that Boreal Owls are notoriously “tame”. So I decided to test my limits. I went outside and started to move slowly in its direction, snapping pictures as I went. After about thirty minutes I was as close as I could get. The experience was incomparable. I felt privileged to

be allowed to come so close to such a bird. It appeared gentle and calm, not the least bit ruffled by my presence.

I went back into the house as the owl stayed there, patiently waiting for a rodent. But after a couple of hours the entire scene changed. A Black-billed Magpie showed up, seemingly from nowhere. Then a second magpie, until there were eight within about a five minute period. The first two had made such a ruckus and attracted the others. They started dive bombing and harassing the little owl to the point where I became very concerned. Their intentions appeared to be deadly.

That same calm little owl that had no problem with letting a human being come so close, now became rattled and jittery. It moved to another tree which had more branches and moss and sat close to the trunk for protection. But the magpies were unrelenting and, finally, the owl left without dinner. I have no idea if it got away safely or not as the magpies left with it.

Heidi's portrait of “the Visitor” graces the cover.

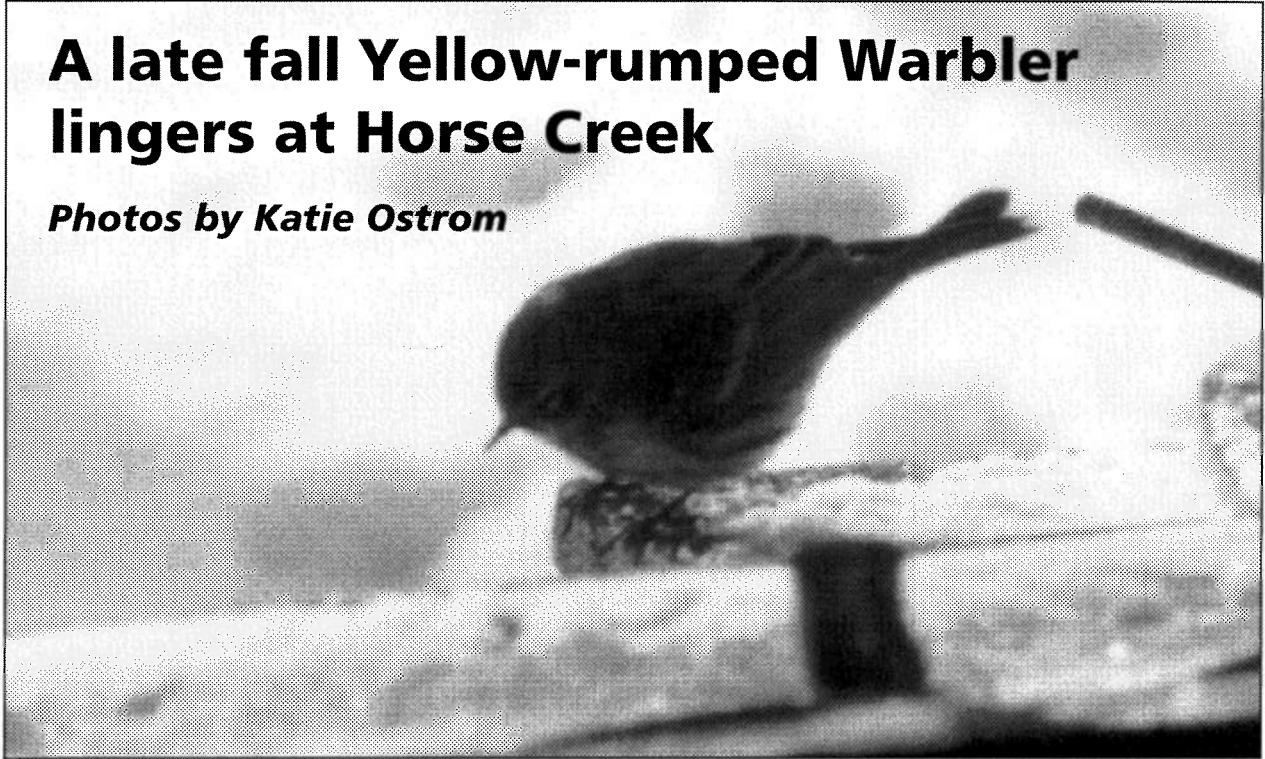


The Boreal Owl seeks shelter from an irate Black-billed Magpie. Photo by Heidi Hehn.

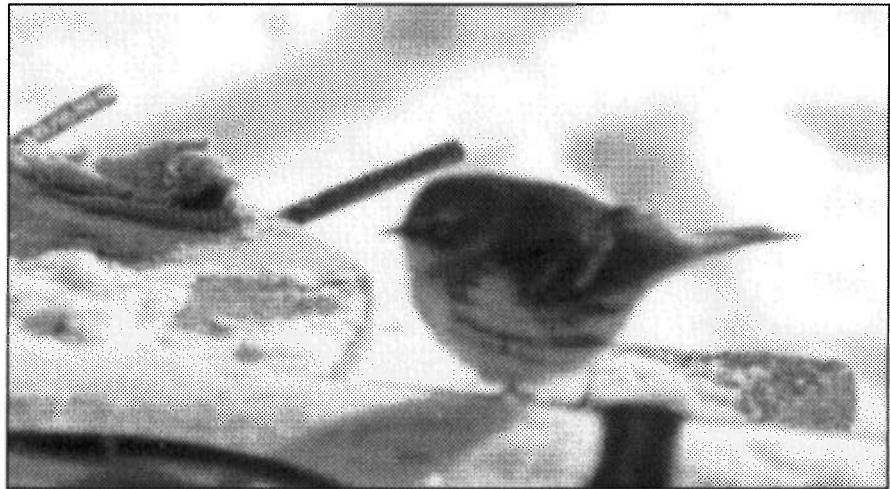


A late fall Yellow-rumped Warbler lingers at Horse Creek

Photos by Katie Ostrom



This Yellow-rumped Warbler lingered into November 1997 at Horse Creek on Lake Laberge and seemed poised to brave the onset of winter. However, Katie Ostrom photographed and then captured the moribund songbird and delivered it to Dave Mossop for transport south. No word has been received on its eventual fate. The original colour photos show the distinctive yellow

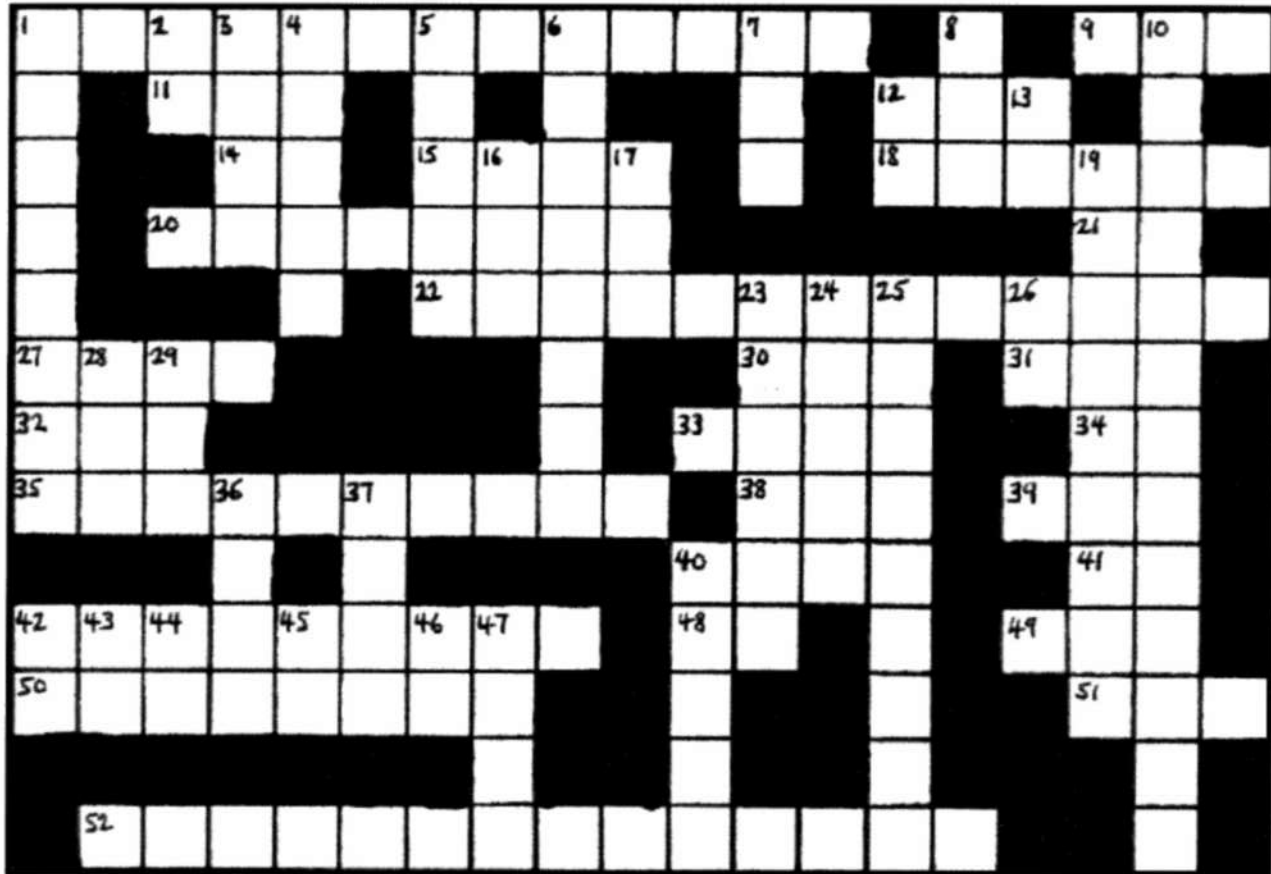


shoulder patches which are characteristic of this species. Other features to note include two whitish wing bars, streaked sides, thin black legs and thin black bill. The bottom photograph clearly shows the whitish “smile” and pale line over the eye which identify this bird as a Myrtle-race. The Audubon’s-race would have only a white crescent over the eye, and lacks the obvious pale streak which extends back from the throat patch (i.e. the “smile”). Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of these photos is how they evoke a sense of the extraordinary challenges faced by Neotropical migrant songbirds.

While birders tend to think of warblers as insect eaters, they readily shift their diet to berries, seeds or suet in winter months when insects are in short supply. This bird was apparently considering a meal of peanut butter at Katie’s feeder. The Horse Creek bird provided only the second November record for Yellow-rumped Warbler. On November 8, 1993 another desperately late Yellow-rumped Warbler was noted at Nares Lake near Carcross. This species has never been reported in the Yukon during the winter months.

Birder's Crossword: Birding Yukon's North

by Jeremy Baumbach



ACROSS

- 1. Yukon's 1st, Canada's 2nd (4,9)
- 9. Birder's tool (3)
- 11. Knock (3)
- 12. Honey maker (3)
- 14. Direction (2, abbrev.)
- 15. Seward Peninsula community (4)
- 18. High elevation (6, spell backwards)
- 20. Northern thrush species (8)
- 21. Aluminum (2, abbrev.)
- 22. Bird with black crown, face and bib (6,7)
- 27. Species of 25-down (4)
- 30. German for "with" (3)
- 31. Did with 9-across (3)
- 32. Time period (3)
- 33. Greek bread (4)
- 34. Direction (2, abbrev.)
- 35. Jaeger species (10)
- 38. 3 consonants (3)
- 39. By (3)

- 40. Fake (4)
- 41. __ IF, end of week saying (2, abbrev.)
- 42. Arctic falcon (9)
- 48. Present tense of 12-down (2)
- 49. Like a chickadee (3)
- 50. Bob Frisch first discovered its Canadian breeding site (8)
- 51. Bird enemy (3)
- 52. Yukon Territorial Park (8,6)

DOWN

- 1. Sandpiper with long downcurved bill (8)
- 2. Alternatively (2)
- 3. Small amount (4)
- 4. Velocity (5)
- 5. Follows eighth (5)
- 6. Jaeger species (8)
- 7. Birder's tool (3)
- 8. Animal's next (3)
- 10. Arctic Coast breeder (6,7)
- 12. Exist (2)

- 13. New UI (2, abbrev.)
- 16. 3 vowels (3)
- 17. Be wrong (3)
- 19. Jaeger species (9)
- 23. One of the longspurs (6)
- 24. Spruce species (5)
- 25. Ground dwelling bird (9)
- 26. __ VP, invitation request (2, abbrev.)
- 28. Latin for "I speak" (3)
- 29. Tin (3)
- 36. Loose talk (4)
- 37. _____ n, a B.C. lake (4)
- 40. Fathers (5)
- 42. N __, field guide author (2, abbrev.)
- 43. __ rt, Siberian tent (2)
- 44. Road abbreviation (2)
- 45. Alberta (2, abbrev.)
- 46. Chromium (2, abbrev.)
- 47. Cartoon dog (4).

Solution on page 20.



Mew Gull a familiar summer breeder

by Cameron Eckert



A Mew Gull rests along the McMillan River in the MacKenzie Mountains. Photo by Cameron Eckert

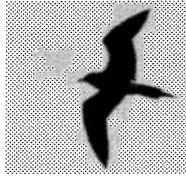
There are birds which convey the essence of beauty both in terms of colour and form - the Mew Gull is such a bird. The Mew Gull is the Yukon's most common and widespread gull species. Its relatively small size, yellow bill (with no red spot) and yellow legs makes the adult easy to distinguish from an adult Herring Gull. Also it does not take a taxonomist equipped with a complex mathematical equation relating bill to head size ratios to know that the Mew Gull is cute and the Herring Gull is not.

In spring, Mew Gulls return in mid to late April, usually a week or so after the first Herring Gulls, and very quickly initiate breeding activity - their raucous displays are a familiar sight on lakes and rivers throughout the Yukon. Its name is apparently derived from its call, a resonant "mew". The breeding range of the Mew Gull extends across southern Yukon and north to the Arctic Coast. While the relatively large breeding colonies of Mew Gulls along the Yukon River near Whitehorse are familiar to many birdwatchers, this

species also breeds as solitary pairs. Mew Gulls usually construct a ground nest of moss and grass, and lay up to three eggs. At the nest they are fearless and can intimidate even the largest intruders which approach too closely. The Mew Gull's diminutive size becomes even more apparent as it lays into a passing Bald Eagle.

By mid-June, young Mew Gulls are hatching and by mid-July juveniles are taking flight. While the juvenile's even brown colouration is very different from that of the adult, its refined presentation and delicate bill provides an immediate clue to its identity. In August, small flocks can be seen flying south en route to their wintering grounds along the Pacific Coast. Unlike the Herring Gull, Mew Gulls do not linger in fall. By the end of August most have left the Territory and are only very rarely seen in September. However, even in deep winter, Mew Gulls are not far away - a short trip to Skagway, Alaska will deliver a gull-starved Yukoner back into the world of this wonderful larid.

FieldNotes: Observations from the field



Please send sightings to Helmut Grünberg, (807 Wheeler, Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2P8. Phone/Fax: 867-667-6703. Email: hgrünberg@hypertech.yk.ca). Include details such as number, date, location, sex/age, and observers' names. Highlight interesting observations and please include descriptions of rare species. 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).

Winter 1997/98

In general the El Niño winter of 1998 was fairly mild in the Yukon with one short cold spell (to -40° C in Whitehorse) in early January. Despite the reasonable weather, there seemed to be few obvious effects on winter birdlife.

While any swan would be considered very unusual in the Yukon in winter, conventional wisdom would dictate that such a swan would be a Trumpeter. This was not the case when a closely observed pair of swans discovered at Lake Laberge on December 30 turned out to be **Tundra Swans** (CE,PS) thus providing a first documented winter record for this species. The observers could clearly see the small yellow tear drops on the otherwise large black bills. Also their high pitched "woo-woo" calls were unlike the deep resonance call of a Trumpeter. A flock of seven **swans** was noted on the Yukon River just south of Whitehorse on December 17 (JSt). A flock of ten **Mallards** was discovered in the McIntyre wetlands on the December 26 Whitehorse CBC (CE); A count there on January 31 revealed 19 birds (9 males & females) (HG); Nine (6 males & 3 females) were counted there on Feb 28 (JMC,PN). Providing a first documented Yukon winter record was a female **Northern Pintail** found among the Mallards at McIntyre Creek on the December 26 Whitehorse CBC (CE); it remained at that location through February (last sighting February 22) surviving early January air temperatures of -40° C (CE,HG,DK). Five **Common Goldeneye** were at the Kathleen River on December 13 (EC), and also five (3 males & 2 females) at the bridge by Carcross on December 20 (RMu,BB). The annual winter Tagish Birding Tour on January 17 turned up a total of 11 **Common Goldeneye**: a male at the Yukon River below Lewes bridge and six males and four females at Tagish Narrows (HG,YBC). Four were on the Yukon River in Whitehorse on January 24 (HG). Three male **goldeneye** were seen in a distance on the outlet of the Teslin River on February 28 (HG). Eight **Common Mergansers** were spotted at Tagish River (2 males & 6 females) and four near Tagish Lake (1 male & 3 females) on January 17 (HG,YBC). Two females were observed on the Yukon River in Whitehorse on January 19 (CE), and two females were seen on the Teslin River at Johnson's Crossing on February 28 (HG).

For at least the second consecutive winter a pair of **Bald Eagles** wintered at McIntyre Creek. The pair was primed to get a jump on the breeding season: following the loss of their nest tree last summer, the birds selected another tree near the same site and initiated nest building in late January. They were also seen nest-building on February 28 (JMC,PN). Another adult **Bald Eagle** was noted along the Yukon River at Lewes Marsh on December 13 (JHa), and one was seen just north of that location on December 17 (JSt). An adult **Bald Eagle**, likely an early migrant was seen over Verslucce Meadow in Whitehorse on February 27 (CE). Extremely early for a migrant was a **Northern Harrier** on the Chadburn Lake Road in Whitehorse on February 22 (BaS,BoS). A **Northern Goshawk** was sighted in downtown Whitehorse on December 6 (CE,PS), and one over Mary Lake on December 25 (RMu,BB). One was flying north near Wolf Creek on February 2 (WN), and one was spotted in the Takhini Burn, Alaska Highway km 1536, on February 20 (HG). **Golden Eagle** sightings included one near the Donjek River in January (DD); one seen killing a fox at Houghton Lake on January 28 (DD,PM); one in the Ruby Range in early February (DD); one in the Pelly Mountains near the Hoole River in February (DD); and one in the Hutshi Lake area on February 25 (DD,PM). A **Gyr Falcon** was seen between Pelly Lakes and Prevost River on February 19 or 20 (DD). One was at Radar Lake in the Aishihik area in late January or early February (DD).





Boreal Owl

This Boreal Owl photographed by Katie Ostrom in her yard at Horse Creek near Lake Laberge on February 18 provided three lucky observers with a rare opportunity to view one of North America's most secretive and elusive owl species. At dusk the small owl left its open perch in an aspen for the adjacent spruce forest. While this species is fairly common in the Yukon, it is seldom detected when not calling.



A female **Ruffed Grouse** was eating rosehips in a yard in Porter Creek on December 23 and was seen again occasionally throughout the winter (CE,PS, NSE). A **Ruffed Grouse** was spotted near Carcross on February 28 (BB). Occasionally one or two **Ruffed Grouse** were at Strawberry Lane in Hidden Valley (LG,JHo). A **Spruce Grouse** was seen near the Aishihik River on December 27 (MB,BB). Three **Willow Ptarmigan** were seen at Wye Lake in Watson Lake on December 27 (LE).



A more obscure view of the Horse Creek Boreal Owl. Photo by K. Ostrom

A **Great Horned Owl** heard at McIntyre Creek wetlands on December 29 (HG) provided a "count week" record for the Whitehorse Christmas Count. **Northern Hawk Owl** sightings included one near the Venus Mine south of Carcross on December 20 (BB), one in Haines Junction in January (DD), one hunting from snags in the Takhini Burn on February 20 (HG), and one "in the middle of nowhere" on a trapline northwest of Whitehorse (JHo). A **Northern Hawk Owl** first seen along McIntyre Creek in October lingered through January to provide one of few Whitehorse area winter records for this species which is generally more common in southwestern Yukon (CE,LK,PS). Two **Great Gray Owls** were observed several times throughout the winter in the Haines Junction area (RJ,WJ), and one was seen in the Finlayson Lake area on February 2 (DD). A **Boreal Owl** which swooped right in front of the observers near Cowley Creek was a pleasant surprise on December 25 (RMu,BB). A **Boreal Owl** was heard at Caribou Lake, at 2:00 a. m. on February 11 (SW), and one was observed in daylight at Horse Creek near Lake Laberge on February 18 (KO,CE, LC). Sadly, a dog retrieved a freshly dead **Boreal Owl** that might have hit a car or a window in Whitehorse on February 28 (SRo,GS).

Winter Pileated Woodpeckers at Watson Lake

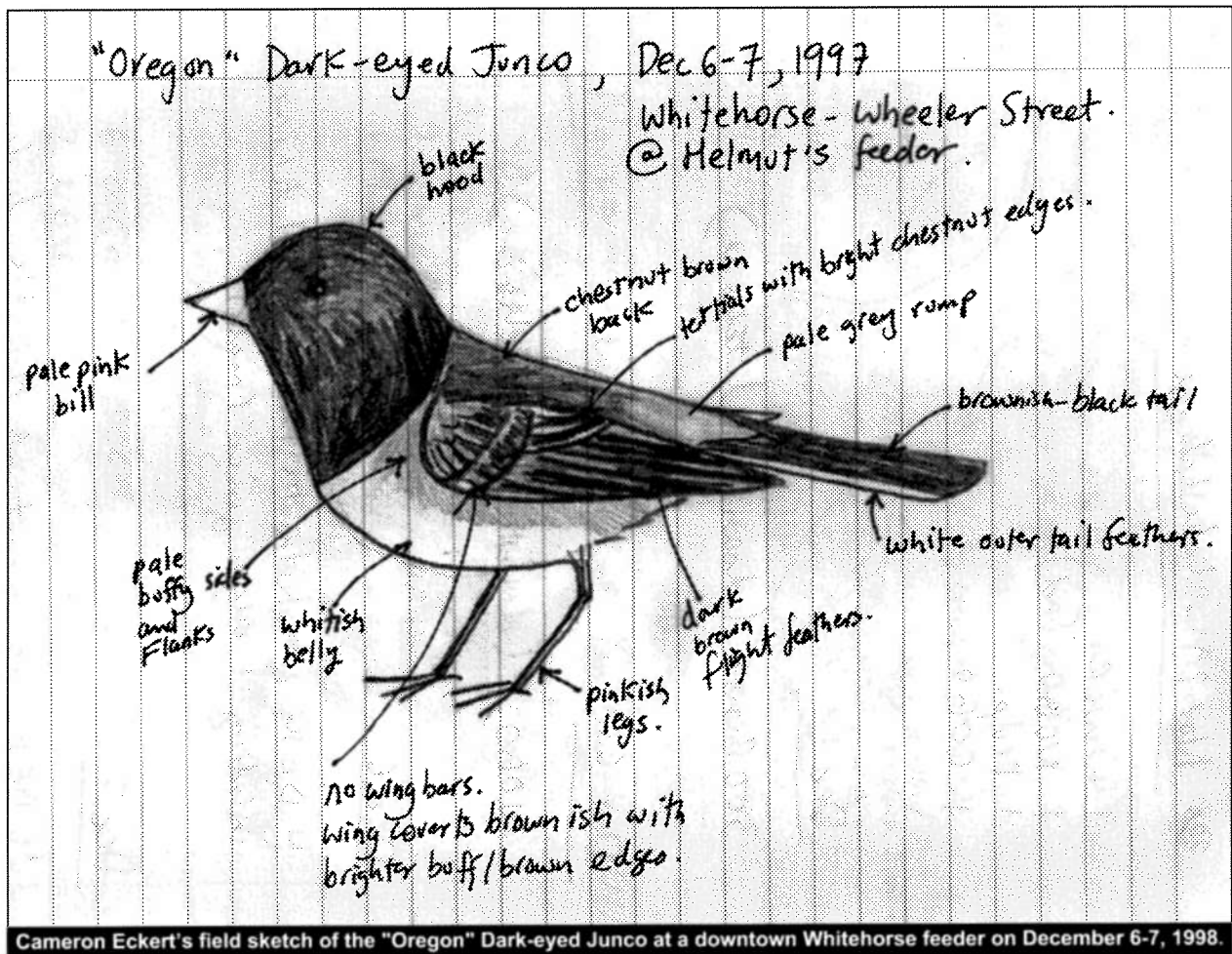
Lois Everett writes ...

"All of October and the first weeks of November I heard reports from Vern Stockman at Upper Liard that the Pileated Woodpecker was seen daily and sometimes would sit for an hour in one spot drumming away. So I faithfully stopped at Upper Liard 2-3 times a week while out snowshoeing - but no, the big pecker would not show himself to me. After I came back from holidays December 8, I again was out seeking my feathered friend but to no avail. December 23 I learned the big bird was dining at Dr. Said's suet feeder, but I was on night shift so missed him again. I had resigned myself I wasn't meant to see this wonderful woodpecker. February 21st was a typical day off - I was setting out to take eight people snowshoeing. I stopped at my place to drop off a box of suet I got from our kind butcher. As I went to leave the yard I heard a chainsaw noise up in a tree - I knew that wasn't the sound of the Hairy or Downy Woodpecker that frequented my yard ! I moved closer to neighbour's fence - there the noise was again ! My heart started to race and I said to myself "I don't believe my ears - the Pileated Woodpecker !" Sure enough I saw this large black woodpecker with red crest. It flew to a tree. Underwings were white as it flew. I was very excited and happy to finally see this elusive woodpecker. Next challenge is to try and capture it on film!"



Downy Woodpecker sightings included one at a Cowley feeder on December 7 and February 10 (RMu,BB); one to two at a Watson Lake feeder from late December through early February (LE); one at a Horse Creek feeder on January 25 (KO); and one regularly at a Teslin feeder (DD). A male and a female **Downy** frequenting a Porter Creek feeder throughout the winter left the area by the end of February. However, on February 21 a second female visited for just one day; the greyish cast to this bird's breast raised questions as to how many subspecies occur in the Yukon (CE,PS). **Hairy Woodpeckers** were apparently more common than Downies with reports including up to two at a Watson Lake feeder from mid-December through mid-February (LE); a male and female regularly at a Whitehorse feeder (HG); a male and a female at a Porter Creek feeder through the winter (one of these began drumming as early as January 21); two at a Horse Creek feeder at least till January 25 (KO); one (heard drumming) at Cowley on February 20 (BB); two regularly at a Teslin feeder (DD); and a male and a female regularly at a Hidden Valley feeder (LG,JHo). Surprisingly, there were no **Three-toed Woodpecker** reports other than one during a CBC.

The only birds seen this winter at Livingstone Creek, at the headwaters of Big Salmon River were an unidentified woodpecker, **Gray Jays** and **Common Ravens** (JSu). **Gray Jays** were reported from Beaver Creek (JMC), and two seemed to be living on the school grounds of Hidden Valley School and were enjoying free lunches and became quite tame (JMC). A **Common Raven** was the only species observed in Old Crow in December (JMC). While very few **Northern Shrikes** actually winter in the Yukon, it is not unusual to see late and early migrants at the beginning and end of the winter season. Such was the case with a **Northern Shrike** at Horse Creek in November and December (KO), and an adult was in pursuit of redpolls and juncos at a Whitehorse feeder on December 13 (HG).



Black-capped and **Boreal Chickadees** were well reported from feeders across southern Yukon. Much rarer was a **Mountain Chickadee** at the Auriol Trail in Kluane National Park on December 29 (RMA). A single **Mountain Chickadee** spotted among Boreals and Black-caps visiting a Tagish feeder was a delight for a group of birders on January 17 (HG,YBC). One was regularly seen at a Teslin feeder (DD). **Red-breasted Nuthatch** sightings included two at a Cowley feeder on December 7 and one on February 28 (RMu,BB); two throughout the season at a Schwatka Lake feeder (HG); three at a Marshall Creek feeder throughout January (KA,LA); three at a Haines Junction feeder in January (IS,ESC); two at a Wolf Creek feeder (SRi) and two were observed at New Constabulary Beach, Marsh Lake on February 1 (JMC). An **American Dipper** was seen along the Yukon River Trail in Whitehorse through February (m.ob.), and one at McIntyre Creek wetlands through February (m.ob.). A **Brown Creeper** first reported from Haines Junction in late November lingered in the area through early December (TH), providing the first Yukon winter record for this species. While the flocks of 200-300 **Bohemian Waxwings** seen in the Whitehorse area in early December dwindled as Mountain Ash berries disappeared, smaller flocks of up to 40 birds were seen at various Whitehorse area locations through January (m.ob.). On January 24 it was a strange sight to watch a flock of 37 flying over the Yukon River, almost like swallows, and then landing at the edge of the ice and drinking water (HG).

Very rare in winter were two **American Tree Sparrows** which frequented feeders in two Hidden Valley yards through mid-January (LG,JHo,CC). The identity of a single mystery sparrow seen in downtown Whitehorse on the December 26 CBC (MB) was confirmed on December 28 when two **American Tree Sparrows** were well-documented at the very same location (CE,PS). **Dark-eyed Juncos** were well reported this winter with two in Valleyview on December 12 (PS), one at a Dawson City feeder on December 14 (GB,MY), probably the northernmost winter record for this species, one at M'Clintock Bay on the December 21 Marsh Lake CBC (JL), and one in Haines Junction (IS,ESC). Some **Dark-eyed Juncos** are apparently limited by extremely cold weather as one dropped dead during a -40°C cold-snap at Shadow Lake on January 7 (DR,SRu). A small flock of **Snow Buntings** was seen in Haines Junction on January 18 (DH,SH). Two **Rusty Blackbirds** lingered at the Haines Junction dump at least till December 3 (TH) to provide this season's only record.



A Common Redpoll leaves its mark. Photo by Cameron Eckert

Oregon-race Dark-eyed Junco winters in Whitehorse

Among five **Dark-eyed Juncos** visiting a Whitehorse feeder from December through February was the Yukon's first well-documented **Oregon-race Dark-eyed Junco** (HG,CE,PS). There is considerable debate as to how many junco subspecies occur in Northwestern Canada and the identification of "Oregon" Dark-eyed Juncos must be made with caution. However, careful study of the obvious contrast between the black hood and chestnut back combined with bright tawny flanks helped confirm the Wheeler Street bird as a male Oregon Junco. While the numbers of "Slate-colored" Juncos at that location decreased to one in February, the "Oregon" Junco stayed past the end of the season (HG).



While a few **Pine Grosbeaks** can almost always be found on a winter's day in the Whitehorse area, most observers reported relatively low numbers visiting feeders this winter: **Pine Grosbeaks** numbering 15-20 were seen at a Horse Creek feeder at least till January 25 (KO). This number is substantially down from a maximum of 55 in the winter of 1996/97 and 75 in the winter of 1995/96. They were well below regular numbers at a Porter Creek feeder this winter with a high count of 15 on December 5 (CE,PS). Somewhat higher numbers were hosted by a Watson Lake feeder which had up to 20 **Pine Grosbeaks** (LE) and a Teslin feeder where 20-30 were tallied (DD). While the reason for the lower numbers of Pine Grosbeaks will remain a mystery, some birders speculated that the relatively mild temperatures this past winter allowed more Pine Grosbeaks to winter in the bush.



Two Common Redpolls at a niger seed feeder. Photo by Jeanette McCrie.

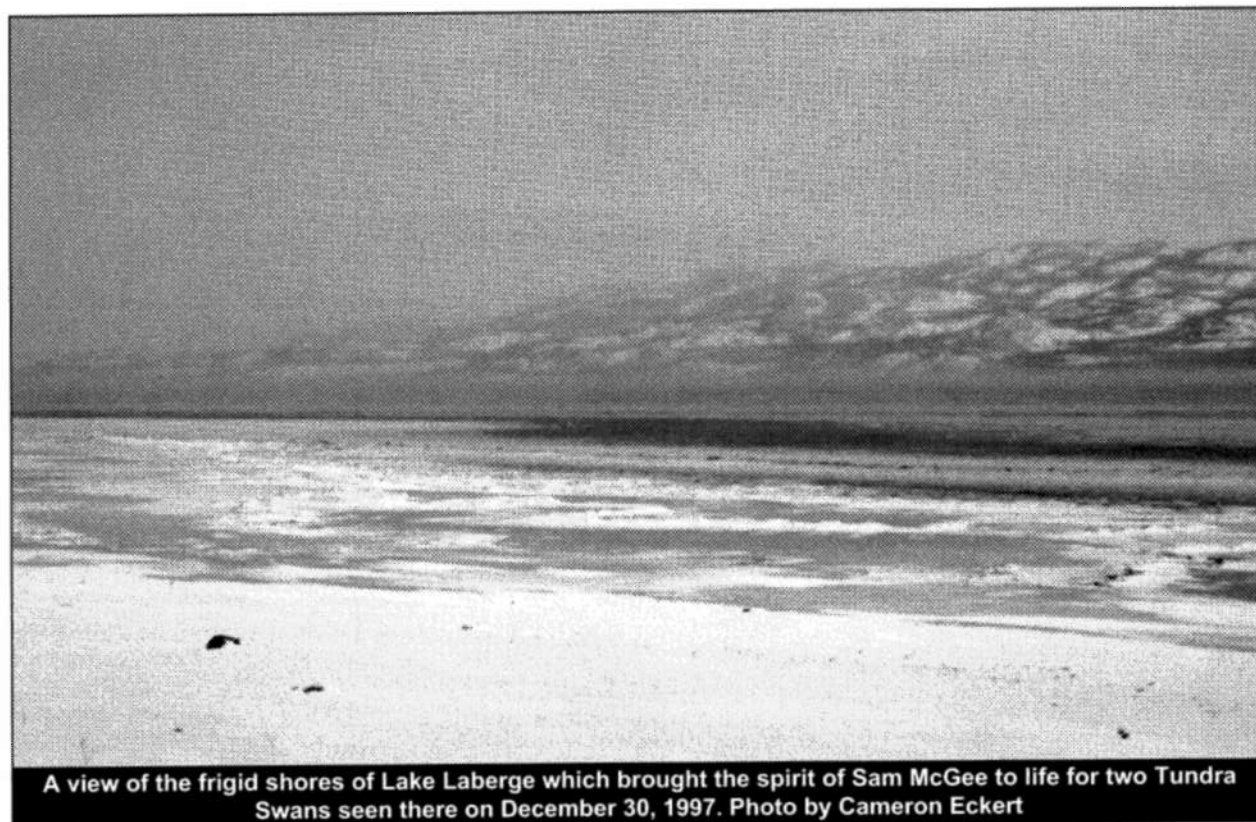


A Common Redpoll pauses for a portrait shot. Photo by Jeanette McCrie

Red Crossbill were seen regularly through the winter in Porter Creek; three seen at a Porter Creek feeder on December 26 provided perhaps the first Yukon CBC record for this species. In Riverdale the first **Red Crossbill** arrived on January 25 (AS). It is interesting to note that just a few years ago Red Crossbill was considered casual in winter, that is, present some years but not occurring ever year. However, better coverage has revealed that this species regularly winters at a few locations especially Riverdale and Pilot Mountain and perhaps Porter Creek. A pair of **White-winged Crossbills** was courting at a feeder in Whitehorse on February 22 (HT,JMC). The male was observed giving seeds to the female. **Common Redpolls** were reported from many feeders, mostly during the latter part of the season. The high count was 100 at a Porter Creek feeder on February 18, which was considered about normal for winter (CE,PS). By contrast, **Hoary Redpolls** were relatively scarce; one was at a Whitehorse feeder on December 20 (HG), and two were found away from feeders on the December 26 Whitehorse CBC (CE,PS). An extremely white **Hoary Redpoll** arrived at a Porter Creek feeder on February 4 and stayed until Feb 22 (CE,PS); A second **Hoary** was present there on February 5 and 18 (CE,PS). A **Pine Siskin** spotted with a flock of 35 **Common Redpolls** on the December 26 Whitehorse CBC provided a first documented winter record for this species (CE,PS).

Observers: Ken Anderson, Libby Anderson, Michael Beauregard, Gwen Bell, Bruce Benett, Linda Cameron, Caroline Couch, Elaine Crawshay, Denny Denison, Cameron Eckert, Lois Everett, Linda Gerrand, Helmut Grünberg, Jim Hawkings (JHa), Todd Heakes, Heidi Hehn, Dave Henry, Suzanne Henry, Jürg Hofer (JHo), Rita Jux, Walter Jux, Lee Kubica, Dennis Kuch, Julie Lefebvre, Rhonda Markel, Jeanette McCrie (JMC), Phillip Merchant, Randi Mulder, Katie Ostrom, many observers (m.ob.), Patti Nash, Sandra Richardson (SRi), Sally Ross (SRo), Don Russell, Sharon Russell (SRu), Aron Senkpiel, George Shaw, Ian Sinclair, Pam Sinclair, Elke Sinclair-Claus (ESC), Nigel Sinclair-Eckert (NSE), Jennifer Staniforth (JSt), Barbara Studds (BaS), Bob Studds (BoS), Joi Sudol (JSu), Heather Thompson, Stu Withers, Mike Yuhsz, Yukon Bird Club (YBC).

Thanks to the many observers who took the time to send in their sightings! ~ Helmut.



A view of the frigid shores of Lake Laberge which brought the spirit of Sam McGee to life for two Tundra Swans seen there on December 30, 1997. Photo by Cameron Eckert



YUKON BIRD CLUB

Promoting awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Yukon birds and their habitats

1997/98 Board of Directors

President:	Pamela Sinclair
Treasurer:	Linda Cameron
Secretary:	Jeremy Baumbach
Newsletter Editor:	Cameron Eckert
Field Trip Coordinator:	open
Events Coordinator:	Wendy Nixon
Sightings Coordinator:	Helmut Grünberg
Checklist Coordinator:	Lee Kubica
Birdathon Coordinator:	Sheila Serup
Special Projects:	open
Youth Coordinator:	open

The Yukon Bird Club is a registered non-profit, charitable organization.

Membership fees:

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

Family memberships cover two or more people living at one address. Foreign members please pay with a Canadian dollar money order.

For more information contact:

**Yukon Bird Club, Box 31054, Whitehorse,
Yukon, Canada, Y1A 5P7**

Email: YBC@yknet.yk.ca

Yukon Bird Club Web Site:

www.yukonweb.com/community/ybc/

Yukon Warbler is published by the Yukon Bird Club. Copyright © 1998 Yukon Bird Club. All rights reserved. Printed material, artwork or photographs may not be reproduced by any means without permission from the credited author, artist or photographer. All other material may not be reproduced by any means without permission from the editor.

Yukon Warbler design and layout by Cameron Eckert

Yukon Warbler - Spring 1998 - Volume 6, Number 1.



Yukon Warbler reprints

The complete set of *Yukon Warbler* back-issues are available. To order send \$2.50 per issue to the Yukon Bird Club.

Volume 1 (1993): Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter.

Volume 2 (1994): Spring, Fall, Winter.

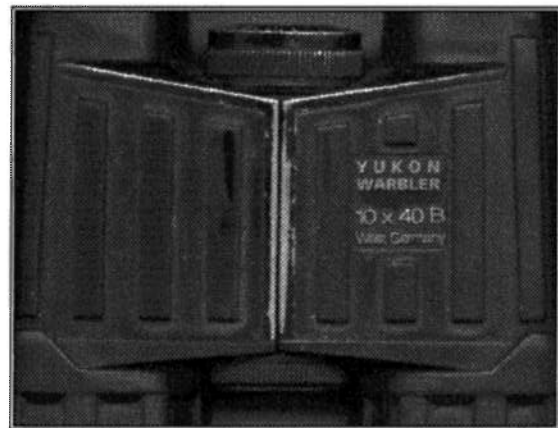
Volume 3 (1995): Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter.

Volume 4 (1996): Spring, Fall, Winter.

Volume 5 (1997): Spring, Fall, Winter.



✓ Crossword Solution



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

**Cameron Eckert, 1402 Elm Street
Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 4B6
Phone/Fax: 867-667-4630
Email: ceckert@yknet.yk.ca**