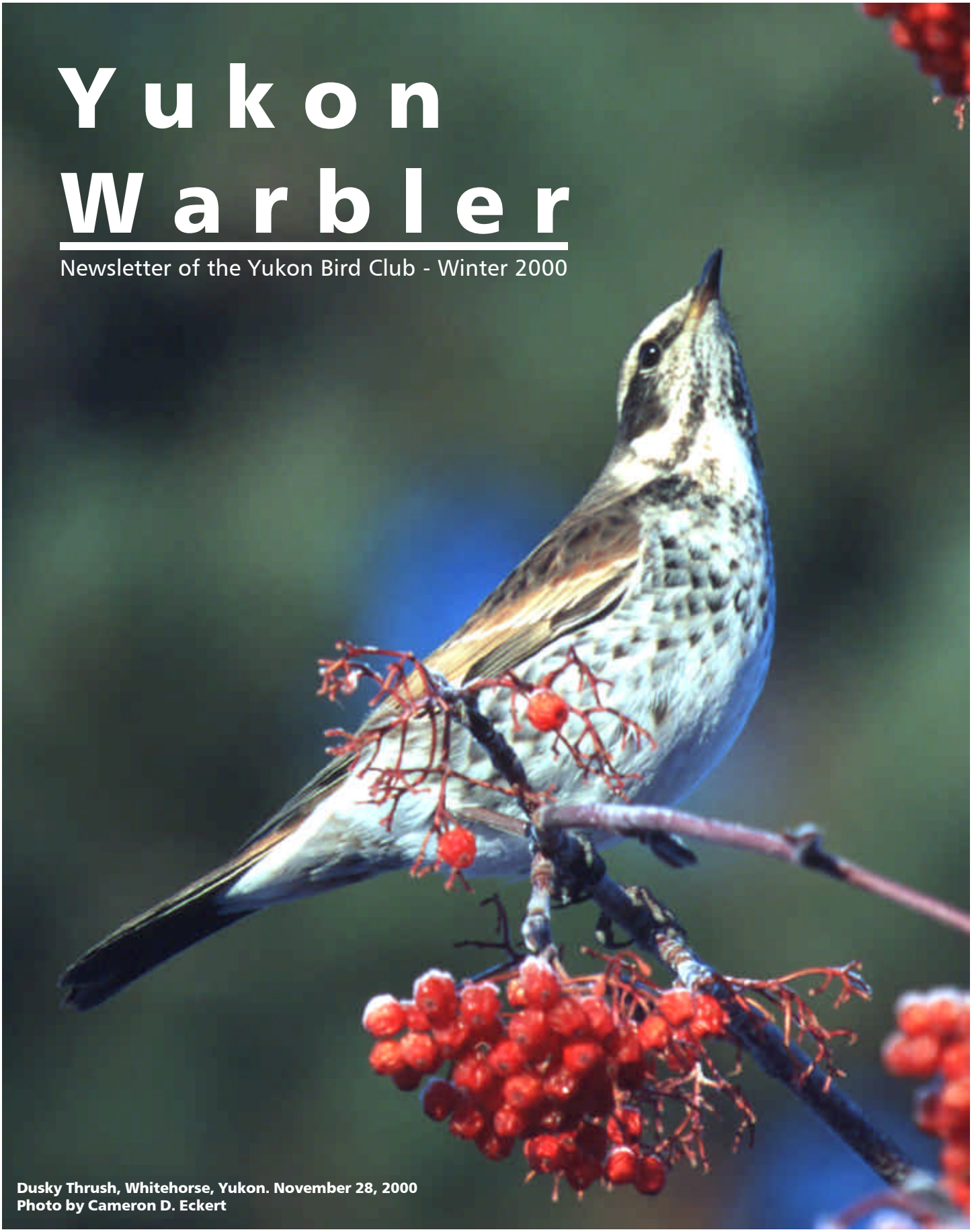
Yukon Warbler

Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club - Winter 2000



Dusky Thrush, Whitehorse, Yukon. November 28, 2000
Photo by Cameron D. Eckert

From the Editor

The past year has been a busy one for me. Three young children and a remarkable parade of extraordinary birds have left me with little time at my desk. None-the-less, I hope you enjoy this issue of the *Yukon Warbler*. This *Yukon Warbler* is a slight departure from previous editions. Seven articles highlight recent sensational Yukon rarities. Six of these were previously published in Canada's premier birding magazine, *Birders Journal*. The original citation is noted at the bottom of each article. Since 1991, *Birders Journal* has provided a key link in Canada's birding community. It has gained a worldwide reputation as a respected source of original and in-depth articles on bird identification. It is an essential publication for anyone with an interest in Canadian birds. For subscription information contact; Birders Journal c/o Sue Holder, 701 Rossland Road East, Suite 393, Whitby, Ontario, L1N 9K3. (E-mail: holder@netcom.ca).

This series of articles reflect the diverse and unpredictable nature of Yukon's birdlife. Who could have predicted that Bean Goose or Dusky Thrush would be recent additions to the Yukon checklist? Yet there they were, the goose feeding on the field at the Whitehorse airport, and the thrush at a Mountain Ash right downtown to the astonished delight of Yukon birders. This past spring saw a seemingly endless movement of eye-catching rarities: flocks of Sabine's Gulls and Smith's Longspurs at Judas Creek, the Yukon's first Eurasian Green-winged Teal and Pacific Golden-Plovers on Marsh Lake, and a Yellow-headed Blackbird in Whitehorse. Some of these were migrants on the move only stopping long enough to feed, rest momentarily, and be duly noted by a happy birder or two. Others lingered longer, allowing enough time for the word to get out to the birding community and enabling others to get out and have a look.

The most cooperative spring rarity was the Yukon's first Black-headed Grosbeak. Ruth McCullough and Doug Wing knew that they had a very special visitor when it turned up at their feeder at Mile 5 on the Mayo Road on May 31. Ruth and Doug got the word out and kindly welcomed birders to their yard to view this fine Yukon rarity which was last seen on June 2. This bird now has a small but significant place in the Yukon's ornithological history. As well, it lingers as a happy memory for a few lucky birders.

From our common backyard birds to mind-bending rarities, birdwatching provides a remarkable window to the natural world. The key is to get out often and enjoy! Please don't hesitate to call right away if you do find something unusual (phone 667-4630, e-mail: ceckert@yknet.yk.ca). Getting the word out provides an opportunity for other birders to share and document the sighting. Anyone wishing to receive news of current sightings can give me a call. Well, that's enough time at my desk and Lake Laberge is a fine destination for a day of winter birding ...

Good birding,

Cameron Eckert

The Yukon's First Black-headed Grosbeak

By Cameron D. Eckert

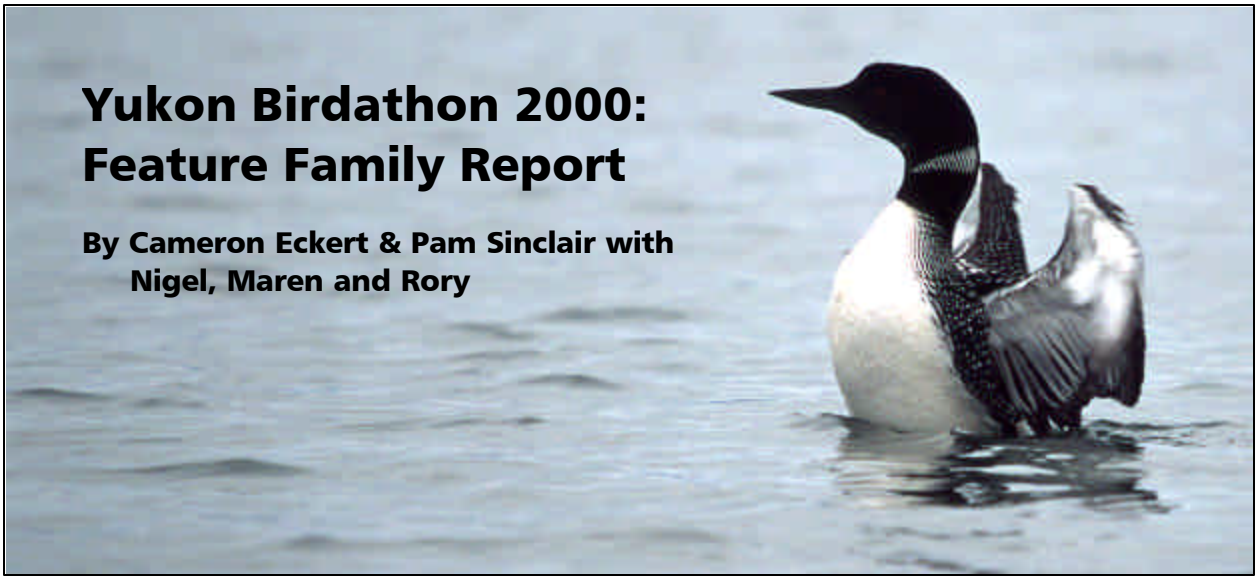
On May 31, 2000 I received a call about a possible female Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus* visiting a feeder at Mile 5 on the Mayo Road just north of Whitehorse. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are fairly common along the lower Beaver and La Biche Rivers in the extreme southeast Yukon, but would be an exceptional rarity for Whitehorse. On the other hand, I considered that Black-headed Grosbeak *Pheucticus melanocephalus*, which has been reported from southeast Alaska, would be a very likely candidate for a vagrant grosbeak in our area. The females of the two closely related species are very similar but can be distinguished by the extent of breast streaking. Rose-breasted Grosbeak has coarse streaking right across the breast, whereas Black-headed Grosbeak has thin breast streaking limited to the sides of the breast and flanks.

Female Black-headed Grosbeak, Mile 5 Mayo Road, Yukon. June 1, 2000. Photos by Cameron D. Eckert.

I drove out to the home of Ruth McCullough and Doug Wing and waited just a few minutes for the bird to appear. It landed on the feeder and immediately turned towards me to reveal an unstreaked orange coloured breast. Perched just a few metres away was the Yukon's first Black-headed Grosbeak.

Its size was just slightly smaller than a Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*. Its head was boldly patterned with dark lateral crown stripes, white median crown stripe, white supercilium, dark auriculars, and white malar. Its chin was white. Throat and breast were rich orange, and belly and undertail were whitish mottled with dull orange. The centre of the breast was unstreaked and thin streaks ran along the sides of the breast and flanks with very thin streaks in the undertail. Its hefty bill had a dark greyish upper mandible and pale pinkish lower mandible. Its dark brownish wings were marked with white spots on the tertial tips and along the tips of the median and greater coverts. Its scapulars, back and rump were pale buff with coarse dark brown streaks. Tail was dark brown and upper tail coverts had dull whitish tips and tail was dark. These features are all consistent with a female Black-headed Grosbeak.

I immediately put the word out to other birders and over the next two days many were able to enjoy this cooperative Yukon first. The Black-headed Grosbeak's stay was short and it was last seen on June 2. Our sincere thanks to Ruth McCullough and Doug Wing who welcomed birders to their yard.



Yukon Birdathon 2000: Feature Family Report

By Cameron Eckert & Pam Sinclair with Nigel, Maren and Rory

This past spring, our family had the pleasure of being "*Feature Birders*" for the 2000 Yukon Birdathon. We continued our tradition of "Enviro-Birdathons" at Judas Creek on the shores of Marsh Lake; For 24 hours, 5 p.m. on May 26 to 5 p.m. on May 27, we relied entirely on foot and bicycle power (supplemented with a steady flow of snacks) to search out as many species as possible at Judas Creek.

Judas Creek offers a remarkable diversity of habitats including wetlands, upland Trembling Aspen and Lodgepole Pine forests, old-growth White Spruce, and the open waters of Marsh Lake. The area has turned up an amazing string of rarities and has acquired a Nation-wide reputation as a sensational birding "hotspot". In 1999, when our Enviro-Birdathon surpassed 80 species at Judas Creek we pondered that the magical 100 species mark could be achieved on an Enviro-Birdathon. On the other hand, such a quest might be outlandish dreaming!! This year we combined our experience from `99 with a relaxed attitude and better snacks and went for the gusto. All that was needed was for the birds to respond on cue.

Local residents were treated to the humorous sight of our birding wagon train: Two bicycles towing two trailers with three kids and a heap of toys, food, rubber boots, and optical equipment. No sooner would the train get rolling when a thrush or warbler would flit across the road and the whole show would come to a sudden halt as we swung binoculars into action! The motivation of our younger team members was boosted as we followed the first rule of a successful Birdathon: "Keep it Fun!" A night in the tent, followed by a pancake breakfast, and then walks along the beach or through the woods, and a scramble up any available "cliff" kept team spirits high. But what about the birds??

All four species of loons were right on cue with a remarkable 14 Red-throated, 60 Commons, two Yellow-billed, and a lone Pacific Loon. Red-necked Grebes put on a good showing although we were skunked by Horned Grebe. We tallied 23 species of waterfowl with the highlight being two Black Scoters. Five species of raptors was modest although we were lucky to spot a Northern Goshawk. A single Ruffed Grouse was our only galliforme - it seems a bit of scouting is required for the elusive Spruce Grouse. Judas Creek is a renowned shorebird hotspot and we had little trouble finding 17 species with noteworthy finds being two Upland Sandpipers, and two Ruddy Turnstones. A big late spring movement of sandpipers produced high counts of 350 Semipalmated and 500 Pectoral sandpipers. Judas Creek is simply the best southern Yukon location for jaegers, and three Parasitic Jaegers on Saturday were a nice addition to our tally. Gulls and terns were limited to local breeders including Bonaparte's, Mew and Herring gulls, and Arctic Tern. For woodpeckers, we clocked Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, and Northern Flicker but missed the Three-toed

Woodpecker which we had seen there on our `99 Birdathon. The three regular corvids were all duly noted. Tree, Violet-green, and Cliff swallows were common. We were teased by a Bank Swallow spotted just minutes after the clock ran out on our Birdathon. Common passerines kept the total climbing higher with Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Swainson's Thrush, and American Robin. But wait! That thrush that just flitted across the road? Our only Gray-cheeked Thrush!! Songbird migration was still underway with good numbers of American Pipits and a few Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs. Seven species of warblers were noted with a migrant Northern Waterthrush moving through the willows being a good spot. Six species of sparrows including good numbers of Chipping Sparrows which is usually a late migrant. Red-winged Blackbird was common although Rusty Blackbird was a big miss! Our finches were limited to Purple Finch, White-winged Crossbill and Common Redpoll. Apparently the Pine Siskins had not yet returned to the area.

At the end of the day on Saturday we put our pencil to paper to tally the success of our Birdathon. We were stunned to find that we'd reached 95 species on an Enviro-Birdathon. Despite not quite reaching the century mark, we'd been treated to a lot of great birding with a few excellent finds, and whole lot of fun! One of the great pleasures of an Enviro-Birdathon is observing the unfolding diversity of birdlife over a 24 hour period in a spectacular natural setting. With an eye to some of our misses (Horned Grebe, Rusty Blackbird, Pine Siskin) it seems that a 100 species Enviro-Birdathon might not be so outlandish! See you next year ...

Many thanks to all our sponsors!!

Cameron, Pam, Nigel, Maren, and Rory!

Our Birdathon 2000 List:
Judas Creek, May 26-27, 2000

1	Red-throated Loon	33	Merlin	65	Violet-green Swallow
2	Pacific Loon	34	Ruffed Grouse	66	Cliff Swallow
3	Common Loon	35	Black-bellied Plover	67	Gray Jay
4	Yellow-billed Loon	36	American Golden-Plover	68	Black-billed Magpie
5	Red-necked Grebe	37	Semipalmated Plover	69	Common Raven
6	Tundra Swan	38	Killdeer	70	Horned Lark
7	Greater White-fronted Goose	39	Lesser Yellowlegs	71	Black-capped Chickadee
8	Canada Goose	40	Solitary Sandpiper	72	Boreal Chickadee
9	Green-winged Teal	41	Spotted Sandpiper	73	Red-breasted Nuthatch
10	Mallard	42	Upland Sandpiper	74	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
11	Northern Pintail	43	Whimbrel	75	Gray-cheeked Thrush
12	Blue-winged Teal	44	Ruddy Turnstone	76	Swainson's Thrush
13	Northern Shoveler	45	Semipalmated Sandpiper	77	American Robin
14	Gadwall	46	Least Sandpiper	78	American Pipit
15	American Wigeon	47	Pectoral Sandpiper	79	Orange-crowned Warbler
16	Canvasback	48	Short-billed Dowitcher	80	Yellow Warbler
17	Redhead	49	Long-billed Dowitcher	81	Yellow-rumped Warbler
18	Ring-necked Duck	50	Common Snipe	82	Blackpoll Warbler
19	Greater Scaup	51	Red-necked Phalarope	83	Northern Waterthrush
20	Lesser Scaup	52	Parasitic Jaeger	84	Common Yellowthroat
21	Long-tailed Duck	53	Bonaparte's Gull	85	Wilson's Warbler
22	Black Scoter	54	Mew Gull	86	Chipping Sparrow
23	Surf Scoter	55	Herring Gull	87	Savannah Sparrow
24	White-winged Scoter	56	Arctic Tern	88	Lincoln's Sparrow
25	Barrow's Goldeneye	57	Belted Kingfisher	89	White-crowned Sparrow
26	Bufflehead	58	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	90	Dark-eyed Junco
27	Common Merganser	59	Hairy Woodpecker	91	Lapland Longspur
28	Red-breasted Merganser	60	Northern Flicker	92	Red-winged Blackbird
29	Bald Eagle	61	Olive-sided Flycatcher	93	Purple Finch
30	Northern Harrier	62	Western Wood-Pewee	94	White-winged Crossbill
31	Northern Goshawk	63	Say's Phoebe	95	Common Redpoll
32	American Kestrel	64	Tree Swallow		

Spring Migration in the Yukon

Photos by Jeanette McCrie

Northern Shovelers touch down on Schwatka Lake. May 9, 1999.

Hudsonian Godwits!!

Left: All eyes to the sky as Cameron (right), Pam (left), and Karen Baltgaelis (centre) spot a flock of 23 Hudsonian Godwits passing overhead at Lewes Marsh on May 13, 1999.

◆

Lewes Marsh

Below: A blanket of shorebirds and dabblers cover the mudflats at Lewes Marsh on May 13, 1999. Long-billed Dowitcher (inset).

A Hairy Woodpecker (right) at its nest cavity at Mary Lake on June 13, 1999.

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Northern Flicker (below) emerges from its nest cavity at Mary Lake on June 13, 1999.

A Ruffed Grouse (below) sits tight on its nest at Mary Lake on June 13, 1999.

Michael Abbott and Lee Hawkings after a successful Birdathon on May 30, 1999.

More images from Jeanette ...

Clockwise from top:

American Crow a rarity at Judas Creek on May 29, 1999.

Lesser Yellowlegs in breeding mode at Mary Lake on June 27, 1999.

Judas Creek Migration Finale: Jim Hawkings and Wendy Nixon scope the mudflats on May 26, 1999.

Bald Eagle a familiar sight at McIntyre Creek wetlands on June 6, 1999.

Great Horned Owls in Teslin

Photo by Margaret Garolitz

Margaret Garolitz writes;

"*Big surprise! I woke up one morning to see a Great Horned Owl sitting in the tree outside my window. It stayed there all day, and in the evening (5 pm) a second owl arrived. That was September 7 1999. They were great! I also watched one regurgitate his supper. They flew at 9 pm. On September 16, there was one at my neighbours house. Stayed around all day. Bob Hassard also told me there was a female with one young that she was teaching to hunt around his place at Fox Point for a week at the beginning of September.*"

Odd Birds from Lake Laberge

David Leverton sent these photos of a partial albino Pine Grosbeak in November 2000, and a partial albino Common Redpoll from a few years ago. Both were at his feeder at Deep Creek.

A notable movement of godwits in the Whitehorse area, Spring 1999

By Cameron D. Eckert

Two Bar-tailed Godwits, May 26, 1999, Judas Creek, Yukon. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

By the time I spotted two godwits at Judas Creek, Yukon on May 26, 1999, I had already scrutinized 102 Hudsonian Godwits *Limosa haemastica* at various Whitehorse area wetlands during the previous three weeks. By Yukon standards, these numbers were unprecedented. The first hint that this spring would be a good one for godwits was on May 2 when I tallied a flock of 52 Hudsonian Godwits at Tagish Narrows. This was the largest flock ever recorded in the Yukon. The largest flock reported by Campbell et. al. (1990) for British Columbia was 26 on 2 May 1984 at Fort St. John. Through the rest of May, Pam Sinclair and I observed Hudsonian Godwits in the Whitehorse area as follows: 10 on May 8 at M'Clintock Bay; 8 on May 8 at Tagish Narrows; 5 on May 8 at Nares Lake; 23 on May 13 at Lewes Marsh; 2 on May 18 at M'Clintock Bay; and 2 on May 20 at Judas Creek. There was significant variation in plumage with birds appearing in breeding plumage, winter plumage, and many in transitional plumage. We checked the underwings, wing pattern and tails on almost every bird to confirm their identities. We usually see about 5 Hudsonian Godwits per spring in the Whitehorse area. Prior to this year, the highest numbers were recorded in 1998 with 70 tallied in May at various Whitehorse area locations which included a one day (May 9) count of 62 with the largest flock being 16 birds. This spring, southeast Alaskan observers also reported relatively good numbers of Hudsonian Godwits with Kodiak's first record (3 on May 2) in 20 years (Richard MacIntosh pers. comm.), and a possible record high one day count (8-9 on May 5) for Juneau (Gus van Vliet pers. comm.).

The two godwits at Judas Creek on May 26 immediately caught my attention. They were obviously godwits, being clearly larger and longer-legged (dark legs) than a nearby Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, with very long slightly upcurved bills (blackish with orange base). Both birds were mostly in winter plumage with a whitish throat, breast, belly and undertail, with one bird showing a distinct reddish patch at the base of the lower mandible and chin. The other bird differed in that it showed no red in the face and had faint fine streaking on the upper breast. Both birds had dark brown crowns, a whitish supercilium and a dark eye line. Back and scapular feathers had dark centres and buffy fringes and notches, while secondary wing coverts appeared worn with dark grey centres and whitish fringes.

Most intriguing about these birds was that they seemed shorter legged and lacked the hunched look of a Hudsonian Godwit. As well, the orange base of their bills was not as bright or extensive as that of a Hudsonian Godwit. The whitish breast and belly and patch of red on one bird's chin excluded Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*. What we could see of these birds suggested that they were Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica.* However, the chance to view an underwing or tail became a significant waiting game.

Two Bar-tailed Godwits, May 26, 1999, Judas Creek, Yukon. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

The birds fed for about 30 minutes without so much as lifting a wing tip. They were able to probe the mud with very little stooping which further emphasized their short legs. Finally, one godwit began to bathe and eventually stretched its wings to display whitish underwings, and spread its tail which was white with dark brown barring. It was a Bar-tailed Godwit. It then took flight and joined its partner in the air thus confirming that both were Bar-tailed Godwits.

In flight, the upper wings showed brownish secondaries, and slightly darker primaries with only a vague whitish wing stripe at the base of the outer secondaries and inner primaries. Most striking were the very dark primary coverts. In flight the tips of their toes extended just barely past their tails which was quite different from the flock of 23 Hudsonian Godwits we observed flying overhead at Lewes Marsh on May 13 (feet extended fully beyond their tails). The Bar-tailed Godwits looked front-heavy in flight, like a dowitcher *Limnodromus*. The rump appeared brownish and contrasted just slightly with the more whitish barred tail which confirmed that these birds belonged to the subspecies *L. l. baueri* which breeds widely in western Alaska and Siberia (Hayman et. al. 1986; Paulson 1993). The Bar-tailed Godwits called frequently, a mellow two-noted "*du-whit*" and occasionally a three-syllable descending "*du-du-du*".

The godwit with the reddish chin departed at dusk on May 26 and was not seen again. The other Bar-tailed Godwit was at Judas Creek on May 28 and we watched it doing high flights at dusk while calling constantly. It was still there on May 29 but not when we returned to Judas Creek on June 5. These birds provided only the second documented Yukon record for Bar-tailed Godwit (Eckert et. al. 1998). The Yukon's first was one at M'Clintock Bay on May 29 1993 (BJ 5(5):256). It is notable that while most Canadian Bar-tailed Godwit records are from fall (Jones and Holder 1996), both Yukon records occurred during spring migration. Most of all, the two Bar-tails at Judas Creek made for a very exciting finale to a remarkable season for godwits.

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Original citation: Eckert, C.D. 1999. A notable movement of godwits in the Yukon, Spring 1999. Birders Journal 8(3):149-150.

Yukon Gullery 2001

Jaegers, gulls and terns are as exciting as they are challenging. This gallery offers images of recent noteworthy observations.

A southbound Long-tailed Jaeger (left) wings its way over Whitehorse on August 15, 2000. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

This adult Caspian Tern on August 1, 1999 at Nisutlin Delta, Yukon (C. Eckert, P. Sinclair, et. al.) established the Yukon's fourth record for this species. Note its striking black wing tips, bulky bill, and relatively short square tail (left photo), and large size compared to an adjacent Arctic Tern (right photo). Caspian Tern has been recorded annually in the Yukon since 1996 and is now considered rare but regular. Photos by C. Eckert.

This first-winter Iceland Gull spent two weeks, October 13-26, 1998, in Whitehorse. Its bill structure (very fine) and colour (dirty pale base), relatively small size, rounded head and overall whiteness indicates that this bird is the nominate subspecies*, Larus glaucoides glaucoides*. To date there are only three documented records for Iceland Gull in the Yukon. Photos by Cameron D. Eckert.

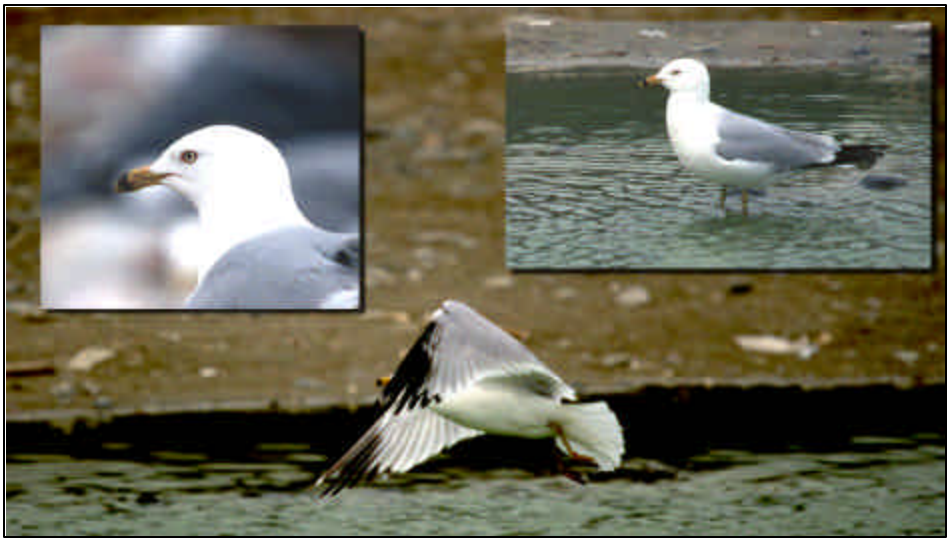
This adult Sabine's Gull was an exceptional find at Tabor Lake near the Peel River in northeast Yukon on June 26, 1999 (C. Eckert, M. Gill). Photos by Cameron D. Eckert.

Ring-billed Gull

Whitehorse, Yukon
May 23, 2000

This Ring-billed Gull was a highlight of the YBC "*Lunch with Birds*" trip to the dump on May 23, 2000.

Photos by Cameron D. Eckert

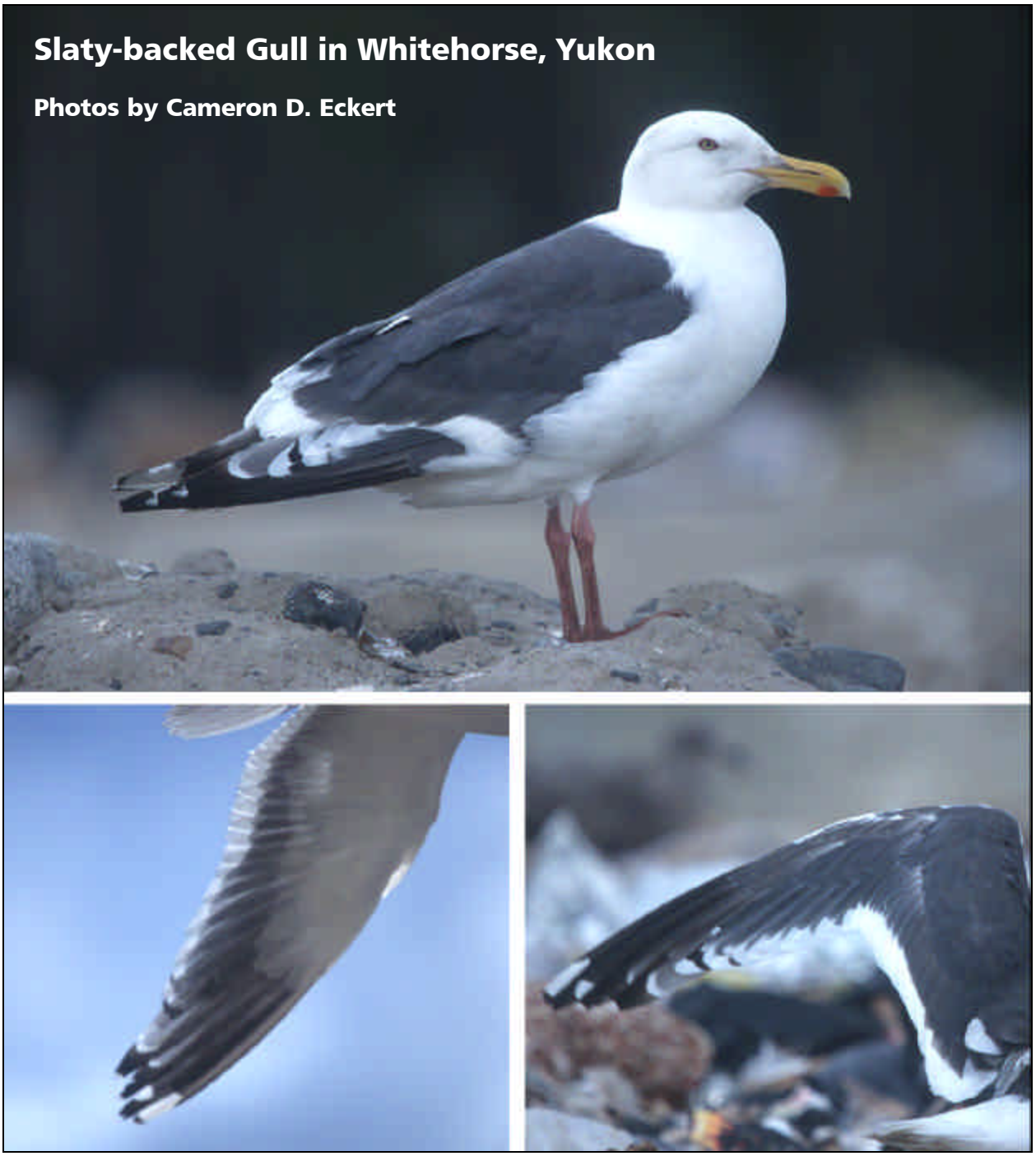


California Gull

Whitehorse, Yukon
August 11, 2000

This second-summer California Gull was a one-day wonder at the Whitehorse dump on August 11, 2000.

Photo by Cameron D. Eckert

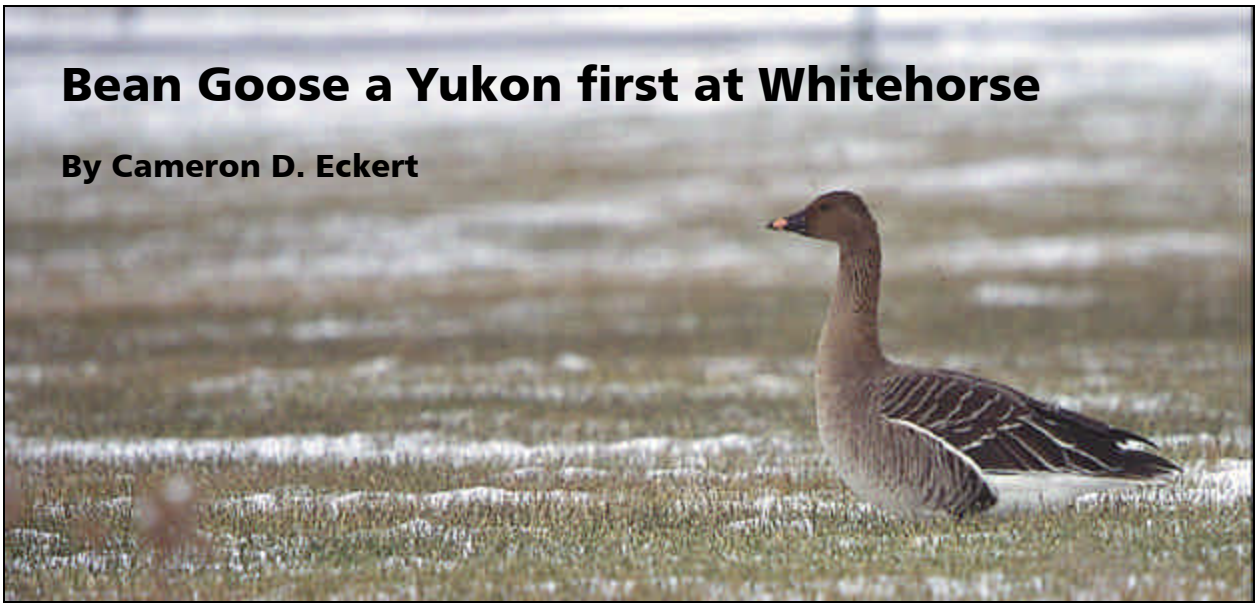


Adult Slaty-backed Gull, September 1-3, 1999, Whitehorse, Yukon. Photos by Cameron D. Eckert.

This adult Slaty-backed Gull was a highlight of the fall '99 birding season. Its dark slate grey mantle sets it apart from any other common Yukon gull. A close examination of the wing tip pattern with its diagnostic white tongue tips excludes other possible dark mantled gulls such as Western Gull and Great Black-backed Gull. The only other documented Yukon record for Slaty-backed Gull was an immature bird (second-summer moulting to third-winter) photographed on July 30 to August 2, 1997 in Whitehorse (C. Eckert, P. Sinclair). Slaty-backed Gull is a north coastal Asian species and is normally found in the Bering Sea region.

Bean Goose a Yukon first at Whitehorse

By Cameron D. Eckert



Bean Goose, October 23, 1999. Whitehorse, Yukon. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

On the morning of Saturday October 23, 1999 I received a call from Marten Berkman that a goose, possibly a Brant *Branta bernicla*, had been seen by Greg Hare at the Whitehorse airport. While a Brant seemed unlikely, I headed to the airport to check. I quickly found the goose, which from a distance looked like a Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*, feeding on an open grassy field. A closer view revealed that it had a black bill with a narrow sub-terminal pinkish-orange band. As well, the overall colouration did not seem right for Greater White-fronted. My thoughts drifted to Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*. I made a few notes, took a few photos and headed home to check a field guide.

A quick check of various field guides confirmed that this goose, with its black and pinkish-orange bill, bright orange legs, and overall colouration was indeed an adult Bean Goose. A heightened level of excitement filled our kitchen. Following a quick flurry of phone calls, Pam Sinclair and I headed back to the airport to study the goose. We had to put our elation on hold as it was not there when we arrived. For the next hour we checked other fields around Whitehorse and then returned to the airport just in time to see the Bean Goose landing at its original spot. In a state of happy disbelief, we studied and photographed the Bean Goose and pondered the chance circumstances that led us to such an extraordinary rarity on an otherwise ordinary Saturday morning.

Description

Size and shape: From a distance it appeared similar to a Greater White-fronted Goose. This was a medium sized, full-bodied goose, with a relatively short, thick neck. Its neck looked shorter when the relaxed and feeding. Its head was rounded with a noticeable angle between the base of the forehead and the bill.

Plumage: In general its plumage looked fresh and in very good condition. Its head and neck were dark brown, the plain face appearing quite dark depending on the lighting. This explains Greg Hare's initial impression that the goose was possibly a Brant as he saw it briefly without binoculars from a car while rushing to the airport. Four very short thin, pale beige marks could be seen at the base of the bill, one on each side, top and bottom. The sides of the upper neck showed long thin vertical ruffs like those of a Greater White-fronted Goose. The front side of the lower neck was paler brown fading to pale brownish-grey at the belly. The lower belly and undertail were white. The flanks had broad brownish-black scallops with pale whitish fringes which contrasted sharply with the pure white feathers of the undertail. Its back, scapulars and tertials appeared dark brown with pale beige fringes becoming white on the

tertials. A line of white feathering showed between the wings and body as it tucked its wing into its body feathers. In flight it appeared very similar to a White-fronted Goose. The wings, from above and below, appeared dark brown with a vague wash of grey at the base of the outer upper-wing. It had dark brown secondary coverts with pale fringes, dark greyish-brown primary coverts, dark brown secondaries, and dark brown primaries with pale feather shafts at the base. Its tail had a white base, a broad dark brown band, and white along the sides and tip.

Bare parts: It had bright orange legs and black eyes. Its bill was black, marked only with a pinkish-orange subterminal band from the lower nostril forward to the base of the nail. The band was pinker along the cutting edge, and more orange on top. The bill seemed relatively short, thick and broad based. It had a conspicuous grinning patch and lower mandible which was convex near the base. The culmen showed a very slight bulge between the base and the nostril and was straight between the nostril and the tip. The nail was oval.

Behaviour and voice: The goose spent most of its time feeding on domestic grasses in front of the airport. It appeared healthy and wary. It was frequently harassed and occasionally flushed by passing Common Ravens *Corvus corax*, and Black-billed Magpies *Pica pica*. No vocalizations were heard.

Bean Goose, October 23, 1999. Whitehorse, Yukon. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

Discussion

The identification of the Bean Goose was confirmed by its size, plumage colouration, black and pinkish-orange bill, and bright orange legs. The well defined ruff of feathers on the neck, blackish feathering along the flanks, and pale beige to white margins on the back feathers, scapulars and tertials indicated that it was an adult. Greater White-fronted Goose and Lesser White-fronted Goose *A. erythropus* have entirely pale bills (with limited dark areas in some juveniles), and adults show black speckled bellies. Similarly, Greylag Goose *A. anser* has an entirely pale bill. While orange legs are possible on Pink-footed Goose *A. brachyrhynchus*, usually on juveniles, this species was further ruled out as it has a pale grey, not dark brown back. As well, our goose did not look particularly petite as would be expected of a Pink-footed Goose. While identification to species was relatively straightforward, the question of subspecies is more complicated.

Bean Goose, October 23, 1999. Whitehorse, Yukon. Photo by Jukka Jantunen.

To date, my experience with Bean Goose is limited to this individual. To address possible subspecies I have relied on literature accounts (Cramp and Simmons 1977; Jonsson 1992; Madge and Burn 1988; Nat. Geo. Soc. 1999; Oates 1997; Ogilvie and Young 1998; Mullarney et. al. 1999), discussions with fellow observers and comments from observers familiar with the species. Bean Goose subspecies are grouped into tundra forms (*A. f. serrirostris* and *A. f. rossicus*) and taiga forms (*A. f. fabalis*, *A. f. johanseni*, and *A. f. middendorffii*). Bill structure and neck and body proportions are key criteria for separating tundra and taiga forms (Cramp and Simmons 1977; Oates 1997; Ogilvie and Young 1998). In general, the tundra form has a relatively short neck compared to the longer neck of the taiga. In tundra forms, the bill is heavy, high at the base, with the culmen gradually sloping to an oval nail. In taiga forms, the bill is more slender, with the culmen concave between the nostril and the tip, and a rounded nail. The lower mandible tends to be conspicuous, heavy and convex near the base in tundra forms, and less obvious, straight and slender on taiga forms. The degree of serration and the space between the upper and lower mandible (the grinning patch) is most pronounced on *serrirostris*, less so on *rossicus*, and almost lacking on taiga subspecies. Within the tundra form, *serrirostris* tends to have a bulkier, broader bill, while *rossicus* has a smaller, stubbier bill closer to that of a Pink-footed Goose. These differences are matters of degrees with much variation within subspecies.

How does this all relate to the Whitehorse goose? To put the Whitehorse record in context: To date, there are two previous Canadian records for Bean Goose both from Cap-Tourmente, Quebec. One on 14-21 October, 1982 was shot by a hunter and subsequently identified as *rossicus* (Godfrey 1986), and the other on October 14-15, 1987 was reported to be *middendorffii* (Pierre Bannon and Kayo Roy *via* Jukka Jantunen). This species is a rare spring migrant in southwestern Alaska (Aleutian Islands) with four specimens of *serrirostris*, and one of *middendorffii* (Gibson and Kessel 1987; Kessel and Gibson 1978). Geographically, the most likely contenders for the Whitehorse Bean Goose are the Siberian taiga form, *middendorffii*, and tundra form, *serrirostris*. Despite the distance between Whitehorse and Cap-Tourmente (~ 4500 km), the tundra form *rossicus* must also be considered.

The first consideration is whether the Whitehorse goose is a taiga or tundra Bean Goose. Its bill did not appear overly long, rather, it appeared broad based with a conspicuous grinning patch and lower mandible which was convex near the base. The culmen was straight, not concave, between the nostril and the tip. It had an oval, not round nail. Its neck appeared rather short and thick especially when the bird was relaxed or feeding. My conclusion is that our bird was a tundra Bean Goose. This was supported by the unanimous opinion of experienced observers who reviewed the photos. Thede Tobish and Daniel Gibson of Alaska both indicated that our bird did not match the taiga

form, *middendorffii*. John Oates and Malcolm Ogilvie of the United Kingdom each identified our bird as a tundra Bean Goose. But *serrirostris* versus *rossicus*? I found that my lack of experience with Bean Goose combined with a dearth of available photos showing the range of subspecific variation made it difficult for me to arrive at a confident identification. Thede Tobish and Daniel Gibson ruled out *middendorffii* and concluded that our bird appeared to be *serrirostris*. John Oates commented that its very thick looking base of the bill could fall into the normal range of variation shown by *serrirostris*, but that it closely resembled *rossicus* (at least the ones he has seen). Malcolm Ogilvie felt that its bill was on the large size for *rossicus*, but not massive enough for typical *serrirostris*. Further, he felt that its rounded head shape, relatively short neck, and noticeable angle between the forehead and the bill also suggested *rossicus.* His conclusion was that our bird was closer to *rossicus* than *serrirostris.* While I would have preferred a unanimous and conclusive opinion by all reviewers, the subspecific identification of a lone Bean Goose can be daunting. As well, individuals which are transitional between subspecies do occur. For one more kick at the can I followed a suggestion by Malcolm Ogilvie and looked for a mathematical solution.

I used bill measurements listed in The Birds of the Western Palearctic (Cramp and Simmons 1977) to calculate average lower mandible depth to bill length ratios for male and female geese. The ratios for *rossicus* were 1:7.3 (males) and 1:7.5 (females), and for *serrirostris* were 1:6.3 (males) and 1:6.8 (females). These ratios show that *serrirostris* has a relatively thicker lower mandible than *rossicus*. It's important to note that these ratios are based on averages and that calculations using the full range of bill measurements showed that overlap between the subspecies is theoretically possible. Taking measurements from a profile photograph an apparent *rossicus* (Todd 1996), I calculated a ratio of 1:8.1. While this ratio is more extreme than average, it is in the right direction for the subspecies.

Bean Goose, October 23, 1999. Whitehorse, Yukon. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

To calculate the ratio for the Whitehorse Bean Goose, I projected the sharpest bill profile photographs and measured bill length and lower mandible depth. The result was a ratio in the range of 1:6.2 to 1:6.4 which suggests *serrirostris*. However, I tend to have more faith in the opinions of experienced observers and do not feel that this simple mathematical exercise has necessarily provided the answer. Malcolm Ogilvie's impression that our bird tended toward *rossicus* carries a lot of weight. In summary, our bird was clearly a tundra Bean Goose, but it seems that the exact subspecies remains uncertain. Bill measurements taken from photographs suggest *serrirostris*, while the impression of two experienced reviewers was of

rossicus. I would be very interested to hear comments from others experienced with both *serrirostris* and *rossicus.*

The question of origin usually arises with rare waterfowl. In this case, there are no aviaries or waterfowl collections anywhere near Whitehorse. This bird appeared wary, was not banded, tagged or clipped, and nothing about it indicated prior captivity. Its apparent subspecies suggests that it traveled to Whitehorse from the Bering Sea region *via* Alaska. This is apparently the first documented western North American record of Bean Goose outside of southwestern or western Alaska. Various reports of a lone goose indicated that the Bean Goose had likely been around Whitehorse for about a week prior to its discovery on the Saturday. A heavy snow fall on Saturday night significantly reduced its feeding opportunities and it departed for good at noon on Sunday. More than any other Yukon rarity, the Bean Goose captured the interest of our birding community, and on Saturday and Sunday morning at least twenty birders enjoyed very fine views of this remarkable bird.

Acknowledgments

The subspecific identification of the Whitehorse Bean Goose was aided by discussions between Pam Sinclair, Helmut Grünberg, Jukka Jantunen, and myself. Pam Sinclair reviewed a draft of this note. Thede Tobish and Daniel Gibson kindly reviewed the photos and provided comments. John Oates and Malcolm Ogilvie kindly reviewed the photos, provided comments with a wealth of information on subspecies, and reviewed a draft of this note. Paul Lehman pointed us in the direction of John Oates' work on Bean Goose. The courteous behaviour of twenty or so Whitehorse birders ensured that everyone was able to enjoy this rarity. Finally, our sincere thanks to Marten Berkman and Greg Hare for alerting us to the fact that an unusual goose was in our midst.

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Snow cover on October 24 greatly reduced feeding options for the Bean Goose. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

Ivory Gull a southern Yukon first at Tagish Narrows

By Cameron D. Eckert and Pamela H. Sinclair

Tagish Narrows at the very moment of discovery! November 21, 1999. Photo by C. L. Eckert.

Tagish Narrows, located about 63 kilometres southeast of Whitehorse is a seven kilometre stretch of water flowing north from Tagish Lake to Marsh Lake. It proved to be a wonderful stop on an enjoyable family outing with our children and their grandparents, Cameron L. Eckert Sr. and Diana Eckert on Sunday November 21, 1999. The low angle light casting across the frozen shores of Marsh Lake and the rolling mountains to the north created a most spectacular view. We set up the spotting scope to check for lingering loons and were surprised when the first bird spotted was a white gull in flight at about 750 metres to the north. Any gull in late November would be noteworthy in the Yukon, but this bird's long pointed white wings, wheeling flight and feet-first drop to the water immediately brought to mind Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea*. As it rose from the water it briefly dangled its legs which appeared black. We traded off at the scope and as we wondered how to get a closer view, the gull itself offered up a gift. It circled far out over the bay and then flew directly towards us. Within seconds we all had our binoculars fixed on the gull and enjoyed a fabulous view as it sailed by. Its all white body, long white wings marked only with fine black spots, black crescents at the wrists, and a black trailing edge on the outer primaries, white tail with a narrow black trailing edge, black patch on its face at the base of its pale bill, and black legs confirmed that this was a first-winter Ivory Gull. It was a moment of pure excitement as we experienced a gull most aptly described by Bruce Mactavish (1998) as "one of the ultimate birds on the planet Earth." It continued flying south and disappeared down Tagish Narrows. We did not see it again that day and the next available opportunity to return to Tagish would not be for another three days.

Boris Dobrowolsky checked Tagish Narrows on November 23 and found the Ivory Gull at its original location and as an added bonus spotted a winter plumage Yellow-billed Loon *Gavia adamsii*. I (c.d.e.) returned on November 24 and right away spotted the gull sitting on the ice at the distant edge of Marsh Lake. It was obviously in a very weakened condition but it was impossible to get anywhere close to it on foot. I explained the situation to Tagish residents, Art and Renie Smith who reacted with interest and concern about their rare visitor. Their son, Les Smith kindly offered to take me out in a small run-about. This was an especially generous offer considering the sub-zero temperatures on that day. Unfortunately, my hopes for a quick trip faded as the only outboard available was a very cold 1954 Johnson which refused to start. I called the Renewable Resources office in Whitehorse and they offered their support but it would have to wait until the next day.

Tagish Narrows' Ivory Gull. Photo by C .D. Eckert.

On November 25, Phillip Merchant and I returned to Tagish and found the gull at the same spot on the ice. It was obviously dead. We boated out and used a pick-ax to retrieved it from the ice. With the bird in hand I was amazed at thickness and density of the body feathers, a straightforward adaptation to life in an extremely cold climate. It seemed to be utterly lacking in fat and had clearly starved although the lice around the base of its bill were still quite alive. It was a sad end for this extraordinary rarity and extremely lovely Arctic gull. It will now be prepared as a museum specimen.

While Ivory Gulls wander south fairly regularly in eastern North America they are extremely rare in the west. The Ivory Gull at Tagish Narrows was the first ever reported in southern Yukon, and also established the first well-documented Yukon record. Undocumented reports from northern Yukon include one on September 7, 1973 at Shingle Point (Salter et. al. 1980); a subadult on July 9, 1975 seen on an aerial survey over the Beaufort Sea about 190 km north of Komakuk (Johnson et.al. 1975); and a dead bird (not collected) at Bonnet Lake on July 30, 1984 (Wendy Nixon & Don Russell pers. comm.). There are just four documented records from British Columbia (Campbell et.al. 1990); a first-winter bird collected at Dease Lake in September 1889; an adult collected at Penticton in October 1897; a first-winter bird at Atnarko River near Stuie on November 2, 1988 (Ron Mayo); and a first-winter bird at Logger Bay on Atlin Lake on November 15-22, 1987 (Ute and Ed Kirschner). The occurrence of the Ivory Gull at Logger Bay, located just 65 km south of Tagish Narrows, was very similar to our bird in terms of location, date and circumstance. That gull showed up in weak condition but fed on fish entrails and meat until its departure. Our Ivory Gull's long journey from the Arctic ended less than 100 km short of the coast where it no doubt would have thrived on the abundant remnants of the late fall salmon run.

Acknowledgements: Our sincere thanks to Art & Renie Smith, and especially Les Smith for their assistance with the rescue attempt on November 24. Yukon Department of Renewable Resource's wildlife technician, Phillip Merchant was key to the recovery of the deceased Ivory Gull on November 25. Thanks to Cameron L. Eckert Sr. for the photo of Tagish Narrows taken at the very moment of discovery!

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The Yukon's first Pacific Golden-Plover at Lewes Marsh

By Cameron D. Eckert & Pamela H. Sinclair

Breeding plumage Pacific Golden-Plover, Lewes Marsh, Yukon. May 10, 2000. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

On May 10, 2000 we were on an evening birding trip to Lewes Marsh, located about 27 kilometres southeast of Whitehorse and documented the Yukon's first Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva*. It was in full breeding plumage with white trim around the face, sides of the neck, and flanks separating its black face, neck, and chest from its brownish-black and golden upperparts. Its solidly black face indicated that it was a male (Paulson 1993). Its white sides, flanks and undertail marked only with sparse black barring readily distinguished it from nearby American Golden-Plovers *Pluvialis dominica.*

We carefully examined a number of other characteristics to ensure that this was not an oddly patterned American Golden-Plover. It differed in the following ways: It appeared slightly smaller, relatively longer legged and with a more upright posture. Its upright posture was accentuated by its relatively short primary extension and wings (extending just to the tail). In flight, its feet extended beyond its tail. Its bill appeared longer. While the black cap, back and scapulars had bright golden spots, the spotting on the wing coverts and tertials was dull yellowish-white. The white trim around the face and along the sides of the neck did not balloon out at the lower neck as is typical on American Golden-Plover. The white extended along the sides, flanks and undertail with only sparse black barring. Its call was different than the American Golden-Plover although it called too infrequently to describe well. It also gave its breeding song which was very similar to the American Golden-Plover. These characteristics are all recognized features for distinguishing these two golden plovers (Paulson 1993; Nat. Geo. Soc. 1999). In flight, its underwing appeared grey like an American Golden-Plover. That combined with its slightly smaller size, long legs, and distinctive posture ruled out the very remote possibility of a Greater Golden-Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* (Jonsson 1992; Nat. Geo. Soc. 1999). The Pacific Golden-Plover behaved very aggressively toward any American Golden-Plover that landed closer than about 50 metres. At one point it pinned an American Golden-Plover to the ground and gave it a thorough thrashing.

The Pacific Golden-Plover shows its relatively upright posture and conspicuous white flanks. Lewes Marsh, May 10, 2000. Photo by C. D. Eckert.

In most years, spring in the Whitehorse area is dominated by strong southwest winds. This year, strong north winds in early May set the stage for a remarkable shorebird migration. In the past, such north winds have been associated with spring fallouts of migrant American Golden-Plovers and Long-billed Dowitchers *Limnodromus scolopaceus.* This was the case this past May when observers reported fairly good numbers of American Golden-Plovers and record high numbers of Long-billed Dowitchers. Numerous uncommon and rare species such as Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*, Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*, and White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* contributed to the total of 30 shorebird species reported in the Whitehorse area through May.

The May 10th Pacific Golden-Plover at Lewes Marsh was followed by two additional sightings of this species; 1 (likely a female) photographed on 13 May at Tagish Narrows (Jukka Jantunen, Amélie Rousseau), and a breeding plumage male on 25 May at Lewes Marsh (JJ). While Pacific Golden-Plover was not unexpected in southern Yukon, the conditions that apparently resulted in its occurrence are infrequent. Better coverage would improve our understanding of this species' status in the Yukon.

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Pacific Golden-Plover at Lewes Marsh, May 10, 2000. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

Red-throated Pipit a highlight of fall migration in Whitehorse, Yukon

By Cameron D. Eckert

The fall 2000 birding season in southern Yukon was quite literally a wash-out. Record high water levels at Nisutlin River Delta, southern Yukon's premier fall hotspot, limited the birding there. As a result, Whitehorse birders had to settle for the local sewage lagoons where the birding turned out to be sensational. A Black Turnstone on August 25, 2000 established Whitehorse's first documented record. On September 18, 2000 I was enjoying excellent birding there when it suddenly got better. A male Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* moulting back to breeding plumage provided the Yukon's first fall record; a juvenile Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria* feeding at the edge of the mudflats established southern Yukon's first well-documented record; and a bright juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* was the fifth I'd seen there since late August. While watching the Sharp-tailed as it probed the mud only a few metres away I became aware of an unfamiliar short call note nearby. I wondered if a wagtail might be present and began scanning through the American Pipits *Anthus rubescens* scattered about the mudflats. Just then a pipit flushed and let out a very high and piercing call note - a long "*pseeeee*" dropping slightly at the end. As it flew, it flashed white outer tail feathers, called again and then landed in clear view showing its conspicuous pink legs. Dark streaking across the breast, down the flanks and on the back were striking on this otherwise sandy-buff bird. It was a Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus.*

Juvenile Red-throated Pipit, September 18, 2000, Whitehorse, Yukon. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

I knew that my encounter with this bird was likely to be very brief. A continual parade of small raptors ensured that every shorebird and passerine was poised to flush at any moment. It was a slightly frantic juggling act as I switched from binoculars to spotting scope and then to my camera. I enjoyed a very good view and then managed to snap a few quick photos before the pipit flushed moments later. It called its long piercing note a few more times in flight and disappeared. Despite a thorough search of the area, the Red-throated Pipit could not be relocated.

Juvenile Red-throated Pipit, September 18, 2000, Whitehorse, Yukon. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

Description: The Red-throated Pipit appeared structurally similar to, but just slightly smaller and shorter tailed than an American Pipit. Its overall colouration was buffy. Its buffy-brown face was marked with a paler buffy supercilium to just behind the eye; and a more conspicuous buffy submoustachial stripe. Its nape was plain buffy-brown. Its dark malar stripe widened to a wide dark patch at its base (lower sides of the throat) extending to coarse dark streaking across the breast and along the flanks to just behind the legs. The coarseness of the breast and flank streaking was similar. Its undersides had a background colour of buff across the breast, fading to whitish at the belly, and then buffier again toward the undertail. It had a well streaked back and rump with two more pronounced pale buffy to whitish streaks bordered with darker feathers along the sides of the back. Its median and greater coverts had blackish centres, buffy edges and broad white tips forming two conspicuous white wing bars. Its tertials had dark centres and sharply demarcated pale whitish-buff fringes. Its tail was blackish with two white outer tail feathers on either side. Its bill was mostly dark with a pale base to the lower mandible. While trying to relocate the Red-throated Pipit I was amazed at how many American Pipits showed pinkish legs. However, none approached the pale pink of the Red-throated Pipit. Its feet were also pink with a very long hind claw at least as long as the rear toe. In terms of behaviour, it pumped its tail a few times after landing and then walked like an American Pipit. The habitat where it was observed was a mix of open wet mud flats and low sparse shrubs, bordered by tall grass.

While Red-throated Pipit is the most likely vagrant pipit to occur in the Yukon, a few other species should be considered. My prior experience with Red-throated Pipit was limited to about 20 individuals (juveniles) seen in August 1994 at St. Lawrence Island, Alaska. I consulted a number of key references (Jonsson 1992; Malling Olsen 1999; Mullarney et. al. 1999; Nat. Geo. Soc. 1999; Roberson 1980) to exclude other possibilities; Species which show a fairly plain back and rump, and dark to dull pink legs and can therefore be readily excluded are American Pipit *A. r. rubescens*, including the Asian race *A. r. japonicus*, Water Pipit *A. spinoletta*, and Rock Pipit *A. petrosus*. Olive-backed Pipit *A. hodgsoni* also lacks pronounced streaking on the back and rump, has olive upperparts, a distinctly patterned face, and its call is a slightly hoarse "*spiz*". Pechora Pipit *A. gustavi* has more pronounced white streaks on the back, a white submoustachial stripe, a very thin malar streak, streaking on the nape, a white belly and undertail without buffy tones toward the undertail, and its call is a short and hard "*tsep*". Meadow Pipit *A. pratensis* has buffy

wing bars, less conspicuous streaking on the back, a thinner base to the malar streak, juveniles lack obvious flanks streaks, and its call is a rising "*ist, ist, ist*". Tree Pipit *A. trivialis* has coarse breast streaks which contrast with faint flank streaking, a short hind claw, lacks the two pronounced pale back streaks, and its call is a hoarse buzzing "*spihz*". My photos of the Red-throated Pipit in Whitehorse, while not great, are good enough to exclude the other potential vagrant pipits and confirm its identification. As well, its distinctive drawn-out call distinguished it from all other pipits. Its coarse malar streak, buffy face and lack of any reddish colour to the throat indicated that it was a juvenile.

The Red-throated Pipit in Whitehorse established southern Yukon's first documented record for this species. Two previous Yukon records, both from the Beaufort Sea coast are: a sight record from the upper Babbage River on June 9, 1973 (Salter et.al. 1980); and an adult male collected on June 23, 1980 at Stokes Point (specimen at the Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa). This species is a casual fall migrant at Middleton Island in the Gulf of Alaska with dates ranging from 13 to 27 September (Gibson 1982). There is one record from southeast Alaska: a juvenile photographed on November 2, 1997 at Juneau (Paul Suchanek). It is a casual fall migrant in British Columbia with dates for five records ranging from September 4 to December 28 (Campbell et. al. 1990). Other recent records from B.C. include one at Tofino, Vancouver Island on November 4, 1995 (A. Dorst); one at Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Island on November 4-5, 1996 (M. Hearne, P. Hamel); one at Esquimalt Lagoon, Vancouver Island on September 22, 1996 (K. Taylor); a juvenile at Central Saanich, Vancouver Island on October 23-24, 1999 (K. Taylor et.al.); and an adult at Sandspit, Queen Charlotte Islands on October 31, 1999 (P. Hamel). Lehman (1998) contemplated that the Yukon was a good place to watch for little-known plumages of four Alaskan species including juvenile Red-throated Pipit. Now that we have documented this species for southern Yukon, we can look forward to ferreting out Rock Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint and ... Aleutian Tern?

Acknowledgments

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Dusky Thrush a Yukon first at Whitehorse

By Cameron D. Eckert

Dusky Thrush at Whitehorse, Yukon. November 28, 2000. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

As the sun was setting on November 21, 2000, Helmut Grünberg spotted a thrush, possibly a Varied Thrush *Ixoreus naevius*, feeding in a Mountain Ash tree in front of the Anglican Church in downtown Whitehorse. I went to check the bird on the following morning and found Helmut already there, camera in hand. His greeting was delightful ... "*it's a Dusky Thrush*." Seconds later the Dusky Thrush *Turdus naumanni* appeared on the church roof. Here was a mind-bending rarity right in the centre of downtown Whitehorse! I quickly called Pam Sinclair who arrived on the scene just a few minutes later with four other birders, and then followed-up with calls to other keen birders. Two radio stations located across the street from the Anglican Church noticed the activity and within ten minutes we were on-the-air with a live report. The Dusky Thrush was an instant headliner. Later in the day, the newspapers picked up the story.

"The Dusky Thrush was an instant headliner … By the end of the bird's stay as many as one-hundred people had experienced the Yukon's first Dusky Thrush"

The news swept through Whitehorse quickly and local birders responded enthusiastically. By the end of the first day at least twenty-five birders had enjoyed fine views. By the end of the bird's stay at least sixty birders and perhaps as many as one-hundred people including curious onlookers had experienced the Yukon's first Dusky Thrush.

For seven days the Dusky Thrush fed in the Mountain Ash to the delight of a small but steady stream of birders. We found that its routine was very consistent. It would feed in the Mountain Ash for about 30 seconds, long enough to eat about 6-8 berries, and then fly to a Lodgepole Pine tree in the adjacent

Stringer Park where it would rest and preen for about 15 minutes. Then back to the Mountain Ash for another quick feed and so on throughout the day. Occasionally it would fly a few hundred metres down to the banks of the Yukon River, probably to drink, but always returned to the Mountain Ash. For the first two days (November 22-23) it had to contend with a very aggressive American Robin *T. migratorius* which had evidently claimed this berry-laden tree as its own. The Dusky Thrush soon adapted its schedule to feed just a few seconds after the robin had finished feeding which seemed to diffuse the robin's attacks. The robin disappeared on November 24 and was no longer a factor. The Dusky Thrush endured its first cold night on November 25 when temperatures dropped to -15° C. For the next three days it appeared in good health but would frequently draw one foot up into its feathers. Then on the night of November 28 the temperature dropped to -20° C and the Dusky Thrush was not seen again.

The Dusky Thrush at Whitehorse, Yukon. November 28, 2000. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert.

Description

It was a luxury to be able to return to this bird throughout the week; the following description was made during my numerous observations. The Dusky Thrush was slightly smaller and slimmer than the American Robin. It was a boldly patterned thrush. Crown, auriculars, and eye stripe (extending to bill) were dark blackish-brown contrasting with a cream coloured supercilium. The back of the crown and nape were a paler greyish-brown. The subloral was cream coloured, marked with fine dark streaks. Its cream coloured malar was marked with fine dark spots and extended to the sides of the neck where it was divided by a thin dark line to form a pale half moon towards the rear side of the neck. The throat was cream coloured, marked with fine dark streaks and framed with blackish-brown lateral throat stripes which extended into a complete blackish-brown upper breast band. Below this band was a cream coloured crescent shaped band, below which was a more diffuse and thicker dark breast band comprised of blackish-brown arrow-shaped spots. From some angles this lower band appeared to have a slight part in the middle, but looked complete when viewed head-on. The subtle cream coloured tones on the face and upper breast were

best seen in overcast conditions, and often appeared white in direct sunlight. Dark blackish-brown arrow-shaped spots extended from the lower breast band along the sides through the flanks. Belly and vent were white and the undertail feathers were white with wide dark brown centres. Its tail appeared blackish-brown with a hint of rust at the base. Tail feathers were more pointed than blunt and were also worn so that the tips of the feather shafts appeared as points. Back feathers were dark brown with darker blackish-brown centres which contrasted with a muted rust coloured rump. A bright rufous patch dominated the folded wing. Looking at the wing in more detail, scapulars and lesser coverts had blackish-brown centres with muted rusty edges. Median coverts were bright rust with pale buffy edges. Greater coverts (outer three missing) were bright rust trimmed with pale buff sides and white tips. The only greater covert that could be seen in its entirety was the innermost and the outer half of that feather appeared bright rust with a white tip, while the inner half appeared blackish. Primary coverts were blackish with a buffy base and buffy streak up the centre which made the black alula conspicuous. Tertials and secondaries were dark with broad buffy outer edges while the blackish primaries had thin buffy outer edges with broad buffy bases. The underwing lining appeared bright rufous, and the broad bright buffy base across the primaries was conspicuous.

Its bill was similar in size and shape to other *Turdus* thrushes, and appeared mostly blackish with a pale yellow-orange base to the lower mandible. Its eye appeared black and legs appeared dark with pinker tones in good lighting. The call heard most often was soft "*tuk-tuk-tuk*" much like that of an American Robin. On one occasion I heard it call a harsh "*chak-chak*" following a head-to-head encounter with a Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica*.

Dusky Thrush at Whitehorse, Yukon. November 28, 2000. Photo by Jukka Jantunen.

Discussion

Identifying the Dusky Thrush was relatively straight forward with a good view. The boldly patterned face, bright rufous wing coverts and feather edges, and dark breast band excluded Varied Thrush and potential vagrants including Fieldfare *T. pilaris*, Redwing *T. iliacus*, and Black-throated Thrush *T. ruficollis* (Jonsson 1992; Mullarney et. al. 1999; Nat. Geo. Soc. 1999).

Dusky Thrush flashes an underwing. Whitehorse, Yukon. November 28, 2000. Photo by Jukka Jantunen.

There are two subspecies of Dusky Thrush and our bird's blackish (not brown or rusty) breast band and flank spots, dark brown back, and blackish auricular indicate that it was the northeast Asian race *T. n. eunomus*. This is consistent with all other North American records where subspecies has been specified (Gibson and Kessel 1997; Kessel and Gibson 1978; Tyson 1993). The question of aging required a closer look. A Dusky Thrush in its first winter retains unmoulted juvenile greater coverts, which show well defined white tips; those on an adult have broad rufous edges and narrow buffy tips (Jonsson 1992; Svensson 1992). In general, the shape of tail feathers for thrushes is more pointed in juveniles and blunter in adults (Pyle et. al. 1987). Our bird showed white tips on the greater coverts and relatively pointed tail feathers and can therefore be aged as first-winter. The sex of the bird is less certain. Svensson (1992) indicates that in males the black breast band is generally prominent and complete and the chin, throat and upper breast are usually unstreaked pale buff-white, or with fine streaks on sides of throat only. Feathers of upperparts tend to be darker. Females have a breast band which is generally broken up and not as black as in the male; the chin and throat are often, but not always, prominently streaked; and the feathers of the upperparts are less dark than in the male. Our bird's complete breast band suggests that it may have been a male.

Two questions prompted by the Dusky Thrush were; when did it arrive and where did it come from? The nearest breeding ground for this species is northeastern Siberia, and it is considered a casual vagrant in far western Alaska (Kessel and Gibson 1978; Roberson 1980). It seems likely that our Dusky Thrush arrived in Whitehorse on about the day it was discovered. The American Robin, which drew Helmut to check the Mountain Ash in the first place, had been reported from that location during the previous week and nobody had noticed a second bird. Ripping southerly winds on November 14-22 suggest that the Dusky Thrush may have been blown in from Alaska, perhaps from the coast. A number of fall vagrants seen in the Whitehorse area (e.g. Bean Goose, Slaty-backed Gull, Red-throated Pipit) along with the regular occurrence of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper hint

The Dusky Thrush at its roost in a Lodgepole Pine tree in Stringer Park. November 28, 2000. Photo by C.D. Eckert.

at a consistent displacement of southbound vagrants from the coast to our area. This of course is pure speculation but interesting none the less.

The Dusky Thrush in Whitehorse established the first Yukon record and Canada's second photographically documented record. The first accepted Canadian record was one present from January to April, 1993 in Langley, British Columbia discovered by J. Ireland (Tyson 1993; Campbell et. al. 1997). Campbell et. al. (1997) list four additional sight records, all from coastal British Columbia. There are two records from southeast Alaska; one on November 12-17, 1989 at Petersburg discovered by P.J. Walsh (Tobish and Isleib 1990), and one on May 12, 1990 at Juneau discovered by M. Schwan (Tobish 1990).

Southern birders who are accustomed to extreme rarities attracting very large crowds could be excused if they noted the Yukon response described above with some amusement. However, it should also be noted that with an adjustment for population size, the Whitehorse Dusky Thrush attracted the equivalent of at least 9000 Toronto-area birders! It was very fitting that Dusky Thrush roosted in a Lodgepole Pine tree in Stringer Park as I.O. Stringer himself was one of the great pioneers of Yukon ornithology. No doubt he would have joined Yukoners in their enjoyment of this remarkable rarity.

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