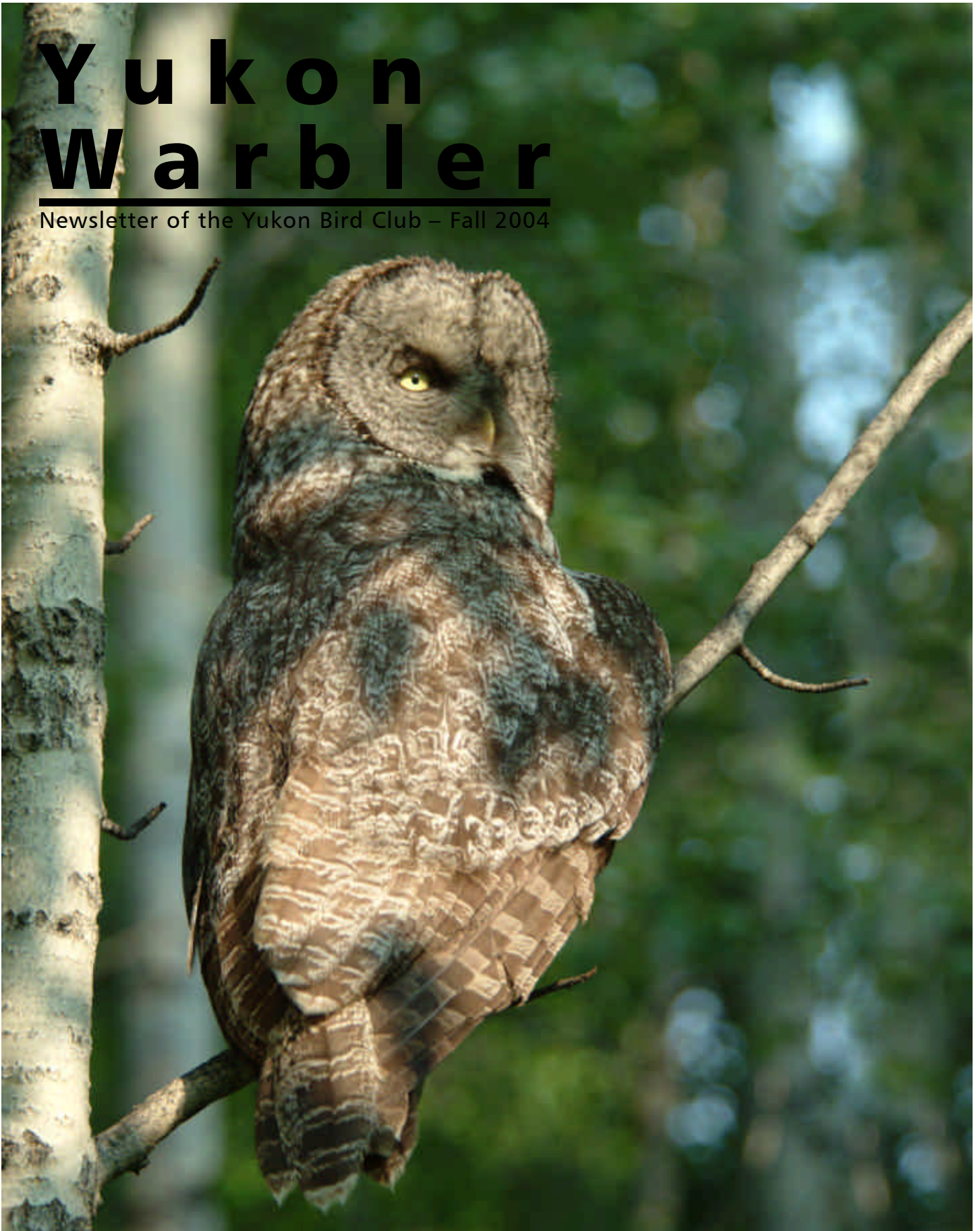


# Yukon Warbler

Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club – Fall 2004



A Great Gray Owl at the La Biche River on June 23, 2004. Photo by Cameron Eckert

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INSIDE:    Albert Creek Revolution   ♦   The Yukon's fist Canada Warbler nest   ♦   Spring Sightings



From top: Olive-sided Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler. Photos by Gwen Baluss, Ben Schonnewille & Julie Bauer

## Albert Creek's Birding Revolution

There is a quiet revolution underway in the Yukon. Driven by a potent mix of enthusiasm, dedication, and a passion for birds, it's called the Albert Creek Banding Station. In 2001, Ted Murphy-Kelly, bander-in-charge, established the station at a site just west of Watson Lake, adjacent to the Liard River. Its rich diversity of habitats offered good potential as a movement corridor for migrants. Since then, the results, both to our knowledge of the Yukon's migratory birds and to the community of Watson Lake have been nothing short of astounding.

The banding station has attracted many visitors from the Yukon, Alaska and across North America. Invariably, they have spent another day or two, and in some cases, a week or two in Watson Lake. At a time when our government is searching for ways to entice visitors to "stay another day", the Albert Creek Banding Station is doing just that. The station's dedicated inclusion of school groups, students, summer interns, volunteers, families, and community members has provided profoundly positive educational experiences for a great many people. The unbridled excitement expressed by school children as they get their first close-up look at a vividly coloured songbird is not something that can be created in a classroom. The station offers highly valued "hands-on" field experience for college students and summer interns who are developing skills that will carry them into their careers. The importance of this to Yukon students can't be overstated.

For Yukon birdwatchers, Albert Creek holds a special allure. It is a place to learn more about the Yukon's "southeast specialties" such as Western Tanager, White-throated Sparrow, American Redstart, and Magnolia Warbler. The station's findings continue to revise our knowledge of migratory birds – for example, who would have expected that this year's most common fall migrant would be Alder Flycatcher? Or that Orange-crowned Warbler would outnumber the ubiquitous Yellow-rumped Warbler. The station has produced a tantalizing list of rarities including Ovenbird, Black-and-white Warbler, and this year's Philadelphia Vireo – what next?! Ted has put a strong emphasis on sharing information and findings from Albert Creek. As a result, many more birdwatchers and naturalists now recognize Watson Lake as a fascinating place to visit and look at birds. This past summer, I had the opportunity to visit Albert Creek and only wished I could have stayed longer. Next summer, why not set aside a few days of your holidays, head to Albert Creek and join the revolution!

*Cameron Eckert*



## A spring at Albert Creek

### Jason Wade

**D**uring my first winter in the Yukon I discovered signs of spring migration begin with snowshoes still strapped to your feet, mercury below freezing, and winter's white carpet disappearing from the base of trees. Overnight, Snow Buntings and Gray-crowned Rosy Finch appear. Soon, Lapland Longspur and American Tree Sparrows were foraging at roadsides; and while snow turned into slush, sparrows, thrushes and warblers poured into the forest while geese, swans and raptors were steering north overhead.

Upon completion of my winter employment in Kluane, and hearing an intriguing CBC Radio interview with Albert Creek bander-in-charge Ted Murphy-Kelly, I found myself heading east to Watson Lake to assist at the banding station. As a field-biologist, I have participated in many bird-banding projects and was impressed with Ted's passion for migration monitoring and the banding station's operation. Bird migration is a seasonal marker, and nowhere in the Yukon is it more closely monitored than at the Albert Creek Banding Station. So, for the first three weeks of May 2004 I became one of the station's volunteer assistants.

From both a banding and birding perspective I found the station's locale ideal. The possibilities of seeing rare species is high because Albert Creek lies at the northwest edge of many eastern birds' ranges. Specifically, the Albert Creek site provides the opportunity to birdwatch and mist-net in multiple habitat types, including: open water, marsh, and deciduous and coniferous forests. The combination of its regional setting and the local habitat diversity make Albert Creek an enjoyable site to visit for banders and birders alike.

Located just off the Alaska Highway, the banding station was easily accessible to both the local community and tourists, allowing Albert Creek to act as an important education centre. I enjoyed assisting Ted in the education of visiting school groups by giving tours and lessons on birds, migration, and the banding process. I felt it was important that the children were provided with this intimate exposure to birds; places like the Albert Creek banding station will help them become more aware of their surrounding environment and its wildlife.



Jason goes head-to-head with a female Lapland Longspur.  
Photo by John Meikle

I was also impressed with how the Albert Creek station was run. The day to day operation is diligently overseen by Ted, with bird safety being a major priority. One of the only problems the station faced while I was there was its lack of experienced assistants available throughout the entire field season. A consistent number of helpers in the coming years would significantly improve the station's operation.

I thoroughly enjoyed my three week stay at the banding station assisting Ted and the other volunteers. I furthered my own knowledge, interacted with other interested individuals, and was able to band and bird in a unique region within the territory. Albert Creek plays an important role in the conservation and monitoring of migratory birds. The banding station provides the opportunity to study population and diversity trends within the Yukon. The information gathered creates a baseline data-set and greater awareness of bird communities in the North, particularly at latitudes where few stations operate and when we are only just beginning to understand migration throughout this northern biome.

*Jason is originally from Brampton, Ontario and is an Environmental Studies graduate from York University in Toronto. As a field-biologist he travels throughout Canada and the United States working on bird and mammal studies.*

## Albert Creek Banding Station Report, 2004



A migrant's view of Albert Creek.  
Below: A White-throated Sparrow - May 22, 2004.  
Photos by John Meikle

### Ted Murphy-Kelly

**A**lbert Creek Bird Banding and Migration Monitoring Station at Upper Liard in southeast Yukon completed another successful year in 2004. Volunteers locally and from abroad, financial help from a variety of sources and a great location helped make this fourth year of operation our best yet. Albert Creek continues to be a birding hotspot for the Yukon where people can view many species in their boreal breeding grounds. This year was another record breaking one as far as birds banded and we continue to band and observe new species for the area. The station operated for 39 days in the spring from April 30 to June 13 with 2267 birds of 47 species banded. During the fall season we operated for 53 days with a total of 1842 birds banded of 49 species. The total number of species banded for the year was 55 including 9 new species for the banding station, increasing our overall total for the past 4 years to 64 species. We recaptured 32 birds of 14 species, which had all been banded at Albert Creek; five of these were first banded in 2001. We are now operating with 20 nets and have set that as the station's standard.



The station participated in three new studies. This spring we collected breast feathers for a continent wide study on bird populations using stable isotope analysis. The samples are now being analyzed at Guelph University. We also participated in a continent wide study of bird ticks. Samples were sent to Ontario for analysis. The third study initiated was scoring molt progression and timing in birds during the fall season in collaboration with Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory.



## Spring season

Jan Adamczewski, Ulla Rembe, Jean Legare, Jason Strudwick and myself set up the station over a three-day period from April 27-29. The site was only accessible by 4x4 as 50% of the ground was still covered in snow. The warm weather was quickly melting what still remained. There were already many early migrants in the area. The usual sparrows such as American Tree, White-crowned, Fox and Dark-eyed Juncos were seen foraging as we set up the nets. Ruby-crowned Kinglets and American Robins were also observed. Rafts of Mallards, Northern Pintail and American Wigeon flew by at low altitudes and a large flock of redpolls (approximately 100) whizzed in and out of the area filling the air with their familiar din of calls and trills. Two small groups of Bohemian Waxwings and a Northern Harrier were also seen working the area. Helmut Grünberg and I had quite a memorable opening day of banding on April 30. Running all the nets was no problem until the local gang of redpolls decided to pay us a visit. It happened without warning and we were forced to close all the nets as I extracted dozens of redpolls. We released about half of the 90 individuals that we caught due to a lack of bird bags and concern for their safety. This luckily did not happen again and for the next few days I was always on red alert for the infamous flock.

Our first Wilson Warbler was banded on May 1. The local Wood Frog colony began singing on May 2 and laying eggs on May 5 as the sun warmed the quickly thawing marsh. Strong westerly and southerly winds prevailed until May 4 when it shifted to the northeast and northwest. This ended the unseasonable warm spell that we enjoyed in late April. Julie Bauer returned for her third year of volunteering on May 4. Her timing was great. The sparrows definitely began to bottle-up due to the weather and on May 5 we banded 119 birds with a notable increase in retraps from previous days. Jason Wade, an experienced bander joined Julie and I on May 6 while we continued to band large numbers of sparrows thanks to the use of 6 newly acquired Potter style ground traps which are especially effective at capturing seed eating ground feeders. The north winds finally shut us down on May 7. We were snowed out and decided to cease banding, as conditions were too harsh.

Life-long learning at Albert Creek — Top: Jason Wade and Cora Murphy-Kelly debate the finer points of warbler aging; Below: Cora helps out on a net run. Photos by J. Meikle





Ted Murphy-Kelly prepares to release a brilliant male Western Tanager at Albert Creek. Photo by John Meikle

**B**ack at the home base in Watson Lake, once the snow let up in the afternoon, we took advantage of the fallout of sparrows and set up one net which enabled Julie and Jason to further improve their banding skills. This lasted for two days. On May 9 we returned to business as usual at the station and were rewarded with two Olive-sided Flycatchers to band. The winds continued to blow from the north and the sparrows continued to make up the bulk of the birds banded and observed. On May 10 we were still retrapping the single Wilson's Warbler that we had banded on May 1. Sadly, on May 11 Julie headed back to Haines Junction after another 100+ bird day. By May 14 we were banding more warblers and less sparrows with the exception of Fox Sparrow which we banded a record 16 individuals on this day.

The daily narrative on May 15 said it all as Jason Wade wrote, "Beautiful, warm, sunny, shirt-off day. Sun tan and banding – what more could a field biologist ask for?" On May 16 we received a surprise

visit by Jukka Jantunen who we convinced to stay for the day. It was such a treat for Jason and I to receive some hands on training in ageing Orange-crowned, Wilson's and Yellow-rumped Warblers by such a master bander. The leaves started to emerge from their buds on this day and a newly arrived Western Tanager was heard high up in the White Spruce.

Kyle Russell a summer student from Whitehorse joined the team on May 17. He quickly learned scribing and within a few days was even extracting birds from mist nets. Having another capable extractor was a great help as the deluge of warblers began on May 15. Johnson Elementary School students were treated to banding demonstrations on May 18 & 20, right at the peak of migration. Jean Legare helped out on May 18 to do net runs and provide crowd control. Principal Chris Wright kindly presented us with a \$200.00 cheque on behalf of Johnson Elementary to go towards the purchase of a mist net.



May 19 was our most memorable day of the season. A record 179 birds were banded. As soon as we opened the nets we were overwhelmed by a massive movement of warblers causing us to close all nets and even release some birds in order to safely process the others. Luckily we received more help from long time volunteers Melanie Pratch and Kerry Rees who rolled in from Faro. Scott Herron from Whitehorse was also a great help as he quickly got a crash course in extracting birds and scribing. The crew was extended to 8 people on May 20 when Lori Schroeder and Hollie Murphy-Kelly joined us. During the peak of migration (May 15-23) the majority of species banded were Wilson's Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Often the banding lab had two banders and two scribes working at the same time while others constantly did net runs and extracted birds. As if perfectly scheduled we were rained out on May 21, allowing all of us to catch up on sleep. After 18 days of service Jason Wade departed for Alaska on May 23. Jason made a big difference at the station this spring. With his expertise and enthusiasm we were able to run the station to its highest potential yet.

John Meikle and his son's Dylan and Lindsay joined us on May 23 for 3 days. Having two young people who were so interested and full of energy was a real treat. Dylan and Lindsay introduced us to a new method of checking nets. They used their bikes to speed along the road and give us a heads up on whether there were birds in the nets or not. John took great photos of birds not in the hand for a change. During their stay we banded a beautiful male Western Tanager. On May 24 bird activity began to subside and I received a fresh crew of volunteers. Gwen Baluss and her trainees, Jesse Reebbs and Matthew Brooks from Juneau arrived ready to treat themselves to a Yukon banding and birding experience. Gwen had volunteered at the station last year and saw how it was a great place to warm up for her own field season working for the U.S.F.W.S. in Southeast Alaska. The relatively slow pace of birds was ideal for her crew to receive some quality training in banding, identification of birds and bird song. It was also on this date that some of the later warblers started to show up such as Tennessee Warbler. Our American friends stayed for five days as bird migration continued to be slow and the weather began to be variable. Northwest winds began to prevail on May 25 and rain clouds often rolled by sometimes giving us a shower. On May 28 we observed a lone Sandhill Crane and a lone Greater White-fronted Goose flying very high headed towards the northwest. At least three Brown-headed Cowbirds were observed in the area from May 25-29.



Matt Brooks (top) decorates a Savannah Sparrow, and later catches a few rays with Jesse Reebbs, and Ted Murphy-Kelly.

Photos by Gwen Baluss



**W**e conducted another banding demonstration on May 29 this time for the general public. We received a good turn out of people who got to see our first American Redstart of the season; a brightly colored, full-adult male. We were rained out for the last two days of May and started off the month of June with another banding demonstration to a group of high school students from Watson Lake. Riley Broadhagen of Watson Lake also joined the ranks at this time. Riley was a very quick learn to extract birds and so became a valued member of the team. We experienced strong winds from the east on June 5-6. On June 7 we were rewarded with Albert Creek's first Bay-breasted Warbler, a female; this was the first record of the species for the Watson Lake area which is about 150 km west of the Bay-breasted Warbler's nearest known Yukon location, at southern Toobally Lakes.

We enjoyed a very close look at a male Pileated Woodpecker working on a rotting stump at net # 9. A flock of 100 White-winged Crossbills was also observed. The next day we added a Cape May Warbler to our observations, another rarity for the Watson Lake area. The excitement continued when we banded a female MacGillivray's Warbler on June 9, another first for the station and also very rare in the area. By June 10 we were beginning to catch many local breeders with well developed brood patches and were quick to process these birds.

## Fall season

The fall season started on July 20 after four humid, mosquito infested days of clearing net lanes and setting up. I was very thankful for the help from Riley Broadhagen and Jason Colbert. Jason, a new member of the team, was in Watson Lake working as a field biologist. This year the fall season was started



Top left; A female Bay-breasted Warbler provides a first Watson Lake area record on June 7, 2004. Photo by Ted Murphy-Kelly. Top right: A Warbling Vireo shows off its newly acquired band. Photo by Gwen Baluss

On June 11 we had our third surprise of the season by banding our first Red-eyed Vireo. This species had been observed for the first time at the station last year. The interesting thing about this bird was that as we were extracting it another individual was heard singing nearby. The station was closed for the season on June 13 as I prepared to commence the breeding bird survey season.

earlier than previous years in order to initiate a new aspect to data collection at Albert Creek. In early July many species of songbirds begin to replace flight and body feathers. Northern stations like Albert Creek can collect valuable data on just when and how particular species go through this critical stage in their life cycle.



The skies on July 20 were still thick with smoke from the Yukon's forest fires. Cameron Eckert visited Riley and me on this day. He was in the area searching for dragonflies further up the road where he found a new species of dragonfly for the Yukon, the Boreal Snaketail (*Ophiogomphus colubrinus*). We banded Albert Creek's first Cedar Waxwing, one of a small flock that was foraging in the area. The next day I was visited by Pam Sinclair who helped me score some Yellow-rumped Warblers in the first stages of molt. We discussed protocols and other matters pertaining to the efficient running of the station. Unfortunately Pam did not get to see our second Bay-breasted Warbler of the year. This was another female and it was exhibiting a brood patch. We banded an adult female and a hatch year Western Tanager on the following day. Both birds were caught closely together in the same net. On July 26 we netted a Sharp-shinned Hawk which was already banded. The bird had been banded at Albert Creek in 2003.

For the second year, Albert Creek received help from the Yukon Government's Y2C2 program (Yukon Youth Conservation Corps). Erin Neufeld, Martin Owen and Brodie Smith worked at the station from July 28 to August 5. Riley and the aptly named "Green Team" completed an extension to the census route. Many of these days brought intermittent showers, which kept us on our toes. On July 31 and August 1 we observed two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks within view of the banding lab. On the first day one of the birds was clearly a male with what appeared to be a

female or juvenile. On the second day we were again visited by two birds this time one of them was vocalizing typical begging calls and exhibiting the typical begging, "quivering wing" display. Amy Darling of the Y2C2 program joined us on August 4 for a day. Banding numbers and birds observed remained low for the first month of the season. Most of the birds were local breeders. We continued to gather valuable data using the molt scoring method.

On August 13 we received help from two more qualified banders from Juneau. Emily Drew (a colleague of Gwen Baluss) and Jason Yenawine who spent 2 days at the station. On one of these days we witnessed a mink running along the road with a muskrat in it's mouth. A Blue-headed Vireo was banded on the August 14, Albert Creek's second record. Two more were banded on August 16, one on the 23 & 24, and a sixth was banded on September 4. Four of these birds were aged as hatch year. Thick smoke returned to the Liard basin on August 15 and the sun appeared as an orange ball in the sky. Ben Schonewille of Teslin arrived at the station on August 17 for his third year. Ben was promoted to run the station as bander-in-charge when I was absent.

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Below: Much of the bander's work begins once the bird has been extracted from the net: detailed records are made of species, subspecies, age, sex, fat reserves (left), and weight & size measurements – such as wing length (right).  
Photos by John Meikle



On August 18 we added a Black-backed Woodpecker to the station's banding list. By August 21 temperatures returned to more seasonal norms and migrants began to increase. August 23 saw yet another extralimital species banded. I arrived just as Ben was completing a net round. He was very anxious to show me a particular bird, which turned out to be a Philadelphia Vireo, another first for the station and the Watson Lake area; this individual was about 280 km west of the species' nearest known Yukon location, in the lower La Biche River valley. From August 24-30 we experienced the typical mid-day warbler waves moving through the marsh. This would often make for one or two busy net runs followed by a long period of inactivity. An interesting observation was made during these days. Many times these groups of warblers were accompanied by one or more Black-capped Chickadees. These chickadees seemed to be the ring leaders of the foraging groups of birds.

On August 29 I had a good look at a Northern Goshawk which was perched on a stump in the marsh. On August 30 Louise Paulin and her day care group of children visited us from Watson Lake. There was a noticeable movement of Yellow-rumped Warblers on this date. Strong southwesterly winds on September 3 made for a slow bird day but a huge leaf extracting day. Luckily Melanie and Kerry made a surprise visit to the station to help me clear nets.

There was a fallout of birds on September 5 after an hour-long shower early in the morning and a small black bear that was reluctant to leave the area added to the excitement. The number of birds continued to be good on September 6 and we were still catching Magnolia Warblers and Alder Flycatchers. We observed a flock of 50 Rusty Blackbird in the marsh on the next day and Dave Sembsmoen arrived to help for three days. An American Redstart banded in the spring was still hanging around on September 9.

By the second week of September the weather became a real issue at the station. On many days running nets was very frustrating, as flash downpours including hail were almost a daily occurrence. Wind was another problem. With few volunteers I found myself clearing leaves out of nets most of the day. Ultimately, the feasibility of the station was greatly decreased as the weather deteriorated. On the September 16 the Watson Lake area received two days of snow. It was at this point that I finally decided to bring an end to the season. When I finally got back down to the station to pack things up from September 20-22 the weather had greatly improved. I was still

catching Orange-crowned, Wilson's and Yellow-rumped warblers. The harsh weather clearly did not force all the Neotropical migrants south. Unfortunately I was unable to get a full picture of the fall migration notably the sparrow movement. This is the second year in a row that severe weather has thwarted my efforts in mid-September. Nevertheless I believe that the year was a great success. Many of the protocols that we were struggling with in past years have been dealt with. Although running a songbird banding and migration monitoring station North of sixty is challenging it is not impossible.

My sincere thanks goes out to Albert Creek Banding Station sponsors and supporters, Southeast Yukon Proper Land Use Society, Environment Yukon through Jan Adamczewski and Thomas Jung, Canadian Wildlife Service through Pam Sinclair and Wendy Nixon, The Environmental Awareness Fund YTG, James L. Baillie Memorial fund (Bird Studies Canada), Lotteries Yukon, Yukon Bird Club, Johnson Elementary School in Watson Lake and all the wonderful volunteers that helped out at Albert Creek. Without this financial and technical help the banding station would not exist. Thanks to John Meikle for his many wonderful photos. I would like to especially thank Ben Schonewille my colleague. Ben's enthusiasm and professionalism has made this project one that I am very proud of. Ben has slogged away many hours entering and analyzing data. He is now a sub-permittee under Albert Creek's master permit and will be establishing the Yukon's second banding station in Teslin next spring.

#### **Albert Creek banders and scribes for 2004**

Ted Murphy-Kelly (bander in charge), Ben Schonewille (Bander, Sub-permittee, Teslin), Jason Wade (Brampton), Julie Bauer (Bander in training, Haines Junction) Kyle Russell (STEP student, Whitehorse), Riley Broadhagen, Hollie & Cora Murphy-Kelly, Ulla Rembe, (Watson Lake), Kerry Rees, Melanie Pratch (Faro), Jukka Jantunen, Dave Sembsmoan, Scott Herron, Lori Schroeder, Pam Sinclair, Helmut Grünberg, Jason Colbert, Theresa Gulliver, John Meikle (Whitehorse), Martin Owen, Erin Neufeld, Brodie Smith (Y2C2, Whitehorse), Gwen Baluss, Jesse Reebbs, Matt Brooks, Emily Drew, Jason Yenawine (Juneau, Alaska)

#### **Citizen volunteers for 2004**

Jan Adamczewski, Jason Strudwick, Jean Legare, (Watson Lake), Lindsay & Dylan Meikle (Whitehorse), Special thanks to Denina Dyck of Watson Lake for making some much needed bird bags.



Seasonal totals for all species banded at Albert Creek, Yukon in 2004		
Species	Spring	Fall
Sharp-shinned Hawk	0	3
Black-backed Woodpecker	0	1
Hairy Woodpecker	1	0
American Three-toed Woodpecker	0	1
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	15	21
Northern Flicker (yellow-shafted)	2	1
Alder Flycatcher	19	217
Hammond's Flycatcher	1	2
Least Flycatcher	0	19
Olive-sided Flycatcher	2	0
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	2	1
Blue-headed Vireo	0	6
Philadelphia Vireo	0	1
Red-eyed Vireo	1	0
Warbling Vireo	11	28
Gray Jay	1	1
Black-capped Chickadee	5	12
Boreal Chickadee	1	6
Red-breasted Nuthatch	0	1
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	51	47
American Robin	13	6
Gray-cheeked Thrush	18	10
Hermit Thrush	3	7
Swainson's Thrush	53	104
Varied Thrush	0	3
American Pipit	0	2
Cedar Waxwing	0	8
American Redstart	18	35
Bay-breasted Warbler	1	1
Blackpoll Warbler	22	44
Common Yellowthroat	17	107
Magnolia Warbler	4	26
MacGillivray's Warbler	1	0
Yellow-rumped Warbler (myrtle race)	268	138
Northern Waterthrush	69	95
Orange-crowned Warbler	286	199
Tennessee Warbler	49	12
Townsend's Warbler	1	0
Wilson's Warbler	502	203
Yellow Warbler	61	159
Western Tanager	2	2
American Tree Sparrow	172	66
Chipping Sparrow	4	9
Fox Sparrow	28	15
Golden-crowned Sparrow	6	1
Lapland Longspur	2	0
Lincoln's Sparrow	42	91
Savannah Sparrow	38	19
Dark-eyed Junco (slate-coloured)	194	44
Swamp Sparrow	2	7
White-crowned Sparrow	184	11
White-throated Sparrow	9	30
Rusty Blackbird	5	12
Common Redpoll	68	0
Pine Siskin	3	5
Purple Finch	10	3
Total Birds	2267	1842
Total Species	46	49
Total Days Banding	39	53



From top: **Wilson's Warbler** is by far the most common migrant at Albert Creek; A rare **Townsend's Warbler** banded on May 23, 2004; An unusual **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** lacking the red patches. Photos by John Meikle

## Volunteers key to Albert Creek

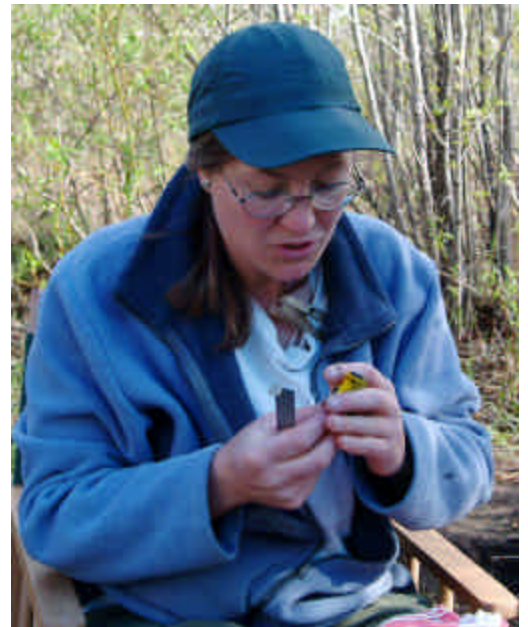
*Clockwise from top-right:* Dylan Meikle carries a precious cargo of warblers on a net run; A Swainson's Thrush is safely held using the "bander's grip"; Banders enjoy a busy day at Albert Creek; Kyle Russell and Lindsay Meikle attend to the patient task of extracting a bird from a mist net; Ted Murphy-Kelly carefully extracts a male Western Tanager. Photos by John Meikle







Sitting (l-r): Ulla Rembe, Ted Murphy-Kelly, Cora Murphy-Kelly, Dylan Meikle, Jason Wade, Kyle Russell.  
 Standing (l-r): Kerry Rees, Melanie Pratch, Lindsay Meikle, Scott Herron. Photo by John Meikle



Dedicated banders at Albert Creek (l-r): Ben Schonnewille, Riley Broadhagen, and Gwen Baluss.



## Field Notes: Observations from the field

**Send your sightings** to Helmut Grünberg, 807 Wheeler St., Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2P8. ([grunberg@yknet.yk.ca](mailto:grunberg@yknet.yk.ca)). Include date, location, number of birds, sex and age, and observers' names. Seasonal schedule: Spring (March 1-May 31), Summer (June 1-July 31), Fall (Aug 1-Nov 30), Winter (Dec 1-Feb 28). Reports are sent to the Canadian Wildlife Service for the Birds of the Yukon database.

**RARE BIRD ALERT** – Alerting other birders quickly to the presence of a rare bird helps ensure that the sighting is documented, and is a great way to share a special find. If you see an unusual bird, call Cameron Eckert (667-4630) or Helmut Grünberg (667-6703).

### Spring 2004 (March – April – May)

Spring came early in the Yukon and was generally warmer and dryer than normal. A **Red-throated Loon** was seen at Jackfish Bay, Lake Laberge on May 29 (HG,BM). A **Pacific Loon** was spotted at Hidden Lakes near Whitehorse-Riverdale on May 12 (JT). A flock of 79 **Snow Geese**, an uncommon migrant in southern Yukon, was at Carcross on May 15-18 (CE,RH,DK). **Swan** migration peaked at M'Clintock Bay, Marsh Lake on April 21 with a total count of 1854 swans including 734 **Trumpeters** and 1060 **Tundras** (JJ). A **Eurasian Wigeon** was noted at Carcross on May 5 (BD,CE,HG), and one was at Shallow Bay, Lake Laberge on May 16 (HG,LL). A male **Cinnamon Teal** was spotted at M'Clintock Bay on May 15 (CE), and one male was seen at Shallow Bay, Lake Laberge on May 16 (HG,LL). A male **Eurasian Green-winged Teal**, rare in southern Yukon, was at M'Clintock Bay on May 5 (CE,BD,HG). A large number of 27 **Redheads** were seen at Tagish on May 5 (BD, CE, HG). A male **Hooded Merganser** was seen at Judas Creek on May 15 (CE). Four **Ruddy Ducks** were observed at M'Clintock Bay on May 5 (BD,CE,HG), and 27 were seen at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on May 6, and 38 on May 14 (HG); two were seen at Swan Lake, north of Whitehorse on May 8 (HG,CO), and one was there on May 26 (HG). A migrant **Double-crested Cormorant** was noted at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on May 6 (HG); two showing wispy white head plumes were seen near their nesting site at Jackfish Bay, Lake Laberge on May 10 (CE), and one was there on May 29 (HG,BM). A small incursion of **Great Blue Herons** in the Whitehorse area included three at Jackfish Bay, Lake Laberge on May 7 (BD,HG), and six at Kookatsoon Lake on May 16 (CD,BS). An **Osprey** was nest with one adult on the nest and another one nearby was at Snafu Lake on May 19 (HG,CO). A **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was seen near a birdfeeder in Haines Junction from March 30 to April 8 (JAB). **Northern Harriers**, **Rough-legged** and **Red-tailed hawks** were common along the North Klondike Highway through the Minto burn in mid-April (MOD).



Above: A **Gray-cheeked Thrush** dines at a Porter Creek compost on May 22, 2004. Photo by C.D. Eckert.

Below: A trio of **Great Blue Herons** at Jackfish Bay, Lake Laberge on May 7, 2004. Photo by Boris Dobrowolsky



Two **Merlins** were on territory at Little Atlin Lake near the "Song Sparrow Marsh" on May 11, and one was there on May 22 & 29 (HG). An immature **Peregrine Falcon** was in hot pursuit of shorebirds at Judas Creek, Marsh Lake on May 20 (CE). Four **American Coots** were on territories at Swan Lake, north of Whitehorse on May 8 (HG,CO). The **Sandhill Crane** migration along the Tintina Trench through the Yukon is one of North America's great avian spectacles; observers at Faro noted the first flock on April 23 (KR), with many thousands of cranes passing overhead at least through May 10 (KR) including a total of 23,000 counted on May 8-9 (JJ).



**Pacific Golden-Plover** is now being recorded annually in low numbers; a breeding plumage male was at Horse Creek, Lake Laberge on May 10 (CE), and a female was there on May 18 (CE). In southern Yukon, shorebird migration peaked during the 3rd week of May; a flock of 500 **Pectoral Sandpipers** at Nares Lake, Carcross on May 17 (CE), and 450 **Long-billed Dowitchers** were at Lewes Marsh and M'Clintock Bay on May 20 (CE). Eight **Wilson's Phalaropes** were at Swan Lake, near Whitehorse on May 29 (HG). Rare shorebirds in the Whitehorse area included a **Stilt Sandpiper** at M'Clintock Bay on May 22 (CE,HG,PS), and a **White-rumped Sandpiper** at Judas Creek on May 29 (HG). Rare gulls included an adult **Ring-billed Gull** at Marsh Lake on May 20-21 (CE), an adult **Glaucous-winged Gull** in Whitehorse on May 8-10 (CE), and a first-year **Glaucous-winged Gull** at Judas Creek on May 26 (CE,YBC). **Herring Gull** migration peaked at M'Clintock Bay on April 23-25 with daily counts of 800 (JJ); about 1000 were present at the Whitehorse landfill on May 3-8 (CE).




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Above left: A **Hudsonian Godwit** at Jackfish Bay, Lake Laberge on May 10, 2005. Photo by C.D. Eckert

Above right: An **Upland Sandpiper** at the rodeo grounds on the Mayo Road, just north of Whitehorse on May 29, 2004. Photo by J. McCrie

Left: A pristine adult **Glaucous Gull** at the Whitehorse dump on May 8, 2004. Photo by C.D. Eckert

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**A Northern Hawk Owl** was seen along the Alaska Highway near the Marsh Lake dump on March 21 and one along the Two-Mile-Hill in Whitehorse near the Fire Hall through March 24 (m.ob.). A **Great Gray Owl** was spotted along the Alaska Highway just east of the M'Clintock River bridge on May 7 (CB). A **Short-eared Owl** was observed at Drury's Pond on April 16 and one just west of the Takhini River bridge along the Alaska Highway on April 17 (HG,CO), and one was seen at the Pine Creek warden office, Haines Junction on April 16-17 (TS). A rare **Northern Saw-whet Owl**, the Yukon's third, was reported along the Kusawa Lake Road, southwestern Yukon on April 15 (BD,HG) and taped on April 16 (HG,CO). Crusty snow conditions may have been the cause of the many **Boreal Owls** seen out of the woods and near homes across southern Yukon from Whitehorse to Watson Lake.

An unprecedented influx of **Red-breasted Sapsuckers** in southern Yukon yielded singles in downtown Whitehorse on March 31 (HG,FF,CE), at the Takhini Hotsprings Road on April 1 (MA), at Cowley Creek on about April 7 (DS), at Marshall Creek on April 9 (KA), at Valleyview in Whitehorse on April 10 (DVW), and at Shallow Bay, Lake Laberge on April 17 (SH). A **Pileated Woodpecker** was calling at Greenway Greens Golf Course, Upper Liard on May 1 (HG).

An **Olive-sided Flycatcher** at Tagish on May 2 (EH,HG,YBC) bettered the Yukon's earliest date by four days; two were banded at Albert Creek on May 9 (TMK). A singing **Warbling Vireo** at Porter Creek in Whitehorse on May 15 (CE, PS) set a record early date for the Yukon. The Yukon's first well-documented **Northwestern Crow** was first reported from Tagish in early March but subsequently disappeared (AS, RS; L&DJ); it returned on March 30 and was closely studied (CE,HG), and careful measurements of its foot prints exactly matched measurements of Northwestern Crow tracks from nearby Skagway, Alaska (CE). A single distant **crow** was seen at Carcross on May 17 (CE,RH). A **Steller's Jay**, rare in the Yukon, was at Carcross on April 27 (RH).

Many observers commented on a general lack of **Tree Swallows**. Inclement weather produced a fallout of up to 1500 **Violet-green Swallows** at McIntyre Creek, Whitehorse on May 8 (CE). A **Mountain Chickadee** was seen at the Jake's Corner feeder on March 16-26 (HG; ADM). **Gray-cheeked Thrush** is a stealth migrant in southern Yukon; two were singing at Porter Creek on May 21-22 (CE,PS), and an impressive 15 were banded at Albert Creek during the last week of May (TMK). A **Townsend's Warbler** was observed at the Copper Haul Road in Whitehorse on May 16 (PS,YBC), and one was banded at Albert Creek on May 23 (TMK); up to three were at White Mountain trail on May 19-29 (HG). Single **Western Tanagers** were banded at Albert Creek on May 25 & 29 (TMK). The season's first **American Redstart** was noted at Albert Creek on May 29 (TMK).



Top: A **Northern Hawk Owl** at the Whitehorse fire station on March 27, 2004. Photo Cameron Eckert

Bottom: A **Red-breasted Sapsucker** in downtown Whitehorse on March 31, 2004. Photo H. Grünberg



**Swamp Sparrows** were found at four marshes on the Albert Creek Road on May 27-28 (GB,MB,JR; HG). A sudden chill and snow produced a dramatic fallout of **American Tree, Fox** and **White-crowned sparrows**, and **Dark-eyed Juncos** at Albert Creek at Upper Liard on May 4-8 (TMK). A **White-crowned Sparrow** nest with three newly hatched young and one egg at Dawson on May 31 (DCa) was indicative of an early breeding season. A flock of 400 **Lapland Longspurs** was observed at Horse Creek, Lake Laberge on May 2 (KO). A migrant female **Smith's Longspurs** was reported at Faro on April 20-21 (KR). Six **Snow Buntings** were reported from the Dome Road near Dawson on March 19 (DCo). A record early male **Red-winged Blackbird** was reported from a feeder in Canyon along the Alaska Highway east of Haines Junction on April 18 (RRH). High numbers of migrant **Gray-crowned Rosy Finches**, including both coastal and interior races, were seen across southern Yukon from March 30 through April; reports included three coastal birds on the Tagish Road on March 30 (CE,HG), one coastal bird at Destruction Bay, southwestern Yukon on April 3 (MF), three (two interior, one coastal) at Watson Lake on April 2-3 (JS,TMK), 50 coastal birds at Morley Bay, Teslin Lake on April 13 (CA,DH), up to three in Whitehorse on April 13-15 (B&BS), and up to 100 at M'Clintock Bay in mid-April (DP). **Hoary Redpolls** were present at most Whitehorse-area feeders through late March. Ten **Hoaries** were at a grain field at the Teslin Marina on March 21 (BD,HG); one was found dead near a feeder at Horse Creek, Lake Laberge (KO).

**Observers:** Carolyn Allen, Ken Anderson, Marilyn Aston, Gwen Baluss, Matt Brooks, Carl Burgess, Damon Calderwood (DCa), Dorothy Cooley (DCo), Linda Cameron, Alan deMartini (ADM), Carolyn Diamed, Boris Dobrowolsky, Cameron Eckert, Marsha Flumerfelt, Fred Freytag, Helmut Grünberg, Rick Halladay, Scott Herron, Dave Hett, Erica Heuer, Jukka Jantunen, Larry & Darcy Johnston, Dan Kemble, Lona Lamken, Bob Murkett, Ted Murphy-Kelly, Mark O'Donoghue (MOD), Clive Osborne, Katie Ostrom, Doug Phillips, Jesse Reeb, Kerry Rees, Robyn Rufiange-Holway (RRH), Bill Sinclair, Pam Sinclair, Terry Skjonsberg, Jenny Skelton, Art Smith, Don Smith, Barb & Bob Studds, Jenny Trapnell, Debbie van de Wetering, Yukon Bird Club



Above: An impressive flock of **Gray-crowned Rosy Finches** at a Marsh Lake feeder on April 13, 2004. Photo by Doug Phillips

Below: A blizzard of **Snow Buntings** at Whitehorse shipyards on April 5, 2004. Photo by Cameron Eckert







### ***Spring Images 2004***

*Counter-clockwise from top:*

A **Warbling Vireo** at Haines Junction on May 24, 2004. Photo by Deb & Steve Osborne

A **Pectoral Sandpiper** on migration at Lewes Marsh on May 23, 2004. Photo by J. McCrie

A **Boreal Owl** at Teslin Lake on March 22, 2004. Photo by M. Garolitz

A **Boreal Owl** at Marsh Lake on April 1, 2004. Photo by D. Phillips

A **Wilson's Warbler** at McIntyre Creek wetland on May 15, 2004. Photo by J. McCrie





## **Summer 2004 (June – July)**

**N**orthern Canada experienced the best and the worst of this year's dramatically variable summer weather. The Yukon enjoyed one of the warmest and driest seasons on record with early nesting, good productivity, and awesome forest fires. Surveys of forests and wetlands along the Beaver and La Biche rivers in the extreme southeast Yukon continued to expand our knowledge of this very remote and productive region of the boreal forest.

A breeding plumage **Yellow-billed Loon** lingered from June 2-12 on the Yukon River in Whitehorse (BS, many observers). Four adult "**Canada Geese**" with about four young were on Nares Lake on June 26 (BS). A female **Long-tailed Duck** was at Blind Lake, near the Hyland River east of Watson Lake on June 18 (BD). About twenty **Ruddy Ducks** were at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on July 5 (DCa,HG). An adult **Merlin** was found dead at Lewes Marsh in June (SF). After two good years, **Peregrine Falcon** nesting productivity took a downturn this year for the Yukon River population; the driving factor is still unknown (DM). A **Sora** nest with five eggs and a chick at the lower La Biche River, southeastern Yukon on June 30 (BB,LC,CE) provided one of the few breeding records for the Yukon. Two **American Coots** were seen at a small lake near the La Biche River on June 14 (BD), and a nest was found there on July 3 (CE).



Above: A **Sora** nest at a marsh near the lower La Biche River on June 30, 2004.

Left: An adult **Bonaparte's Gull** at McQuesten Lake on June 7, 2004.

Photos by Cameron Eckert



A very agitated pair of **Greater Yellowlegs** was spotted at a wetland near Crag Lake, south of Whitehorse on June 18 (CE) and again on June 24 (HG,SH,PS). However, we are still lacking a conclusive breeding record in the Yukon: Three **Greater Yellowlegs**, two adults and one juvenile, were seen in the same area on July 3 (HG), but the young bird was already grown and able to fly. An **Upland Sandpiper** was observed at the Rodeo Grounds, North Klondike Highway on June 1 (BD,HG), and two were there on June 6 (HG) suggesting possible nesting. A total of 21 calling **Whimbrel** were recorded on June 22 at two nesting sites in Vuntut National Park, northern Yukon, as part of a newly established monitoring program for the species (DH). A **Whimbrel** at Lake Laberge on June 1 (BD,HG) was a rare sight in that area. **Short-billed Dowitcher** is a very rare and localized breeder in southern Yukon; four pairs and one nest (4 eggs) were discovered on June 18 at a wetland near Crag Lake, south of Whitehorse (CE); on June 24, the nest contained three tiny young and one egg (HG,SH,PS). Two pairs of **Short-billed Dowitchers** were noted at the previously suspected nesting site at Judas Creek, southeast of Whitehorse on June 16 and 21 (CE). About six **Wilson's Phalaropes** were a nice sight at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on July 5 (DCa,HG). An immature **Thayer's Gull**, photographed at treeline in Asi Keyi on July 23 (JM) provided a rare summer record, and the first for southwestern Yukon. Twenty-two **Black Terns** were seen at the only known breeding colony in the Yukon, at Blind Lake, near the Hyland River east of Watson Lake on June 18 (BD).

**Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** were found at two new Yukon locations this year; one was singing along the North Klondike Highway, 32 km north of McQuesten on June 9 (PS,LC), and one was singing at the lower La Biche River on June 24 and July 2 (CE,LC). The known range of the **Dusky Flycatcher** in the Yukon was extended about 150 km north with observations of three singing birds along the North Klondike Highway between McGregor and McCabe Creeks on June 4 (PS). One **Dusky Flycatcher** was singing at its known location right at the Atlin Road, km 5, above the "Song Sparrow Marsh" on June 2 (HG). Three male **Pacific Slope Flycatchers**, a Yukon first, were recorded singing on territories at the Beaver River Hotspots, southeastern Yukon on June 25-27 (CE,LC). An **Eastern Kingbird**, consuming a dragonfly, was seen along the La Biche River Road, extreme southeastern Yukon, and another one was observed 5 km northwest of that location near the La Biche River on June 13 (BD,HG).

Two **Blue-headed Vireos** were singing at Rancheria on June 9 (BD,HG), but were subsequently missed further east at the Rancheria Breeding Bird Survey where they usually occur (HG). One was at Rancheria on June 19 (HG). **Philadelphia Vireo** is rare anywhere in the region; two were singing along the lower La Biche River, southeastern Yukon on June 24 (LC,CE). **Red-eyed Vireos** were recorded well west of the species' normal range in the Yukon; two were at Albert Creek, Upper Liard, southeastern Yukon on June 10-11 (TMK,RB), one was singing at the Watson Lake airport on June 23 (LC,CE), and one was seen singing in Whitehorse on July 11 (WN).



**Short-billed Dowitcher** is a very rare and localized Yukon breeder with only 4 known or suspected Yukon nesting sites. This nest (circled) was discovered at a wetland near Crag Lake on June 18, 2004. Photos by C.D. Eckert





A **Clark's Nutcracker**, the first seen and documented in the Yukon in over a decade, was at Printers Pass in the Ruby Range on June 11 (KM); subsequently two more were seen at different Yukon locations in the fall. A singing **Winter Wren**, very rare in the Whitehorse area, was near Porter Creek on July 17 (WN). **Cedar Waxwings**, irregular in southern Yukon, were common during late June and July at Watson Lake (SC,CE;TMK), and the lower La Biche River (CE,LC). **Tennessee Warblers** were noted in higher than normal numbers from Watson Lake to Whitehorse; a total of 40 were banded at Albert Creek on May 30 to June 13 (TMK), and 3 were at Judas Creek, near Whitehorse on June 21 (CE). **Cape May Warblers** were noted well west and north of the species' normal range with one singing at Albert Creek on June 8 (TMK), and one singing at the Lubbock River, south of Whitehorse on June 20 (LC,JS). Intensive breeding bird surveys in southern and central Yukon partially filled the hole in the **Townsend's Warbler's** Yukon range; a total of 14 was recorded on seven of ten Breeding Bird Survey routes during June 5-22 (PS,SH); additionally, four were singing at Moose Creek campground, central Yukon on June 10 (CE,PS). A female **Bay-breasted Warbler** banded at Albert Creek on July 7 (TMK), a first for the Watson Lake area, was about 150 km west of its range. One was also banded there in late July (TMK). A **MacGillivray's Warbler** was banded at Albert Creek on June 9 (TMK). The Yukon's first **Canada Warbler nest** was an exciting find at the lower La Biche River on July 4 (CE,BB,LC). By far the year's most stunning report was that of a pair of **Scarlet Tanagers**, a Yukon first, seen at Big Salmon Lake on July 10 or 11; the female was killed in a window-strike, but the male was photographed (LT,TT). **Western Tanagers** were noted well beyond the species' normal range; one seen and heard singing near Little Atlin Lake, southern Yukon on June 4 (HG) was 300 km west of its range, and one singing along the North Klondike Highway, 10 km north of McQuesten on June 9 (LC,PS) was an amazing 600 km northwest of its range; one heard during the Rancheria Breeding Bird Survey on June 19 (HG) was about 100 km west of its known range. Four **Brewer's Sparrows** were seen on July 22-25 in Asi Keyi, sw. Yukon (LC). A **Song Sparrow** was heard singing at a wetland, 12 km east of the village of Swift River on June 9 (HG). A **Lark Sparrow**, the Yukon's third, was seen on July 4 at the lower La Biche River (CE,LC). A total of eight **Le Conte's Sparrows** was counted at the lower La Biche River, Yukon June 23 - July 4 (CE,LC,BB); this number is consistent with counts there ten years ago. A **White-throated Sparrow** seen singing on June 4 at McCabe Creek, south of Pelly Crossing (PS,LC) was well beyond its range.



**Scarlet Tanager in the Yukon!** Despite the soft quality of these photos, the originals taken at Big Salmon Lake on July 10-11, 2004, clearly show a bold reddish-orange tanager with completely black wings and tail. The nearest record to the Yukon was one found at Barrow, Alaska on 25 June 1934. Photos by Leisa and Tom Thurmer

A pair of **Smith's Longspurs** was seen below the Natazhat Glacier in Asi Keyi, southwestern Yukon on July 22 (LC). Rock Island Lake may well support the Yukon's largest breeding concentration of **Red-winged Blackbirds**; a count of 51 was made there on June 4 (LC,CE,SH); a post-breeding flock of about 100 **Red-winged Blackbirds** was seen in a field at Upper Liard on July 20 (CE). A male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was at a farm along the Atlin Road, Yukon on July 9-11 (KG,SG). Hershel Island's second **Rusty Blackbird**, a male, was seen June 13 to at least July 23 (DCo;BD). Single **Rusty Blackbird** nests were found at Lhustaw Lake on June 5, and at Five Mile Lake on June 8 (PS et al). Two **Brown-headed Cowbirds** were seen running around in the grass underneath a feeder in Whitehorse on June 5-6 (TA).



**Summer rarities** – clockwise from top right:

The Yukon's first **Canada Warbler** nest at the La Biche River on July 4, 2004 (C.D. Eckert);

The Yukon's first **Pacific Slope Flycatcher** at the Beaver River hotsprings on June 26, 2004 (C.D. Eckert);

The Yukon's third **Lark Sparrow** at the La Biche River on 4 July 2004 (C.D. Eckert);

A **Rusty Blackbird** at Herschel on July 21, 2004 (D.Cooley)

A male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** at an Atlin Road farm on July 9-11, 2004 (Sandra Gabb).



**Summer observers:** Terri Aberson, Brian Bell, Riley Brodhagen, Syd Cannings, Dannie Carsen (DCa), Lisa Christensen, Dorothy Cooley (DCo), Boris Dobrowolsky, Cameron Eckert, Scott Fraser, Ken Gabb, Sandra Gabb, Helmut Grünberg, David Henry, Scott Herron, Kathy Martin, John Meikle, David Mossop, Ted Murphy-Kelly, Wendy Nixon, Jennifer Staniforth, Betty Sutton, Pamela Sinclair, Leisa & Tom Thurmer.



## Summer at Hershel Island

Photos by Gerry Perrier



**Herschel Island**, known to the Inuvialuit as Qikiqtaruk – “it is island”, lies just off the Yukon’s Arctic Coast. It is a Yukon Territorial Park where the Inuvialuit hunt and fish and visitors from all parts of the world travel to experience its very special natural character. It is renowned for its Arctic breeders such as Common Eider, Black Guillemot, Long-tailed Jaeger, Lapland and Smith’s longspur, Ruddy Turnstone, and Rough-legged Hawk.

*Counter-clockwise from top:* A Barren-ground Caribou at Pauline Cove; a flight of Long-tailed Ducks; a female Common Eider sits tight on its nest; Common Eiders flying along the beach at Pauline Cove.



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

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### The Yukon's rich history through the eyes of birdwatchers

1877- Leroy McQuesten at Fort Reliance

1887- William Ogilvie on the Yukon River

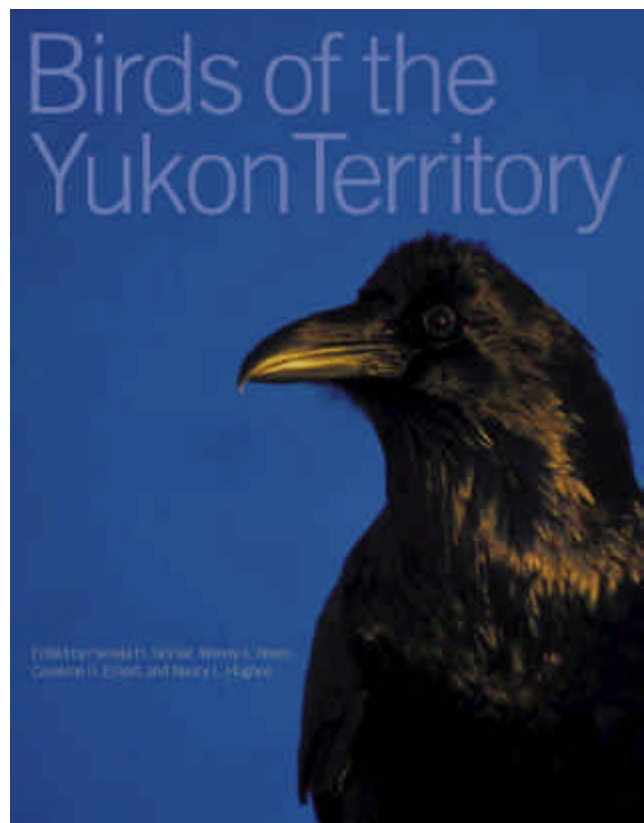
1898- Rev. I.O. Stringer at Herschel Island

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