

Yukon Warbler

Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club – Spring 2004



A stunning male Yellow-rumped Warbler at McIntyre Creek wetland on May 10, 2003. Photo by Jeanette McCrie

INSIDE: Yukon Christmas Counts ♦ Canada's First Bluethroat Nest ♦ Blind Lake's Black Terns

Yukon Bird Club Field Trips – Spring & Summer 2004

*Dress for the weather, wear appropriate footwear, and bring binoculars (if you have them). For more information contact Patti Nash (633-6880). **Non-members, visiting birders and beginners welcome!***

Sunday 2 May: Tagish Birding Tour! Helmut Grünberg guides this exciting trip to Tagish and Carcross. Bring lunch and meet at the SS Klondike at 9:00 am. (~ 5 hours).

Tuesday 4 May: Shrike Migration in the Takhini valley with Lee Kubica. Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 6:30 pm. (~ 3 hours).

Thursday 6 May: Schwatka Lake Beginner's Waterfowl Night. Learn about waterbird identification with René Carlson. Meet at the SS Klondike at 6:30 pm. (~ 2 hours).

Saturday 8 May: International Migratory Bird Day - Spring Migration Count! To participate in this annual "spring round-up" call Cameron Eckert at 667-4630.

May 8-9: Sandhill Crane and Fannin sheep viewing weekend in Faro! Free interpreted tours and talks. Family Dance. Mother's Day pancake breakfast. Sunday birding tour to Whitehorse. For more information contact: Saskia Bunicich (867- 994-2728; saskia@yknet.ca), or Sara Nielsen, (867-667-8291; sara.nielsen@gov.yk.ca).

Saturday 15 May: Cowley Lake waterbirds and more, just down the Carcross road with Norm Barichello. Bring lunch and meet at the Carcross Corner at 10:00 am. (~4 hours).

Sunday 16 May: McIntyre Creek bird songs and calls workshop! Tune your bird-song identification skills with Pam Sinclair! Meet at Porter Creek Super A at 7:30 am. (morning!)

Tuesday 18 May: Explore Shallow Bay on Lake Laberge with Cameron Eckert. Bring rubber boots and dress warmly. Meet at Porter Creek Super A at 5:30 pm. (~3 hours).

Thursday 20 May: Schwatka Lake waterfowl! René Carlson points out easy ways to identify a variety of waterbirds. Meet at the SS Klondike at 6:30 pm. (~2 hours).

Wednesday 26 May: Judas Creek migration hot spot with Jim Hawkings. A good chance you will see something unexpected! Meet at the SS Klondike at 5:30 pm. (~3 hours).

May 28 at 5 pm. to May 29 at 5 pm: Annual YUKON BIRDATHON. A conservation education fundraiser and an annual highlight of spring birding! Join the post-Birdathon barbecue at 6:00 pm at Wolf Creek Campground. For more information call Boris, 633-6404.

Saturday 29 May: Neotropical treasures of Albert Creek with Ted Murphy-Kelly! Magnolia Warbler, American Redstart, and Tennessee Warbler make this outing a must for anyone with a passion for songbirds. Meet at the Upper Liard restaurant at 8 am. (~3 hours).

Tuesday 1 June: McIntyre Wetlands on Fish Lake Road! Join Jeanette McCrie to check on returning migrants. Meet at the SS Klondike at 6:30 pm. (~2 hours).

Saturday 5 June: Faro's colourful breeding birds! Join Kerry Rees on this outing along the Blind Creek Road to Faro sewage lagoons to view a variety of local breeders. Meet at Faro Information Centre at 9 am. (~3 hours).

Tuesday 8 June: Enjoy Takhini-McIntyre Pond, a prolific little wetland area behind Yukon College, with Jeanette McCrie. Meet at the SS Klondike at 6:30 pm. (~2 hours).

Thursday 10 June: Discover Paddy's Pond in Hillcrest with Mary Whitley to look for an assortment of nesting birds. Meet at the Airline Inn parking lot at 6:00 pm. (~2 hours).

YBC Field Trips – Spring & Summer 2004 con't ...

Saturday 12 June: *Weekend on the Wing to Two Moose Lake!* Join Christine Drinnan for this tour of Dempster birds. Meet at the Tombstone Park campground interpretive centre at 12 pm. (~3 hours).

Sunday 13 June: *Weekend on the Wing Dawn Chorus!* Christine Drinnan leads this morning birdwalk at Tombstone Park campground. Meet at the Tombstone Park campground interpretive centre at 7 am. (morning) (~2.5 hours).

Tuesday 15 June: *Birds of Mary Lake!* Join Wendy Nixon and explore the bird life of this rich wetland. Meet at the S.S. Klondike at 7:00 pm. (~2.5 hours).

Thursday 17 June: *Summer at Hidden Lakes!* Join Scott Heron on this outing to Hidden Lakes in Riverdale, which offers a diverse mix of breeding waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds. Meet at the SS Klondike at 6:30 pm. (~2.5 hours).

Sunday 4 July: *Alpine birds and wild flowers on King's Throne!* Join David Henry on a challenging alpine hike south of beautiful Kathleen Lake. Pre-register for this trip by calling David at 634-2426. Bring lunch and meet at the Kluane Park Visitor Centre at 10:00 am.



YBC News & Notes

Canada's territories united in a new North American birding region

North America's premier journal for bird sightings, *North American Birds*, has established a new Northern Canada reporting region. This new region will include the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. In fact, this region will be the largest in the history of *North American Birds*. To date, Yukon sightings have been included with British Columbia's seasonal reports. *North American Birds* publishes quarterly seasonal reports summarizing bird sightings, rarities, photographic highlights, and trends from across the Americas. As well, the journal includes articles on bird identification, significant records, population trends, and numerous other topics. Long-time Yukon Bird Club director Cameron Eckert will serve as the editor for the new region. Yukon birders can continue to send their sightings to Helmut Grünberg (grunberg AT yknet.yk.ca; 667-6703) or to Cameron Eckert (cdeckert AT yknet.yk.ca; 667-4630-evenings or 667-8546-day). As well, we are now interested in receiving your sightings from NWT, or even Nunavut for those birding further a field.

For *North American Birds* subscription information contact: ABA Membership, PO Box 6599, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80934-6599, USA. phone (800) 850-2473 or (719) 578-1614 email member@aba.org

President's Message and AGM Report

In fall 2003, Helmut Grünberg represented YBC at meetings with other non consumptive forest users to develop a response to the government's Forest Policy Development document. The group issued a "Summary of Critical Issues" which YBC supported in a letter to YTG. Thanks Helmut! Several members of the Club attended meetings to investigate a Whitehorse Area Conservation Initiative. Thanks to Helmut, Pam Sinclair and Cameron Eckert for presenting the Club's viewpoint at these seminal meetings.

Wendy Nixon has served on the Board since the inception of the Club a decade ago. She has worked tirelessly in many positions, most recently as field trip co-ordinator. She has now stepped aside due to the demands of family and work. Wendy's ideas will be sorely missed.

The members of the present board are: Mary Whitley president, Pam Sinclair secretary, Nancy Hughes treasurer, Patti Nash field trips, Cameron Eckert projects, Boris Dobrowolsky Birdathon, Scott Herron events, Helmut Grünberg sightings, Lee Kubica checklist, Valerie Graham and Jeannette McCrie, Directors at large. We look forward to continued interest in our events and field trips. Look for the field trip schedule in this issue and post it so you don't miss upcoming trips.

Happy birding to all!

- Mary Whitley

Birders' Exchange Equipment Drive

Sharing tools & saving birds across the Americas

Birders' Exchange is a program of the American Birding Association which supports Caribbean, and Central and South American bird researchers and conservationists by redistributing new and used birding equipment, free of charge, to researchers, conservationists, and educators working to conserve birds and their habitats in the Neotropics.

While many of us have expensive scopes and binoculars, closets stuffed with outdoor gear, and bookshelves groaning under the weight of reference material and field guides; many of our fellow conservationists, researchers, and educators working in other parts of the Americas do so with naked eye, little outdoor equipment, and no local field guides. They are working to understand and protect many of the individual birds, and species that we work with here.

Since 1990, Birders' Exchange has sent 1,800 binoculars, 1,025 field guides, 275 backpacks, 150 cameras, 200 scopes, 150 tripods, and other tools to more than 350 programs in over 30 Latin American and Caribbean countries. This equipment enhances awareness of birds, and it empowers local people to make wise conservation decisions. If you would like more information about the Birders' Exchange you can access their web material through the American Birding Association's website at:

www.americanbirding.org/programs/consbex.htm

Check out the page about the recipients. All donors of equipment will receive individual thank you letters listing the equipment received.



Please consider donating some of the following items:

- binoculars
- spotting scopes
- tripods
- field guides to Neotropical birds
- field guides to North American birds
- ornithology texts
- laptop computers
- backpacks

Yukon birders wishing to contribute should contact Scott Herron (herron_AT_yknet.yk.ca or call 393-6760-day).

Weekend on the Wing Tombstone Territorial Park

Friday June 11 to Sunday June 13, '04

**A great opportunity to view the region's many Northern Specialties:
Surfbird, Northern Wheatear,
Gyr Falcon, Smith's Longspur & more!**

**For more information contact:
Dennis Kuch at (867) 667-8299
Yukon Dept. of Environment, Parks Branch**



Birding Flashback '03

This nice selection of photos presents interesting sightings from Teslin and Faro. Clockwise from top:

A **Great Blue Heron**, a rare sighting on the shores of Teslin Lake, on May 18, 2003. Photo by Margaret Garolitz

A female **Spruce Grouse** enjoys a well used dust bath at Teslin, June 24, 2003. Photo by Margaret Garolitz

The first **Mountain Bluebird** nest record for Faro: one of the recently fledged young on July 5, 2003. Photo by Kerry Rees and Melanie Pratch-Rees

The female **Mountain Bluebird** feeds her dependant fledgling at Faro on July 5, 2003. In fact, the female had a slightly deformed bill which didn't seem to affect her various activities. Photo by Kerry Rees and Melanie Pratch-Rees



Black Terns at Blind Lake – 2003

Pamela Sinclair, Canadian Wildlife Service



The Black Tern nests at Blind Lake were placed on dead bulrushes along the outer edge of a thick stand of *Carex aquatilis*. June 27, 2003. Photo by P. Sinclair

Nesting Black Terns were first noted in the Yukon in June 1996, when Cameron Eckert and Helmut Grünberg documented their occurrence at Blind Lake during CWS surveys of several sites in southeast Yukon (Eckert 1996, Sinclair 1997). During that first survey of Blind Lake, local resident Geoff Morrison told the survey crew that Black Terns had nested at Blind Lake at least since fish farming operations began there in 1993.

The Black Tern is a small North American freshwater tern, remarkable for its graceful beauty as well as its reliance on sensitive habitats. Although its breeding distribution extends from New Brunswick west to interior British Columbia and California, the Black Tern is most abundant on the prairies. The single known nesting site in the Yukon (Blind Lake) is about 300 km northwest of its nearest neighbours, which are near Fort Nelson, B.C. The Black Tern is a “species at risk” in many jurisdictions, and is a “Category 2 Candidate Species” in the U.S., but is not listed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). Population declines have been documented in much of its range; the primary cause is thought to be loss and degradation of its wetland habitats (Dunn and Agro 1995). Black Terns feed on insects and small fish, and nest in shallow marshes with

emergent vegetation. Blind Lake, as its name implies, is a lake with no outlet (a closed basin kettle lake). It is situated about 30 km due east of the town of Watson Lake, Yukon. It is approximately oval in shape, about 3.5 km north to south. During the first bird survey of Blind Lake, on 16-19 June 1996, 25 nests and 44 adults were counted in a dense colony at the south end of the lake, and one nest and 5 adults were noted at the marsh on the east side of the lake. Nests were constructed on floating mats of dead bulrushes (*Schoenoplectus acutus*). Nest contents were checked at only a few nests; those contained 3 or 4 eggs each (Eckert 1996).

The purpose of our visit to Blind Lake in 2003 was to assess the current status of the Black Terns nesting there, to collect more detailed information on productivity of the tern colony, and to document and assess the habitats being used by the terns. We also surveyed the area for other birds, amphibians, bats, and aquatic invertebrates. The survey crew consisted of Sasha Oystryk (water quality and invertebrates), Pam Sinclair (birds), Brian Slough (amphibians and bats), and Jennifer Staniforth (plants).

During 26-28 June 2003, Black Tern nests were found in the marshy area at the east side of Blind Lake, along the “inside” edge of a sparsely

vegetated bulrush zone, where wind and waves had caused floating dead bulrush stalks to accumulate at the "outer" edge of a more densely vegetated zone of *Carex aquatilis*. The nests were easy to find after we had found the first one, as they were situated along this rather linear and abrupt transition between habitat types. We paddled slowly along among the sparse emergent bulrush, and viewed the nests along the edge of the adjacent, more densely vegetated sedge zone. The sedge zone was about 30m wide, so that the nests were an estimated 30m from shore.

Twenty nests were found. Adults were incubating on 3 of the nests, and contents were observed in 17 nests. Eight nests contained eggs, 4 contained small chicks, and 5 contained both eggs and chicks. Clutch size ranged from 1-3: one nest of one, 7 of 2, and 9 of 3. All chicks appeared to be the same size and age, indicating that laying had been synchronous.

Based on known incubation and fledging times (Dunn and Agro 1995), a hatch date of 27 June indicates that laying occurred around 7 June, and fledging would be around 17-21 July. This corresponds with the few previous reports from Blind Lake. Geoff Morrison noted that the terns had not yet arrived when he visited on 24 May 1997, but were there when he returned on 30 May (Sinclair et al. 2003). The latest previous report of Black Terns at Blind Lake was on 19 June 1996, and the latest previous record for the territory was from 23 June 1994.

Only a very few abandoned nests were found at the south end of the lake on 27 June 2003, despite the abundance of active nests there in June 1996. It was surmised that the entire colony of terns may have attempted to nest at the south end of the lake, and then failed, perhaps due to strong winds or other inclement weather, and re-nested at the east side of the lake. Alternatively, a few pairs may have made failed attempts to nest at the south end of the lake while most pairs nested at the east side of the lake.

Broad zones of emergent bulrush are not common in the Yukon, but they do occur at a few locations, including Rock Island Lake (south of Pelly Crossing). Blind Lake is probably the most southeasterly location in the Yukon which features adequate *Scirpus* mats. As colonial nesters, Black Terns rely not only on appropriate habitat, but also on social facilitation. Thus even if a single pair migrated another 530 km to Rock Island lake, it might not breed on its own.

The status of the colony of Black Terns at Blind Lake appears unchanged since it was first discovered in 1996. The exact location of the nesting colony in 2003 was about 2.5 km northeast of the location of the 1996 colony. This underscores the importance of the entire zone of emergent vegetation on Blind Lake, as the colony may be located at different sites from year to year.

Acknowledgments

Mary Morrison and Ted Neufeld kindly provided information on previous sightings of amphibians, and generously loaned a boat to the field crew.

Species observed at Blind Lake, Yukon, 26-28 June 2003.

Pacific Loon	Three-toed Woodpecker
Common Loon	Northern Flicker
Horned Grebe	Olive-sided Flycatcher
Red-necked Grebe	Alder Flycatcher
Trumpeter Swan	Blue-headed Vireo
American Wigeon	Warbling Vireo
Mallard	Gray Jay
Northern Pintail	Common Raven
Green-winged Teal	Tree Swallow
Ring-necked Duck	Violet-green Swallow
Lesser Scaup	Bank Swallow
Surf Scoter	Boreal Chickadee
White-winged Scoter	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Bufflehead	Swainson's Thrush
Common Goldeneye	Hermit Thrush
Barrow's Goldeneye	American Robin
Red-breasted Merganser	Bohemian Waxwing
Bald Eagle	Tennessee Warbler
Peregrine Falcon	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Ruffed Grouse	Common Yellowthroat
Spruce Grouse	Chipping Sparrow
Sora	Lincoln's Sparrow
Lesser Yellowlegs	Dark-eyed Junco
Solitary Sandpiper	Red-winged Blackbird
Wilson's Snipe	Rusty Blackbird
Mew Gull	White-winged Crossbill
Black Tern	Pine Siskin
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Little Brown Bat
Hairy Woodpecker	Wood Frog

Literature Cited

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- Eckert, C.D. 1996. Blind Lake's Black Terns. Yukon Warbler 4(2): 10-11.
- Sinclair, P.H. 1997. Songbird reconnaissance of selected sites in southeast Yukon, 1996. Yukon Warbler 5(3): 10-12.

Birds of Spring

Photos by Jeanette McCrie

Spring birds in their finest breeding plumages. These images, along with Jeanette's magnificent cover photo of a Yellow-rumped Warbler are inspirational reminders of the joys of birding. It is about exploring rich ecosystems, basking in the beauty of remarkable creatures, and often enjoying the company of friends or family. Spring is the time to go out, and go often.



Count-clockwise from top:

An adult **Mew Gull** at the Takhini pond along McIntyre Creek on May 3, 2003.

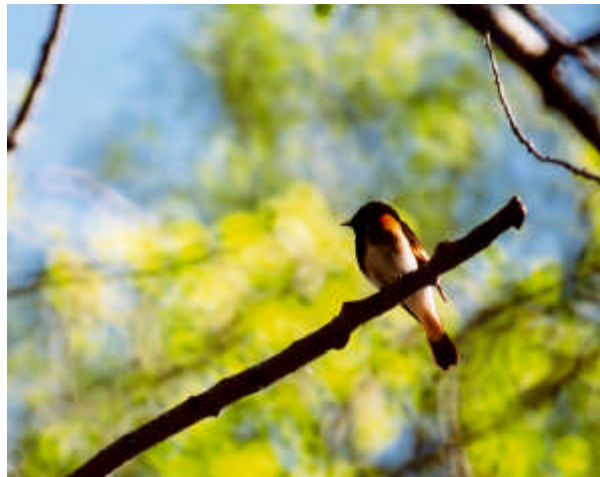
A **Greater Yellowlegs** shows its gently up-curved bill and heavily barred flanks at Lewes Marsh on May 19, 2002.

A **Pine Siskin** at McIntyre Creek wetland on May 10, 2003.

An **Arctic Tern** sits tight on its nest at Judas Creek on May 27, 2003.



Counter-clockwise from top: A flight of **Pectoral Sandpipers** at Lewes Marsh, May 19, 2003; An adult **White-crowned Sparrow** at McIntyre Creek wetland, May 4, 2003; An adult **Bonaparte's Gull** at Lewes Marsh, May 19, 2002.; An adult male **American Redstart**, a summer rarity, along the Yukon River trail, June 14, 2003; An adult **Golden-crowned Sparrow** at McIntyre Creek, May 18, 2003.



Going, going, gone? The precipitous decline of Yukon Rock Doves: a conservation warning for our Native birds

Cameron D. Eckert

Rock Dove is now Rock Pigeon according to the American Ornithological Union, the official body which rules on changes to bird names and taxonomic order. But it's a change that might not matter for much longer in the Yukon. The Territory's only established breeding population of Rock Pigeons, located in downtown Whitehorse, sits at the very edge of extirpation. While Whitehorse residents think of pigeons as a common sight, the species has all but vanished in recent years.

How far have the numbers fallen?

The Whitehorse Rock Pigeon population rose through the early 1990s reaching record high numbers during 1995 to 1997 (Sinclair et al. 2003). High totals on the Whitehorse Christmas Bird Count for that period were 468 on December 26, 1995; and 456 on December 26, 1997. This changed in 1998 when the numbers started to drop. The subsequent Christmas Count data shows a rapid decline. During the fall and winter of 2003/04, a few birders have kept close track of their numbers. On October 21, 2003 a complete count of the population totaled 42 birds. Then the 2003 Whitehorse Christmas Bird Count turned up just one pigeon. Just as this article was going to print, parts of one of the few remaining pigeons were found scattered outside the roost site; clearly torn apart and eaten by a raptor. As of April 2004, there are four or fewer surviving pigeons.

How did this happen?

There appear to be two factors that turned the tables for Rock Pigeons in Whitehorse. During the early 1990s through 1997, the pigeons enjoyed an exceptionally generous feeding station downtown with large quantities of seed made available on a daily basis. This likely accounted for the



The door may be closing for Yukon Rock Pigeons: three of Whitehorse's remaining pigeons at their downtown roost on October 12, 2003. Photo Cameron D. Eckert

Whitehorse Christmas Bird Count (Dec. 26) totals for Rock Pigeon	
Year	Total
1990	133
1991	100
1992	120
1993	233
1994	400
1995	468
1996	350
1997	456
1998	32
1999	72
2000	101
2001	38
2002	36
2003	1

rise in numbers during that period. In spring 1998, that feeding station was discontinued. However, there were and still are numerous other feeders available to pigeons in downtown Whitehorse. The change in food supply would have likely resulted in a plateau, but not a drastic plunge in population. That is, were it not for at least one resident Northern Goshawk for which Rock Pigeon has become the prey of choice. In May 1998, downtown Whitehorse was awash in pigeon feathers. Main Street was littered with little bits of pigeon. In fact, one day while birding along the Yukon River trail, I raised my binoculars to check an odd waterbird in the middle of the river only to see a freshly dead pigeon being swept downstream. While the initial onslaught may have been the work of a Peregrine Falcon, it has been a regular event to see a Northern Goshawk chasing down pigeons in Whitehorse. There were also reports that a few Common Ravens had taken to attacking and eating pigeons.

Why would anyone care?

In North America, the Rock Pigeon is an introduced non-native species that was brought to the continent over 100 years ago. It now inhabits most North American cities, towns, and rural areas. There is no conservation interest in the species, nor should there be. Yet, the Whitehorse Rock Pigeon population demonstrates how fast and how far a species can decline. This decline was apparently set off by relatively small changes in a couple of factors integral to the health of the population. A similar story has been told by the introduced population of Crested Mynas in Vancouver, B.C., which numbered up to 20,000 in the 1920s, and has now all but disappeared (Campbell et al. 1997). The imminent “extinction” of the Yukon’s Rock Pigeons serves as a compelling illustration that the survival of small populations of any species is precarious at best, and that even our common species require watchful attention.

Biologists have been encouraged by recent population increases for the critically endangered Whooping Crane, which numbers 189 according to the most recent population count (US Fish and Wildlife Service, news release December 12, 2003). Likewise, the most recent Kirtland’s Warbler survey found a slight rise in numbers

with 1,202 singing males (Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources, news release July 30, 2003). But still, a single event such as an oil spill or hurricane could be disastrous for such species. The plight of endangered species is clear, but what about our common Yukon birds? Rusty Blackbird is known as a common and widespread breeder throughout much of the Yukon, but for how much longer? This species has shown steep population declines of up to 90% across its North American range (Greenberg and Droege 1999). Similarly, the familiar “*quick-three-beer*” song of the Olive-sided Flycatcher is becoming alarmingly less familiar with significant population declines, particularly in the west (DeSante and George 1994). Also common in the Yukon, and also in decline are Lesser Yellowlegs (Morrison 2001), and American Kestrel (Mossop 2003). Our common species are disappearing before our eyes, and our rare species could wink out without notice. We require the highest order of vigilance, combined with aggressive and effective habitat conservation if these species are to have any chance of long-term survival.

Literature Cited

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Yukon Christmas Bird Count Report – 2003/04



Winter holds its grip on the St. Elias Range. Photo Cameron D. Eckert

Yukon Overview

Helmut Grünberg

Would you believe that we saw 32 bird species on this year's winter counts? Did you even know there are that many birds here in winter? Well, that's one of the results of this season's Christmas Bird Counts. When the last migrants had left and a long stretch ahead of us before most of the birds would return, this mid-winter birding event was enjoyed by all participants. A total of 86 birdwatchers came out to locate birds in their respective Count Circles (48 km diameter). Cameron Eckert and Bruce Bennett actually participated in two Counts. These Christmas Bird Counts are being held all over North America, but not too many experience such extreme weather conditions as we do in the Yukon. We had six Count Circles this year, welcoming Carcross as a brand-new Christmas Bird Count. We wish Dan Kemble and his friends much success in the years to come. When you walk through the Yukon winter landscape, you may see a bird here and a few calling over there and 20 at a feeder. On the Christmas Bird Count, we went out in many groups and found 3635 birds over the count days! The most common species

was the Bird of the Yukon, the Common Raven with 1330, mostly on the strength of Whitehorse, which recorded 875 ravens. Next in line was the Pine Grosbeak with 925. The highest number (324) was seen on the Marsh Lake/Yukon River count. Common Redpolls followed with 503 individuals; Haines Junction and Whitehorse tied with 144 for highest count. Next was Black-capped Chickadee with 183; Carcross led with 54. Other species which had counts over 100 were Black-billed Magpie (131) and Boreal Chickadee (124).

We often enjoy those "other" birds that are not commonly seen in winter: Whitehorse had 12 Mallards, a rare winter duck. For a couple of years there has been a female Barrow's Goldeneye in Whitehorse in winter, and one was also seen during the Christmas Bird Count. Mayo recorded the only two Northern Goshawks. Haines Junction identified the only ptarmigan species: one Willow and three White-tailed Ptarmigan. Rock Pigeons have dramatically declined in Whitehorse in the last years and months. We wonder whether the one bird seen during the Count was the last one ever on a Yukon Christmas Bird Count? There were two Great Horned Owls in Haines Junction and one in Watson Lake. Haines Junction saw

four different woodpeckers: two Downy, an amazing 11 Hairy and eight American Three-toed Woodpeckers and the only Black-backed Woodpecker of all the Counts. Whitehorse reported a Northern Shrike, rare in winter in the Yukon. During its inaugural Christmas Bird Count, Carcross observers found the only two Mountain Chickadees and claimed the chickadee "Grand Slam": Black-capped, Mountain and Boreal Chickadees. Surprisingly, Haines Junction reported the only two Red-breasted Nuthatches. Whitehorse observers recorded a high number of 76 Bohemian Waxwings, the only ones recorded during Count Day. Four Snow Buntings in Haines Junction were the only ones reported in any of the six Christmas Bird Counts.

In the following sections, we will hear from the six compilers with reports on their Counts:

Marsh Lake-Yukon River – Dec 21, 2003

Helmut Grünberg

At day break, 12 birders met at the Yukon River bridge by Lewes Marsh to hope for an interesting birding day ahead. We went out in seven groups and walked, drove or skied in seven different directions to find as many birds as possible. In addition, several people watched the birding scene from behind windows at their feeders. The temperature was quite pleasant, between -4 to -14C. The morning was nearly calm, but in the afternoon the wind picked up considerably and made bird observations quite a challenge because birds would hide and birders sometimes would have liked to hide. At lunch we all met at Swan Haven. Thanks go again to the Wildlife Viewing Program and Bruce Bennett who had pre-warmed the building and made us all comfortable when we were sharing our stories from the morning. After lunch, a reduced group of birders fanned out again to go into areas that had not been covered yet to get that last bird on a road or near the river. We came up with a record 619 birds (previous high: 588) of 15 species plus 3 more species during the Count Week (three days before and three days after the Count Day). It turned out that we saw the highest ever number of Pine Grosbeaks with 324 (previous high: 244). Surprisingly, the two American Dippers we

observed were the highest since 1979, the beginning of this Count. We also saw the most Gray Jays with 30 (previous high: 21). Checking the results, it was interesting to note that we actually saw more Black-billed Magpies (35) than Common Ravens (33) despite the fact that the Marsh Lake dump was visited by one group, but 35 magpies was one less than the previous record of 36. Four Downy Woodpeckers were record high (previous high: 2). All three woodpeckers expected in the area in winter were seen: Downy, Hairy and American Three-toed Woodpecker (formerly "Three-toed" and before that "Northern Three-toed Woodpecker"- this is now the longest Yukon bird name). On the other hand, only 8 White-winged Crossbills were seen, a far cry from the record 211 in 1995. I want to thank all the participants who came out to make this a very nice mid-winter birding event!

Participants: Mike Beauregard, Bruce Bennett, Liz Doekle (count week), Cameron Eckert, Helmut Grünberg, Peter Heebink (field observations and feeder), Gladis Hudsel (feeder), Jocelyn McDowell (field observations and feeder), Wendy Nixon, Clive Osborne, Doug Philips (field observations and feeder), Lisa Snyder, Dale Stokes (field observations and feeder), Betty Sutton, Thalina Tchulokovsky (feeder), Elsie Wain (count week), Florence Wright (feeder).

Whitehorse – December 26, 2003

Wendy Nixon

The Whitehorse count was held coordinated by Wendy Nixon and Jim Hawkings. Eighteen enthusiastic observers braved the cold and wind to get a look at a grand total of 22 species including Common and Barrow's goldeneye, a Northern Shrike, and a record low number of Rock Pigeons. Only one lone Rock Pigeon was counted. Pine Grosbeaks were abundant; a total of 261 were counted, while Red Crossbill was absent. The survivors of the north wind enjoyed a wonderful pot luck supper at Jim and Beth Hawkings house after the sun went down.

Participants: Diana Mulloy, Barbara Robertson, Syd and Sue Cannings, Gerry Quarton, Jim, Lee, and Adrian Hawkings, Scott Heron, Cameron Eckert, Pam Sinclair, Nigel Sinclair-Eckert, Cynthia Onions, Debbie Van de Wetering, Don Russell, Kyle Russell, Dave Mossop, Bruce Bennett.



Common Redpolls were well represented on all Yukon Christmas Counts this year. Photo by C.D. Eckert

Mayo – December 29, 2003

Mark O'Donoghue

We completed our CBC as scheduled, but a number of factors conspired to not make it our best. Illness diminished our usual fairly modest-sized crew. More importantly though, despite the weatherman's continued insistence that there was only a 40% chance of flurries moving in the afternoon (a story they stuck with all day despite the evidence), it snowed for 2 days straight starting at 06:00 of Count Day. Most birds just seemed to stay put, and we really had to search out those that we did find. Our feeder watchers noted very low numbers of birds compared to what they usually get and, in about 5-1/2 hours of walking by field crews, we saw no chickadees! Owls were likewise silent. We did make a few interesting observations though. Highlights were 2 Dark-eyed Juncos that have stayed around so far this winter at a local feeder, an American Dipper on the Mayo River below the powerhouse (second year in a row for this), and

Northern Goshawks seen in 2 different places (one of these noted when it tried to make a meal of my daughter's fur mitts!). Our totals are as follows: 2 Northern Goshawks, 1 Hairy Woodpecker, 6 Gray Jays, 189 Common Ravens, 6 Black-capped Chickadees, 1 Boreal Chickadee, 1 Downy Woodpecker, 1 American Dipper, 2 Dark-eyed Juncos, 13 Common Redpolls, and 5 unidentified redpolls. So, alas, only 9 species, and we were lucky to get that. Other Count Week species are Ruffed Grouse (first year we've missed these on the Count), Pine Grosbeak (few of these this year compared to previous years, but still regular feeder visitors), and Hoary Redpoll. There are very few spruce cones this year in the Mayo area and also very few crossbills, quite a contrast to last year! The weather was warming from -28C in the morning to -19C in the afternoon (it was -38C at midnight), cloudy and light snow all day, and a NE wind varying from calm to about 5 kmh.

Participants: Jim Carmichael, Shann Carmichael, Jean Gordon, Ina Mae Klippert, Mark O'Donoghue, Molly O'Donoghue, Susan Stuart.

Haines Junction – December 29, 2003

Suzanne and David Henry

A good turn out of 19 people enjoyed a pot-luck hosted by Ken and Libby Anderson. Weather: Day started out -30C, calm, 90% cloud cover. By 5 pm it was -20C, but by 10 pm Chinook winds had blown in and it was -4C with gusts up to 20 kmh. 45 cm of snow on the ground in the forest openings. 20 species of birds and 602 individuals were recorded. Interesting sightings included: 1 American Dipper, 4 Snow Buntings, 1 Dark-eyed Junco, 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches, 3 White-tailed Ptarmigans. Most common were Common Redpoll was (144), Pine Grosbeak (140), and Common Raven (101). Great Horned Owl (2) was the only owl. Northern Goshawk (2) was the only hawk, and it was recorded only during count week. On count day, 80% of the Black-capped Chickadees (37 out of 46) were recorded at feeders, but only 13% of Boreal Chickadees (3 out of 23) were at feeders. Thanks to all who participated in this year's count!

Participants: Rick and Daniel Staley, Andrew and Rosemary Lawrence, David and Darlene Sillery, Bob and Caroline Hayes, Wolf Riedl, Lloyd Freese, Brent Liddle, Terry Skjonsberg, Todd Heakes, Libby and Ken Anderson, Millie Hall, Colleen Bunn, Suzanne and David Henry.

Watson Lake – December 31, 2003

Ted Murphy-Kelly

This year's Count was rather uneventful. Temperatures were -16C to -18C. The cloud ceiling was very low at the beginning of the day making visibility very poor. It finally cleared in the afternoon. Ted and Pierre's Albert Creek walk was cut short due to Pierre being suddenly struck by severe stomach flu. There were four feeder counts and five groups in the field. A short owl survey on the lower Robert Campbell turned up a Great Horned Owl, and Gord Dumas saw a large owl during his walk but was unable to identify it to species. Pine Grosbeak numbers were good and redpolls turned up at feeders much earlier this year. The get-together at Hollie and Ted's afterwards was well attended, and much fun was had playing the birding trivia board game.

Participants: Joyce Armstrong, Lorne Armstrong, Brett Cove, Tom Cove, Zuneza Cove, Gord Dumas, Renelle

Guenette, Cora Kelly, Pierre Martin, Linda McDonald, Barb Millen, George Millen, Kyla Millen, Trevor Millen, Hollie Murphy-Kelly, Ted Murphy-Kelly, Ulla Rembe, Jenny Skelton, John Skelton, Jayson Strudwick, Lori Strudwick.

Carcross – January 2, 2004

Dan Kemble

Our first official CBC, dubbed "Carcross pR²", began with a coffee-fuelled feeder watch while teams touched base by phone and the sun struggled with a frigid morning. Partially inspired by "Birds of the Yukon Territory's" revelations that the Carcross area has been a birdwatching Mecca since the 1800's, we hope to contribute to this wonderful tradition. Congratulations to all who've made the Christmas Counts and especially the makers of the aforementioned book. We decided on a spot near the Nares Lake Narrows (where Nares runs into Tagish Lake) for our centre point. This gains the outlet of Lime Lake in Striker's Pass, almost guaranteeing dippers. However, no one went there, nor did any of us head up Montana Mountain for ptarmigan and Blue Grouse. The temperature ranged from -27 to -24 this day, and the alpine looked windy. We hate to admit it, but most of our birding took place around town. Ed and Dot (Ed Lishman, Dorothy Gibbon) scoped out the North Wind Birds, or Pine Grosbeaks and chickadees around their turf - the airstrip and Grayling Bay. They hit a few hot spots on the outskirts of town but only saw a few corvids. Team U.S.A. (Brian and Anita LaFont) bagged us the first Common Redpolls at their feeder near the Train Bridge. I had dangled the plum post of the local dump before them when trying to lure the LaFonts in, and they went for it ...18 ravens! Dan² (Dan Patterson, Dan Kemble) toured Bennett Beach and Natasaheeni River bagging some grosbeaks and chickadees and almost double-dipping on Team U.S.A.'s redpolls. No wintering ducks in the river today although Anita had seen one yesterday. We spent an hour around the home of Mary Ann Roy - the Mother Theresa of our local bird world. Here there are a dozen well-stocked feeders and we counted 18 Pine Grosbeaks, some redpolls and a bunch of chickadees. I hung around the flocks of Black-caps until finally being rewarded with a single Boreal Chickadee. We took a walk on the frozen

Watson River out by Spirit Lake. Got cold, had a nice hike, saw no birds. Rick Halladay spent the day with a couple of young ladies (Mica and Gwen) out around Willie Kleedehn's dog farm. We called their team Chicks 'n' Rick with apologies to the gender sensitivity out there. They saw the usual corvids - Gray Jays, Common Ravens and Black-billed Magpies, but nothing else. Rick drove home late that night. He called it "owling"; we called it "overstaying his welcome". Sucker Bay Jim (Jim Borisenko) scoured the Sucker Bay area (Tagish Lake near the mouth of Windy Arm) with a friend. They saw more of the same. However, included in their observations was something which even got a reaction from the usually unflappable Cam Eckert - a chickadee

Grand Slam! Yes, Jim had a couple of Mountain Chickadees grace his feeder along with the resident Boreals and Black-caps. Way to go Jim!

Conclusion ... our premier Carcross Christmas Bird Count highlighted the obvious - the scarcity of birdlife on a cold winter's day in the Boreal mountains of the Yukon. Regardless, we enjoyed ourselves, and it's satisfying to be able to contribute to the bigger picture. My thanks to those mentioned for taking part and to the folks out there who make the Yukon Bird Club tick and the Christmas Count a reality.

Participants: Jim Borisenko, Dorothy Gibbon, Rick Halladay & Mica & Gwen, Dan Kemble, Anita LaFont, Brian LaFont, Ed Lishman, Dan Patterson, Barb Ried.

Yukon Christmas Bird Count 2003/04: Totals for all species, and those seen during count week (cw).							
Species	Marsh Lk Dec 21	Whitehorse Dec 26	Haines Jnt Dec 29	Mayo Dec 29	Carcross Jan 2	Watson Lk Dec 31	Total
Mallard		12					12
Common Goldeneye	3	1					4
Barrow's Goldeneye		1					1
Common Merganser	3	cw					3
merganser sp.		1					1
Bald Eagle		2					2
Northern Goshawk		cw	cw	2			2
Ruffed Grouse	2	1	1	cw			4
Spruce Grouse	cw	1					1
Willow Ptarmigan			1				1
White-tailed Ptarmigan			3				3
ptarmigan sp.	cw		2				2
Great Horned Owl			2			1	3
owl sp.						1	1
Rock Pigeon		1					1
Downy Woodpecker	4	4	2	1		1	12
Hairy Woodpecker	2	4	11	1		6	24
Am. Three-toed Woodpecker	1		8		cw		9
Black-backed Woodpecker			1				1
Northern Shrike		1					1
Gray Jay	30	15	17	6	5	7	80
Black-billed Magpie	35	64	17		15		131
Common Raven	33	875	101	189	24	108	1330
Black-capped Chickadee	43	19	46	6	54	15	183
Mountain Chickadee					2		2
Boreal Chickadee	78	14	23	1	4	4	124
chickadee sp.		18					18
Red-breasted Nuthatch			2				2
American Dipper	2	4	1	1			8
Bohemian Waxwing	cw	76					76
Dark-eyed Junco			1	2			3
Snow Bunting			4				4
Pine Grosbeak	324	261	140	cw	82	118	925
White-winged Crossbill	6	5					11
Common Redpoll	45	144	144	13	34	123	503
Hoary Redpoll		4	2	cw			6
redpoll sp.	8	55	73	5			141
Total	619	1583	602	227	220	384	3635

First Nation Mythology and Creation Stories

Compiled by Marylene Jules

Coyote and Eagle steal light, but cause winter

The following is from the Zuni tribe in the southwestern United States:

Coyote and Eagle are hunting together when Coyote complains that it is too dark to find food. Coyote then suggests they travel to the west to find light. While trying to cross a river, which Eagle easily flies over, Coyote almost drowns.

One day, they come across the Kachina Village, where the Kachina have light in a box. The Kachina open the box when they want light. Coyote and Eagle borrow the box.

Eagle carries the box. Coyote argues that Eagle, as Chief, should not have to carry the box. Eventually, Eagle lets Coyote carry the box. Curious, Coyote hides and opens the box.

The sun and moon escape. As they leave, they take the Earth's heat with them up to the sky. This is why there is winter.

Gill, Sam D. and Sullivan, Irene E. 1992. Dictionary of Native American Mythology. Oxford University Press. New York. 55.

Feathery Facts

Salt water ducks have specialized salt glands above each eye. Excess salt is picked up by the duck's blood and carried to the salt glands. The concentrated salt solution moves by way of ducts to the nostrils where it is excreted.

O'Claire, Rita M.; Armstrong, Robert H.; Carstensen, Richard. 1997. The Nature of Southeast Alaska. Alaska Northwest Books. Anchorage. 120.

Canada's first Bluethroat nest and other noteworthy sightings from Ivvavik National Park, Yukon

Cameron D. Eckert and Bruce Mactavish

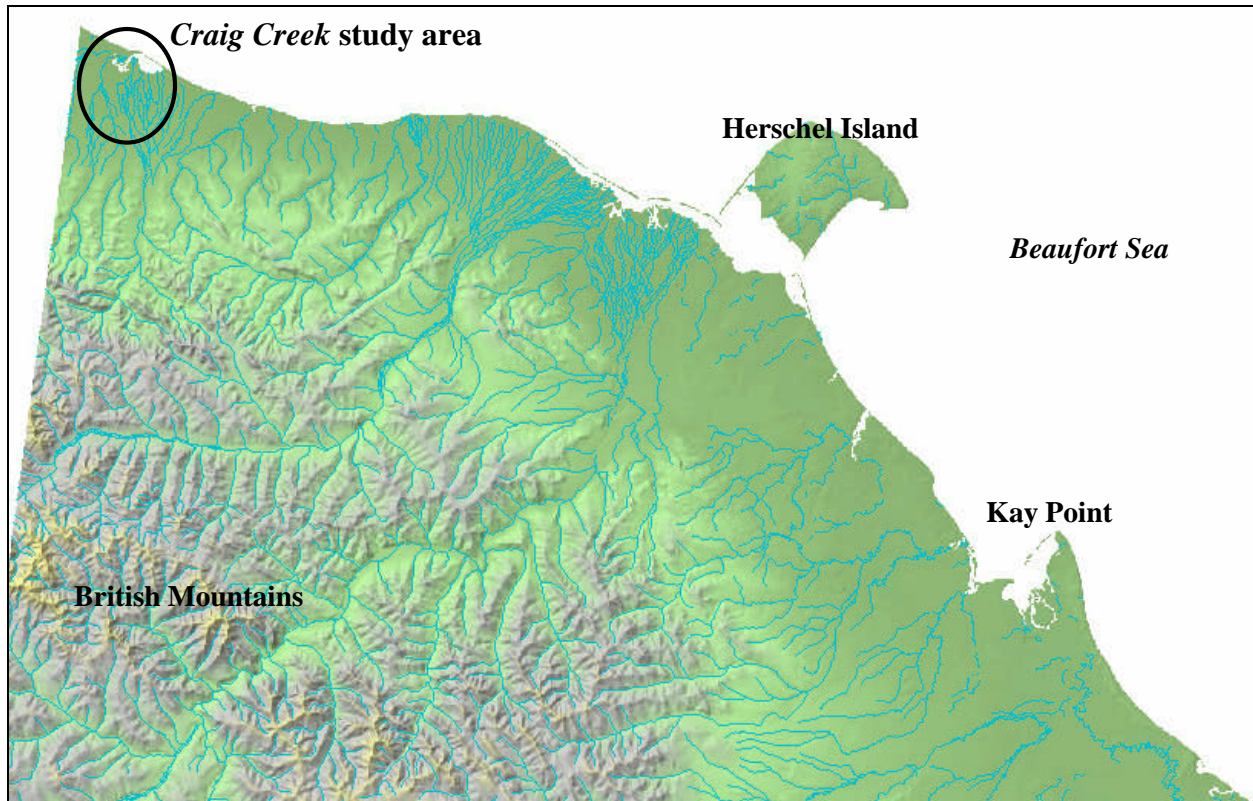


Home of the Bluethroat – Craig Creek, Ivvavik National Park, Yukon. June 25, 2003. Photo by C.D. Eckert

On June 22, 2003 the list of species thought to breed in Canada, but not yet confirmed became one shorter with the discovery of Canada's first Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* nest on the Yukon's North Slope. The Bluethroat is an Old World thrush that winters in Southeast Asia and breeds widely across western and northern Alaska. It was first recorded in Canada on June 9, 1973 at the upper Babbage River on the Yukon's North Slope (Taylor et al. 1974). The subsequent 3 decades provided 16 more records from rivers across the Yukon's North Slope, including 15 males, and a single fleeting observation of a female (Sinclair et al. 2003). The *Birds of the Yukon Territory* noted that a confirmed breeding record for Bluethroat "would constitute a significant event in Canada's ornithological history" (Sinclair et al. 2003). On June 25, 2003 our team of 5, sponsored by the Canadian Wildlife Service, flew 320 km northwest from Inuvik, NWT to Craig Creek in Ivvavik National Park at the far western edge of the Yukon's North Slope.

On board were Cameron Eckert, Bruce Mactavish, Brian Bell, Erin Spiewak, and Judy Selamio from Aklavik, NWT. We shared camp and numerous adventures with Teresa Earl and Fritz Mueller, a writer-photographer team from Whitehorse. At the heart of this 19 day research expedition to learn more about the region's breeding bird communities, was the quest to find Canada's first Bluethroat nest.

That 30 years had passed between Canada's first Bluethroat sighting and the first nest highlights both the furtive nature of the species, and the remoteness of the landscape it inhabits. This area is well beyond the reach of all but the most experienced and well-provisioned guided trips. Craig Creek flows a course of about 25 km from the British Mountains north across the Coastal Plain into Clarence Lagoon on the Beaufort Sea. The Coastal Plain is relatively compressed in this area, with the mountains only about 14 km from the coast, and our camp on the east fork of Craig Creek was about mid-way across.



Map showing the study area location at the far northwestern edge of the Yukon's North Slope.

The convergence of mountains, rivers, tundra, and coast creates an environment of awesome beauty. We chose this location as it had the highest number of Bluethroat observations (6) during landbird surveys conducted at four main rivers across the Yukon's Coastal Plain in June 1992-93. As well, the area features numerous other rare Yukon breeders such as Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*, and Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*.

Our approach was to survey the major creeks for singing Bluethroats and then follow up with intensive observations of territorial males while watching for females and signs of nesting. Every day became a walking marathon as we routinely covered distances of 20 km, and on a few epic days staggered back to camp having completed a 40 km trek. By June 19, we had found 8 male Bluethroats all located in streamside willow thickets inland from our camp. Typically, these willow thickets ranged from 0.5 to 1.5 m in height, with a mix of open areas, and some fairly impenetrable dense stands. Taller willows, up to 2 m, scattered throughout were used for singing perches. The Bluethroat's song is a birding trip in

itself. It displays uncanny mimicry skills as it strings together the songs and calls of an amazing array of species including American Golden-Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*, Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus mutus*, Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*, Yellow Wagtail, White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*, redpoll *Carduelis* sp., and Arctic Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus parryii* to name a few. All this, together with a lively song flight, and a brilliant iridescent blue throat makes for an exceptionally charismatic bird.

On June 22, we began extended vigils at Bluethroat territories, and the very first day proved to be an immensely rewarding one. It was late in the day and there was little song activity by the time we arrived at the southernmost Bluethroat territory on the west fork of Craig Creek. As we watched the willow thickets and walked quietly through the brush, CE spotted a female Bluethroat hopping from branch to branch but sticking close to an opening in the willows. We knew such opportunities would be rare, and were determined not to let this one slip away.

While BM watched the female, CE and ES retreated to a good vantage point. As soon as BM left the spot, the female disappeared into the willows. With a fix on that location we returned in time to see the female skulking away. Moments later a wave of euphoria broke as CE spotted the nest, a finely constructed grass cup containing 6 bluish-green eggs, on the side of a low bank at the edge of the willows. We minimized disturbance of the nesting pair, staying only long enough to record habitat measurements, take documentary photographs, and periodically check on the progress of the nest. On a subsequent visit to the site, the female showed her secretive side as she moused quietly off the nest while we were still 35 m away, and did not reappear. On our last visit to the nest, on July 2, the pair was busily feeding their 6 newly hatched young.

The discovery of a Bluethroat nest relatively early in the trip eased the pressure of achieving one of our primary goals. A good thing, as there would be many surprises to enjoy. On June 25, we arrived at the west branch of Craig Creek to see a largish blackbird with a relatively long tail sitting atop a tall willow. The silhouette was familiar to a few in our group, but not one expected in this Arctic environment. A closer view confirmed that it was a female Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula*, apparently the first recorded in the Beaufort Sea region (Johnson and Herter 1989). It showed a heavy black bill, black legs, pale yellow eye, and its dull iridescent blue head contrasted with a brown body. Perhaps not an exciting species for most Canadian birders, but at nearly 1,400 km beyond its breeding range, this was something like a Scott's Oriole *Icterus spurious* turning up in Winnipeg.

We established a routine of morning Bluethroat watches, followed by searches of the willows and other habitats, as the song activity dropped off. On June 28, CE was deep in the willows and heard a "junco-like trill", a sound we had listened for keenly from the start and not because we were hoping to see a junco. BM was out on the adjacent tundra about a kilometre away, when he received the call via hand-held radio. Moments later CE spotted a small green warbler emerge briefly from the willows confirming that a "Yukon mega" was in our midsts. BM made record time across the tundra.



Top to bottom: i) A male Bluethroat surveys its territory, Craig Creek area, Yukon, June 24, 2003 (Cameron D. Eckert). ii) **Canada's first Bluethroat nest** – Craig Creek, Yukon, June 22, 2003 (Cameron D. Eckert). iii) The female Bluethroat at her nest site, Craig Creek, Yukon, June 22, 2003 (Bruce Mactavish).



Canada's second documented Arctic Warbler – Craig Creek area, Yukon, June 28, 2003. The conspicuous yellowish supercilium and short white wing bar are diagnostic for this species. Photos by Cameron D. Eckert

This bird appeared to be on the move, darting from willow to willow feeding actively and pausing occasionally to sing. Over the next three hours we snatched good views and poor photos of its conspicuous buffy-yellow supercilium and dark eyeline, short white wing bar, plain olive green crown, back, wings and tail, whitish throat, with a pale yellow wash across the breast and flanks, and warbler-like bill – dark at the tip with a pale base. Its call was a harsh ‘zrit’, and its trilling song was about 12 notes long varying in pitch and quality from rich to flat and metallic. We enthusiastically answered a question that BM had posed back in April 2003 – “Do you think Arctic Warbler [*Phylloscopus borealis*] is a possibility on the Yukon coast?” with a resounding yes! This Arctic Warbler looked brighter and greener than is illustrated in some field guides (e.g. Jonsson 1992), being most similar to the illustration of a “bright adult” in Sibley (2000). Our bird’s relatively small bill suggested that it was likely *P. b. kennicotti*, the subspecies found in Alaska (see Jantunen 2003). It had been 54 years since Canada’s only previous documented record of the species; one collected at Mould Bay, Prince Patrick Island, NWT on July

21, 1949 (Godfrey 1986). Sinclair et al. (2003) listed this species as hypothetical in the Yukon based on Biota Consultants’ (1995) report of an “unconfirmed” sighting of 2 birds in the Firth River area on July 19, 1995.

The tingle of excitement over the Arctic Warbler was still very fresh; in fact the day was not yet over, when Craig Creek unveiled its next avian treasure. A midnight dash across the tundra was prompted by a strange song, a hoarse double-phrase ‘tulip-tulip’, heard by BM near camp, then an unfamiliar bird showing rust in its tail seen near our cook tent by BB, and finally a high flying *Turdus* thrush, apparently headed to its night roost, calling a somewhat squeaky ‘crk-crk-crk’ or ‘du-du-du’ heard by CE along with BM and BB. These meager fragments suggested that the bird could be an Eye-browed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*, or Dusky Thrush *Turdus naumanni*, although it could still be explained away as an abnormal American Robin *Turdus migratorius*. The sprint across the tundra proved unsuccessful, and the story might have ended there, but on July 1 at 06:30 hrs as BM was crawling out of his tent he heard the same squeaky toy ‘crk-crk-crk’ and saw a robin-like bird fly up out of the willows and

head westward. Later in the morning CE heard the hoarse ‘tulip-tulip’ at the original location, and with BM spotted a robin-sized *Turdus* thrush sitting on a willow as the source of the strange song. It proved to be an amazingly elusive bird, especially as it was locked in a wide-ranging battling with a couple of American Robins and never sat long enough for a photo. Finally, both CE and BM were able to “lock on” for a good view. First, CE had an excellent rear view noting its long creamy-white supercilium and malar extending around the sides of the neck and framing the black cheek. It showed a dark brown crown, back and tail with a rust-coloured tail base. In flight, it flashed rufous-golden underwings, almost translucent towards the primaries. Then it flew straight at BM, passing just overhead and providing a brief yet fantastic view. BM noted a bird the size and shape of a robin, with a distinct blackish solid patch in the cheek area, white underparts with much black blotching and markings lacking a distinct overall pattern but concentrated on the upper chest and flanks. The overall impression of the body from the underside was white with heavy black markings, and no red at all. In contrast to the white and black underparts were the reddish wings. The primaries and secondaries on the upper side were a shiny coppery-red, almost metallic in the sun. The reddish colour was in stark contrast to the rest of the dull colours on the bird. The reddish was

visible on the upper side of the wing during down flaps. BM’s arms-raised, victory call of “Dusky Thrush” crystallized this precious birding moment. This established the Yukon’s second documented record for the species (see Eckert 2001). There is at least one other record from the Beaufort Sea region, at Barrow, Alaska on June 16, 1971 (Pitelka 1974, Johnson and Herter 1989).

This account is already long, and it only stirs the surface of the innumerable ecological spectacles we encountered. Every day of this trip was immersed in a sense of anticipation and discovery. During our stay at Craig Creek we recorded 80 species of birds, with confirmed breeding records for 32 species. The birdlife was distinctly Arctic with all 4 Yukon loons, King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*, Common Eider *S. mollissima*, all 3 jaegers, Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*, Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*, Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria*, Willow Ptarmigan *Lagopus lagopus*, Rock Ptarmigan *L. mutus*, Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*, Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*, and Hoary Redpoll *C. hornemanni*. Nest-finding highlights, other than the Bluethroat, included Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Wandering Tattler *Heteroscelus incanus*, Ruddy Turnstone, Baird’s Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*, Smith’s Longspur *Calcarius pictus*, and 3 Yellow Wagtail nests. Our final Bluethroat tally was 8-10 males, 2 females, and one nest.

The Yukon’s third **Common Grackle** – a female at Craig Creek, Yukon on June 25, 2003.
Photo by Cameron D. Eckert



Conservation biologists describe wilderness based on the presence of wide ranging species such as Barren-ground Caribou *Rangifer tarandus* and top-level carnivores such as Grizzly Bears *Ursus arctos*. At Craig Creek we witnessed the awesome migration of the massive Porcupine Caribou herd as the thousands of cows and their tiny calves moved from the birthing grounds to summer feeding areas. Each day during this movement, we

gave a wide berth to Grizzly Bears wandering up the creeks, or lying in wait in the willows for a stream-side caribou ambush. Ivvavik National Park is wilderness on the grandest of scales. The smaller and less common species, such as Bluethroat and Yellow Wagtail may not be considered “ecosystem drivers”, but they are also integral to the character and diversity of these Arctic ecosystems.



Northern wilderness – thousands of Porcupine Caribou on the move from their birthing grounds to summer feeding range. Craig Creek, Ivvavik National Park, Yukon, June 30, 2003. Photo by Cameron D. Eckert

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Birding among Bluethroats

Photos by Cameron D. Eckert

Spectacular landscapes, charismatic birds and wildlife, and rich floral blooms are all part of life at Craig Creek in Ivvavik National Park. It is a place of unlimited natural experiences where every day is anticipated with a sense of discovery. It is a true wilderness so obviously deserving of our Country's highest order of conservation and habitat protection.



Counter-clockwise from top:

A dark-morph **Parasitic Jaeger** patrols its nesting grounds at Clarence Lagoon on June 27, 2003.

A spectacular bloom of ***Polemonium acutiflorum*** at Craig Creek on July 2, 2003.

The worldwide population of **Wandering Tattlers** numbers just 10,000; this species was one of our nest finding highlights at Craig Creek on June 22, 2003.





Clockwise from top:

Two female **King Eiders** trail two female **Common Eiders** at Clarence Lagoon on June 30, 2003.

A male **Yellow Wagtail** surveys its territory at Craig Creek on July 1, 2003.

An **American Tree Sparrow**, one of the area's most common songbirds, collects food at Craig Creek on June 26, 2003.

Field Notes: *Observations from the field*

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

Fall 2003 (August/September/October/November)

A fairly typical fall saw most species leave on schedule with winter conditions sweeping the territory by mid to late November. Highlights of the season included a new species for the Yukon Territorial checklist and an exceptional weather-driven fall-out of American Robins, Dark-eyed Juncos, and other sparrows in September. A **Red-throated Loon** was on Lake Laberge on September 4 (HG); an adult and a juvenile were here on September 17 (HG); Schwatka Lake in Whitehorse hosted two individuals on October 1 and 5 (HG). A **Pacific Loon** in breeding plumage was seen on Dezadeash Lake on August 13 (HG); two adults were noted at the Judas Creek Marina, Marsh Lake, on August 30 (HG), and one was observed at Lewes Marsh, Marsh Lake area on October 12 (BD,YBC). A moulting adult was seen on Lake Laberge on October 31 (HG), and one was there on November 2 (BD,HG,KK). A juvenile **Yellow-billed Loon** at Jackfish Bay, Lake Laberge on November 2 provided the only report of the season (BD,HG,KK). A group of five **Western Grebes**, casual in the Yukon, was on

Schwatka Lake on October 3 (HG,CE). A flock of 14 **Greater White-fronted Geese** was seen at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on August 27 (HG), and ten were recorded at Nisutlin Delta on August 29 (BD,CE,YS). A family of six (two adults and four juveniles) was seen at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on September 19-24 (CE,BD,HG). About 35 **Snow Geese** were flying south over Whitehorse on October 9 (BS). **Gadwall** was again recorded breeding at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons with a female with nine downy young on August 2 (HG,BD), and apparently the same female with six young on August 20 (CE). Two tardy **Redhead** were at Jackfish Bay, Lake Laberge on October 31 (HG). A **Red-tailed Hawk** was reported from the Dempster Highway near Eagle River on August 30 (BB). A **Peregrine Falcon** was seen catching a small duck at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on August 6 (HG), and one or two individuals, including a juvenile of the Tundra subspecies, were seen here regularly till September 28 (CE;HG,YBC).



A family group of **Greater White-fronted Geese** at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on September 15, 2003. Photo C.D. Eckert

A small portion of the **American Coot** mother-load at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on September 14, 2003. Photo C.D. Eckert



American Coot observations from the Whitehorse sewage lagoons included two adults with two downy young on August 1-2 (HG,BD), and a high count of 166 on October 3 (HG), with the last bird seen at the late date of October 29 when the lagoon was 95% frozen (HG). Two adult **Sandhill Cranes** were seen at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on August 28 (DW), and two were observed along the Dempster Highway at km 268 on August 30 (BB). One was also reported from the Takhini Hot Springs Road in Whitehorse in the first week of September (BC).

A juvenile **Black-bellied Plover** was at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on October 5-7 (CE,HG,WN). Two **Pacific Golden-Plovers** alongside two **American Golden-Plovers** provided a nice study at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on September 14 (AD,CE,HG). Regular coverage of the Whitehorse sewage lagoons in recent years has turned up small numbers of **Pacific Golden-Plovers**, although this species is not yet considered annual; one to two juveniles were noted there on various dates from September 14 to October 15 (CE,HG,AD). An impressive 25 **Killdeer** were at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on August 26 (CE). **Western Sandpiper** reports from the Whitehorse sewage lagoons included two juveniles on August 20 (CE), one juvenile on August 22 (CE,HG), and one on September 28 (HG,YBC). **Sanderling** sightings at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons started out with a high of ten birds on August 22 (CE,HG); one to five were observed here between August 27 and October 3 (AD,BD,CE,HG,YBC). A **Sanderling** was also noted at Nisutlin Delta on August 29 (BD,CE,HG,YS). A juvenile **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** was seen at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on September 12, 14 and 19

(CE,HG,AD). Rare in fall was a **Dunlin** at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on October 24-27 (CD,HG). One to two **Stilt Sandpipers** were seen at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons from August 6 to September 5 (CE,HG), and a high count of 13 was made on August 22 (CE,HG). A **Wilson's Phalarope**, only casual in fall in the Yukon, was seen at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on August 1 (HG). A high count of 171 **Red-necked Phalaropes** was made at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on August 1 (HG). Two juvenile **Red Phalaropes** moulting into winter plumage provided a rare southern Yukon fall record at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on September 12 (CE). Three were here on October 1 (CE,HG), with two lingering to October 3 (HG).

The season's first major influx of southbound **Thayer's Gulls** occurred on September 14 with 100 adults and 50 juveniles at the Whitehorse landfill; also present was one juvenile on September 14-15 edging towards the **Kumlien's Gull** side of the spectrum (CE,BD,HG). A juvenile **Glaucous-winged Gull**, very rare in fall, and a second year **Glaucous-winged x Herring Gull** hybrid were at the Whitehorse landfill on November 5 (CE). An adult **Sabine's Gull** made a brief but much appreciated stop at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on September 11-12 (HG,CE).

The precipitous crash of the **Rock Pigeon** population in Whitehorse, which numbered over 400 in 1997 and is the only one in the Yukon, has brought the species nearly to the point of extirpation; a count of 42, likely the whole population, was made on October 21 (CE). A **Short-eared Owl** was reported from the Dempster Highway at km 440 near Rock River on August 30 (BB).

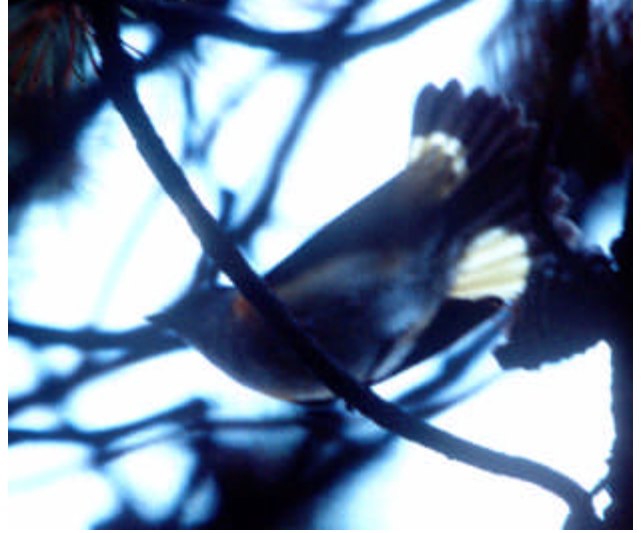


A **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** looks perfectly at home at Henderson Corner on August 3, 2003. Photo by C. Drinnan

The Yukon's first **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**, a male, at Henderson Corner near Dawson City on August 3 was an exceptional find (CD,RO); by getting the word out quickly, a few others were able to see the bird on August 4 (GB,HG,CH). Reports of **Northern Shrikes** included a juvenile at Nisutlin River Delta on August 29 (BD,CE,HG,YS), and an adult in Whitehorse on September 14 (AD,CE,HG). Single **Blue-headed Vireos** were banded at the Albert Creek Banding Station at Upper Liard on August 16 and 18 (TMK). Two late **swallows**, one confirmed as a **Cliff Swallow**, were at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on October 7 (HG). Two **Mountain Chickadees** continued to be regular visitors to a feeder at Whitehorse-Pilot Mountain (BD,YS). Three **Mountain Bluebirds** were lingering at Judas Creek, Marsh Lake on October 12 (BD,CE), and one was noted at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on October 13 (BD,HG). A cold weather front caused a fallout of **American Robins** in Whitehorse on September 19 with two flocks totaling 130 in Whitehorse-Porter Creek (CE,PS), and 200 in downtown Whitehorse (CE). Among the masses of **robins** were a **Gray-cheeked Thrush** on September 20 (CE), and a **Swainson's Thrush** on September 19 (HG). Flocks of hundreds of **Bohemian Waxwings** were roving around the Mountain Ash trees in Whitehorse through November (m.ob.).

Fall reports of "southeast" warblers are infrequent: This year's catch at the Albert Creek Banding Station at Upper Liard through August and September included 36 **Magnolia Warblers** (latest August 31), and 27 **American Redstarts** (latest September 4) (TMK). An immature male **American Redstart** flashed through a Porter Creek yard in Whitehorse on August 22 (PS,CE). The only previous fall record of **Song Sparrow** was in 1943; reports this year included one apparently lingering on its possible breeding territory at Judas Creek, Marsh Lake area on September 8 and 11 (CE), and one feeding with **Dark-eyed Juncos** at Watson Lake on September 14 (TMK). The cold-front fallout produced a flood of **sparrows** with about 500 **Dark-eyed Juncos**, along with 20 **American Tree Sparrows**, 100 **White-crowned Sparrows**, and one **Chipping Sparrow** tallied in downtown Whitehorse on September 20 (CE). An adult **White-crowned Sparrow** was seen at a feeder in Dawson City, central Yukon, from November 16 to the end of the season (ML).

Observers: Bruce Bennett, Greg Brunner, Bernie Cross, Boris Dobrowolsky, Al DeMartini (AD), Christine Drinnan, Cameron Eckert, Scott Fraser, Helmut Grünberg, Cynthia Hunt, Kaz Kuba, Maria Ledergerber, many observers (m.ob.), Ted Murphy-Kelly (TMK), Wendy Nixon, Russell Oborn, Pam Sinclair, Betty Sutton, Debbie van de Wetering (DW), Yammy Stote, Yukon Bird Club (YBC).



Fall Birding 2003

Clockwise from top:

The ultimate mode of birding at **Policeman's Point** along the Yukon River on September 26, 2003.
Photo by Boris Dobrowolsky

Flash in the pan – a quickly moving immature male **American Redstart** fans its distinctive tail. Porter Creek, Yukon, August 22, 2003.
Photo by Cameron D. Eckert

A first-year **American Pipit** rides the migrant wave in downtown Whitehorse on September 20, 2003.
Photo by Cameron D. Eckert

This **juvenile gull** photographed in Whitehorse on September 25, 2003 was obviously too pale for Thayer's but showed more brown fill in the scapulars and wing coverts than is typical of Kumlien's Iceland Gull.
Photo by Cameron D. Eckert



Winter 2003/04 (December/January/February)

The Yukon experienced a typical winter with one rather nasty cold spell in January as temperatures plunging to -50C in some areas, and record snow falls in the Dawson area. In Whitehorse, McIntyre Creek wetland hosted its very reliable flock of wintering **Mallards** with a count of 12 on the December 26 Whitehorse Christmas Bird Count (CE), and 25 on February 15 (HG). A female **Mallard** along with four **Common Mergansers** were at the edge of the Takhini River along the Kusawa Lake Road on February 29 (HG,CO). A female **Barrow's Goldeneye**, casual in winter, was seen on the Yukon River in Whitehorse on December 26 (SC,JH,AH,LH) and was still there on February 15 (HG). A pair of adult **Bald Eagles** was observed at McIntyre Creek wetland in Whitehorse on December 26 (CE) and February 15 (HG). A **Northern Goshawk** was seen chasing down the last of the Yukon's Rock Pigeons in downtown Whitehorse through the winter (fide LC); two **Northern Goshawks** were noted on the December 29 Mayo Christmas Bird Count (compiler MOD), and two were seen during the week of the December 29 Haines Junction CBC (compilers DHen,SH).

Three **White-tailed Ptarmigan** were noted on the December 29 Haines Junction CBC (compilers DHen,SH). The Yukon's only **Rock Pigeon** population is down to the nitty-gritty; only four were confirmed surviving by early March (LC;CE;HG). Please report any Rock Pigeon sightings of more than four birds. **Northern Hawk Owls** were apparently scarce this winter; one was seen in Whitehorse on February 29 (CE). A **Short-eared Owl**, casual in winter, was seen along the North Klondike Highway just north of Whitehorse on December 21 (MB,JS). After not having seen **Boreal Owls** most of the season, one was reported on the last day of the season in the Whitehorse residential area; it was roosting in Riverdale on February 29 (FS,MLS,LK); this proved to be the start of a wave seen in the Whitehorse area and other locations through early spring.

At least one **Northern Shrike** overwintered this year: One was seen near a Whitehorse downtown feeder on December 6 (HG); one was observed in Hillcrest on December 26 (JK); one was reported near feeders in the Jackfish Bay and Horse Creek areas near Lake Laberge all winter (AR,MR,KO); and one was seen in the frozen marshes of Swan Lake, north of Whitehorse on February 28 (BD,HG). Providing the Yukon's first true winter

record was a ragged **Horned Lark** completely missing its tail at the Whitehorse landfill on January 14-15 (DK,CE).

A **Steller's Jay**, casual in the Yukon, was reported to have spent all winter in Tagish (TF). Two **Mountain Chickadees** were seen regularly at two feeders in Pilot Mountain (BM;BD,YS); two were reported from the newly established Carcross CBC on January 2 (compiler DK); one was seen at Tagish on February 13 (HG); and one was frequenting a feeder at Jake's Corner on February 26 (HG). The Yukon's first winter records for **Brown Creeper** were provided by singles seen in Haines Junction on December 18 (WR), and along the Auriol Trail near Haines Junction on December 20 (JB,TS). Eight **American Dippers** were counted at the edge of the Takhini River along the Kusawa Lake Road on February 29 (HG,CO). There were scattered reports of small numbers of **Bohemian Waxwings** (m.ob.). A starving Bohemian Waxwing was rescued during the coldest day of the year in Whitehorse (-45C) on January 28 (TB); after ferociously eating berries for a week the bird was released to the elements seemingly healthy. One large group of 76 birds was seen during the Whitehorse CBC on December 26 (compilers JH,WN); another large group of 200 was seen at Swan Lake, north of Whitehorse on February 28 (BD,HG); and three were seen as far north as Dawson on February 28-29 (ML).

An **American Tree Sparrow** was noted during the first few days of December at Teslin (CA,DHet). A **White-crowned Sparrow** had been frequenting a feeder in Dawson since the fall season and was last seen on January 24 after the temperature had dropped to -50 °C for three nights in a row (ML). **Dark-eyed Junco** reports included one seen through December and again in late February in downtown Whitehorse (HG), two on the December 29 Mayo CBC (compiler MOD), and one on the December 29 Haines Junction CBC (compilers DHen,SH). **Snow Buntings** are rare but regular in winter; one was seen in the Horse Creek area in January (KO); four were seen on the December 29 Haines Junction CBC (compilers DHen,SH); the first migrants were a small flock of 15-20 was reported from Whitehorse on February 12 (DC); and 30 in the fields of Drury's Farm west of Whitehorse on February 29 (HG,CO). **Pine Grosbeaks** were reported in good numbers in southern Yukon with counts of 324 on the December 21 Marsh Lake/Yukon River CBC

(compiler HG), and 144 on the December 29 Haines Junction CBC (compilers DHen,SH); however, this species was apparently scarce in the Mayo area and was missed on their CBC (compiler MOD). Small flocks of **Common Redpolls** with a few Hoaries mixed in were regular at most Yukon bird feeders through the season (m.ob.). A male **Evening Grosbeak** was observed at a feeder in Northland Trailer Park in Whitehorse on February 29 to March 6 (JMI,MD).

Observers: Carolyn Allen, Terry Barrick, Julie Bauer, Marten Berkman, Doug Caldwell, Linda Cameron, Syd Cannings, Mary Darkes, Boris Dobrowolsky, Cameron Eckert, Ted Fairman, Helmut Grünberg, Adrian Hawkings, Jim Hawkings, Lee Hawkings, David Henry (DHen), Suzanne Henry, David Hett (DHet), Jean Kapala, Dan Kemble, Lee Kubica, Maria Ledergerber, many observers (m.ob.), Judith McIntyre, Bob Murkett, Wendy Nixon, Mark O'Donoghue (MOD), Clive Osborne, Katie Ostrom, Wolf Riedl, Alf Roberts, Marlene Roberts, Terry Skjonsberg, Fred Smith, Mary Lou Smith (MLS), Jennifer Staniforth, Yammy Stote.

What would winter birding in the Yukon be without redpolls?

This nice study of **Common Redpoll** (top) versus **Hoary Redpoll** (bottom) photographed in Porter Creek on February 28, 2004 shows many of the features which distinguish the two species.

The Hoary's bill looks almost ridiculously small compared to that of the Common.

Also note the Hoary's thin flank streaking, buffy wash on the face, smaller red cap, and paler feather edges throughout.

Photos by Cameron D. Eckert



YUKON BIRD CLUB

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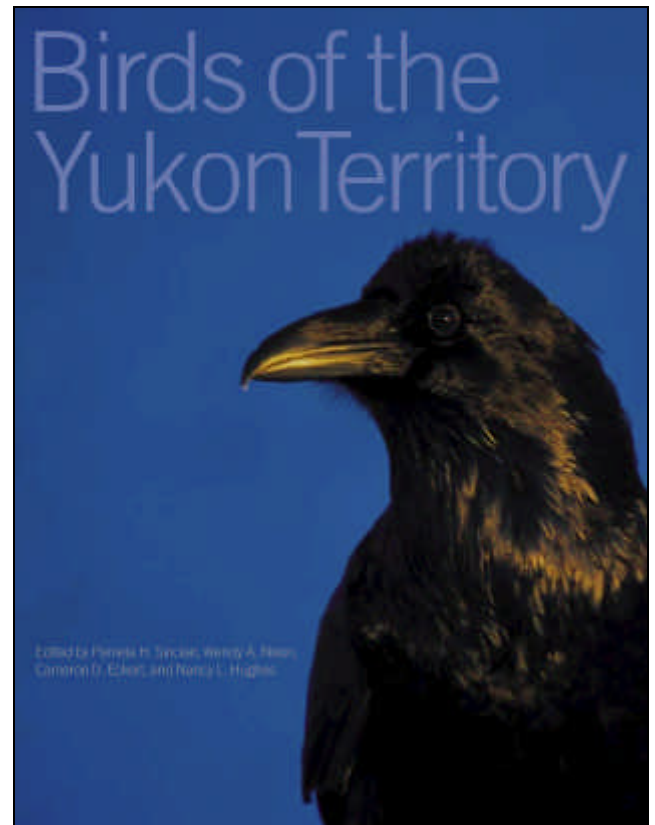
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