

# Yukon Warbler

*Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club*



*Cameron Eckert photo*

Female Rusty Blackbird on her way to nesting grounds.

## *Student has birding trip of a lifetime*

Shyloh van Delft has “unique and life-changing experience” with Students on Ice program to Antarctica.

See story page 7



## *Help track Rusty Blackbirds*

With blackbird populations on steep decline, the Spring Migration Blitz aims to find which habitats the birds use during migration.

See story page 3

# Yukon Bird Club

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

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

## Membership fees

Individual	\$15.00
Family *	\$25.00
Senior/Student **	\$10.00
Institutional	\$50.00
Contributing	\$50.00
Supporting	\$100.00
Lifetime	\$200.00

\* Family memberships cover two or more people living at one address.

\*\* Also includes those for whom finances are limited.

Foreign members please pay by Canadian dollar or money order.

### For more information contact:

Yukon Bird Club  
Box 31054  
Whitehorse  
YT, Y1A 5P7  
Canada  
[yukonbirdclub@gmail.com](mailto:yukonbirdclub@gmail.com)

YBC Website: [www.yukonweb.com/community/ybc](http://www.yukonweb.com/community/ybc)  
Yukon Warbler is published by the Yukon Bird Club.  
Copyright © 2014 Yukon Bird Club. All rights reserved. Printed material, artwork, or photographs may not be reproduced by any means without permission from the author, artist, or photographer. All other material may not be reproduced by any means without the Editor's permission.

### We want your birding photos and stories!

Thank you to all who contribute to make the Yukon Warbler. [YBCnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:YBCnewsletter@gmail.com)

Yukon Warbler Editor: Liz Hargreaves:  
[YBCnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:YBCnewsletter@gmail.com)

**Cover:** A female Rusty Blackbird on migration to her boreal breeding grounds.

*Cameron Eckert photo.*

## 2014 Board of Directors

Cameron Eckert - President  
Pam Sinclair - Special Projects Coordinator  
Jim Hawkings - Treasurer  
Helmut Grünberg - Director  
Scott Williams - Director  
Devon Yacura - Youth Coordinator  
Shyloh van Delft - Director  
Betty Sutton - Events Coordinator  
Al Cushing - Director  
Liz Hargreaves - Newsletter Editor

## Rare sightings reports

All sightings of rare or notable birds should be sent directly to the Sightings Coordinator:  
[yukonbirdclub@gmail.com](mailto:yukonbirdclub@gmail.com)

# Blackbird Blitz!

*Canada's common boreal blackbird has suffered drastic declines, and here's your chance to help figure out why*

by Pam Sinclair

Research points to several factors that may have contributed to the decline — habitat loss on the wintering grounds in the U.S. southeast, habitat change on the breeding grounds, persecution of blackbirds as agricultural pests, mercury toxicity, and others. However, we still don't seem to have the whole picture. Very little is known about these birds during migration, so to find out more, birders are being asked to participate in the Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz 2014.

The Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz 2014 is happening throughout the bird's migration range; in the Yukon it's on from April 15 to May 31. The idea is to go out during that time and find Rusty Blackbirds, and report your sightings on eBird ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org), or [www.ebird.ca](http://www.ebird.ca)), where you will find a special Rusty Blackbird Blitz data sheet.

In the Yukon, the first Rusty Blackbirds arrive in the second half of April, and numbers peak around the beginning of May.

## Not Rusty in Spring

So what does a Rusty Blackbird look like? Well here in the Yukon, it is our common blackbird, so if you've birded in Yukon wetlands in spring or summer, you've probably seen or heard one. Rusty Blackbirds are "rusty" only in the fall. In spring, male Rusty Blackbirds are a solid glossy black, with gleaming whitish-yellow eyes. Female Rusties are solid slate grey, also with the pierc-



Keith Williams photo

**A male Rusty Blackbird hunts Caddis Larva in McIntyre Creek, Whitehorse.**

ing pale eyes. Here in the Yukon, we don't have many similar species to confuse Rusties with. In other regions, Rusties must be distinguished from Brewer's Blackbirds or Common Grackles, but here we need only make sure we're not looking at a Red-winged Blackbird or a Brown-headed Cowbird.

Red-winged Blackbirds are usually obvious because of the bright red shoulder of the male, although this can be hidden.

Female Red-wingeds are brown and streaky, while Rusty females are solid slate grey. Brown-headed Cowbirds are uncommon in the Yukon, and the males are black with a

chocolate-brown head. Both Red-winged Blackbirds and Brown-headed Cowbirds always have black eyes, whereas in spring, all Rusty Blackbirds have whitish-yellow eyes.

One of the aims of the Blitz is to find out what habitats the birds are using during migration. In southern Yukon, Rusties are usually found in wetlands or along the edges of rivers, but may also be seen in farm fields or other cleared areas. This year, with so much lingering snow, any patch of bare ground or bit of open water may potentially attract Rusties.

## Reporting your Sightings

When you go out looking for Rusties, or just go out birding, record the amount of time you spend, and record the location and number of Rusties you see. Then go to [www.ebird.ca](http://www.ebird.ca) and enter your sightings. If you don't already use eBird, consider this an opportunity to start! eBird is an amazing resource, and easy to use. By entering your bird sightings in eBird, you are contributing data that can be used for a number of purposes, including tracking numbers of declining species such as the Rusty Blackbird.

## Help track Rusty Blackbirds with YBC:

**Dawson:** May 17th, meet at 10:00 at Henderson Corner (north entrance)  
To find out more, go to [www.rustyblackbird.org](http://www.rustyblackbird.org).

**Pam Sinclair**  
Yukon Blitz Coordinator  
[pam.sinclair@ec.gc.ca](mailto:pam.sinclair@ec.gc.ca)

# Spring Sightings 2013

by Cameron D. Eckert

**D**eep winter snow and unsettled weather produced harsh conditions and some dramatic fallouts across the Yukon. The incredible numbers of American Golden-Plovers, Pectoral Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers, and Lapland Longspurs were reminiscent of the legendary spring of 1992. Unfortunately, it was a short-lived migration for some birds which succumbed to the elements.

Greater White-fronted Geese put on a good showing this spring; a record-early migrant was at Watson Lake 28 March (ph. SD); and a much-admired and fairly tame flock of up to 74 spent 2 weeks in Whitehorse in early May (m.ob.). Snow Goose reports included at least 16 at Nisutlin Bay 17 May (MC). Two Ross's Geese, casual in the Yukon, were at Lake Laberge 14-17 May (ph. JJ; ph. CE, SVD). An unprecedented incursion of migrant Cackling Geese was observed across southern Yukon and extending into south-central Alaska; a total of 467 Cacklers (all minima race) and just 4 Canada Geese were counted between Beaver Creek and Whitehorse 7 May (ph. CE, PS); and up to 150 Cacklers (all minima) were at Lake Laberge 10-15 May (CE, SVD; JJ). The overwhelming majority of Cackling Geese seen in the Yukon are minima race; and so a non-minima Cackler in Whitehorse 29 April (ph. CE) was especially interesting; though it was not certain as to what race it was — *taverneri* perhaps. M'Clintock Bay on Marsh Lake is one of the Yukon's most important migratory waterbird habitats; counts of 1368 American Wigeon and 623 Mallards were recorded there 11 May; and 817 Green-winged Teal 16 May (JH). A total of 300 North-



*Cameron Eckert photo*

Cackling Geese at Tagish, April 30, 2014. There was an unprecedented incursion of Cacklers across southern Yukon last spring.

ern Pintail was at the Whitehorse sewage ponds 7 May (JH, DY). A male Blue-winged Teal x Northern Shoveler hybrid was an eye-catcher at Judas Creek 29 May (CE). A flock of 50 King Eiders was at Herschel Island 30 Apr (LJM, RJ). A small flock of 10 Ruddy Ducks was seen on the Yukon River near Whitehorse 7 May (AP). Horned Grebe populations have declined in recent years; and so flocks of 220 on the Yukon River at Burma Road 8 May (BD, CE), 710 at M'Clintock Bay 9 May (JJ), and 175 at Tagish 10 May (JJ, SVD) were noteworthy. Yellow-billed Loon is a very rare but regular southern Yukon spring migrant; 1-2 were at Watson Lake 26-29 May (JAB, JJ), and 1 was at Marsh Lake 28 May (BD, ph. CE). Swainson's Hawk is a scarce southern Yukon migrant, with just

a few seen annually en route to their northern breeding grounds; 3 singles were at Lewes Marsh and Tagish 4 April to 3 May (JJ), 2 at Johnson's Crossing 8 May (JJ), and 1 at Lake Laberge 15 May (ph. CE, SVD). A fall-out of American Golden-Plovers in the Yukon Southern Lakes area produced a record-high total count of 2025 on 19-21 May (CE, PS; BD; SVD); while a count of 95 at Watson Lake 22 May (JJ) was high for southeast Yukon. A total of 31 Solitary Sandpipers were tallied between Haines Junction and Kluane Lake 13 May (LD, NH). A fallout of shorebirds at Nares Lake 19 May was dominated by 600 American Golden-Plovers, 120 Semipalmated Plovers, 100 Lesser Yellowlegs, 7,000 Pectoral Sandpipers, and 300 Long-billed Dowitchers (CE, PS); the fallout

# Red-breasted Sapsucker visits Haines Junction

continued at Judas Creek 22 May with 1,200 Semipalmated Sandpipers, 750 Pectoral Sandpipers, and 750 Long-billed Dowitchers (CE, JH). Meanwhile, at Lake Laberge two flocks totalling 1700 Long-billed Dowitchers were recorded 20 May (BD, CE). Rare shorebirds included a well-documented Willet at Watson Lake 31 May-1 June (ph. JJ; ph. SD; CE, TMK), a male Ruddy Turnstone at the Takhini Valley 20 May (CE), 1 White-rumped Sandpiper at Watson Lake 22 May (JJ), 3 White-rumped Sandpipers at Judas Creek 26 May (ph. CE), 3 Stilt Sandpipers at Judas Creek 22 May (ph. CE; JH), 1 Stilt Sandpiper at Watson Lake 27 May (JAB, JJ), 1 Red Knot at Squanga Lake 26 May (ph. RaM), and 2 Red Knots at Judas Creek 27-28 May (ph. CE; BD).

Two Franklin's Gulls, west of their range, were at Watson Lake 26 May (ph. JJ). Bonaparte's Gulls migration can produce impressive numbers; 1,900 were at M'Clintock Bay 14 May (JJ); and 300 were at Lake Laberge 15 May (CE, SVD). Two adult Ring-billed Gulls estab-

lished the first records for Dawson 13-14 May (ph. CE). Also in Dawson were two Glaucous Gulls, rare in central Yukon, 14 May (ph. CE). Two Caspian Terns, northwest of the species' range, were at Marsh Lake 28 May (BD, ph. CE). The timing of Black Tern migration was hinted at by 7 on 25 May at Watson Lake (JAB, JJ), just 30 km west of the nearest nesting colony at Blind Lake. Eurasian Collared-Dove is now fairly common in the Yukon; one of the season's first was at Timberpoint, Teslin Lake 27 May (ph. MCl). A Snowy Owl was at Herschel Island when the rangers arrived 27 Apr (LJM). A migrant Short-eared Owl was at Dawson 14 May (GB, ph. CH). An especially cooperative Boreal Owl perched in a yard in downtown Whitehorse 20-21 Mar (HG, ph. CE). Red-breasted Sapsucker is a rare spring over-shoot from its nesting grounds in southeast Alaska to s. Yukon; one was found freshly dead on the Carcross Road 27 Mar (TO); and singles were seen in Whitehorse 11 Apr (TL), and Haines Junction 11-



*Marrilee Chambers photo*

A Red-breasted Sapsucker was sighted in Haines Junction between 11-12 April 2014.

12 Apr (ph. MCh). An intergrade yellow x red-shafted Northern Flicker was at Teslin 28 May (ph. MC).

A massive foraging flock of 3,500 Tree Swallows was at Jackfish Bay, Lake Laberge 20 May (CE, BD). Swallow migration was noted at Haines Junction with flocks of 150 Tree Swallows 18 May, and 200 Violet-green Swallows 16 May (RJ). A snow storm in Dawson 19 May produced a small fall-out including 3 Northern Wheatears and 5 Gray-cheeked Thrush (GB, ph. CH). A flock of 15 Mountain Bluebirds was seen at Wolf Creek 27 April (JH), and a male at the fringe of its range was seen near Moose Creek 9 April (JF). A drive from Dawson to Stewart Crossing recorded an incredible 8200 Lapland Longspurs 14 May (CE). Smith Longspur is always a prize find on migration; this season there was 1 at Tagish 21 May (CE), and 65 at Watson Lake 24 May (JJ). A male Western Tanager, west of its range, was in Whitehorse 26 May (ph. RoM). Yellow-headed Blackbird is a rare but regular wanderer to the Yukon; a male was at Little Atlin Lake 18-19 May (ph. KG, SG; CE, PS, SVD); and a female was at Watson Lake, se. Yukon 18-27 May (ph. SD; JJ).

A female Brewer's Blackbird, casual in the Yukon, was at Watson Lake 19 May (JJ). Two Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches were at Dawson 10 April (PB); an impres-



*Cameron Eckert photo*

Ring-billed Gull at Dawson City, May 13, 2013.

sive flock of 250 (80% coastal-race littoralis and 20% interior-race tephrocotis) was at Carcross 27-28 Apr (BD, CE, PS); and a snow storm in Dawson produced 3 on 19 May (GB, CH), and 2 there on 20 May (AB).

**Lesser Goldfinch** would rightly have been called a “once-in-a-lifetime” bird when one showed up in the Yukon in 2006; that was until another was found this season in Whitehorse — this time a sub-adult male (green-backed race hesperophilus) which was first discovered 27 May (ph. CE, RoM, HG) and then seen sporadically to 14 Jun (ph. RoM; BS).

*Observers: Julie-Ann Bauer, Anton Berger, Palma Berger, Greg Brunner, Merrilee Chambers (MCh), Minnie Clark (MCl), Lucas DeCicco, Susan Drury, Boris Dobrowolsky, Cameron Eckert, Julie Frisch, Ken Gabb, Sandra Gabb, Helmut Grünberg, Nick Hajdukovich, Jim Hawkings, Cynthia*



*J. Jantunen photo*

**A Western Meadowlark was sighted at Watson Lake airport on May 24, 2013.**

*Hunt, Jukka Jantunen, Rita Jux, Trish Murphy-Kelly, Toos Omtzigt, Ben Luet, Robbie Mackay (RoM), LeeJohn Schone-wille, Shyloh van Delft, Devon Meyook, Ralph Müller (RaM), Ted Yacura.*

## Window collisions kill millions of birds

Birds face many threats when they come into contact with urban populations. One of the leading causes of avian mortality in cities is window collisions. In Canada it is estimated 25 million birds are killed each year as a result of bird window collisions.

The Birds and Windows Project was developed to use citizen science and active participation to continue to identify the factors that affect

### Help out!

To get involved in the Birds and Windows Project, visit:  
[birdswindows.biology.ualberta.ca](http://birdswindows.biology.ualberta.ca)

collision risk at residential homes.

Last fall Environment Canada released a report on the leading causes of human related bird deaths, with collisions with houses or buildings tied for second spot with power lines,

collisions and electrocutions, behind domestic and feral cats. Most studies on window collisions have focus on tall skyscrapers but based on the sheer number of houses compared to tall skyscrapers, houses represent 90 % of the mortality. More work is needed; only four studies in the past have focused on bird window collision mortality at houses.

To better understand what can be done to reduce bird window collisions at your home, the University of Alberta has developed this project to actively involve YOU in data collection. We are asking you to think about bird window collisions you have observed in the past and would like you to regularly search around your residence for evidence of bird window collisions in the future.

This project is Canada wide and will be running at least until the end of 2014.

## Event Coordinator report

*by Betty Sutton*

2013 was a busy year for Bird Club Events. Ione Christensen gave approximately ten talks/presentations in the Yukon. With the assistance of Shyloh Van Delft and Jim Hawkings, Ione gave presentations at the MacBride Museum on Birds of Spring, Birds of Summer and Birds of Fall and Winter. Ione and Shyloh also gave talks at Carcross and Tagish. Ione also did an event for the kids at the Railway Camp in Copper King area. Tourists and locals both came out to all these event.



photos courtesy Shyloh van Delft

Shyloh hanging with some Chinstrap Penguins.

# Trip of a lifetime

*Students on Ice expedition participants learn about rich Antarctic ecosystem*

by Shyloh van Delft

The uncommonly mild swells of the treacherous Drake Passage gently rock our ship. My head swimming, I realize that the worst part of being on a ship is that there's no place to rest — no place to go to escape the intense nausea of seasickness. I stagger downstairs to the lobby windows, hoping to find relief in the horizon and a cup of tea, when I see them for the first time. Wandering Alba-

ross glide effortlessly alongside the ship, just skimming the waves with their graceful fourteen-foot wingspans... True nomads of the sea.

My expedition to Antarctica with Students on Ice was a unique and life-changing educational experience which gave me a deep personal connection to the southern Polar Region. I gained valuable insights into Antarctic ecosystems, noting how similar they are to those in the Arctic.

Though considered an ice desert, some parts of Antarctica are incred-

ibly, and unexpectedly rich in life. Islands abundant in wildlife al-



Pintado Petrel.

lowed us the opportunity to observe first-hand the natural processes of life and death in this isolated part of the world.

It was moving to witness the delicate south-polar ecosystems not just surviving, but thriving in the harshest of environments - where any human disturbance or interference can have devastating impacts.

As a Yukoner, the northern environment, with its complex ecosystems and rich biodiversity, has always been very important to me. Exploring Antarctica gave me new perspectives on the importance of the relationship between the Polar Regions to the health of our planet.

My experiences in Antarctica reinforced my goal of becoming a biologist specializing in birds, so that I can contribute to the conservation of northern environments and biodiversity.

Students on Ice introduced me to an invaluable global network of like-minded students, experts, and organizations such as the Youth



**Adele Penguin Rookery.**

Arctic Coalition, dedicated to polar science and conservation.

The amount of support I received from the Yukon was staggering; without it this incredible journey would not have been possible.

The Yukon Bird Club was extremely helpful, providing sponsorship, letters of recommendation, and other support I needed. The

Antarctic expedition with Students on Ice was a stunning experience that inspired a new sense of confidence in me and the other students, and has left a lasting impression on our lives.

Thank you to the Yukon Bird Club and everyone else who helped me achieve the opportunity of a lifetime.



**Crab-eating Seal.**



# Scientist monitors sewage lagoon for chemicals

*Pharmaceuticals and personal care products end up in waste water used by birds*

Devon Yacura is gearing up for his second and final summer of data collection at the Whitehorse sewage lagoon. He is a master's student at the University of Alberta, and board member of the Yukon Bird Club, who is studying the occurrence of pharmaceuticals and personal care products at the Whitehorse sewage lagoon. The Whitehorse sewage lagoon is a top site in the southern Yukon for bird species diversity and abundance.

High invertebrate densities are a major factor contributing to the high density of bird use at the lagoon. Recently however, studies have found that aquatic invertebrates sampled from wastewater treatment plants have measurable concentrations of pharmaceuticals and personal care products (PPCPs). The widespread occurrence of PPCPs within WWTPs, including hormones, prescription and non-prescription drugs, antimicrobials, synthetic musks, and antibiotics has been recognized as an emerging environmental issue. A significant concern is that many PPCPs can accumulate in organisms and reach toxic levels.

The objectives of Devon's research are i) to quantify the removal efficiencies of PPCPs at the Whitehorse sewage lagoon; ii) to quantify the seasonal variation of PPCP concentrations; and iii) to quantify the PPCP concentrations within the sludge and invertebrates of the secondary treatment pond at the



Devon Yacura takes water samples to test for contaminants



A few of the many chemicals that are flushed into the sewage system.

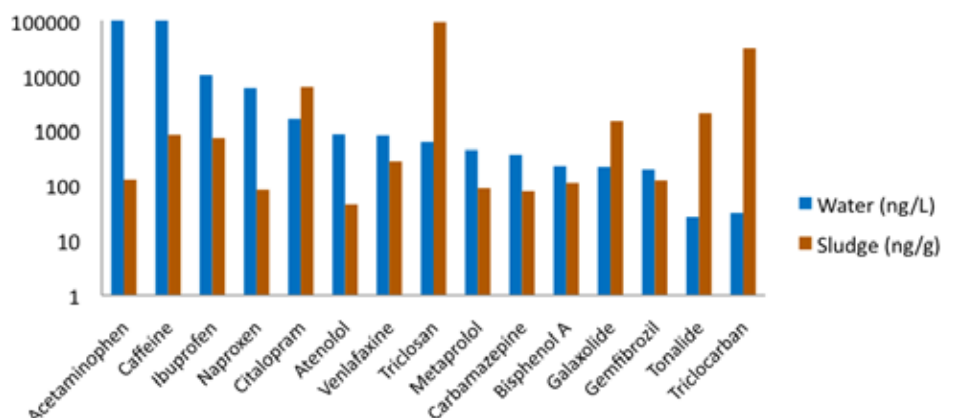
Whitehorse sewage lagoon.

This study is the first of its kind at the Whitehorse sewage lagoon, and the first to identify and quantify PPCPs in a northern wastewater treatment system. Currently in Canada, no guidelines exist for PPCP concentrations in the aquatic

environment. This emphasizes the importance of this research at the Whitehorse sewage lagoon. It is anticipated that the results of this research will be used as a baseline for other research in Canada and abroad. Please feel free to contact Devon at 667-7597 or [balancenvironmental@gmail.com](mailto:balancenvironmental@gmail.com) for more information.

tion, including a summary report of last summer's data. Devon would like to thank the City of Whitehorse, Yukon Research Center, and Yukon Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Trust Fund for their financial support.

Water and sludge concentrations of the top 15 PPCPs in the primary treatment pond (raw sewage)



# The artistry of Keith Williams

*Yukon photographer shares nature photo tips*

*Keith Williams has been a nature and landscape photographer for about 40 years and has been published in newspapers, magazines and books. See more of his photos at: [www.flickr.com/photos/keithmwilliams](http://www.flickr.com/photos/keithmwilliams)*

When shooting birds, wait for them to come to you — and be prepared. “You have to be at the go and ready when walking, so you can pick up gear and shoot hand held.

“One of my most famous shots — sparrows in mid-May snowstorm, I shot at 1/100th second handheld, it can be done you just have to take lots of shots,” he says.

Williams uses a 150-500 mm lens. “I almost always shoot at 500mm. Usually birds are small and far away, so 400-500mm is minimum for bird photography,” he says.

You should get to know how to shoot on manual settings, he advises.

“If the camera makes the choice, it will likely make the wrong one. You have to know instinctively what the settings are for the light.

“I use spot light meter for birds, not the scene. For example, a swan, or raven, with a lot of white or black, can be tricky. Exposure can be tricky so take a shot and have a look. Look at histogram, if it’s blown out over-exposed make adjustments,” he says.

Although Williams shoots handheld, he says a monopod is a good idea to keep photos sharp. “It will double your amount of keepers.”

His No. 1 tip: shoot lots. “Shoot till the bird leaves, digital files are cheap.”



*Douglas Moyer photo*  
Keith Williams shooting a Yukon River sunrise.



William’s photo of swallows in a snowstorm was used as a promo for The Cornell Lab, on the cover of the 2014 Canadian Wildlife Federation calendar, in the Handbook of the Birds of the World — and it was the inspiration for a painting.

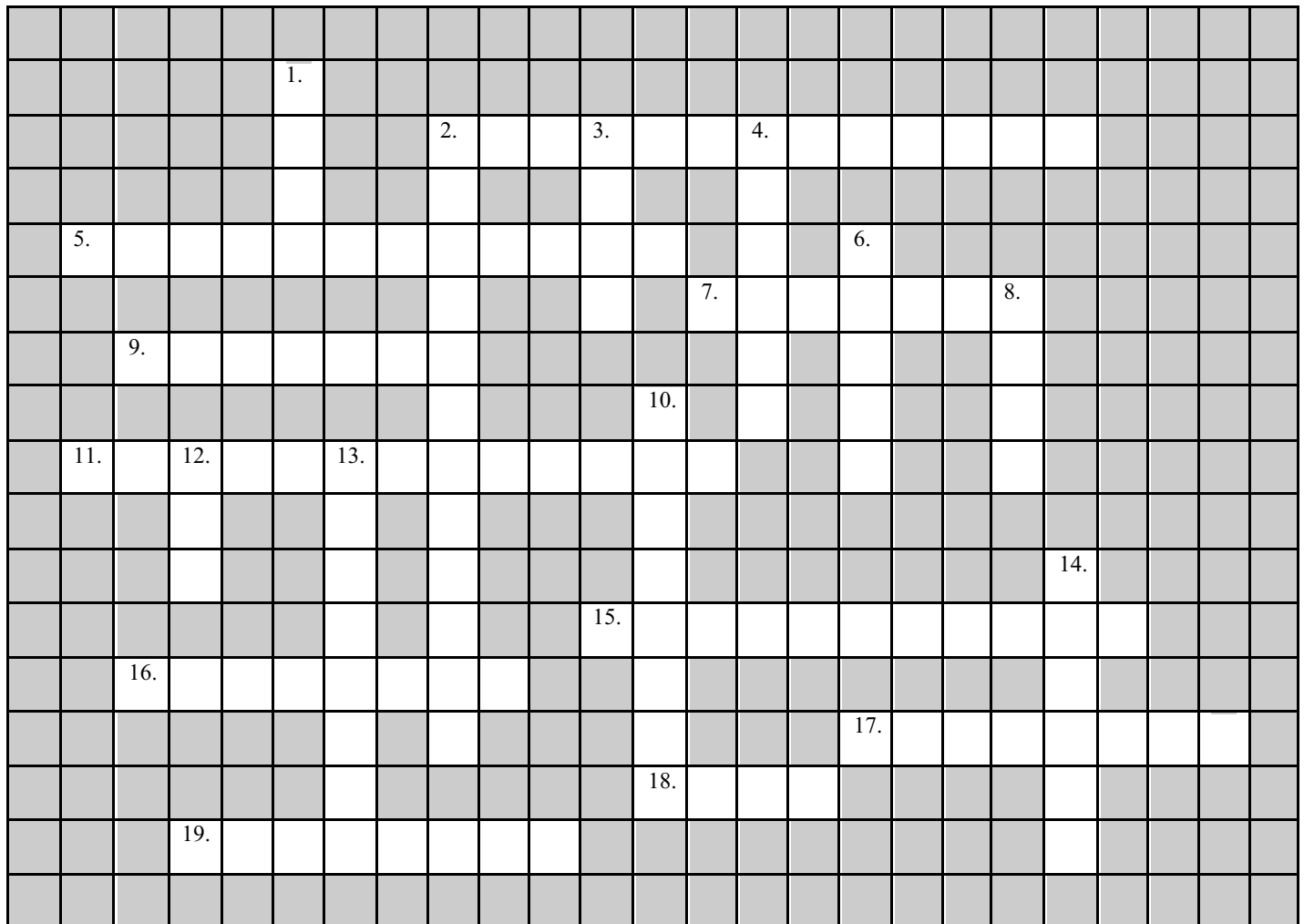


*Keith Williams photo*

“This Lapland Longspur is one of a small migratory flock on their way to their Arctic breeding grounds. Apparently longspurs get their name from their unusually long rear claw, seen here. In breeding plumage, the males are quite striking with their chestnut brown, black and white collar. I’m always thrilled when they stop by in the spring.”

# Yukon birds crossword - sparrows

by Ruth McCullough



## Across

- 2. Black eyestripe white throat with yellow lores, black whisker (malar stripe).
- 5. Found in Southern/western U. S. its pink bill, grey head and breast make it appear junco like.
- 7. Canada's smallest sparrow; plain drab colour and complete white eye stripe best field marks.
- 9. Very rare, with long bill and yellow line before the eye. Found on the Eastern U.S. seaboard.
- 11. Found in the Southern U. S. Identified by its unstreaked deep rufous crown and black whisker marks.
- 15. Has a distinctive brown cheek patch, gray nape, and white median streak through crown.
- 16. Broad purplish collar, orange eye stripe, and white stripe through crown. Pale and brightly patterned.
- 17. Song of rapid chips. Distinctive dark lores and gray rump.
- 18. Sports a single black breast spot. Commonly found in the Eastern U.S. in Sagebrush and Chaparral. Gray upperside, white eye-ring.
- 19. Found in Southeastern U.S., identified by a dark upper mandible, purplish back dark crown and tail.

## Down

- 1. Common east of the Mississippi River, has chestnut head, white breast with black central spot and rounded white outer tail feathers.
- 2. Prominent white and black streaked crown, which it often raises in slight crest.
- 3. Brightest and largest of the rusty capped sparrows
- 4. Our largest sparrow, identified by a pink bill, black or blotched bill, black crown and streaked sides.
- 6. Found in Eastern Canada and U.S., adult is identified by its red cap, gray eye stripe and gray face with structure similar to Lincoln's.
- 8. Heavily streaked breast and long slightly rounded tail which it "pumps" in flight. Song has pleasant rhythm.
- 10. Only sparrow with an olive head, found primarily in the Eastern U.S.
- 12. Heavily streaked under parts and massive bill.
- 13 Heavily streaked breast, yellow tinge on lores, notched tail.
- 14. Clean white outer tail feathers, white eye ring, often flies to treetop when disturbed.

