

# YUKON WARBLER

*Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club*

Winter 2018-19



Cameron Eckert photo

*A juvenile Buff-breasted Sandpiper, one of the Yukon's rarest migrant shorebirds, touches down in Whitehorse on 18 September 2018.*

## ***In this issue:***

### ***Annual General Meeting***

February 20, 7:30 pm - 9:30 p.m.  
All welcome!  
Come join us at the Sport Yukon board-room



***33rd birdathon, page 7***



***Chimney vs. Flicker, page 8***

# Yukon Bird Club

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

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## For more information contact:

Yukon Bird Club  
4061-4th Avenue  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Y1A 1H1  
Canada  
[yukonbirdclub@yukonbirds.ca](mailto:yukonbirdclub@yukonbirds.ca)

YBC Website: [yukonbirds.ca](http://yukonbirds.ca)

Yukon Birds Facebook group: [facebook.com/groups/212509148852262/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/212509148852262/)

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# Sightings – spring 2016-spring 2017

By Cameron Eckert

**SPRING 2016 - This season saw an especially weak shorebird migration, with low numbers for most common species – hopefully this is not a lasting trend and numbers improve in the coming year. Yukon birders turned up two new species for the territory, with highlights being long-awaited and well-documented American Black Ducks, and a surprise Indigo Bunting.**

A northbound movement of 2103 **Greater White-fronted Geese** was observed at M'Clintock Bay 21 Apr (JJ). A flock of 150 **Snow Geese** passed over the Indian River 30 Apr (MS). **Brant** is a rare but regular late spring migrant in the Yukon Southern Lakes; a total of 595 black Brant were seen at Lake Laberge 29 May (ph. CE); and the following day 133 **gray-bellied Brant** were seen flying over there (ph. CE), which remarkably were being satellite tracked at the same time – providing a valuable field sighting of a tracked flock. The Yukon's first well-documented **American Black Ducks**, a pair, were at Teslin Lake 4-6 May (ph. JJ, CE; BD), and then at nearby M'Clintock Bay 8 May (JJ). It was fortunate to fully document these pure ducks first, as a **hybrid American Black Duck x Mallard** was at nearby Tagish Narrows 9 May (ph. JJ). A variety of hybrid ducks are seen annually in the Yukon Southern Lakes, with notables this year being single **Mallard x Northern Pintails** at Shallow Bay and Whitehorse on 30 Apr (JJ), and 3 May (TA) respectively; and a **Blue-winged Teal x Northern Shoveler** was at Shallow Bay 4 May (JJ). Yukon Southern Lakes saw some decent dabbler numbers with 1,600

**American Wigeon** at Lake Laberge 25 Apr (CE), 1310 **Mallards** at M'Clintock Bay 19 Apr (JJ), and 2050 **Northern Pintail** there 23 Apr (JJ). A flock of 206 **Red-breasted Mergansers** was at M'Clintock Bay 10 May (JJ), while 120 **Common Mergansers** were off nearby Judas Creek 12 May (JJ). A count of 20 **Ruffed Grouse** was recorded along Dominion Creek 25 Apr (MS). The Yukon's record-high count of 9 **Eared Grebes** at the Yukon Wildlife Preserve 21 May (ph. CE, PS), was followed up by a confirmed breeding record there 28 May (CE). Four **Western Grebes**, casual in the Yukon, were at Aishihik Lake 16 May (ph. JJ). A group of 9 **Great Blue Herons**, a record number for the Yukon, was at Nares Lake 27 Apr (BD, ph. CE). **Sandhill Crane** migration along the Yukon's Tintina Trench is a continentally-significant avian event; a total of 7280 was tallied flying over Faro 7 May (TS). It was an exceptional season for **Pacific Golden-Plovers** at Lake Laberge with a record-high Yukon count of 30 on 6 May (DB, CE, JJ). For the more common species, shorebird migration in southern Yukon was very flat this season with modest high counts, such as 5 **American Golden-Plovers** at Lake Laberge 8 May (SH), 300 **Pectoral Sandpipers** at Lake Laberge 8 & 10 May (CE), and 300 at Tagish 9 May (JJ); 126 **Lesser Yellowleg** at M'Clintock Bay 2 May (JJ); 90 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** at M'Clintock Bay 10 May (JJ), and just 45 **Long-billed Dowitchers** at Marsh Lake 8-9 May (JJ). **Ruddy Turnstone** is a very rare spring migrant in southern Yukon; 1 was at M'Clintock Bay 2-3 May (JJ, TA; CE). **Dunlin** is an abundant West Coast migrant yet largely bypasses southern Yukon; and so a count of 12 at M'Clintock Bay 3 May was high (CE, JJ). A single **Franklin's Gull**, rare in the Yukon Southern Lakes region, was

at M'Clintock Bay 23 May (wd. CE, JJ). Peak **Mew Gull** movements through southern Yukon were seen in early May with 500 at Nares Lake 1 May (CE), and 1100 at Lake Laberge 4 May (JJ). An unprecedented fallout of 360 **Iceland (Thayer's) Gulls** was observed at Lake Laberge 29 May (ph. CE). A total of 80 **Arctic Terns** was at Judas Creek 19 May (JH, YBC). The duo of **Eurasian Collared-Doves** that wintered at Henderson's Corner near Dawson City was last reported 16 Mar (ph. CE). A **Snowy Owl** was nicely documented at Tombstone Territorial Park 7 Mar (EK, ph. GK). **Northern Saw-whet Owl** is rare but regular in southern Yukon; one was heard near Rancheria 25 Apr (TA). The **Pileated Woodpecker** that wintered at Haines Junction was last reported 11 Apr (JAB, TS). An impressive foraging flock of 600 **Violet-green Swallows** was at McIntyre Creek 6 May (DB, CE). An impressive 700 **American Pipits** were at Nares Lake 27 Apr (BD, CE), and 300 were at Lake Laberge 29 Apr (CE). Diligent birding at the Watson Lake airport over the years has found **Smith's Longspur** to be a rare but regular migrant there; 4 were noted 17 May (JJ). Ovenbird continues to have a toe-hold along Cosh Creek; 2 singing males were there on 25 & 31 May (BD, ph. CE; JAB, JJ). The Yukon's first **Indigo Bunting**, a male, was at Watson Lake 11-12 May (ph. SW, JW; ph CE). The season's high count for **Rusty Blackbird** was a meagre 30 at Henderson's Corner 2 May (JAB, TS).

*Observers: Tracy Allard, Julie-Ann Bauer, David Britton, Cameron Eckert, Boris Dobrowolsky, Jim Hawkings, Stephan Howarth, Jukka Jantunen, Elaine Kennedy, Elvira Kraus, Gerhard Kraus, Pam Sinclair, Terry Skjonsberg, Mike Sutor, Jammie Weedmark, Shelly Weedmark, Yukon Bird Club.*

# Sightings – summer-fall 2016

**SUMMER 2016 - An exciting summer birding season produced noteworthy sightings across the Territory. Highlights included the Yukon's first Crested Auklets – which remarkably brings the Yukon checklist to an impressive 8 alcid species.**

A high count of 250 **Ruddy Ducks** was at the Whitehorse sewage ponds 29-30 Jul (CE). A hike on Grey Mountain tallied 24 **Dusky Grouse**, including 3 broods, 11 Jul (ph. CE, PS). A **Turkey Vulture**, casual in the Yukon, was recorded by an automated camera at Sulphur Lake 13 Jul (fide MP). A **Swainson's Hawk** seen at km383 along the Canol Rd. southern Yukon 18 Jul (JJ) established an intriguing summer location. It was a seawatch shocker at Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk when a total of 10 **Crested Auklets**, a Yukon first, flew past 22 June (wd. CE). A total of 162 **Thick-billed Murres** was tallied from Herschel I-Qikiqtaruk 12-22 Jun, with a high count of 46 on 22 Jun (ph. CE). Forty **Black Guillemots** were at the nesting colony at Herschel I-Qikiqtaruk 10 Jun (CE). A road-kill **Glaucous-winged Gull**, casual in cen. Yukon, was found at Pelly Crossing 5 Jun (ph. CE). Five **Caspian Terns**, rare but increasing in southern Yukon, were at Kluane Lake 18 Jul (GL). An aerial survey of Blind Lake, the species' northwestern-most nesting site, recorded 8 **Black Terns** 8 Jul (ph. CE). **Arctic Terns** depart early from southern Yukon and are a scarce fall migrant; 58 were seen at Teslin Lake 28 Jul (JJ). A **Western Kingbird**, casual in the Yukon, was at Drury's Farm 17 Jul (GL). A pair of **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** nesting in a **Bank Swallow** colony along the Yukon River near Whitehorse established the Yukon's first confirmed breeding record 10 Jul (ph. CE, PS). Good numbers of

**Bank Swallows** were noted at a few locations with 1,000 at Whitehorse 29 Jul (CE), 500 at Coot Lake 5 Jun (CE), and 300 at Watson Lake 3 Jun (JJ). A pair of **Barn Swallows** appeared set to breed at Herschel I-Qikiqtaruk on 12 Jun; but by 14 Jun only the male remained and it soon succumbed to the cold (ph. CE); the specimen now resides in the Yukon College collection. Three **Golden-crowned Kinglets** at Dawson 3 Jul (CH) were at the nw. edge of their range. A **MacGillivray's Warbler** at Herschel I-Qikiqtaruk 19 Jun (ph. CE) provided a first island record and one of the few for the Beaufort Territory. A singing **Vesper Sparrow**, casual in the Yukon, was at Wye Lake 20-21 Jun (GL).

*Observers: Cameron Eckert, Colin Hill, Jukka Jantunen, Guy Lemelin, Michael Peers, Pam Sinclair.*

**FALL 2016 - Consistent observations over many years that contribute to a better understanding of changes to northern bird populations. Our view of a species as a once in a lifetime rarities, such as Horned Puffin or Anna's Hummingbird, changes when it turns up for a second or third time. These may well be the vanguards of change.**

At Teslin Lake peak flight for **Tundra Swan** was 3,832 on 6 Oct, while **Greater White-fronted Goose** was 1,647 on 1 Sept (JJ). Waterfowl highlights from the Whitehorse included peak counts of 500 **Gadwall** 6 Oct, 3,500 **American Wigeon** 3 Sept, 1,200 **Mallards** 15 Oct, 1,000 **Northern Shovelers** 22 Aug, 400 **Green-winged Teal** 15 Sept, 200 **Ring-necked Ducks** 5 Sept, and 210 **Ruddy Ducks** 5 Sept (CE); while at Nisutlin River Delta 1,000

**American Wigeon** and 1,000 **Mallards** were tallied 18 Sept (BD, CE, JJ); and 300 **Bufflehead** were at Lake Laberge 22 Aug (CE). At Avadlek Spit, Qikiqtaruk 600 **Surf Scoters**, 100 **White-winged Scoters**, and 200 **Long-tailed Ducks** were recorded 8 Aug (CE). A flight of 133 **Pacific Loons** was recorded at Teslin Lake, 26 Sept (JJ). Single **Yellow-billed Loons** were at Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk 10&12 Aug (CE), and Teslin Lake, 26 Sept (JJ). A total of 97 **Red-necked Grebes** at Marsh Lake 8 Oct (BD, TA, CE). Migration watches at Teslin Lake produced notable raptor tallies of 13 **Osprey**, 54 **Northern Harriers**, 368 **Red-tailed Hawks**, 141 **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, 38 **American Kestrels**, and 10 **Peregrine Falcons** all on 10 Sept; 18 **Rough-legged Hawks** 3 Oct; and 19 **Golden Eagles** 5 Oct (JJ). A group of 30 adult and juvenile **American Coots** was at Yukon Wildlife Preserve 21 Aug (DP). Single **Red Phalaropes** were at Teslin Lake on 24 Sept & 2 Oct (JJ). Single juvenile **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** were seen at Teslin Lake, 8 Sept (JAB, JJ), and Nisutlin River Delta 18 Sept (CE). Seawatches from Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk recorded totals of 19 **Thick-billed Murres** and 8 **Horned Puffins** 4-15 Aug (CE). The Yukon's only **Black Guillemot** colony at Herschel Island-Qikiqtaruk numbered 37 on 7 Aug; breeding was poor with just 7 successful nests and a total of 9 chicks on 16 Aug (CE). Unfortunately, relentless predation of the colony by a **Peregrine Falcon** is contributing to its decline. Two **Sabine's Gulls** were at Teslin Lake, 24 Sept & 6 Oct, with a single there 5 Oct (JJ). The Yukon's second **Anna's Hummingbird** appeared at a Whitehorse yard 24 Aug and by 10 Oct had finally finished moulting a fresh set of flight feathers and was observed departing at pre-dawn on

its migration (ph. CE, PS). Another Anna's frequented a Whitehorse yard from early Aug remained for at least a few weeks (ph. EJ). Season highlights for passerine migration at Teslin Lake included 72 **Alder Flycatchers** 21 Aug; a **Pacific-slope Flycatcher** 4 Aug; 703 **American Robins** 4 Oct; 279 **Varied Thrush** 6 Sept; 200 **American Pipits** 18 Sept; 92 **Yellow Warblers** 1 Sept; 230 **Yellow-rumped Warblers** 3 Sept; and 79 **Rusty Blackbirds** 4 Sept (JJ et al). There is increasing interest in **Barn Swallow** populations across the Territory; 10 were at Klukshu 2 Aug (SC). **Bohemian Waxwings** typically start to congregate in mid to late fall – 250 were at Haines Junction, Yukon 22 Oct (TS). A trip up Mt. Gilliam 4 Sept produced 60 **Snow Buntings** and a flock of 5 **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches** (TS).

*Observers: Tracy Allard, Julie-Ann Bauer, Syd Cannings, Cameron Eckert, Jukka Jantunen, Ed Jenni, Dan Peach, Terry Skjonsberg, Pam Sinclair.*

**WINTER 2016/17 - Reports of marginal winter species, many of which didn't quite lasts the winter, showed what a tough season winter is in the far North. While Christmas Bird Counts continue to be a primary source of information, observations at other times of the season really help create a full picture of the Territory's winter bird populations.**

A flock of 42 **Trumpeter Swans** along with a **Ring-necked Duck**, casual in winter in southern Yukon, were at Johnson's Crossing 27 Dec (CE, JC, MC). A high count of 111 **Mallards** was recorded on the Whitehorse CBC 26 Dec (fide JH). **Buffhead** is rare in southern Yukon in winter; one was at Carcross 18 Dec (DK), while another along with 2 **Barrow's Goldeneye** were noted on the Whitehorse CBC

26 Dec (fide JH). **Bald Eagle** is now a common winter bird in Whitehorse with 29 tallied on the CBC 26 Dec (fide JH). A roving adult **Glaucous Gull** was doing the rounds with sightings at Whitehorse 26 Dec (fide JH), Johnson's Crossing 27 Dec (CE, JC, MC); the N. Klondike Hwy, n. of Whitehorse 28 Dec (JD, ph CE); and Whitehorse 1-2 Jan (ph. CE, PS) and 13 Feb (JH). A **Short-eared Owl** was seen at the s. end of Dezadeash Lake 20 Jan (JB). A roosting **Boreal Owl** was a star of the Tagish CBC 18 Dec (SVD, CE, et al); as was one seen on the Dawson CBC 18 Dec (SJ). A notable count of 70 **Black-billed Magpies** was recorded at the Whitehorse dump 19 Feb (CE). **American Crow** numbers are steadily increasing in the Yukon over the past 20 years; this season, 2 spent much of the winter in Watson Lake (fide SD). Whitehorse turned up a record high 3, 007 **Common Ravens** on the Dec 26 CBC (fide JH). Tagish continue its reign as the Territory's **Mountain Chickadee** hotspot with a total of 21 recorded on the 18 Dec CBC (fide SVD). An **American Robin**, set to tough out the winter, was noted on the Carcross CBC 18 Dec (fide DK). A sizeable flock of 800 **Bohemian Waxwings** was tallied in Whitehorse 2 Dec (CE). Two **Fox Sparrows**, casual in winter, were reported on the Haines Junction CBC 17 Dec (fide JAB). A **Song Sparrow**, casual in winter, appeared briefly at a Whitehorse feeder 6-7 Jan (JT, ph. CE). Single **White-crowned Sparrows** were at Haines Junction 17 Dec (fide JB), and Shallow Bay at least through 20 Dec (MD, CG, ph. CE). **Dark-eyed Junco** reports included 3 at Haines Junction 18 Dec (fide JB), 5 at Tagish 18 Dec (SVD), and 2 at Whitehorse 26 Dec (fide JH). A **Gray-crowned Rosy-finch**, casual in the Yukon in winter, was at Tagish 18 Feb (ph. CE).

*Observers: Julie Bauer, Jim Clark, Minnie Clark, Jim Dilabo, Marianne Douglas,*

*Susan Drury, Cameron Eckert, Chad Gubala, Jim Hawkings, Sebastian Jones, Dan Kemble, Pam Sinclair, Jenny Trapnell, Shyloh van Delft.*

**SPRING 2017 – Impressive numbers of migrants across a diversity of species groups were seen throughout the Territory. Diligent observations by birders not only helps monitor bird populations, they also highlight important migration habitats and staging areas. The Yukon saw one new species to the territory, and a suite of rarities elsewhere made for an exciting season.**

A record count of 37 **Blue-winged Teal** was recorded at M'Clintock Bay, Yukon 13 May (JJ). A male **Cinnamon Teal**, rare in south Yukon, was at Judas Creek 18 May (JH, YBC). A notable count of 800 **Green-winged Teal** was recorded at Teslin Lake outlet 8 May (JJ). Tagish Narrows hosted 200 **Canvasback** 5 May (JJ). Impressive counts of 700 **Greater** and 1,200 **Lesser scaup** along with 210 **Ring-necked** and 240 **Long-tailed ducks** were recorded at Whitehorse sewage lagoons 13 May (CE); while the season's high count of 300 **Barrow's Goldeneye** was there 3 May (CE).

Two **Harlequin Ducks**, rare in the Yellowknife, NT area, were at Tartan Rapids 21 May (RH). A total of 660 **Surf Scoters** was at Watson Lake 16 May (JJ). **Black Scoter** is casual in spring in southern Yukon; singles were at Teslin 10 May (JJ), and Schwatka Lake 18 May (TA; CE). The annual Nares Mountain **Dusky Grouse** hike produced a tally of 7 on 28 Apr (DK, YBC). Meanwhile the spring grouse caravan to Duke Meadows, tallied 17 **Sharp-tailed Grouse** 22 April (BD, CE). A notable count of 365 **Common Loons** was recorded at Tagish Narrows 10 May (JJ). Yukon Southern Lakes hosts high



numbers of migrating grebes with notable counts this season of 343 **Horned Grebes** at M'Clintock Bay 5 May (JJ); and 450 **Horned** and 80 **Red-necked** at Lake Laberge 6 May (CE). The Territory's show-stopper rarity was the Yukon's first and Canada's second **Far Eastern Curlew**, a sensational find at Lake Laberge 31 May – 2 June (ph. CE, BD, PS; JB). Other shorebird highlights from the Yukon Southern Lakes included 70 **Semipalmated Plovers** at Tagish 10 May (JJ); 480 **Long-billed Dowitchers** at Lewes Marsh 12 May (JH, YBC); and at Lake Laberge there were notable counts of 280 **Lesser Yellowlegs** 7 May (CE); and 70 **Semipalmated Plovers** along with 27 **Baird's**, 250 **Least**, and 500 **Pectoral sandpipers** 11 May (CE). Notable staging concentrations of gulls included 700 **Bonaparte's Gulls** at Lake Laberge 7 May (CE), and 510 in Whitehorse 9 May (CE); and an impressive 4,500 **Mew Gulls** was at Lake Laberge 7 May (CE). **Herring Gull** migration peaked in the Yukon

Southern Lakes with 850 at M'Clintock 18 Apr (JJ) and 800 at Lake Laberge 29 Apr (CE). The season's high count of 60 Arctic Terns was at Dezadeash Lake 31 May (BD, CE). **Barred Owl** continues to return annually to Albert Creek with reports this season 17-28 May (JJ, PS, BDL). An evening outing on the Gray Mountain Rd in Whitehorse produced 7 **Boreal Owls** 29 Apr (CE). **Pileated Woodpecker** has a slim but enduring toe-hold at Albert Creek with 1-2 there 17-21 May (JJ, PS). An impressive 3,000 Bank Swallows along with 400 Cliff Swallows 600 Tree, 200 Violet-green swallows were at Jackfish Bay, Lake Laberge, Yukon 21 May (CE). A **Brown Creeper**, casual in southern Yukon, was at Tagish Narrows 19 Apr (JJ, SVD). A high count of 430 **American Pipits** was recorded at M'Clintock Bay, YT 11 May (JJ). **Smith's Longspur** is a scarce migrant though with a growing number of observations from Watson Lake; 2-4 were there 16-17 & 26 May (JJ, PS). A **Black-and-white Warbler** just beyond its range was at Albert

Creek 21 May (JJ). A wave of 92 **Yellow-rumped Warblers** was observed at the Ibex Valley 5 May (SVD). A sizeable flock of about 100 **American Tree Sparrows** along with an equal number of **Dark-eyed Juncos** were at Haines Junction 14 Apr (LA); another flock of 100 **Dark-eyed Juncos** was seen there 18 Apr (JB, TS). A male **Western Tanager**, casual in sw. Yukon, was at Dalton Post 31 May (BD, CE). The **Rusty Blackbird** Blitz continues in the Yukon with 102 at McIntyre Creek, 5 May (BS); 75 at Watson Lake airport 5 May (SS); and 100 in 2 flocks near Tagish same day (JJ). A male **Common Grackle**, casual in southern Yukon, was at Watson Lake 23 May (JW, SW).

*Observers: Tracy Allard, Libby Anderson, Julie Bauer, Boris Dobrowolsky, Cameron Eckert, Jim Hawkings, Jukka Jantunen, Dan Kemble, Ben Schonewille, Scott Schuette, Pam Sinclair, Terry Skjonsberg, Shyloh van Delft, Jamie Weedmark, Shelly Weedmark, Yukon Bird Club.*

## YBC's first scholarship recipient

The Yukon Bird Club Conservation Scholarship is newly offered by the Yukon Bird Club in celebration of our 25th Anniversary, and is meant to recognize Yukon College students who demonstrate a keen interest, passion, and outstanding commitment towards environmental and bird conservation. The spirit of the award reflects the mission of the Yukon Bird Club – which is to promote awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Yukon birds and their habitats. Maya Poirier is this year's recipient. Her dedication to her studies in the Northern Environmental & Conservation Science program, her passion and interest for the outdoors and conservation, and her strong awareness and appreciation for birds and their northern environments make Maya an obvious choice for this award. We are very pleased to be able to support Maya in pursuing her interests!





# 33rd Birdathon a fun affair

By Jenny Trapnell

There's always fun to be had at the annual spring Birdathon. About 30 participants observed a total of 141 species, raising \$1500 for bird conservation, education and awareness in Yukon.

The 24-hour birding blitz began on 5 pm Friday, May 25, and closed with a potluck picnic and prizes Saturday evening at Robert Service Park in Whitehorse.

It's a great opportunity for both new and experienced birders to get outside and enjoy peak spring migration. It's also a fun social event.

YBC's president, Shyloh van Delft and her brother Toren formed the top birding team with 105 species recorded – a personal best for Shyloh. The pair doubled their effort at Albert Creek - one of the territory's most abundant birding spots.

The duo also observed two new birds for their checklist: an Ovenbird and a Buff-breasted Sandpiper.

Begun as a Yukon Conservation Society (YCS) fundraiser, the Birdathon was co-run with the Yukon Bird Club (YBC) after its founding in when it as founded in 1993. The annual event was renamed five years ago in honour of the late long-time birder and president, Helmut Grünberg.

This year's Feature Birder was Tracy Allard who raised almost \$800 with 90 species observed. Allard, an avid e-birder, supports YBC both as a trip leader and board member.

The top Enviro-birder with 87 species was Boris Dobrowolsky, who sailed, canoed and hiked his way to Swan Lake (see the Spring 2018 Warbler), which was Helmut Grunberg's favour-



Betty Sutton photos

birder. Cameron Eckert and Pam Sinclair won the prize for most species seen by an enviro-birding family team.

Cameron Eckert MC'd the traditional checklist read-through In the absence of YBC's inveterate Birdathon coordinator Jim Hawkings (who had business down south to attend to), (see photo).

Events coordinator Betty Sutton did a stellar job again organizing the annual potluck.

Thanks also to YCS for helping promote the 24-hours of birding fun.



ite spot. Malkolm Boothroyd, another enviro-birder, reported 73 species including a Golden-crowned Sparrow and several Goshawks.

Prizes for the youngest birder went to Faris Mecklai, while Julia Duchesne received a prize as the newest youth

awareness, appreciation and conservation of Yukon birds and their habitat. Funds raised support production of YBC newsletter, The Warbler, research, monitoring and education grants, and birding resources for field trips and public libraries.





## Chimney 1 Flicker 0

*Photos and story by Jim Hawkings*

Early September. Finally, we had a cool wet day or two after such a beautiful warm sunny summer. Our home heating systems had been turned right down to 10 degrees C all summer and it seemed like a good time to give the wood stove a short workout to take the chill out of the house. Late last winter we redid the floor protection under our wood stove and gave it a good cleaning, so all was good to go. I split some dry kindling and grabbed a bag of miscellaneous bits of paper that had accumulated over the summer. We have a radon fan which can make starting our stove from scratch a bit of a smoky nightmare, so I turned that off and opened a window to make sure air would easily go up the chimney while the fire was getting started. I opened the glass door on the stove and – WHAT the heck is that! An immaculate Northern Flicker was nestled eerily against the back of the firebox. I knew almost immediately it was lifeless. I reached in and picked it up – and immediately felt almost sick. The poor bird weighed almost nothing. In seconds I envisioned exactly how its hor-

rible demise had played out. No doubt it was prospecting for nesting cavities sometime in the spring (perhaps late May?) and made a bad decision to check out our steel chimney. It went through the gap under the cap and got into the chimney – which I’m guessing is a bit too skinny for a flicker to fly in and too slippery for it to crawl up. It eventually went down the chimney and directly into our stove, which has a baffle (but no catalytic combustor) – leaving a gap large enough for the bird to get right into the firebox. The next part is what makes me sick. I think of the poor bird fluttering around in the firebox, able to see light through the glass door but unable to get out. How many days did it suffer in there before it got too weak and just sat quietly in the corner and died?

We were away on a trip for all of May. A delightful single mother and her three young children lived in our house while we were gone. From what I know she was (and is) incredibly busy with a full-time job and her kids. If the flicker saga played out during this time I’m not surprised it went unnoticed. The glass on the stove door is a bit dirty and any sounds inside would be

quite muffled as it is pretty airtight. It does have outside air that feeds into the firebox – a strange twist of fate as likely this arrangement provided enough air for the poor bird trapped inside.

Would I have noticed the bird in the stove if I had been home? Who knows, but the whole tragedy weighs on me every time I think about it. I pondered what to do with the mummified Flicker, but really couldn’t settle on anything. As of this writing it is sitting quietly on the window sill in our front entry, a sad reminder of the perils we sometimes unwittingly impose on our wildlife neighbours.

We have heated with wood for 30 years and only once before have I encountered anything like this. A swallow somehow got down our chimney and expired many years ago, again in the summer. It went completely unnoticed until I took the back of the stove (an older model with a rather complex firebox) apart to troubleshoot a lack of draft when I lit the first fire in the fall. I thought back and did recall hearing some scratching noises in the stove, but that bird was not visible in the firebox and I only intermittently heard





a bit of scratching, so I didn't really clue in to what was going on until I encountered its charred remains in the nether regions between the firebox and the bottom of the chimney.

I had a brief check online to see if there was any literature on this type of mortality to cavity-nesting birds, but really couldn't find anything – lots of stuff on collisions with windows and buildings, but not so much on “poor choices” when searching for nesting cavities. Even from personal experience I know there are a lot of poor choices out there. I've had Violet-green Swallows nest in the ends of the snow stops on our metal roof...great until there is a good rain which results in water running through their nest! I've also heard tales of swallows nesting in drier vents and other holes which can get very inconvenient for both birds and homeowners – and I'm guessing often it doesn't end well. And we have all heard tales of swallows squeezing into homes and garages and having to be captured or shooed out.



What am I going to do to prevent a repeat of this sad event? I don't know yet. I suppose I could put a screen of wire mesh (small enough to prevent birds from getting through) around the top of my chimney after the end of the heating season next spring – actually a great idea as it would not be that difficult to do...and even if I forget to take it off before I light a fire in the

fall it will allow enough airflow to not cause a safety hazard. Not something to leave on during the heating season however as it would likely get clogged with creosote before very long.

Please let me know if you have any tales of woe related to cavity nesting birds making poor choices like this. (jimh@yukonbirds.ca)





## Kestrel Nest Box Program

*By Mitchell Warne*

The Yukon American Kestrel Nest Box Program is a Citizen Scientist initiative that involves the installation of nest boxes throughout southern Yukon to help kestrels find safe and secure places to nest and to facilitate observation and monitoring by citizen scientists. American kestrels, or kestrels for short, are the blue, brown, white and

orange birds that are about the size of a gray jay that are often seen perched on power lines hunting for voles and grasshoppers. Kestrels are the smallest falcon in North America and are also a cavity nesting species that readily use nest boxes.

This fall 2018, I am seeking suitable locations to install the kestrel nest boxes from Watson Lake to Carmacks,

Whitehorse and back to Watson Lake. The preferred habitat for kestrels is pasture or hay land. However, the habitat can also be a mix including some agriculture. If you would like to volunteer to have a kestrel nest box installed on your property and/or to observe/monitor any nest box(es) please contact myself, Mitchell Warne, at [info@warneinthewild.com](mailto:info@warneinthewild.com).





## Spruce Grouse encounters on the trail

*Photos and story by Kim Selbee*

As a relative new-comer to Whitehorse and the Bird Club, I have been in constant awe of the vast natural beauty and seemingly endless trails to explore, here in the Yukon. My husband and I arrived on January 1st of this year, and Spring seemed a very long way away! But as soon as the last of the snow had melted from the Mt. McIntyre Cross Country Ski Trails, I began hiking them, camera in hand.

One afternoon, on an overcast day in mid-July, as I was walking along, a Spruce Grouse hen and her brood crossed the path just ahead of me. A few more steps, and half the chicks flushed awkwardly into the coniferous trees, while the remaining 4 or 5 quickly hid amongst the mossy greenery of the forest floor. I had only a matter of a few seconds to just point my camera, and hope I had been able to capture even a glimpse of them... then all was completely quiet again.

The hen, however, behaved in exactly the opposite manner! She deliberately walked towards me, head up and alert, clucking softly.

Surprised, I began speaking in a low,



soft voice, hoping to reassure her that I meant no harm to her or her family. It quickly became clear to me that this was no "fool hen" (as they are often called), but a wise and courageous ploy to distract my attention from her young! And what a great job she did, hopping up on a dried piece of wood and proceeding to strike a series of poses, as if showing off for the camera, and I was treated to a close-up view of her understated, yet spectacular plumage for several minutes!

Then, aware that she needed to get

back to her hidden fledglings, and having taken an abundance of photos-- I quietly thanked her and went on my way.

Later, upon viewing my pictures on the computer, I saw to my delight that there was indeed a chick in one of the shots, but it was the images of the Spruce hen that so amazed me, that it was difficult to pick just one to share... and it is my hope that this one photo will help showcase the remarkable beauty of the "common" Spruce Grouse!





# Thanks for the birding workshop

*Photos and story by Jenny Trapnell*

Thirteen people attended the Yukon Bird Club's first introduction to birding workshop offered by local biologist Glenn Ruddman on May 20, 2018 in Whitehorse.

The full-day workshop included some classroom and outside time learning bird identification, how to use binoculars, and other information helpful to new birders. A big thank you goes to Glenn for sharing his impres-

sive expertise and experience to support the appreciation, awareness and conservation of Yukon birds!





# Why the Canada Jay for National Bird

By Dan Kemble  
*Caribou Crossing*

Here in our wilderness cabin, near the BC/Yukon border, our relationship with the Whiskey Jack goes back the 42 years we do.

It's been a fair deal, they must enjoy our largesse (or "spillage") and perhaps our strange antics. We've certainly enjoyed their consistent presence and character. The other wildlife mostly shuns us, fleeing our presence, but the jay seeks us out. Like an emissary of the wilds, perhaps an interpreter too, they "go between" our world and theirs.

The go-between has also always played a major role in our country's history and culture.

As a life-long birder, I've taken quite an interest in the debate over a national bird. Being non-computerized, the information comes to me in fits and starts. I read about it in Canadian Geographic Magazine. I guess I'd always sort of been in the "loon" camp if pressed about it. Don't really know why – just seemed to be accepted, you know, not to be questioned. Something to do with all those CBC "Nature Vignettes" about the cottage country favourite. It is a mighty cool species. When I learned that other Canadians, some in high places, were promoting the Gray Jay as national bird, I realized that chains can be broken, as they can be forged.

Inspired by its promoters and informed by their arguments, and those of the other birds' advocates, I began to ponder this.

Now, alone in Striker's Pass, watching the Whiskey Jacks take their turns at the moose rack feeder, I know why it's the perfect candidate for national bird. Should such a species represent who we are, who we think we are, or who we'd like to be? Good questions. Don't know for sure. I'd just like to make a few general comments and observations about the Whiskey Jack and let the reader decide if this is a national symbol or not. Watching the jays glide up to the feeder, one at a time, impresses



Kim Selbee photo

me. No squabbling or pecking like the Canada Goose. They always seem to travel in small groups, or at least pairs, and seem to respect other individual's space, at least mine do here.

They're opportunists, no denying that. They're not here to "visit", much as I'd like that. They just "know" in their collective memories that we spill our food and don't usually bite.

The jays gorge on whatever's offered but always fly away with beaks stuffed to cache food for later. Planning for the future, does your goose do that, or your Snowy Owl, or loon?

While I think we all admire thrift and the philosophy of banking for the future, apparently we spend \$1.60 for every \$1.00 earned. Perhaps we could think of the Whiskey Jack as a role model in this regard.

By their constant caching of food they help feed other jays and other species. Planned or not, this happens. Altruism? Charity? Probably not, but a certain amount of anthropomorphising is unavoidable in a "national bird" debate.

The Boreal Forest is the largest ecozone in Canada – that's where the Gray Jays are. Probably the closest think we've got to an endemic species – they're a northern bird.

Looks-wise, other candidates do have

more flash. The jay's plumage is very much shades of gray. But the very arrangement of those shades of gray results in a pleasing dapper appearance and the posture of the jay speaks of confidence and alertness.

Their common colloquial name, the one I think is "Whiskey Jack" is based on a First Nations word. How Canadian is that! They also figure heavily in First Nations culture and folklore such as their early nesting period and the difficulty in locating a nest.

They reside here in Canada year-round. There's a bunch of stuff that I find compelling.

I love all birds, especially the owls. Any bird which commands the public attention in such a way as to be considered a national symbol certainly has my respect.

Nevertheless a comment or two on my views of the other candidates may be in order. Snowy Owl – a beautiful northern icon, but a stone cold killer and bit of a "cold fish" which few ever see. Don't think so. Common Loon – our old "stand-by" but on closer inspection, a bit stand-offish, a showboat, and a snowbird. No go. Canada Goose – worst possible choice, no personality, increasingly feral, sexually ambivalent. Good eatin', that's about it. Sorry you goose advocates. Black-capped Chickadee – a close second, for many of the same reasons as jay, a personal favourite but no doubt suffers from "Little Dog's Syndrome".

I suggest we endorse the Gray Jay as national bird with one stipulation. Let's petition the AOU (American Ornithological Union) to have the name of this charming bird reverted back to the infinitely more appropriate "Canada Jay". This is the view taken by the Royal Canadian Geographic Society, Bird Studies Canada, and the Owl Woods Boys. We should ask ourselves where the Yukon Bird Club stands on this issue, then vigorously support our choice. I'd like to thank the Yukon Bird Club for doing what they do, and the readers for their time.

# Yukon Territory's Christmas Bird Counts 2017

By Clive Osborne

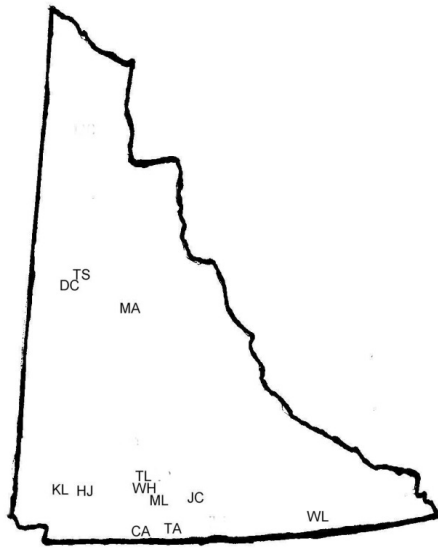


Figure 1. Locations of 2017 Yukon CBCs. This year's Audubon designated unusual sightings were: Trumpeter Swan (5 – Carcross), Sharp-shinned Hawk (1 – Whitehorse), Brown Creeper (3 – Tagish), White-crowned Sparrow (1 – Watson Lake), Dark-eyed Junco (1 – Marsh Lake, 1 – Takhini / Lake Laberge).

Christmas Bird Counts were conducted in 12 Yukon circles by citizen scientist birders in 2017. Whitehorse, Watson Lake and Haines Junction led the way in turn out again this year. Dedicated people return every year to count in the smaller communities and document interesting changes. This article summarizes the information collected from the Yukon Christmas Bird Counts conducted in 2017 as posted to the Audubon Society's website, the official sponsor of the Christmas Bird Count throughout North America. A total of 8633 birds comprising 41 species were counted by 147 participants from the first counts on December 17 to the last count on December 29. A few observations that stick out are the unusually high number of Bohemian Waxwings, the growing number of House Sparrows and the demise of the Rock Pigeon, all in Whitehorse. *The location*

*of the counts is shown in Figure 1 and the counts are summarized in Tables 1-3.*

**Record high numbers** for some species were observed again this year: Mallard (116 – Whitehorse), Common Goldeneye (80 – Tagish), Spruce Grouse (9 – Whitehorse), Bald Eagle (5 – Kluane N.P.), Downy Woodpecker (14 – Watson Lake), Boreal Chickadee (53 – Tagish, 36 – Watson Lake), Brown Creeper (3 – Tagish), Bohemian Waxwing (2033 – Whitehorse), House Sparrow (151 – Whitehorse).

**Record low numbers** were also reported for two counts: Rock Pigeon (1 – Whitehorse), Red Crossbill (3 – Marsh Lake).

Some observers made a few sightings of species during count week that were not counted on count day: Whitehorse (Northern Shrike), Haines Junction (Spruce Grouse, White-winged Crossbill), Kluane N.P. (Ruffed Grouse, Goshawk, Hairy Woodpecker, Boreal Owl, American Dipper, Snow Bunting).

| Species                      | No. of Birds | Rank |
|------------------------------|--------------|------|
| Common Raven                 | 2677         | 1    |
| Bohemian Waxwing             | 2033         | 2    |
| Common Redpoll / redpoll sp. | 1068         | 3    |
| Pine Grosbeak                | 926          | 4    |
| Black-capped Chickadee       | 401          | 5    |
| Boreal Chickadee             | 372          | 6    |
| Black-billed Magpie          | 253          | 7    |
| House Sparrow                | 151          | 8    |
| Mallard                      | 124          | 9    |
| Gray Jay                     | 123          | 10   |

Table 2. The top ten most abundant species over all counts.

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Pine Grosbeak          | 12 |
| Boreal Chickadee       | 12 |
| Common Raven           | 11 |
| Gray Jay               | 11 |
| Black-capped Chickadee | 11 |
| Common Redpoll         | 9  |
| Black-billed Magpie    | 7  |
| Red-breasted Nuthatch  | 7  |
| Ruffed Grouse          | 6  |
| Downy Woodpecker       | 6  |

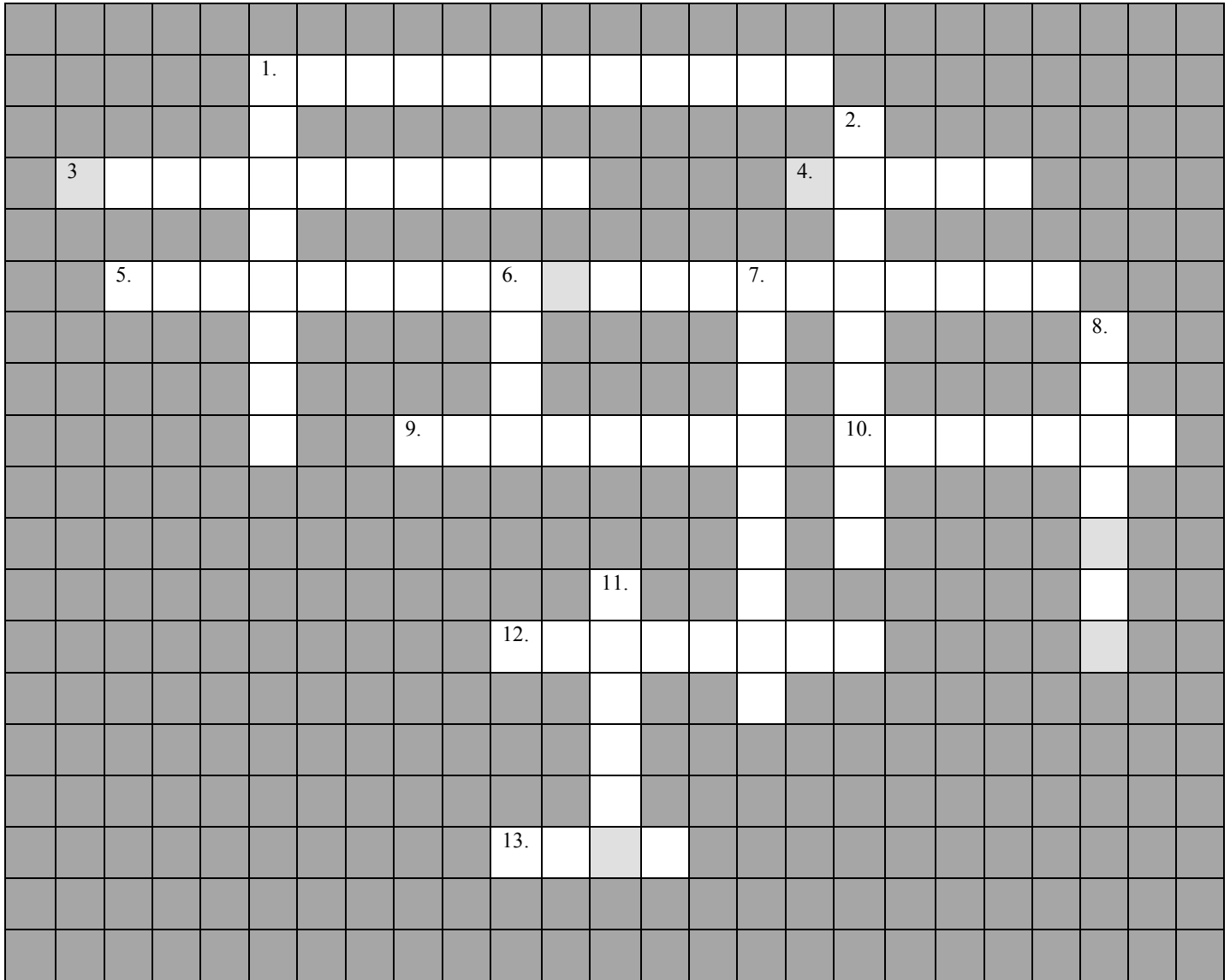
Table 3. The top ten most widespread species as determined by the number counts on which they were observed.

| Count                  | Date  | No. of Field Observers | No. of Species Observed | No. of Birds Observed |
|------------------------|-------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Whitehorse (WH)        | 26/12 | 36                     | 24                      | 5353                  |
| Watson Lake (WL)       | 26/12 | 27                     | 15                      | 576                   |
| Haines Junction (HJ)   | 17/12 | 22                     | 20                      | 774                   |
| Carcross (CA)          | 18/12 | 12                     | 20                      | 296                   |
| Marsh Lake (ML)        | 18/12 | 10                     | 15                      | 430                   |
| Takhini – Laberge (TL) | 20/12 | 10                     | 11                      | 119                   |
| Kluane N.P. (KL)       | 18/12 | 8                      | 10                      | 25                    |
| Mayo (MA)              | 29/12 | 6                      | 12                      | 253                   |
| Tombstone (TS)         | 27/12 | 6                      | 9                       | 41                    |
| Tagish (TA)            | 18/12 | 4                      | 17                      | 494                   |
| Dawson (DC)            | 18/12 | 3                      | 9                       | 149                   |
| Johnson's Xing (JC)    | 27/12 | 2                      | 8                       | 123                   |

Table 1. Summary of Yukon Christmas Bird Counts.



# Birds You Might See in Winter



By Ruth McCullough

## DOWN

1. This bird spends alternate winters in the Yukon.
2. Your best bet for seeing these birds is at the Whitehorse dump.
6. This bird has a low-pitched hoarse call.
7. This grey-crowned bird nests above 7,000 feet and winters in lowlands.
8. What 10 across likes to find on feeders.
11. This bird's tail is longer than its body, it wanders erratically

in winter and has an ascending whine or rapid series of loud harsh cries for its call.

## ACROSS

1. The long slender tail of this owl gives it a falcon like appearance.
3. This owl is twice the size of the crows that often harass it.
4. This bird features prominently in First Nations stories.
5. You would have to go to a certain residential area in downtown Whitehorse to view this extremely rare bird. Their call is a sort of hooting coo.

9. This woodpecker is best told by its short slender bill and softer "pik" call.
10. This bird often becomes tame, especially around campgrounds.
12. This bird is best noted for its distinctive "head gear."
13. This will attract 9 across to you feeder.

*When the crossword is complete, the shaded squares will spell the name of a group of birds that are a major food source of lynx, foxes, martens and birds of prey.*

