

YUKON WARBLER

Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club

Spring-summer 2017



Shelly Weedmark photo

This Indigo Bunting spotted in a Watson Lake yard is a Yukon first.



***Ode to
Dusty the dove***

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Boreal Owl survives window collision

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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.

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We want your birding photos and stories!

Thank you to all who contribute to make the *Yukon Warbler*. To make a submission, write to:

YBCnewsletter@gmail.com

Our next deadline is September 30, 2017.

Yukon Warbler Editor: Liz Hargreaves:

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Rare sightings reports

All sightings of rare or notable birds should be sent directly to the Sightings Coordinator:

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Cameron Eckert photo

Male Rusty Blackbird. An estimated 86 per cent of the world's Rusty Blackbirds nest in Canada's boreal forests. The Rusty Blackbird was listed as a species of Special Concern by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada based on population declines.

Tracking Sensitive Yukon Bird Species

by *Shyloh Van Delft*

How are sensitive bird species tracked in Yukon? It begins with you observing birds at your feeder or in the field and then reporting what you see to the Yukon Bird Club, eBird, or another similar database.

Every bird report goes into an international pool of data that is shared and analyzed by researchers and scientists who use the information to monitor and track bird species - whether it is as common as a House Sparrow or as rare as a Whooping Crane. In Yukon, one of these important data pools is the Yukon

Conservation Data Centre (CDC), which is a member of a network of data centres and Natural Heritage Programs around the western hemisphere coordinated by NatureServe International. It is the CDC's job to collect, compile, and distribute information not only on Yukon birds, but also on Yukon mammals, fish, amphibians, invertebrates, lichens, and plants.

Information drawn from resources such as eBird, North American Bird publications, and the Yukon Bird Club's *Yukon Warbler* have been used by the Yukon CDC to create a list of bird species that occur in the Yukon

and assign NatureServe conservation status ranks to each species. Species are ranked on global, national, and territorial levels, and the list is constantly updated as new information comes in. Additionally, the Yukon CDC uses information from birders to precisely map the localities of birds of conservation concern in the Yukon.

The Yukon CDC database is made publically available to anyone looking for information on species and ecosystems of concern, and is also accessed by other organizations such as Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada

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Accurate information is essential

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(COSEWIC) to facilitate effective management, conservation, and protection strategies for sensitive Yukon bird species such as Common Nighthawk, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Bank Swallow, and Barn Swallow. "Accurate information about species

and ecosystems at risk is essential to effectively manage, conserve and protect our natural resources. The CDC provides a central, reliable, and continually updated source for this information" (Yukon Conservation Data Centre 2016).

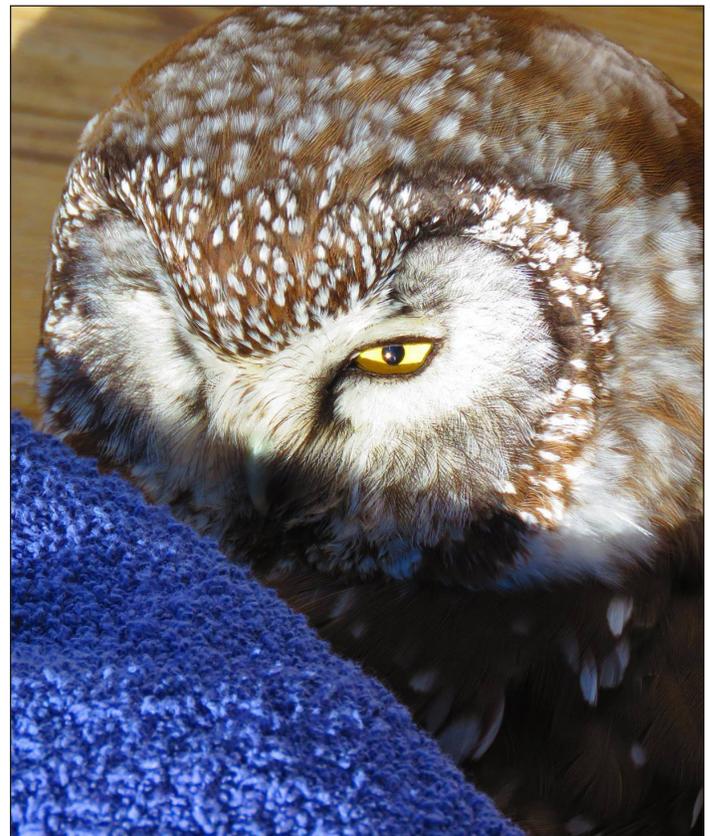
Because the Yukon CDC database utilizes information from the Yukon Bird Club, eBird, and other sources, it is important for birders and bird-watchers out there to continue submitting accurate reports of their observations; these reports should include the species, count, exact

location, time, date, and observers (and contact info if you are reporting a rare or unusual bird). If you want to report bird, wildlife, or plant sightings directly to the Yukon Conservation Data Centre (yukoncdc.gov.yk.ca), you can find sightings forms on their website along with more information about their work.

Yukon Conservation Data Centre website: <http://www.env.gov.yk.ca/animals-habitat/cdc.php>

NatureServe Explorer Website: <http://www.explorer.natureserve.org>

Boreal owl hit a window



Photos and story by Melody Anne McKenzie
March 2017

This little Boreal Owl was being chased by four Grey Jays and hit our living room window. We wrapped him in a warm towel and let him sit on our deck until he could fly away. It took about half an hour with him sitting in

the sun. Before he flew away he landed on my hand the tip of his wing brushed my cheek as he left.
Haines Junction., YT.

See Fatal Light Awareness Program Canada's tips to care for injured bird.
<http://www.flap.org/find-a-bird.php>



Cameron Eckert photo

Devon pursuing his other passion, fishing for flounder on the Alaskan coast.

2016 Raven Award – Devon Yacura

The Raven is an annual award to recognize an individual's outstanding contribution to the Yukon birding community or 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.

The 2016 Raven Award recognizes Devon Yacura for his ground-breaking research investigating bird populations and contaminants at the Whitehorse Sewage Lagoons. Devon's research began in 2013 as a Yukon Bird Club project under the mentorship of Helmut Grünberg to study bird use of the Whitehorse Sewage Lagoons. The research developed into an investigation of pharmaceuticals and chemicals associated with personal

care products in the sewage lagoons as a Master of Science Thesis through the University of Alberta under the supervision of Katie Aitken and Fiona Schmiegelow. In December 2016 Devon successfully defended his thesis and was awarded a Master of Science. Congratulations Devon!

Past Raven Award recipients:

2009 – Malkolm Boothroyd. In recognition of Malkolm's fossil fuel-free Big Year to raise awareness about bird conservation and climate change.

2010 – Sylvia Frisch. In recognition of Sylvia's work as part of International Polar Year to host a series of natural history events, including Weekend on the Wing, at Tombstone Territorial Park.

2011 – Shyloh van Delft. In recognition of Shyloh's outstanding representation

of the Yukon birding community at the Young Ornithologists' Workshop at Long Point Bird Observatory.

2012 – Karen Baltgailis and Christina Macdonald. In recognition of Karen and Christina's dedicated efforts to protect the McIntyre Creek watershed and wetlands.

2013 – Lone Christensen. In recognition of Lone's much appreciated series of summer bird presentations co-hosted with the MacBride Museum in Whitehorse.

2014 – Dan Kemble. In recognition of Dan's enthusiastic leadership of the annual Nares Mountain Dusky Grouse hike.

2015 – Adam Skrutkowski. In recognition of Adam's diligent monitoring of the Yukon's wintering Trumpeter Swans at Johnson's Crossing for the past 10 years.

Swan Haven – Southern Yukon’s Spring Migration Gem

by Jim Hawkings

As I write this, it’s mid-March and we are suffering through a late cold snap in southern Yukon – into the mid minus 20s at night and in the high minus teens during the day, with high wind chills. It’s 10 to 15 degrees below normal – an increasingly rare event in the past few years as our climate steadily warms. It’s hard to believe that in two or three weeks the first few migrant swans should trickle into our few tiny oases of open water. By mid-April the numbers will swell into the thousands, and as they say, it’s all downhill from there. There are few things that can compare with the cacophony of a thousand or more swans on a crisp, otherwise silent, spring day as they work to find enough to eat in a limited patch of open water.

Swan Haven, located at the north end of Marsh Lake, 44 km southeast of Whitehorse, is the most well-known and accessible of our spring migration areas. It turns out to be the one that is most important to birds as well. Other hotspots are located nearby at Tagish River, Johnson’s Crossing, and Carcross.

From the viewing platform at Swan Haven overlooking M’Clintock Bay it may be a bit difficult to understand what is going on in front of you. For much of the spring there is a vast flat expanse of ice and snow extending almost a kilometre. You have to look carefully to see a thin ribbon of blue open water beyond that, seemingly right next to the far shoreline. If it’s calm the swans are much easier to hear than see. If you visit during mid-day, the sun will be glaring directly in your eyes, making viewing very difficult.

Viewed from above this landscape is much easier to understand. The vast expanse of ice and snow in front of you is the delta of the M’Clintock River, which flows in from the left (you will drive across the M’Clintock River Bridge on the Alaska Highway just a stone’s throw east of the Swan Haven road turnoff). This delta is very flat and composed of sand and silt deposited over hundreds of years by the river. Much of the snow and ice in front of you in April is actually sitting on the ground – it formed in early



winter when the water level was about 2 metres higher. By late May the ice will be gone, replaced by a smooth but muddy pasture of sparse, short aquatic vegetation. Several brown river channels wind through this mess before emptying into the deep, crystal-clear Yukon River channel, which flows northward out of the lake on the far right.

So why are all these swans here? Well, in late March and early April, pretty much every bit of water in Southern Yukon is still frozen ...except at some of the outlets of the large lakes and a few other odd spots such as the Yukon River below the Whitehorse Rapids Dam. Among the few places with open water, only a few offer any food for swans and other aquatic birds. Swans are vegetarians and they need access to their staple natural diet of aquatic plants. The detectives among you can gather the evidence of this for yourselves:

You can see most of the swans lined up as close to the ice edge as possible (that is where the water is usually shallowest). They spend a lot of time upended with feet flailing in the air, reaching down in the water as deep as they can.

If you are close enough to see the water lapping against the ice or shore, you will likely see a windrow of plant bits and pieces which have washed up – these are “leftovers” discarded by the feeding swans and other waterfowl.

Viewed from the air, each swan feeding in the relatively clear Yukon River channel has a cloud of muddy water trailing downstream which is created as it excavates food with its bill (and feet when the water is shallow enough).

If you wander around the outer part of the delta in late May or early June before the water rises, you will find numerous craters in the mud where these excavations occurred.

The delta of the M’Clintock River has all the right conditions for these plants to grow: shallow, sheltered water and a rich silty bottom. The plants can grow all summer and through the fall. In the winter they store their energy in parts of their roots – a waiting buffet for swans when they arrive in the spring.

There are quite a few nice river deltas around the southern lakes with aquatic plants growing in their shallow waters, for example Judas Creek, Monkey Creek, Nisutlin River Delta, Jennings River delta, the Yukon River inflow to Lake Laberge. However, most of them remain ice-covered until around mid-May when the ice starts to break up on the larger lakes.

The secret ingredient at Swan Haven as well as Tagish, Carcross, and Johnson’s Crossing is that each is located the outlet of a large lake. Here there is a slightly warmer flow of water coming from deeper layers of the lake. The increased flow of this slightly warmer water at the lake outlet is enough

to keep some water open, even in the nastiest cold of winter. As air temperatures warm in spring, the open water rapidly expands into the lake and also downriver to expose shallows with available food for the swans. At Tagish, open water at the “outlet” of Tagish Lake extends downriver and well into the “inlet” of Marsh Lake.

Swans and other waterbirds have been counted at these areas since the late 1970s, and the counting has been quite regular and detailed since 2004. Swan Haven has the most complete records thanks to the ongoing efforts of the Yukon Environment Wildlife Viewing Program, Environment Canada, and a host of birdwatchers. From these counts we have learned a lot:

According to the eBird database (<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L767519?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>), which has been the data repository of choice for observations at Swan Haven over the past 5 years or so, 147 species of birds have been sighted there. Over 50 species have been counted on a single visit in mid-May. Just about every type of duck, goose, swan and other water-loving bird in Yukon has been reported.

Swans are the flagship birds here, and they often outnumber all other birds during the first few weeks of the season. Both Trumpeter and Tundra Swans use these areas, but about 80% are Trumpeter Swans.

Swan Haven consistently has the highest numbers of swans, followed by Tagish, and Johnson’s Crossing. Over the period 2004-2013 Swan Haven had about 54% of the Trumpeter Swans and 46% of the Tundra Swans. Tagish had 35% of the Trumpeter Swans and 24% of the Tundra Swans. Johnson’s Crossing had 11% of the Trumpeter Swans and 30% of the Tundra Swans.

The highest count of Trumpeter Swans ever recorded at Swan Haven was 2,432 on 7 April 2010 and the largest count of Tundra Swans was 1,060 on 21 April 2004.

The largest count of both species of swans at all three areas on a single date was 3,954 on 14 April, 2005. The largest count of Trumpeter Swans was 3,491 on 7 April 2010, and the largest count



Lewes Marsh and the north end of Marsh Lake as seen from the Landsat 8 satellite on 27 May, 2013. A huge plume of muddy water is visible pouring out of the M'Clintock River in front of Swan Haven and flowing down the Yukon River.

of Tundra Swans was 2,098 on 21 April 2004.

Every year is different. The earliest year for migration ever was 2016 followed by 2010 and 2004, and the latest year was 1982 followed by 2014 and 2011.

When should you go to Swan Haven?
The short answer is: as often as you

can! Actually the best time to go is when there are lots of birds close to the viewing platform and the weather is perfect. Figuring out the best date and time is a bit trickier. Here are a few hints:

Viewing conditions are generally best in the late afternoon and evening because the sun is shining from your back and the temperature is warmer.

Early in April there is more likely to be smaller numbers of species and smaller numbers of birds, and they will be further away from the viewing area.

Every year is different. Before you go you can check out the previous day’s observations in the daily “Swan Haven Report” (http://www.env.gov.yk.ca/animals-habitat/cos_happenings.php) on Environment Yukon’s Wildlife Viewing web site – that will tell you what you are likely to find. For example last year (2016) we had over 1200 swans at Swan Haven on April 1, but in 2014 there were only 19 on that date.

What will this spring be like? We had a lot of cold weather and snow over spring. However things are getting much warmer and it could all turn around pretty fast! Get out there and find out for yourselves!



M'Clintock Bay from the air looking north on May 5, 2016. (aerial support provided by Lighthawk).

Ode to a dove

By *Lone Christensen*

Dusty Girl....
 You came unbidden with the mid-
 night sun
 On soft gray wings you glided in
 Found your perch in the big May tree
 Then preened each feather all ways
 leaving one
 For little Harry to find..
 "Look Grandma a feather, who left it?
 Can I keep it?"
 "Yes my child it is a gift from our little
 Collared Dove
 A Feather, the magic of flight. Study it
 well,
 Gently stroke the long fine lines that
 Carry such birds high and far as they
 seek a home."
 Dusty Girl, you made my yard and my
 hart your
 home
 With a visit each day and I looked
 Forward to your coming. First thing
 each morning
 I would look at you perch to see if you
 were there.
 The raise of the morning sun bath that
 branch
 With warm soft light and there you
 were
 All fluffed out, socking in the celestial
 heat.



All Summer and Fall you came; we
 often talked
 And in your own way you would tell
 me of your travels
 You never showed aggression, but the
 Squirrel,
 Magpies and all birds would leave
 when you came.
 I could see how lonely you were, yet
 you were ostracized.
 Perhaps that is why you would sit and
 let me get oh so close,
 But we never made physical contact, I
 would talk,
 While you would just sit and close
 your eyes in contentment
 Just to have another being close and
 trusted.

You would watch as I scattered the
 rich seed on the ground.
 Then you would drink, sucking water
 through a straw-like beak.
 Golden leaves , the first heavy frost,
 flights of swan winging South.
 Would you follow them? Winter was
 no time for a signal bird.
 Then the snow came and your visits
 were more frequent.
 The seed was needed to fuel your tiny
 body.
 Did you go to the river for water or did
 you use snow?
 The temperatures dropped, the sun
 was lower,
 Your branch was touched by a weaker
 light
 But still you came and the Magpies
 still moved way.
 Then on Dec. 15, 2017 I looked out
 and the Magpies were pulling your tail I
 ran out and they left but you were weak,
 your feet little balls
 Your beak crusted in ice. I talked to
 you but you just sat, eyes close,
 I tried to catch you, to get you inside
 for the winter
 But you left, it was our coldest night
 and you have never returned.
 I so miss you, little spirit of piece, little
 visitor from affair
 Were you an invasive species or a
 refugee from another world
 With a message of things to come?

Grandson can speak Chickadee

When my first grandson was two
 years old, he had a language that
 was all his own. We would speak
 to him in English, give instruction,
 directions, etc and he totally under-
 stood but he would answer us in a
 language that, like I said, was all his.
 Not quite Klingon but close.

It was summertime and he was
 visiting me while his Dad was off
 to a funeral in Marsh Lake. So, off
 for a walk we go... Down to the
 mailboxes... Both of us chattering
 away... Not quite in Klingon but
 communicating non the less....
 when up in a tree a Black-capped
 chickadee called.. Chickadee..dee..
 dee.. Chickadee..dee.dee. Immedi-

ate my grandson's attention went
 to the sound.. Being a keen birder
 myself I was delighted that he was
 interested in the sounds and so I
 explained that it was a chickadee...
 And I repeated the call to him.. He
 immediately repeated "dee dee
 dee" .. Twice.. Loved the fact that we
 were both speaking and commu-
 nicating in the same language. We
 continued our walk home... Both
 very pleased with each other.

My son soon returned .. How did
 things go.. Fine..and His son ran up
 to him... Smiling.. Saying .. "Dee..
 dee..dee""dee dee dee"... And my
 son goes, "You saw a Chickadee?"
 To which the two year old replied

"dee...dee...dee""dee dee dee."

Shortly afterwards my daughter-
 in-law phoned on the cell to my son
 to see how things went.. Immedi-
 ately the two year old hearing his
 mother's voice, runs up, hands out
 for the phone.. Speaking in his own
 language... And then "dee...dee..
 dee""dee dee dee" and his Mom
 said "Oh, you saw a chickadee? He
 was communicating.. I always re-
 member the incredible smile on his
 face... And that folks was the start of
 us communicating.

Betty Sutton
Grandmother extraordinaire

Crossword

by Ruth McCullough

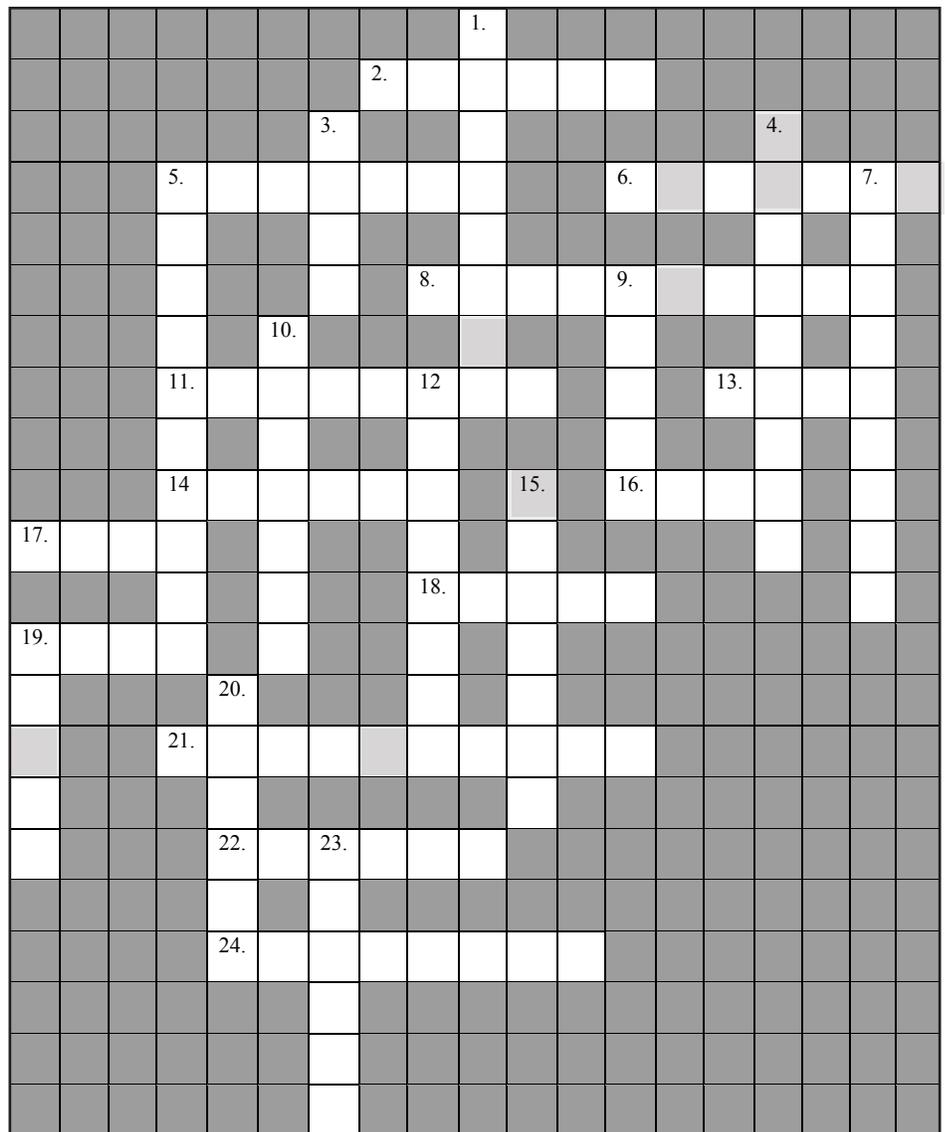
When the crossword is complete, the shaded areas will spell the American official bird.

Across

2. The color of the piping plover's legs
 5. This family of birds are medium sized flycatchers
 6. One of the most common and easily recognized ducks
 8. The male of these ducks is distinguished by the large white patch on its puffy greenish head.
 11. This family of birds have long pointed wings, deeply forked tails and are strong elegant fliers.
 13. What owls like to eat.
 14. This family of birds pursue insects, small birds and rodents which they impale on thorn trees or barbed wire.
 16. What you put in your feeder
 17. A Woodpecker's tool for getting bugs
 18. A small dark goose with a short neck, formerly had "Black" in its name.
 19. These birds are small, brownish with a tail that cocks upward.
 21. The adult of this species is recognized by its black breast marks and facial design.
 22. A common small dark falcon.
 23. This family of small birds are equally at home climbing up, around or down a trunk head first.

Down

1. Former name of the long-tailed duck.
 3. This small, shy duck flies in



small tight flocks

4. This family of birds are found in open woodlands and are said to bring happiness.
 5. This bird has heavily streaked under-parts, deeply notched tail and a slender sharp bill.
 7. This Phalarope is often seen during storms along the coast.
 9. This family of water birds are known for their mournful cry.
 10. This Goldeneye is less widespread than its common cousin.
 12. Common in Deciduous woods, this perching bird has a heavily-streaked breast and black

strips on the crown.

15. Nominated by *Canadian Geographic* to be Canada's official bird
 19. Part of the Sandpiper family, it breeds in coastal marshes.
 20. Half of Yukon's official bird.
 23. What Owls do with their heads.

- SEE ANSWERS ON BACK PAGE

Field trips galore, new locations added

Get ready for some terrific birding adventures with the Yukon Bird Club!

Each year the club organizes field trips to help new and older birders learn about and enjoy Yukon's birds and spectacular bird habitats.

This year's field trip program includes 25 free guided events at diverse birding hotspots in Whitehorse and five other communities.

Leaders will have binoculars and scopes on hand to help get a closer look.

The trips started in mid-April, with a "Shrike and Bluebird" tour on the North Alaska Highway, and they end on November 15 at the Blue Bridge on the Yukon River, to see "what's on the Yukon River" in winter.

Most events take place in May, the peak of bird migration, leading up to the Yukon Birdathon May 26-27.

In Tagish, expert birder Shyloh van Delft helped birders enjoy early migrants in April, and in May will join Adam Perrier in offering an "Under 30s" trip at McIntyre Marsh, one of Whitehorse's most impressive bird habitats.

This year there will be two trips led by Jim Hawkings to the Quartz Road

wetlands opposite Walmart. It's a good trip for young children who can get pretty close to the ducks in the area.

The nice folks at the Yukon Wildlife Preserve – Jake Paleczny and Dave Mossop are also hosting two trips, one in May and one in June to share the incredible diversity of birds there.

Most events involve pretty easy strolls, but a few call for sturdy hiking shoes and perhaps a walking stick. But Dan Kemble's Dusky Grouse Nares Mt. trip in April is well worth the ridge climb for the scenic views that it affords.

Whether you want to learn more about bird-songs, shorebirds, waterbirds, or bird-banding, there is a trip for you!

New this year is an "early bird" walk each Monday starting at 7 a.m. from Shipyards Park. Other new trips include a birding walk from Spruce Hill to Cowley Creek and a trip at Ear Lake, an area the City of Whitehorse is looking to rehabilitate.

Well known returning trip leaders include Sarah Davidson in Haines Jct, Susan Drury in Watson Lake, Mark O'Donoghue's trip to 5-Mile Lake, and

a bird-banding event at the Albert Creek Bird Observatory with Ted Murphy-Kelly. Pam Sinclair will again host a fabulous early morning trip to identify bird songs.

Scott Cameron, with from the Yukon government's wildlife viewing program, will help out with a trip at the Sheep and Crane Fest, and Dr. Katie Aitken, an expert in cavity-nesting birds, will lead a visit along McIntyre Creek near Yukon College.

"The Yukon Bird Club is incredibly proud of the events that our expert volunteers lead," says YBC president, Cameron Eckert. "These field trips are one of the main ways we work to help increase awareness of our incredible bird populations and habitat, for both residents and visitors".

"They also help support valuable partnerships whether it be with the Society for Yukon Bird Observatories or Yukon's Wildlife Viewing Program.

Look for the insert in this Warbler for the complete schedule or check it out at yukonbirds.ca

For more information, contact Cameron Eckert, or Yukon Field Trip coordinator, Jenny Trapnell, 335-3918.

Bench for birders in Helmut's honour



Boris Dobrowolsky photos

This bench at Rarities Pond, Swan Lake, in honour of Helmut Grünberg. He spent many days here studying the birds of Swan Lake.

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



Rhonda Glenn photo

Gray Jay: *let's change its name back to "Canada Jay."*

time, impresses 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.

