

# YUKON WARBLER

*Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club*

Spring-summer 2016



**Cameron Eckert photo**

***This stunning Pileated Woodpecker***, first seen by Russel Osborne and TJ Grantham on 11 November 2015, and photographed here on 20 February 2016, was a star rarity in Haines Junction through the winter to the delight of local birders.

***Biodiversity  
assistant job  
gives wealth  
of experience***

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**Dave Mossop photo  
Banding Peregrine  
Falcon chicks.**



***Cassin's Finch a Yukon first***

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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

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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](mailto:YBCnewsletter@gmail.com)

Our next deadline is September 31, 2016.

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:

[yukonbirdclub@gmail.com](mailto:yukonbirdclub@gmail.com)

## Contributors

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**Bruce Bennett**

**Cynthia Hunt**

**Shyloh van Delft**

**Ione Christensen**

**Dave Mossop**



Cameron Eckert photo

*This adult Common Loon made a real attempt at overwintering on a short stretch of open water along the Yukon River in Whitehorse at least from 26 Dec (here 28 Dec) to 31 Jan after which its fate was uncertain.*

# Yukon Sightings – winter 2014-15

by Cameron D. Eckert

*Christmas Bird Counts are both a primary source of information about northern bird populations in winter, and a catalyst for community well-being – citizen science at its best!*

*Tracking winter birds through the season produces fascinating trends for common winter birds, as well as an impressive list of winter rarities – which this season included both Common and Yellow-billed Loons, two unseasonal corvids, a suite of sparrow species, and a new finch for the Yukon.*

A flock of 46 **Trumpeter Swans**, record high for winter, along with 9 **Mallards**, 2 **Common Goldeneye**, and 11 **Common Mergansers** were at Johnson's Crossing 26 Dec (AS). Elsewhere, a single **Trumpeter Swan** with 2 **Mallards** were at Fox Lake 14 Dec (BD, CE); and 7 **Trumpeters** with 1 **Mallard**, 1 **Bufflehead**, and 4 **Common Goldeneye** were at Nares Lake 17 Jan (CE). Four **Mallards**, pushing the limits of their winter range, were at Dawson 21 Dec (fide SJ); while a record-high count of 75 **Mallards** was recorded on the Whitehorse CBC 26 Dec (fide JH). A **Bufflehead**, rare in winter, was at Tagish Narrows 4 Feb (JH). High

counts for **Common Goldeneye** this season were 36 at Lake Laberge 14 Dec (BD, CE), and 31 at Tagish L. 20 Dec (CE, AP, PS, SVD). **Barrow's Goldeneye** is scarce in s. Yukon in winter; 1 was at Marsh L. 21 Dec (CO); 1 at Whitehorse 26 Dec (fide JH); and a high count of 4 was at Whitehorse 4 Feb (ph. GN). **Willow Ptarmigan** are thin in s. Yukon; reports this winter included 7 at Teslin 14 Dec (fide BS), 21 at Tagish 21 Dec (DK), and 18 at the Teslin R. 26 Dec (AS). Five **White-tailed Ptarmigan**, rarely seen in winter, were on Montana Mountain 21 Dec (DK), and 16 were seen at Thomson Creek Valley 15

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# Cassin's Finch sighting a Yukon first

*Continued from page 3*

Feb (MM). Two lingering **Common Loons** and a single **Yellow-billed Loon** were at Lake Laberge 3 Dec (CE); though more impressive was a winter-plumage adult **Common Loon** swimming continuously in the current on a short stretch of open water on the Yukon River in Whitehorse 26 Dec to 31 Jan (ph. CE, mob). An immature **Horned Grebe**, casual in winter, was at Lake Laberge 6 Dec (ph. CE). The Whitehorse CBC produced a record-high count of 39 **Bald Eagles**, along with a rare winter **Golden Eagle** 26 Dec (ph. CE; fide JH). A **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, casual in s. Yukon in winter, was reported from Teslin 14 Dec (fide BS). **Snowy Owls** winter in the far north

but are rarely reported; one was at Chapman Lake, central Yukon 13 Jan (CM). Christmas counters in Haines Junction turned up a **Northern Hawk Owl** and a **Great Gray Owl** 20 Dec (fide JB). Another **Great Gray Owl** was seen at Kluane Lake 27 Dec (JB); and one was along the Tagish Road 22 Feb (TA). A Gyrfalcon, rarely seen in winter, was near Chapman Lake 27 Dec (GB, CH).

An interior-race (*C. s. annectens*) **Steller's Jay** first seen in Watson Lake in late Oct continued at least to 26 Dec (WA). Two **American Crows**, casual in winter in the Yukon, were seen at Watson Lake through 19 Jan, with one remaining through 30 Jan (ph. SD). The winter **Common**

**Raven** population in Whitehorse is on a steady rise with a tally of 2,209 on the 26 Dec CBC (fide JH). Tagish continues as Northern Canada's **Mountain Chickadee** hotspot with a count of 21 on the 21 Dec CBC (fide SVD). A long walk along the Wolf Cr trails 20 Dec recorded an impressive 17 **Boreal Chickadees** (JH). A flock of 500 **Bohemian Waxwings** was at Whitehorse 23 Dec (CE). Rare winter sparrows included an **American Tree Sparrow** at Teslin to mid-Dec (HS); a **Fox Sparrow** at Whitehorse to 1 Jan (DS; ph. CE; RL, MAL); a **Lincoln's Sparrow** at Tagish 21 Dec (ph. CE, AP, PS, SVD); a **White-crowned Sparrow** in Whitehorse on 26 Dec (ph. RL, MAL) and through the season (TA); a **Golden-crowned Sparrow**



Bruce Bennett photo

*This Cassin's Finch seen briefly at a Cowley Creek feeder 15 Feb 2015 established the Yukon's first documented record. Despite the photo's soft quality, it does show the bill shape, underside patterns, and very slight golden tones to the face which favours Cassin's over Purple Finch.*



Cameron Eckert photo

*There are very few winter records for Fox Sparrow - this one at a Whitehorse feeder through 1 Jan (here 30 Dec) established the Yukon's first Christmas Count record for the species.*

## Fox Sparrow at Christmas Bird Count

*Continued on page 4*

through the season at the Takhini River (LG, JH); and a single **Dark-eyed Junco** at Dawson 21 Dec (fide SJ). An incredible total of 54 **Dark-eyed Juncos** as well as a **White-crowned Sparrow** were recorded on the Haines Junction CBC 20 Dec (fide JB). Three **Rusty Blackbirds**, casual in winter, were tallied on the Whitehorse CBC 26 Dec (ph. CE), with one surviving at a feeder through the season (LC). A small flock of **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches**

along Schwatka Lake in Whitehorse 18 Dec (ph. RL, MAL) grew to about 60 birds by 16 Jan (ph. CE; ph RL, MAL). The Yukon's first documented **Cassin's Finch** was seen briefly at a Cowley Creek feeder 15 Feb (ph. BB). **Pine Siskin** is normally casual in s. Yukon in winter; reports this season included 11 along Windy Arm 13 Dec (ph. CE); 8 at Carcross 21 Dec (DK) and 120 there on 17 Jan (CE); and 1-2 in Whitehorse through late Feb (TA).

**Observers:** Tracy Allard, Julie-Ann Bauer, Bruce Bennett, Greg Brunner, Linda Cameron, Boris Dobrowolsky, Cameron Eckert, Linda Gerrand, Jim Hawkings, Jurg Hoefler, Cynthia Hunt, Sebastian Jones, Dan Kemble, Mary Ann Lewis, Rob Lewis, Meghan Marjanovic, Colin McCann, Geoff Newhouse, Clive Osborne, Adam Perrier, Ben Schonewille, Hendrien Schonewille, Pam Sinclair, Adam Skrutkowski, Dorothy Sorensen, Shyloh van Delft.

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# Exploring the Yukon wilds with a Biodiversity Assistant job

by Shyloh van Delft

**B**iodiversity Assistant STEP Job – My Summer with Dave Mossop. Little did I know what last summer held in store for me.

Mine and Dave's summer started off with a Willow Ptarmigan survey in the Chilkat Pass in April. This allowed us a beautiful winter drive through snowy landscape, and when we started the survey at around 7am the display calls of several dozen males echoed off the hills within our 1km area. May was mostly lab work (skinning birds), and weekly duck surveys between Whitehorse and Carmacks. This was really interesting as we found a few active nests along the way, and a female Hooded Merganser – an unusual Yukon migrant.

When June arrived, nest box checks took priority. Dave and I spent several days checking nest boxes for American Kestrels and Boreal Owls around Whitehorse, through Lewes Marsh, between Whitehorse and Carmacks, from Carmacks to Dawson, and all along the Dempster Highway, as well as Aishihik Lake. We checked 78 boxes, in which we found a few active Bufflehead and Northern Flicker nests, and 7 active American Kestrel nests containing about 34 eggs.

## Weekend on the Wing

When we went up the Dempster we got to stay in Tombstone Campground for the annual Weekend on the Wing celebration. Dave gave a talk on his American Kestrel monitoring project during the Friday evening, and on Saturday I went on a 9 hour hike up Charcoal Ridge. Cameron took the lead for this hike, and was lucky to find nearly all of the focus species for our hike, including Northern Wheatears and the elusive Surfbird! The next day, Dave and I



Shyloh van Delft photo

*Dave and Shyloh at kestrel nestbox checks.*

traveled further north into Eagle Plains for Breeding Bird Surveys, which started at 3:30am.

We were pretty tired for the second one because a large brown Black Bear visited our camp during the night and woke us up. There was no way I was going to sleep well in a tent for the rest of the night after that!

Starting June 26th we boated the Yukon River up and downstream of Dawson for a week doing Peregrine Falcon surveys.

Along the way back to Dawson we got caught in a big thunderstorm that followed our metal boat directly overhead. However, Dave's belief that "no one gets stuck by lightning... You need a little more risk in your life, kid!" kept us going.

After a week, we made it back to Dawson alive and had to start thinking of our next big trip up north, the canoe trip down the Eagle, Bell, and Porcupine Rivers. When the big day

finally came, I was excited to get into the Eagle River and paddle, knowing that I would be in Old Crow for the first time two weeks later and that I would be seeing some incredible scenery along the way.

## Rains bring high rivers

The river was high and fast-flowing from all of the rain the territory had been receiving before we got there, and because we were moving with the current we made speeds of up to 12km/h sometimes. The weather could not have been better the whole trip; it was usually clear and sunny and warm, with and just two days of gloomy, windy weather. During the trip we all tanned brown as berries.

The bugs were not bad on the river; the only times when mosquitoes were insufferable were the times when I had to truck off somewhere in the tundra to (being a



Shyloh van Delft photo

*Peregrine Falcon chicks.*

## *Once in a lifetime experience*

woman) expose my posterior and other lower extremities to the hoards of blood-sucking beasts.

As we came nearer to Old Crow we found an outhouse; never have I found an outhouse to be such a luxury! It's amazing the things that we who live well-off in privileged modern society take for granted. I'm not talking about just indoor toilets, but clean water as well. Clean water never felt so amazing to me as it did when we reached Old Crow. Up until that point, we had been drinking either highly muddy water or stagnant tundra water that had larvae swimming in it.

Birds were the main focus of

our trip, and we got great views of Peregrine Falcons, Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Hawk Owls, a Great Horned Owl, a Great Gray Owl sitting on a nest with a chick, lots of Spotted Sandpipers, Canada and Greater White-fronted Geese, and heard lots of Alder and Hammond's Flycatchers - even a few Yellow-bellied Flycatchers.

### **Banding Peregrine Falcons**

Dave possesses a permit to band Peregrine Falcons, and we found one nest that was accessible. The largest female in the nest gazed boldly up at me with her huge feet stuck straight out in front of her, her beak slightly open, a whole thrush leg sticking ungainly out of her throat.

I enjoyed the expedition to Old Crow, but I have to admit to bad homesickness and to what a relief it was to come around a bend in the Porcupine River one day and see Old Crow. After that, my "work" was pretty much over. We flew to Inuvik next,

and I got to see nearly the full scope of the massive Mackenzie Delta below us.

The size of this delta was extremely impressive, and the water made the flat tundra landscape look like a shattered mirror. I had time alone in Inuvik while Dave went with a couple of biologists to do helicopter surveys of Peregrine Falcons along the Yukon's North Slope and Herschel Island, during which I prepared for our imminent departure back to Whitehorse.

The summer was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, full of unexpected adventures and life lessons. One lesson I took from him was his philosophy of slowing down and enjoying life to the fullest, which he usually expressed with his favourite quote: "Life is meant for living, and the river is meant for travelling, and there is NO hurry essential to either!" He is a very interesting guy with years of experience under his belt, and as many or more great stories to accompany it.

# BIRDING EVENTS



The Yukon Bird Club had its 2nd annual potluck dinner and slide show on January 21, 2016 at Hellaby Hall. This event has proven to be very popular, well attended and excellent pictures from a variety of people... Not to mention the great food that always seems to “just appear” at a Yukon gathering. We have already booked Hellaby hall for January 2017. Check our [calendar of events](#) for the exact date.

MacBride Museum will be our venue again for Birds of Spring, Summer and Fall & Winter with Lone Christensen. Lone presents Birds of Spring on June 14 at 7p.m., Birds of Summer on July 7 at 1:30p.m., Birds of Summer on Aug. 11 at 1:30p.m., and Birds of Fall & Winter Sept. 15 at 7p.m.

Happy birding!

**Betty Sutton**

**Event Coordinator**

*Lone Christensen will be hosting a series of talks at the MacBride Museum, including talks on birding. Other shows lone presents at the museum are: July 5 at 1:30 pm - Fort Selkirk, July 19 at 1:30 pm - Chilkoot Trail, July 21 at 1:30 pm - Whitehorse History. In August: Aug. 9 at 1:30 pm - Fort Selkirk, Aug. 23 at 1:30 pm - Chilkoot Trail, Aug. 25 at 1:30pm - Whitehorse History.*



**Cameron Eckert photo**

*A male Mountain Bluebird scoping out nest sites along the Yukon River in Whitehorse, April 1, 2016.*

# How well do you know your birds?

By Ruth McCullough

When the crossword is complete, the shaded squares will spell a bird, the male of which has a red head and yellow body.

**Across:**

- 3. This male duck is recognized by its green head and white neck band
- 6. Old name for this long tailed duck
- 9. One of the smallest white-headed gulls
- 10. A small passerine bird, common in Southern U.S. and Mexico
- 12. Home to a bird
- 13. This shorebird is a rare but regular migrant in Western Alaska and Yukon
- 15. This Tern has a white streak below its black cap
- 16. What 11 down does for life
- 17. When hunting, this bird walks slowly through shallows or stands with head hunched on shoulders
- 18. Common on beaches or mud flats
- 19. What a raven sometimes steals from greens
- 21. Has a white stripe above and a black stripe through the eye
- 24. Abundant in flocks in berry-bearing trees
- 26. This duck is useful for making duvets
- 27. Nighthawk's dive inducer
- 29. A very sad dove
- 30. Another word for birds
- 31. Can be crossed

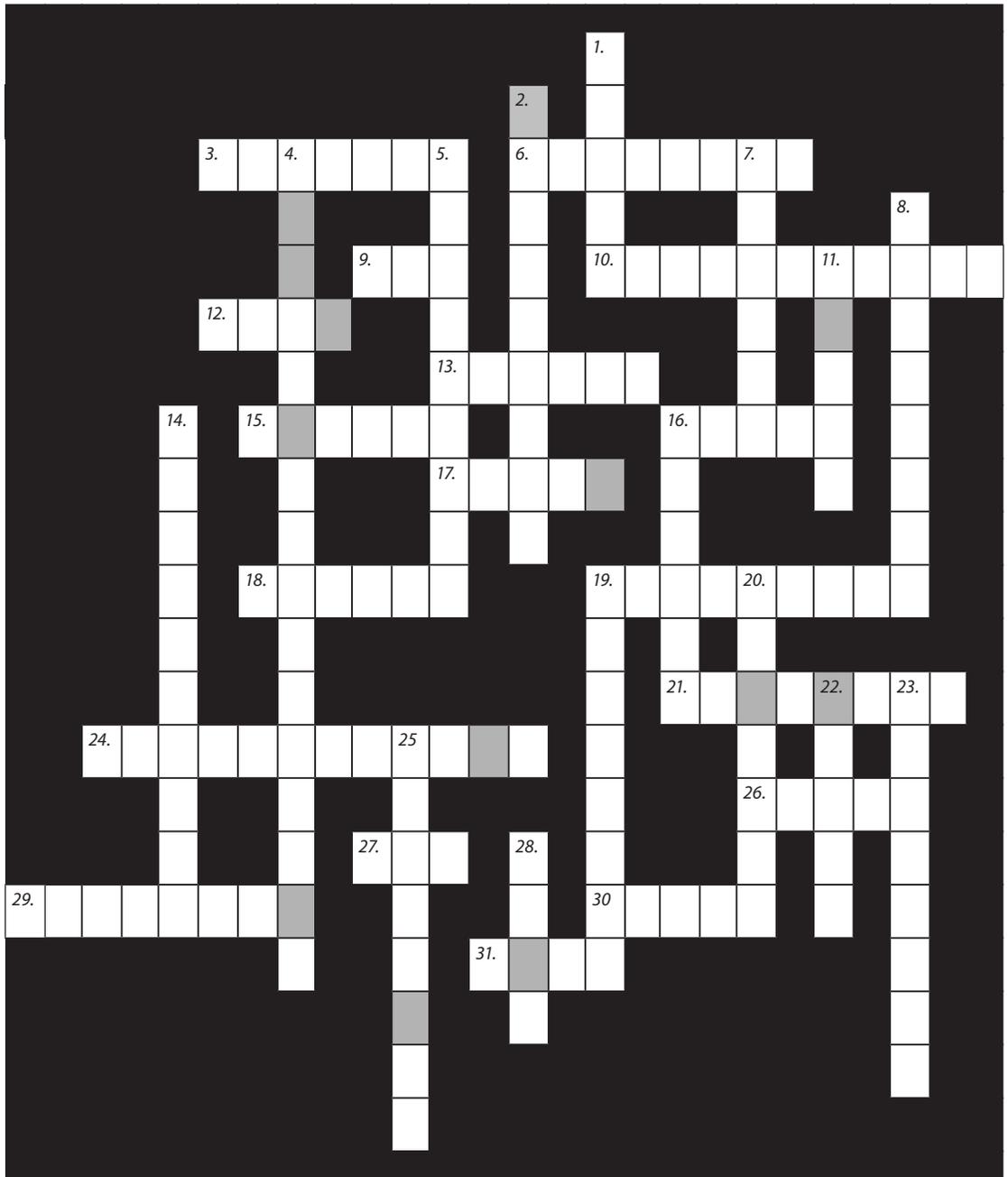
**Down:**

- 1. This duck with white cheeks and a dark cap likes lakes & ponds with floating vegetation

- 2. Supposed to "bring babies"
- 4. Has a more slender and shorter bill than the Greater
- 5. This shorebird is noted for its long bill
- 7. This shorebird's bill is needle like and curves upward
- 8. What keeps a bird warm
- 11. Large plump bird with long neck and short legs
- 14. How 21 across travels on a tree trunk
- 16. Uncommon dark Falcon
- 20. Common bird at feeders and in

- forests of spruce and fir
- 22. A shy bird most active at dusk and night
- 23. This Flycatcher could be mistaken for a tree
- 25. The only northern crested bird with a conical beak
- 28. This Curlew's call is a short, mellow whistle, rapidly repeated 6 – 7 times.
- This bird has a very short tail with a bobbing action.

- SEE ANSWERS ON BACK PAGE



# Dawson City birding highlights

I would like to highlight our dear Sora Rail, with photo evidence of chicks, and our new neighbours

The noisy Eurasian Collard Doves which have took up residence at Henderson's Corner near Dawson last summer. It looks like southern Yukon and Whitehorse had the wackiest bird season ever last year. It is sad when global warming is exciting and fun for us Northern birders.

Happy Birding, spring is on it's way.

*Cynthia Hunt Dawson City*



Cynthia Hunt photos

*Eurasian Collard Doves spotted in Dawson area.*



*American Coot spotted in Dawson area.*



*Sora Rail chick.*

## YBC is looking for a Birdathon Coordinator!

Jim Hawkings is looking to gently surrender the Birdathon Coordinator role for YBC. The Helmut Grünberg Yukon Birdathon (scheduled for 27/28 May, 2016) is our major annual fundraiser and an important rite of spring for many local birders. This is not an onerous portfolio as there are a good number of dedicated regular participants in the event who don't need much prodding. It really just involves coordinating some publicity and making sure documents for the Bir-

dathon are up to date for the current year and available on the website and perhaps a few locations in town. The venue (Robert Service Campground) also needs to be booked. Jim and Betty Sutton will be glad to help you out to learn the ropes!

General info about the Birdathon is available on the YBC website at [yukonbirds.ca/birdathon](http://yukonbirds.ca/birdathon) Please contact YBC or Jim at 668-2639 if you are interested.

# Long Point trip an amazing experience for young birder

by *Rebecca Heath*

Here is a little piece of writing that explains what my time at the Long Point Bird Observatory was like.

I would also like to thank the Yukon Bird Club for making this amazing experience possible.

I must start this memoir off, by giving a brief insight into my life thus far; My hat has been hung in places with classes of five students, twenty students in high school, and 110 students in a school, total - grades K to 12. For fifteen years I had no idea what it was like to be around people with the same interests as me; it was a foreign concept that anyone else my age could possibly like birds. But the Young Ornithologists' Workshop promised just that; young people, who love birds. I could tell right away that the advertising was no hoax; the other young people in the workshop carried the same, incurable ailment that I had.

About an hour after stepping off a plane in Toronto, a little, grey bird flew over the car on the drive to the Oldcut banding station. The birders reading this know exactly what I'm talking about; you see the bird out the car window, said bird is moving too fast and the car is moving far too fast, you don't identify the bird. Damn. That was exactly my experience, but the difference between this sighting and the countless others that occur when driving with

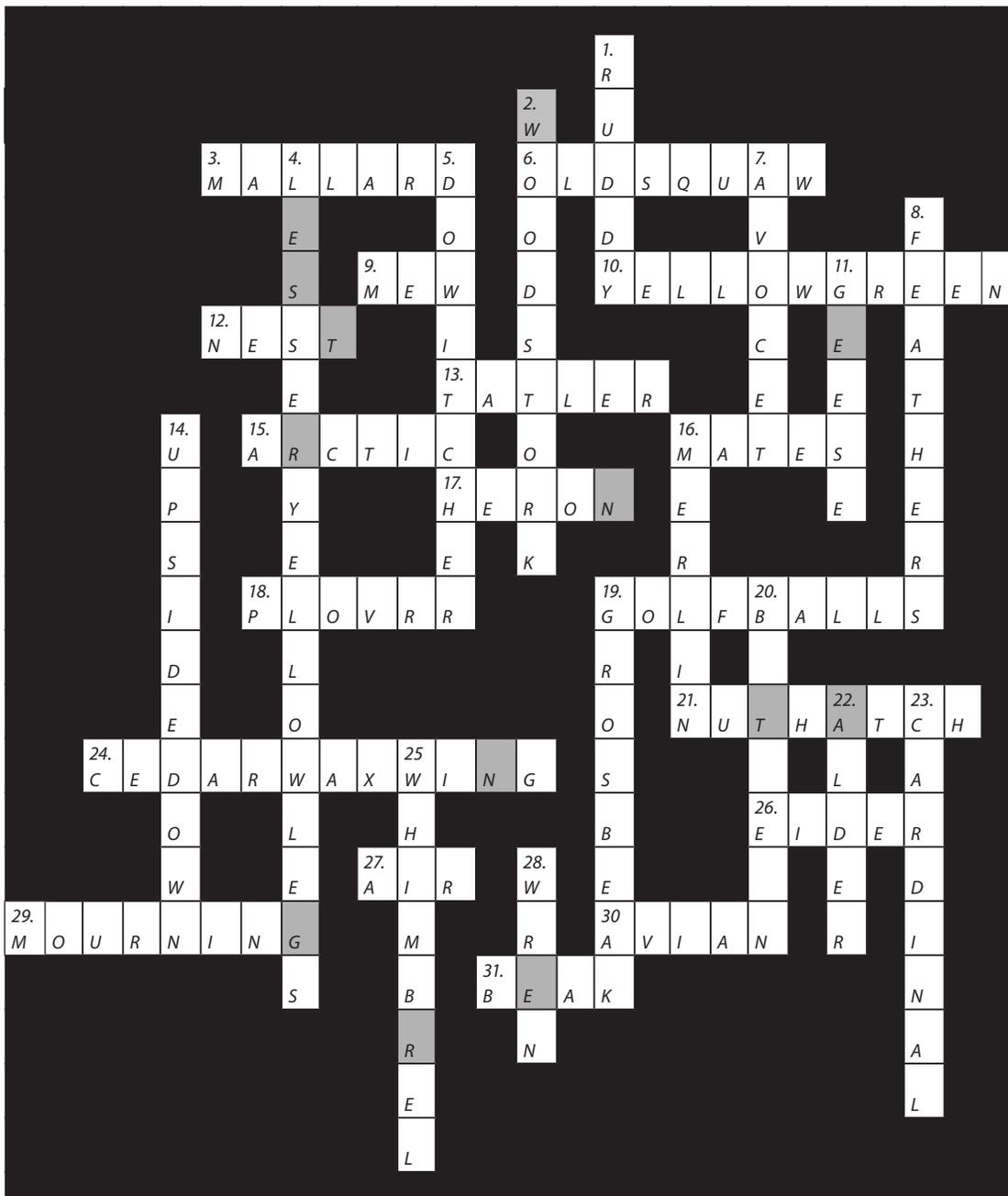


*Rebecca Heath - learned how to band birds, the art of skinning, and about the decline of songbirds while at the Young Ornithologists' Workshop at Long Point.*

my family, was that another participant also noticed the bird. I think my brain went into shock; I remember trying to process what I had seen and all that my brain could compute was, "what?" The week went on, and I started to see that, wow, these people knew their stuff, but it didn't become apparent just how far into the

stages of "bird-mania" these guys were, until sports were brought into the equation. I was the only girl participant in the workshop, surrounded by four, quite active boys. Now, most girls might be intimidated, but if you know me at all you know that I am not most girls. I am not afraid to take a soccer ball to the face, or spike a volleyball so that my opponents can only cower in response. I am not afraid of playing soccer with four boys, not by a long shot. But I noticed that something was off about these boys; when a creature of the avian variety flew over, one would call, "bird," and the game would be forgotten, binoculars retrieved from their safe hiding places, and the bird identified. Then they went back to being normal boys — to the average passerby — until the next bird. Again, I was flabbergasted; there really were people like me out there, and boys too. That was the most important thing my time at the Long Point Bird Observatory showed me; that I am not alone, that it really is one in a million and not one in seven-billion. Of course, I learned how to band birds, about the steep decline in songbird numbers, the delicate art of skinning, how smart humming birds are, and so, so much more, but I learned what it's like to be a part of a group of people with the same interests. Thank you LPBO staff, for everything you have taught me.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS



Shaded squares spell Western Tanager

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