

Yukon Warbler

Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club – Fall 2003



An adult Sabine's Gull in Whitehorse on September 12, 2003. Photo by Cameron Eckert

Yukon Christmas Bird Counts 2003/04

All are welcome – beginners, feeder watchers, and seasoned veterans! Please contact the count coordinators listed below at least a week prior to count day.

Count location	Count day	Count coordinator	Phone
Skagway	Dec-14	John McDermott	907-983-3103
Marsh Lake	Dec-21	Helmut Grünberg	867-667-6703
Whitehorse	Dec-26	Wendy Nixon	867-668-7572
Mayo	Dec-29	Mark O'Donoghue	867-996-2529
Haines Junction	Dec-29	David Henry	867-634-2426
Watson Lake	Dec-31	Ted Murphy-Kelly	867-536-2057

Christmas Count Frequently Asked Questions

Source: www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/

What is the Christmas Bird Count?

The Christmas Bird Count is a long-standing program of the National Audubon Society. It is an early-winter bird census, where volunteers follow specified routes through a designated 15-mile (24-km) diameter circle, counting every bird they see or hear all day. It's not just a species tally—all birds are counted all day, giving an indication of the total number of birds in the circle that day. All individual CBC's are conducted in the period from 14 December to 5 January (inclusive dates) each season, and each count is conducted in one calendar day.

Why was the Christmas Bird Count started?

The first CBC was done on Christmas Day of 1900 as an alternative activity to an event called the "side hunt" where people chose sides, then went out and shot as many birds as they could. The group that came in with the largest number of dead birds won the event. Frank Chapman, a famed ornithologist at the American Museum of Natural History and the editor of Bird-Lore (which became the publication of the National Association of Audubon Societies when that organization formed in 1905) recognized that declining bird populations could not withstand wanton over-hunting, and proposed to count birds on Christmas Day rather than shoot them.

Will I be doing this by myself, and do I have to be an experienced birder?

CBC participants are organized into groups—or field parties—by the organizer or Compiler of each Count. Each field party covers a specific area of the 24-km diameter circle on a specific route. And

anyone is welcome to participate, since Compilers arrange field parties so that inexperienced observers are always out with seasoned CBC veterans.

Do I have to join a field party, or can I count the birds at my feeder?

As long as you live within a designated CBC circle, you are welcome to count the birds at your feeder. All you'll need to do is contact your local Compiler so that you may report your results on the Count Day.

Can I do a Christmas Bird Count on my own?

No. Since each CBC is a real census, and since the 24-km diameter circle contains a lot of area to be covered, single-observer counts (except in unusual circumstances) cannot be allowed.

Is the Christmas Bird Count useful?

Absolutely. The data collected by observers over the past century allow researchers, conservation biologists, and interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. In the 1980's CBC data were used to document the decline of wintering populations of the American Black Duck, after which conservation measures were put into effect to reduce hunting pressure on this species.

Is there a cost?

Yes, there is a \$5.00 fee per field participant per count. Feeder watchers do not need to pay the fee, and all observers 18 and under may count for free. These fees help to cover the costs of generating materials for Compilers, producing an annual CBC summary issue, and maintaining the CBC website and database.

Yukon Birdathon 2003

Ten teams participated in this year's Birdathon. This year the Birdathon was on May 30/31, and this late date resulted in a scarcity of migrating birds (shorebirds, longspurs, pipits). These deficits were made up by the increased amount of breeding birds (flycatchers, warblers). The weather was ideal for searching out birds. Winds were light and the skies were mostly

sunny. The Bar-B-Q finale was a successful social event. Thanks to Adam Perrier, our featured birder and all the other participants. A special thanks to the organizers and those who gave so generously. This year the Birdathon raised \$3,486.23. These monies are shared evenly between the Yukon Bird Club and The Yukon Conservation Society.

Marsh Lake Field Trip Report – October 12, 2003

Weather was great, with calm seas, and the odd outburst of sun bathed this cheery group of birders in tranquil radiance. Birding did not live up to the rash predictions of the leader, though 26 species were observed. Some grumbling was overheard among the participants,

who were wondering where the promised rarities were. The trip leader used a heavy hand to stifle dissent. Leader: Boris Dobrowolsky. Participants: Dianna McArthur, Jeanne Hinchey, Jenny Trapnell, Yammy Stote, Khaz Kuba, Cameron Eckert, Helmut Grünberg.

Yukon River Bridge	
Pacific Loon	1
Horned Grebe	1
Trumpeter Swan	2
Tundra Swan	1
White-winged Scoter	4
Bufflehead	250
goldeneye sp.	20
Bald Eagle	2
Black-billed Magpie	2
Army Beach	
Common Loon	23
Horned Grebe	2
Red-necked Grebe	4
Bufflehead	50
Goldeneye sp.	20
Common Merganser	60
Bald Eagle	1
Thayer's Gull	1
Hairy Woodpecker	1
Black-billed Magpie	1
Common Raven	2
Boreal Chickadee	1
Redpoll sp.	6
Judas Creek	
Common Loon	2
Horned Grebe	30
Red-necked Grebe	6
Trumpeter Swan	50
Tundra Swan	70
Mallard	2
Bufflehead	20
goldeneye sp.	20
diving duck sp.	200
Herring Gull	4
gull sp.	1

Gray Jay	2
Black-billed Magpie	3
Mountain Bluebird	3
Dark-eyed Junco	1
redpoll sp.	8
Tagish	
Common Loon	1
Horned Grebe	4
swan sp.	6
scaup sp.	20
Surf Scoter	7
White-winged Scoter	1
scoter sp.	50
Bufflehead	200
Common Merganser	1
Northern Harrier	1
gull sp.	2
Black-billed Magpie	2
Common Raven	2
Black-capped Chickadee	1
longspur sp.	4
Carcross	
Horned Grebe	2
Red-necked Grebe	2
American Wigeon	15
Bufflehead	500
goldeneye sp.	30
Common Merganser	10
Bald Eagle	1
passerine sp.	20
Schwatka Lake	
Common Loon	2
grebe sp.	2
Bufflehead	10
goldeneye sp.	5

Albert Creek Banding Station Report, 2003

By Ted Murphy-Kelly



Albert Creek, Yukon. Photo by Ted Murphy-Kelly

The third year of banding and migration monitoring at Albert Creek was an exciting one all round. We banded 2173 birds of 51 species in 2003 adding 13 new species to last year's list of which 3 are rare. Our total of birds banded was the best yet and we continue to catch very impressive numbers of Wilson's, Yellow-rumped, and Orange-crowned warblers. The number of recaptured birds from previous years was also notable; 37 birds of 14 species were recaptured this year, and 25 of these were migrants including Alder Flycatcher, Tennessee Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat and Swainson's Thrush. Four individual birds have been recaptured each year since 2001. Lincoln Sparrow band # 225020423 has been caught on several occasions in the past two years. New net lanes were established and we are now operating with 18 nets. Summer student programs continue to help with the station's operations and local school groups visited the station again this year. Things are already shaping up for the next year

financially speaking and the next few months will be spent looking at various additional sources of funding. The station was in operation for 40 days in the spring from May 1 to June 14. We reopened for the fall season on August 4 and closed on September 13 for a total of 36 days. Next year, we intend to operate 45 days in spring and 65 in fall. There were more volunteers than ever and more visitors than last year to the station. Albert Creek banding station opened for business on May 1 this year, a whole week earlier than last. Three volunteers, Jayson Strudwick, Jose Valero, Johnny Van Langen and I set up 9 mist nets and banded four Tree Sparrows. Snow still covered 25 percent of the ground and the marsh was still covered with ice. Waterfowl numbers dominated our observations as rafts of Mallards, American Wigeon and Canada Geese worked the area. The first of the songbird migrants had also arrived such as American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, and flocks of American Pipits.



Master bander Ted Murphy-Kelly carefully affixes a tiny leg band to a male Common Yellowthroat.
Photo by Julie Bauer

On May 2, we had 15 mist nets set up and the first of the warblers appeared. We banded 2 Orange-crowned Warblers on this day. We welcomed our first visitors from the public to the station on the next day. The top species observed continued to be American Tree Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, and American Pipit. Waterfowl continued to dominate the skies for the next few days along with the odd Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Red-tailed Hawk. On May 4, Lisa Christensen of Whitehorse arrived to help out on loan from Canadian Wildlife Service, Whitehorse. This was also the first sighting of the famed Pileated Woodpecker of the year thanks to Lisa's keen eyes. We managed to band a couple of the year's first Yellow-rumped Warblers on this day. Banding numbers remained low for the next couple of days and on May 7 the Wood Frogs began to sing just as the marsh became ice free and our first Wilson's Warblers appeared. By

May 9, the Wood Frogs were already laying eggs and Lisa returned to Whitehorse. The big surprise on this day was a lone caribou which came strolling down the road and did not see us until it was a mere 100 meters away.

On May 12, I began to receive help from Teri Aschacher of Whitehorse a STEP student spending the summer in Watson Lake. Ben Schonewille of Teslin also arrived to volunteer for 4 days. Ben was my summer student from the previous year and had obviously caught the banding bug. For the next few days things started to pick up as more migrants such as Blackpoll Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, and Common Yellowthroat trickled in. We added two beautiful Bohemian Waxwings to our banding list on May 13, and a Wilson's Snipe on May 15. On May 18 I almost lost one of the mist nets to a cow and calf moose that charged through the bush during a net run narrowly missing a net by a few feet.

By May 19 migration really started to get into gear. Luckily this was also when Gwen Baluss, a skilled bander and her trainee Rob McKee of the U.S.F.S. traveled from Juneau to help out for 5 days. We were quickly overwhelmed with Wilson's, Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned, and Yellow warblers. We had our three top banding days during this time. May 20, 21, and 22 had 106, 106 and 123 birds banded respectively. On May 22, Wilson's Warbler made up 66 of the total. The marsh was alive with birds. The banding lab was abuzz as Gwen and I rifled through dozens of birds while calling out species names, band numbers and measurements to Rob and Teri as they feverishly entered all the information on the banding sheets. During these three days we operated with just 10 to 12 nets as soon as the birds became active. At times it was quite a challenge for even two banders to process birds in a timely manner. There was a bit of a lull in bird activity for the next few days and then an increase again on May 26 as the later migrants such as Warbling Vireo and the flycatchers began to arrive. Banding was often frustrating as I was forced to run fewer nets due to lack of help. Short bursts of bird activity would often create a boom and bust effect.



Top to bottom: A trio of Albert Creek warblers – Wilson's, Orange-crowned, and Magnolia.
Photos by Gwen Baluss and Ted Murphy-Kelly

By May 29-30, the last of the migrants appeared including Magnolia Warbler, American Redstart, Western Tanager and an unexpected Ovenbird. This bird was never heard or seen and caused quite a stir, as it was known to only occur in the Beaver and La Biche river valleys in the extreme southeast Yukon. On May 31 Cynthia Onions of Whitehorse added to the list of much appreciated volunteers. We also continued to receive the odd visitor to the station travelling up the Alaska Highway.

On June 3, Julie Bauer returned for her second year of volunteering at the station all the way from Haines Junction. It was on this day that we were able to identify a male and a female Pileated Woodpecker foraging on old spruce stumps just 200 meters from the banding lab. Julie and I snuck up on both birds and viewed them for several minutes at distances as close as 15 meters as they worked on rotting stumps. Both birds arrived on the scene together and foraged within 50 meters of each other. These birds were often only identified by their distinctive 'wuck-wuck- wuck' call or their sudden, obvious appearance as they flew across the marsh. We were never able to locate a nest although evidence would tend to suggest that there is possibly one breeding pair in the Watson Lake area.

The excitement continued on June 4 when we banded another rare warbler for the Watson Lake area. The day was otherwise slow and uneventful until a boldly patterned Black-and-white Warbler made its way into net # 11. This species became somewhat of a celebrity overshoot for the season in the Yukon as one had also been observed by Wendy Nixon and another by Mike Gill even further west.

On June 10, a team of students through the Y2C2 program arrived at the station for two days working on net lane maintenance and census trails. A flock of 40 White-winged Crossbills moved into the surrounding White Spruce and moved on within an hour to give us a brief but valuable observation for the station.

Albert Creek Banding Station provides valuable training opportunities for Y2C2 and STEP students Kate Westberg, Megan Whittle, Nicole Enders, Theresa Mundell, and Teri Aschacher.



By June 14, all migrants seemed to have arrived and we ended the spring season with yet another rare Liard Basin bird. As we were winding down and calling it a season a Red-eyed Vireo made its presence known with its incessant '*here I am – where are you?*' song. The bird was quickly located and positively identified. After setting up nets and preparing net lanes for two days, we resumed banding at Albert Creek for the fall season on August 4. Alder Flycatchers were still very vocal around the marsh but other birds had become virtually silent. The fall season is always an interesting time at Albert Creek as certain bird species are moulting and hatch year birds provide a different aspect to data gathering. Albert Creek was fortunate to have the help of Helmut Grünberg, a very skilled birder from Whitehorse who visited the station for a couple of days. During this time we banded several warblers in various stages of molt, notably Magnolia Warbler and American

Redstart. Molt in certain species is something that northerly banding stations are well positioned to gather information on. So far Albert Creek is Canada's northernmost passerine banding station after Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory in Alberta. Pine Siskin activity became quite evident but it was difficult to get good "estimated totals" on other species. The next few days we banded local breeders such as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, White-throated Sparrow, Swainson's Thrush, Alder Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Swamp and Lincoln's sparrows. Jeff Botti of Watson Lake volunteered as scribe and Hollie Murphy-Kelly and Pierre Martin volunteered to help set up the banding lab. Unfortunately we had our gazebo tent stolen only three days after setting it up. Daily banding totals were moderate at the beginning of the month and numbers were manageable as nets were opened at a conservative rate.



Left to right: A trio of Albert Creek rarities – Blue-headed Vireo on August 16, Black-and-white Warbler on June 4, and Ovenbird on May 29. Photos by Ted Murphy-Kelly and Julie Bauer

On August 5, a hatch-year Brown-headed Cowbird was banded. On August 16 and 18 a Blue-headed Vireo was banded. This was a first for Albert Creek. An Osprey was also sighted on this date as it flew by with a fish in its talons. On August 18, we banded our first Townsend's Warbler since 2001. This was the first of 4 for the season. A flock of 40 White-fronted geese was recorded flying over the marsh and Ben Schonewille arrived once again from Teslin to lend a hand. On the next day we banded our only Western Tanager of the year and caught good numbers of Swainson's Thrushes, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Empidonax flycatchers are always a challenge at any banding station. We finally had the opportunity of netting a Hammond's Flycatcher on August 22 and again on the next day. Julie Bauer returned for a fall banding stint on August 23. A group of Cliff Swallows was feeding around the marsh on August 24, and all species of warblers were still being observed or banded in the area. Black-backed Woodpecker was added to our species list at this time. After a heavy rain during the night we experienced a typical fall "boom and bust" day when a huge wave of birds moved through the marsh causing Julie and I to close many nets in order to process a sudden heavy net run. Julie's help was much appreciated especially her excellent raptor identification. On the next day we witnessed a Northern Goshawk fly very low right over the banding lab. On

August 29, Pierre Martin who was employed to help out at the station thanks to the Environmental Awareness Fund came within a few meters of a Black Bear while doing a net run. The bear walked off, unconcerned but this continues to be a serious awareness issue at the station. By this time falling leaves in the nets were becoming a real painstaking task during any net run and as the winds picked up the work of clearing certain nets became a bit ridiculous.

On August 30, we were rewarded with a fall out of birds which produced 58 birds banded. The night before had experienced a considerable drop in pressure and an increase in humidity. Bird activity was very high at the beginning of the day and dropped drastically before noon. This produced a typical "wave" of migrants moving through the marsh and then a dead period for the rest of the day. The Relkoff family of Watson Lake visited the station on September 1. Katherine, Rick, Blair, Alex and Leigh have been regular visitors for two years enjoying the opportunity to see birds up close and personal. They also got to see one of the 14 Fox Sparrows banded in the fall season. On September 3, the marsh saw a group of Rusty Blackbirds move through and we were fortunate to keep 5 of them in the nets before they flapped themselves out. A Three-toed Woodpecker finally found its way into net #15 the only net located in the mature White Spruce stand.

On September 4, we finally experienced the number of Pine Siskin in the area when 18 were trapped in net #11. They were feeding on alder seeds. We banded another Three-toed Woodpecker on September 5 to make up for the very low numbers of birds banded on that day. We were rained out on September 7-8, but resumed the following day as we welcomed Johnson elementary school children to the station. We conducted talks on bird ecology and banding demonstrations to grades 5-7, twice a day for 3 days. The teachers and students were thrilled to see what a bird banding station was all about. On September 13, I received my last three visitors to the station including Tom Jung of Environment Yukon. The day was very short as it soon started to rain non-stop forcing me to close for the day. This was the last day of the season; a fierce weather system blew in and dumped 5 centimetres of wet snow the next day. Cold blustery weather with snow flurries and rain persisted for the next 3 days. I was suddenly faced with the urgency of packing up the mist nets as soon as a clear dry day appeared. Most of the migrants had been pushed south from this weather system but it did create a great fallout of juncos and other sparrows. Numbers were thin at Albert Creek but I banded just over 200 Juncos at our yard in town.

Overall the year was a great success. My sincere thanks goes to Albert Creek banding station sponsors and supporters, the Canadian Wildlife Service (major contributor), Environment Yukon through Jan Adamczewski and Thomas Jung, Environmental Awareness Fund YTG, James L. Baillie Memorial Fund Bird Studies Canada, Yukon Bird Club, and Southeast Yukon Proper Land-use Society. I am now assessing what I should do with certain protocols such as how early I should open the nets and how long I should run them. Many of the conditions are very different at a station located north of sixty and I continue to learn about the best way to operate. At the beginning of October I had the great opportunity to attend the annual Canadian Migration Monitoring Network (CMMN) conference which was held in Calgary. There I met with bird banders and representatives from stations across the country to discuss and learn about a wide range of topics related to migration monitoring and banding. I am planning to collaborate with Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory on a molt study using their standardized scoring methods and an extended fall season. Next year, fall banding will begin on July 15. I hope that you can all make it to Watson Lake next year to what is now the northernmost banding station in Canada.



Bird banding is fun! Public outreach is an integral part of the Albert Creek banding station.

Albert Creek banders and scribes for 2003:

Ted Murphy-Kelly (bander in charge), Ben Schonewille (Bander in training, Teslin), Teri Aschacher (STEP student, Whitehorse), Julie Bauer (Bander in training, Haines Junction), Gwen Baluss, Rob McKee (Juneau, Alaska), Lisa Christensen (Whitehorse) Hollie Murphy-Kelly (Watson Lake), Pierre Martin (Watson Lake) Cynthia Onions (Whitehorse), Helmut Grünberg (Whitehorse), Jeff Botti (Watson Lake)

Citizen and student volunteers for 2003:

Megan Whittle, Kate Westberg, Nicole Enders, Theresa Mundell (Y2C2, Whitehorse) Johnny Van Langen, José Valero, Jayson Strudwick (Watson Lake), Reiner Rembe (Simpson Lake, constructed and donated the welcome/sightings sign), Mark Murphy (Toronto), Arro Barry (Watson Lake).



White-throated Sparrow (above) and Red-breasted Nuthatch (below) at Albert Creek, Yukon. Photos by Julie Bauer and Ted Murphy-Kelly

Seasonal totals for all species banded at Albert Creek in 2003.		
Species	Spring	Fall
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	1
Lesser Yellowlegs	1	0
Common Snipe	1	0
Yellow Bellied Sapsucker	7	8
Hairy Woodpecker	1	0
Three-toed Woodpecker	0	2
Western Wood-Pewee	1	0
Hammond's Flycatcher	0	2
Alder Flycatcher	15	80
Least Flycatcher	3	8
Blue-headed Vireo	0	2
Warbling Vireo	6	17
Gray Jay	4	0
Black-capped Chickadee	0	3
Boreal Chickadee	6	7
Red-breasted Nuthatch	1	0
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	24	125
Gray-cheeked Thrush	1	1
Swainson's Thrush	21	65
Hermit Thrush	2	3
American Robin	10	3
Varied Thrush	1	3
Bohemian Waxwing	2	0
Tennessee Warbler	17	13
Orange-crowned Warbler	137	52
Yellow Warbler	66	51
Magnolia Warbler	1	36
Yellow-rumped Warbler (myrtle race)	143	85
Black-and-White Warbler	1	0
Townsend's Warbler	0	4
Blackpoll Warbler	22	10
American Redstart	7	27
Ovenbird	1	0
Northern Waterthrush	47	33
Common Yellowthroat	35	72
Wilson's Warbler	384	86
Western Tanager	0	1
American Tree Sparrow	24	26
Chipping Sparrow	10	1
Savannah Sparrow	27	6
Fox Sparrow	11	14
Lincoln's Sparrow	39	42
Swamp Sparrow	4	9
White-throated Sparrow	19	35
White-crowned Sparrow	6	7
Golden-crowned Sparrow	2	0
Dark-eyed Junco (slate-colored race)	21	39
Rusty Blackbird	5	10
Brown-headed Cowbird	0	1
Purple Finch	11	0
Pine Siskin	2	31
Total Birds	1152	1021
Total Species	44	40
Total Days Banding	40	36

A Visit to the Albert Creek Banding Station

By Gwen Baluss

During May 19-23, 2003, I had the opportunity to visit and assist Ted Murphy-Kelly with the Albert Creek Banding Station near Watson Lake, Yukon Territory, Canada. We had originally met at the Haines, Alaska Bald Eagle Festival and talked again at the Partners in Flight meeting in Whitehorse in October 2002. Our conversations and an article in the *Yukon Warbler* about the station piqued my interest to see it in operation. Although it was a long ferry ride and drive, it was geographically probably the closest bird banding station to the one that I run for the US Forest Service in Juneau, Alaska. The location of the station is also interesting to any naturalist because it straddles the continental divide, and is at the eastern or northern edge of many species range.

On arrival, I was impressed with the location at Albert Creek. We were overwhelmed with birds, most notably the huge numbers of Wilson's and Myrtle warblers. The station is also surprisingly diverse. I was able to see 40 species at the station in just a few days, 23 of them in hand. The area is obviously a busy migration corridor for Neotropical migrants headed to Alaska and elsewhere in the Yukon. Learning more about their migratory habits will be an asset to conservation especially given the recent interest in the Boreal Forest as one of the world's vast breeding bird habitats.

I was also impressed with the operation of the station. Ted has an unmatched enthusiasm for banding, and is a proficient and efficient bander. I have observed many banding operations over the last 10 years, spanning 4 US States and 2 Mexican states, and have observed a range of techniques and skill levels. Ted is very organized and meticulous with data and record keeping; has good knowledge of the species; and uses of up-to-date equipment and techniques. I was glad to see that bird safety was top priority and that he was interested in further perfecting his operation by



Left to right: Rob McKee, Gwen Baluss, and Ted Murphy-Kelly

looking for tips from others. He asked me for input since I am a certified bander with the North American Bird Banding Council and hold a master bander permit.

I was also glad to see that he was interested in tapping the station's potential for educational use. Bird banding allows observers to see species that are generally elusive to the general public. The appreciation of birds and subsequent interest in conservation of birds and bird habitat seems to be more important than ever in the North with the ever-increasing pushes for resource development. Further, the area's potential for bird watching by travelers could likely use more publicity. There are economic opportunities for attracting more visitors or retaining drivers off the Alaska Highway longer. In the US, birding is the fastest growing outdoor hobby and has surpassed hunting in money spent.

The biggest limitation of the station at this time seems to be the number of trained helpers and funding resources available. I hope that these become more available, and that the station can reach its ripe educational and scientific potential.

The Yukon's Magnificent Wetlands

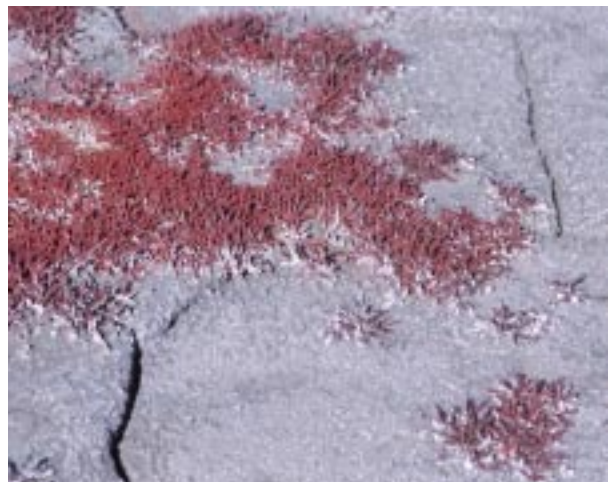
The Yukon is a land of rugged mountains and great rivers. Wetlands are an integral part of this wilderness mosaic and are critical to biodiversity and ecosystem health. More than 50 of the territory's wetlands have been declared "significant", and many more have yet to be explored. Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of wetlands, only a meager dozen of the territory's key wetlands are protected.

Kloo Lake wetlands - May 27, 2003. Photo by Cameron Eckert



The Sedge Darner *Aeshna juncea* is common in sedge peatlands to treeline.

Judas Creek, September 11, 2003.
Photo by Cameron Eckert



The Takhini Saltponds hosts rare plant communities with salt-loving species such as Boreal saltwort *Salicornia borealis* (above), and Salt lick mustard *Thellungiella salsuginea*.

Photo by John Meikle



Yukon Coastal Plain

Ponds, lagoons, and tundra wetlands offer breeding and migration habitat for numerous Arctic species. This female Red Phalarope (above), and Red-throated Loon nest (above right) were photographed at Clarence Lagoon in Ivvavik National Park on June 27 and 30, 2003, respectively.

Lhutsaw wetlands

A dead tree (right) at Lhutsaw Lake provides a nest cavity for a Tree Swallow on June 10, 2003. Scirpus marshes at Tthe Ndu Lake (below) support an abundance of nesting waterbirds. An American Coot nest (left) and Horned Grebe nest (right), photographed on June 9, 2003, are built on floating mats of dead bulrushes.

Photos by Cameron Eckert



Three extralimital Yukon records of Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* in 2003

By Wendy Nixon, Ted Murphy-Kelly, and Mike Gill



Black-and-white Warbler banded at Albert Creek, Yukon on June 4, 2003. Photo by Julie Bauer

The Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia* made its debut into the Yukon record book in June 1995 (Eckert 1995; Sinclair et al. 2003). Breeding was confirmed for this species in the La Biche River valley (124°W longitude), where it is considered to be at the western extent of its breeding range. In northeastern B.C. it has been noted breeding as far west as 123°W longitude in the Taiga Plains

ecoprovince. It is noted as “casual” in Alaska (Collville River Delta 1977, Hyder 1992, and Juneau 1998), and is a confirmed breeder in southwest NWT.

Record 1: The first Black-and-white Warbler of 2003 was observed by Wendy Nixon at 10:45 am on May 28 at the northeast edge of Mary Lake (15 km south of Whitehorse). The bird was

identified initially by the clear two-note song (emphasis on first note - repeated 3 to 5 times each time the bird sang) coming from the forest edge at Mary Lake. The bird was spotted about 4 m above the ground in the inner branches of a trembling aspen tree. The black and white striping on the head, white ring around the eye, and heavy streaking on the sides that merged at the throat confirmed that it was indeed a male Black-and-white Warbler. The streaking on this bird was overall “unkempt” looking (no appearance of clean edges) and there was a brownish tinge to the rump, characteristic of a 1st year male. When in view, this bird was usually in dense spruce/tall willow and trembling aspen forest, gleaning along the inner branches and trunk. It was impossible to photograph as it was constantly moving, often visible for only a fraction of a second. Other birds in the area included several Wilson’s Warblers as well as Blackpoll and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Given the time of year and the density of birds in the area, the warblers were probably a group of migrants. Later in the day, birders Helmut Grünberg and Boris Dobrowolsky came out to see the Black-and-white Warbler. The area was searched the following day without success.

Record 2: The second Black-and-white Warbler of 2003 was captured by Ted Murphy-Kelly at about 7:40 a.m. on June 4 in a mist net at the Albert Creek Banding Station northeast of Watson Lake. The bird weighed 10.2 gram, and was male by plumage. Julie Bauer photographed the bird in the hand. The area is described as a marsh complex dominated by willow, birch, Balsam Poplar, alder and mature White Spruce. This bird was not heard or seen before it was discovered on a routine net run, and it was not heard or seen again after it was released. Only 24 birds of 12 species were captured on June 4 – a relatively slow day for the banding station. This Black-and-white Warbler was also observed by Teri Aschacher.

Record 3: The third Black-and-white Warbler of 2003 was observed by Mike Gill at about 8:30 a.m. on June 6 adjacent to a small wetland at 61.58963°N / 139.41069°W, 730 metres elevation (GPS derived) near Swede Johnson Creek in southwest Yukon. The bird was singing

an undulating high-thin song repeatedly. It was seen initially in willow shrubs in front of a spruce stand, and was briefly seen scaling the trunk of a spruce tree, and moving sideways along willow branches. The bird had a white underbody, the throat and sides were heavily streaked with black, and black auriculars and black striping were visible on the head. A white eye-ring and black streaking on the undertail was also noted. The bird displayed jittery movements like a Red-breasted Nuthatch or a Brown Creeper.

In 1995-1997 Black-and-white Warblers were not detected in the Beaver River valley immediately west of the La Biche River valley in spite of extensive surveys in forest habitats that were comparable to the La Biche River valley (Sinclair et al. 2003). Also, Black-and-white Warblers had not been detected at Mary Lake or near Swede Johnson Creek in previous years, in spite of the fact that routine surveys of waterfowl have been done at those sites for the past decade. With respect to weather, 2003 was an “average” year for spring and early summer weather conditions.

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Canada Goose with a white forehead at Nares Lake, Yukon

By Wendy Nixon

On return from a ski trip at the Whitepass on 27 April 2003, I stopped to look at birds at Nares Lake. Near the road, I spotted a Canada Goose with a white forehead in a flock of 32 Canada Geese with dark “normal” foreheads. The bird was photographed by Jim Hawkings. In *Sibley Guide to the Birds*, geese with white foreheads are described as “variants” – observed occasionally in all Canada Goose populations. The *Sibley guide to Birds* describes dark cheek patches as another “variant”. A Canada Geese observed at Nares Lake had the usual white cheek patches. The geese, along with several pairs of Mallard were feeding on the flats near the bridge at the west end of Nares Lake, just east of Carcross.

Two views of an otherwise normal Canada Goose sporting a white patch on its forehead at Nares Lake, Yukon on April 27, 2003.

Photos by Jim Hawkings



Sharp-tailed Grouse a Yukon road-side attraction

By Wendy Nixon

This displaying male Sharp-tailed Grouse was photographed mid-morning on May 18, 2003 about 5 kilometres south of Beaver Creek. Its wings were outstretched like an umbrella, tail erect and the purple neck pouches fully inflated. He made a rattling sound with his tail and stomped his feet, turning a quarter circle while neck and wings were extended. The Birds of North America (Connelly et al. 1998) explains the rattling tail sound is a result of “lateral movement of upturned rectrices” – the rectrices scrape or click against one another. This male was in the ditch right beside the highway - totally oblivious to traffic just a few meters away. The female he was trying to attract was about 6 metres away ingesting grit from the roadside.



Field Notes: *Observations from the field*

Please send sightings to Helmut Grünberg, 807 Wheeler St., Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2P8. Include details such as date, location, number of birds, sex and age, and observers' names. Highlight interesting observations and include descriptions of rare species. Please send sightings according to the following seasonal schedule: Spring (March 1 - May 31), Summer (June 1 - July 31), Fall (August 1 - November 30), Winter (December 1 - February 28). Reports are sent to the Canadian Wildlife Service for the Birds of the Yukon database.

RARE BIRD ALERT!

Alerting other birders quickly to the presence of a rare bird helps ensure that the sighting is documented, and is a great way to share a special find. If you see an unusual bird, call Cameron Eckert (667-4630) or Helmut Grünberg (667-6703).

Spring 2003 (March/April/May)

The Yukon had one of the driest springs in nearly 50 years. As well, late April produced some record-breaking warm days. The major birding event of the season was the appearance of the book *Birds of the Yukon Territory*.

A high count of 137 **Horned Grebes** was made at Schwatka Lake in Whitehorse on May 5 (JJ). A **Great Blue Heron** was photographed at Marwell area, Whitehorse on May 14, and perhaps a second bird at Hidden Lakes on May 15 (JHa). On March 19, the first **Trumpeter Swans** of the season were noted, 11 at Tagish Lake (ASm) and 2 adults and an immature bird at Marsh Lake (DP). An adult **Whooper Swan**, a Yukon first spotted during counts at M'Clintock Bay, Marsh Lake, on April 11 (JJ,IB,CE,NH, WN,PS), was a highlight of the season. It didn't linger, however, and was seen flying past Whitehorse the next day during a migration watch (JJ).

Three **Snow Geese** were seen at Kluane River on April 30 (KA,LA,CH,NM,MH); two were noted at Tagish bridge on May 4 (HG,YBC), and three were encountered at the Whitehorse Sewage Lagoon on May 21 (HG). An unusually large flock of 500 **Brant** was noted at Swan Lake near Whitehorse on May 31 (BD,HG). Two **Gadwalls** seen at M'Clintock Bay, Marsh Lake on April 12 (JJ,HG) were record early. A **Eurasian Wigeon** and a **Eurasian Green-winged Teal** were reported from M'Clintock Bay, Marsh Lake on or just before April 27 (JJ). A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was also seen at Jackfish Bay, Lake Laberge on May 26 (HG).

A flock of five Snow Geese grazing at Drury's Farm along the Takhini River on May 15, 2003.

Their grey feathers indicate that they are all first-spring birds, which is the age typical of spring Snow Geese seen in the Whitehorse area.

Photo by Cameron Eckert



Two **Harlequin Ducks** were a rare sight at the Whitehorse Sewage Lagoon on May 21, and a large number of 120 **Long-tailed Ducks** was seen here on May 21 (HG). **Hooded Merganser** reports included a male at lower McIntyre Creek in Whitehorse on April 27 (AK,LK,PK), and two at Swan Lake near Whitehorse on May 23 (HG), and again there on May 31 (BD,HG). Two **Ruddy Ducks** were an unusual sight at Swan Lake on May 23, May 29 (HG) and on May 31 (BD,HG); at the Whitehorse Sewage Lagoon the numbers built from two on May 3 to 40 on May 30 (HG).

An adult **Bald Eagle** was seen near km 434, Dempster Highway on April 19 (DC,ASc). A big female **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, one of two birds hunting in a back yard, was banded in Watson Lake on April 20 (TMK); one was noted on the Marsh Lake Road on May 31 (OBBC). A **Northern Goshawk** was seen 6 km south of Haines Junction and 3 km east of the Haines Road on April 20 (GW, MW), and one was observed at Swan Lake near Whitehorse on May 31 (BD,HG). A nearly light morph **Swainson's Hawk** was seen at Ear Lake in Whitehorse on May 5 (JJ). A **Red-tailed Hawk (Harlan's race)** was seen in Atlin, B.C. on April 4 (MCo). Between the Destruction Bay dump and the Burwash airport, seven **Red-tailed Hawk (Harlan's race)** were tallied; three were recorded at Kluane River on April 14 (BBen); and one each was seen at Koidern; 16 km west of Donjek River; and at Burwash Landing on April 15 (BBen). Between the Destruction Bay dump and the Burwash airport, there were nine **Rough-legged Hawks**, and one was 10 km east of the Donjek River, all on April 14 (BBen); one dark morph individual each was recorded 10 km east of the Donjek River and at Burwash airport, and two light morph birds were seen at Burwash Landing on April 15 (BBen). A light morph **Rough-legged Hawk** was flying along the Yukon River in downtown Whitehorse on April 15 (LiC), and another light morph individual was encountered at km 1924, Alaska Highway (Enger Creek), southwestern Yukon on May 5 (HG). During aerial surveys, one **Golden Eagle** each was seen 10 km southwest of the west end of Alligator Lake and in the vicinity of Fox Lake on March 21; and 5 km south of the south end of Annie Lake and 5 km south of Coal Lake on March 26 (GW,MW). Two **Golden Eagles** were

noted at Kluane River on April 30 (KA et al.). An adult **Peregrine Falcon** was seen at Ear Lake in Whitehorse on May 5 (JJ); an adult *Anatum* **Peregrine** was at Lewes Marsh on May 12 (CE).

Two male **Blue Grouse** were booming at Grey Mountain in Whitehorse on May 7 (JJ), and one was seen there on May 10 (LiC,JF). Two pairs of **Sharp-tailed Grouse** were seen in the Minto burn, south of Pelly Crossing on April 29 (MOD); two were at Duke Meadows, southwestern Yukon on April 30 (HG), and one was 5 km south of Beaver Creek near May 20 (WN). An **American Coot** was spotted at Policeman's Point, Lake Laberge area on April 24 (HG); three **American Coots** were seen at the Tagish bridge on April 25 (RC,TJ), and five were here on May 4 (HG,YBC).

A male **Pacific Golden-Plover** at M'Clintock Bay, Marsh Lake on May 17 (CE,PS) was the only one reported this spring. The first **Killdeer** of the season, four individuals, were reported at Nares Lake near Carcross during a bus tour organized by Wildlife Viewing on April 13 (JHa,LiC and others), and three were seen in Whitehorse on April 14 (MW); three were observed at Carcross on April 20 (SMH). These sightings are about "on time" for the bulk of **Killdeer** to arrive but three weeks later than the earliest sightings. Two **Greater Yellowlegs** were identified at Nares Lake, Carcross on May 4 (HG,YBC), and one was observed here on May 31 (OBBC). A **Wandering Tattler** was seen at Fish Lake, Whitehorse on May 31 (RA). A **Dunlin** was at Judas Creek, Marsh Lake on May 17 (CE,PS); one was noted at the Slims River, southwestern Yukon on May 19 (HG), and three were at the south end of Kluane Lake near May 20 (WN). A flock of 600 **Pectoral Sandpipers** was observed at Judas Creek on May 12 (CE), and 400 were seen at Lewes Marsh on May 13 (CE).

A north-bound **Parasitic Jaeger** was seen at Pine Lake near Haines Junction on May 10 (MH). Two rare adult **Ring-billed Gulls** were noted this spring with one at the Quartz Road Marsh in Whitehorse on April 30 (JJ), and one at the Judas Creek Marina, Marsh Lake on May 27 (JHa, YBC). A first-year **Glaucous-winged Gull** was among roosting **Herring Gulls** at the Quartz Road Marsh in Whitehorse on April 16 (CE). An incursion of **Glaucous-winged Gulls** from late

April through May involved at least 15 birds of various ages around Whitehorse (CE,JJ); two were identified at Bennett Lake on May 4 (CE). An adult **Glaucous Gull** was reported from the Quartz Road Marsh in Whitehorse on April 30 (JJ).

Along the Alaska Highway in southwestern Yukon, one **Northern Hawk Owl** each was reported at km 1778, at km 1924 (Enger Creek), and at km 1909 (Dry Creek #2) on April 5 (BBen). Six **Northern Hawk Owls** were tallied between the Destruction Bay dump and the Burwash airport on April 14 (BBen). One was also seen 12 km east of the Donjek River; one was noted at km 1783, Alaska Highway; one was reported at km 1780; and one was seen at km 1745, all on April 15 (BBen); one **Northern Hawk Owl** each was seen at Duke Meadows on April 30, along the Alaska Highway between Duke Meadows and Burwash airport on May 1, as well as 20 km west of the White River on May 5 (HG). A good number of **Great Gray Owls** (seven) was recorded during roadside owl surveys in southeastern Yukon (TMK,HG). A **Short-eared Owl** was reported from Atlin, B.C. on April

4 (MCo); another one was seen at the Alaska Highway near Judas Creek on April 10 (JJ), and one was flying over the marshes of Swan Lake on May 23 (HG) and on May 31 (BD,HG). During roadside owl surveys in southern, southwestern and southeastern Yukon, **Boreal Owls** seemed to be particularly common this season. Nesting **Boreals** were found at Frances Lake (SR,TR) and in Whitehorse-Mary Lake (JHi).

The sighting of four **Common Nighthawks** in the Swan Lake area north of Whitehorse on May 30 (BD,HG) was only one day later than the earliest ever recorded there and rare for a Birdathon. A **Red-breasted Sapsucker** was reported from Haines Junction on April 12 (BL). The familiar 'wuck-wuck-wuck' of the neighbourhood **Pileated Woodpecker** boomed through the pines at the Albert Creek Road near the Liard River, Upper Liard, and the woodpecker proceeded to drum several times on April 17 (TMK).

**A pristine adult Glaucous-winged Gull at the
Whitehorse landfill on May 5, 2003.
Photo by Cameron Eckert**



A **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** was heard and seen near the Albert Creek Banding Station, Upper Liard on May 12 (TMK). A **Northern Shrike** was seen at White River, southwestern Yukon on April 14 (BBen); one each was also seen at Edith Creek and 2 km east of Edith Creek on April 15 (BBen). An unidentified **crow** was seen in the Kulan Industrial area in Whitehorse during the week of May 14 (GJ). One **Mountain Chickadee** each was noted at two feeders in Whitehorse-Pilot Mountain in early March (BMu; BD) and at a Crag Lake residence, Tagish Road on May 4 (BD,CE). A **Winter Wren** was reported from the Kulan Industrial area in Whitehorse during the week of May 14 (GJ). Six male and four female **Mountain Bluebirds** were observed all day by the Nisutlin River bridge in Teslin on April 15 (MCI). A male **Mountain Bluebird** was also seen at the Kluane National Park farm near Haines Junction on April 15 (SH). A **Hermit Thrush** was singing at the mouth of McIntyre Creek in Whitehorse on May 8 (WN). In Dawson, the first **American Robin** of the season was seen on April 21 (MK). A male and a female **Varied Thrush** were observed at a feeder in Teslin on April 18 (MCI). Three **European Starlings** were observed for several days at a Tagish residence on and before April 12 (ASm), and one was seen in the Lake Laberge area on May 15 (BD).

One **Townsend's Warbler** each was seen and heard at the lower part of Mt. McIntyre and at the

Copper Haul Road near the McIntyre wetlands on May 25 (HG). A singing male **American Redstart** was discovered at the Yukon River Trail in Whitehorse on May 31 (JT). An **Ovenbird** was banded at Albert Creek Road, Upper Liard on May 29 (TMK) for a first record in the Watson Lake area and over 200 km west of its known range in the Yukon. Ten **Fox Sparrows** were banded at the Albert Creek Banding Station, Upper Liard on May 12 (TMK). A rare **Song Sparrow**, discovered at McIntyre wetlands in Whitehorse on May 14 (JHa), remained there till May 21 (BD,HG). The wintering **Dark-eyed Junco** at Shadow Lake was last seen on March 30 (SMH). A **Smith's Longspur** was seen at Dom Hill in Dawson on May 13 (DC). Small groups of **Snow Buntings**, the first of the season along the North Klondike Highway, were seen between Carmacks and Mayo on March 18 (MOD) and near Lake Laberge on March 24 (KO). A flock of 200 **Rusty Blackbirds** was notable at Simpson Lake, southeastern Yukon on May 1 (UR). A male **Brewer's Blackbird** at the Whitehorse landfill on May 10-11 (CE) provided the first documented record for the Whitehorse area. Three **House Finches**, discovered in December, over-wintered successfully in Whitehorse, with sightings of three birds on March 15 (BaS,BoS) and two on March 24 (CE,HG). A **Hoary Redpoll** was observed in downtown Whitehorse on April 2 (HG,BaS). An **Evening Grosbeak** was seen at a feeder at Teslin Lake on May 14 (AJ).



A male Red Crossbill at a Porter Creek feeder on April 29, 2003.

The Red Crossbill, unlike its close relative the White-winged Crossbill, is a regular visitor to bird feeders.

Photo by Cameron Eckert

Birds of spring, 2003



Left: Whitehorse rarity – A male **Brewer's Blackbird** checking out the compost at the Whitehorse landfill on May 10, 2003.

Below: A recently-fledged juvenile **Common Redpoll** makes a nice identification challenge at a Porter Creek feeder on May 25, 2003.

Photos by Cameron Eckert





Clockwise from the top: A trace of grey in the wingtips hints at hybrid genes in an adult **Glaucous Gull** at the Whitehorse landfill on May 5, 2003 (Cameron Eckert). Very rare in spring was a ragged first-year **Thayer's Gull** (missing a foot) at the Whitehorse landfill on May 5, 2003 (Cameron Eckert). Another rare spring migrant – a trio of **Dunlin** at the south end of Kluane Lake on May 20, 2003 (Wendy Nixon). The 2003 Birdathon Bar-b-que attracted an enthusiastic crowd (Boris Dobrowolsky).



Summer 2003 (July – August)

Yukoners enjoyed a summer of fantastic weather and even better birding. Trips to a variety of remote areas produced many exciting finds.



Three of four adult Yellow-billed Loons seen at Clarence Lagoon, Ivvavik National Park on June 30, 2003.

Photo by Cameron Eckert

All four species of loons including four **Yellow-billed's** were at Clarence Lagoon, North Slope on June 30 (CE,BMa). A pair of **Pacific Loons** was seen in a lake at the head waters of Cultus Creek, Jarvis River area on June 18 (MW). Two rare **Pied-billed Grebes** were seen on Rock Island Lake, Pelly Crossing area on June 10 (CE,PS,MCh), and one was heard there on June 11 (BD,HG). A **Double-crested Cormorant**, rare in the Yukon, was at Kloo Lake on June 3-4 (PS,CE). Herschel Island park wardens reported a pair of **Snow Geese** with three chicks during aerial surveys on July 19 (*fide* DC); this was only the second Yukon breeding record. A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was at Kloo Lake on June 3-4 (PS,CE), and a hybrid **Eurasian x American Wigeon** was there on June 5 (CE). A male **Eurasian Wigeon** was seen at Swede Johnson Creek on June 5 and 7 (MG; CE,PS). A male **Cinnamon Teal**, casual in summer in the Yukon, was at Swan Lake near Whitehorse on June 1 (HG,KK,MN). A few pairs of **King Eiders** seen at Clarence Lagoon, North Slope on June 20-30 were suggestive of breeding in the area (CE,BMa). A male and two female **Harlequin**

Ducks were seen at the headwaters of Snyder Creek, a tributary of Fourth of July Creek, which is a tributary of the Jarvis River, on June 15 (MW). A lone female was seen on the Peel River, within 50 kilometers (by river) south of the N.W.T. border on June 23 (HG). A well-observed female **Black Scoter** was at Judas Creek on Marsh Lake on June 12 (CE,BMa). A female **Ruddy Duck** at Shallow Bay, Lake Laberge was unusual in that area on June 1 (BD, YBC). A male was seen at Rock Island Lake, Pelly Crossing area on June 11 (BD,HG). A female **Ruddy Duck** at Two Moose Lake on June 15 and July 1 (CE,BMa;HG) provided a first record for the Dempster Highway area. Two males were also at "Coot Lake", 8 km south of Pelly Crossing on June 20 (HG). A record count of 72 **Ruddy Ducks** was made at the Whitehorse sewage lagoons on July 22 (CE).

An adult **Northern Goshawk** was seen in Whitehorse on July 9 (MW); it had just killed a small bird and flew into the bush to eat it. A **Red-tailed Hawk (Harlan's race)** was flying and calling around a nest with two big juveniles on July 10 (HG,BSu). A **Golden Eagle** was spotted

in the mountains west of Snyder Creek on June 16 (MW), and one was seen at White Mountain on June 15 (BD,HG,YBC). The **Gyr Falcon** nest at km 158 of the Dempster Highway had two young birds on June 21 (HG); an adult was perched on a rock near the nest, which still had the two juveniles on July 1 (HG). A **Golden Eagle** was spotted in the mountains west of Snyder Creek on June 16 (MW), and one was seen at White Mountain on June 12 (BD,HG,YBC).

Red morph **Ruffed Grouse** are fairly rare in the Yukon; one was at Blind Lake, southeastern Yukon on June 27 (PS). A female **White-tailed Ptarmigan** with four small chicks was at Montana Mountain on July 8 (CE,BMa). Two **American Coots** were seen at Two Moose Lake, Dempster Highway at the northernmost known Yukon location of this species on June 7 (BBel and others). A female **Sharp-tailed Grouse** with four young was encountered on the "Ditch Road" off the Dempster Highway near km 7-10 on July 2 (HG). An **American Coot** nest with 8 eggs, only the 2nd nest recorded in the Yukon, was noted at Rock Island Lake on June 9 (CE,MCh); two **American Coots** were seen there also on June 11 (BD,HG), and, not surprisingly, one was at "Coot Lake", 8 km S of Pelly Crossing, on June 20 (HG), as were two on July 2 (HG). A **Sandhill Crane** was observed near the Faro mill on June 13 (WE).

A **Wandering Tattler** nest was a nice find in the Craig Creek area, Ivvavik National Park on June 22 (BMa,CE); one was noted at Snyder Creek, Jarvis River area on 15-18 June (MW). A rare **Surfbird** was seen high on Surfbird Mountain, Dempster Highway on June 7 (DB and others). A late migrant **White-rumped Sandpiper**, rare in the Yukon, was at Judas Creek, Marsh Lake on June 12 (CE,BMa). Two **Baird's Sandpiper** nests, each with 4 eggs, were found in the Craig Creek area on June 19 (CE, BMa). A **Wilson's Snipe** nest with 4 eggs was found in the Paddy's Pond area in Whitehorse-Hillcrest on July 5, and it contained 3 chicks with dry feathers and one unhatched egg on July 18 (MW).

Observations of a few pairs and local **Pomarine Jaegers** in the Craig Creek area on the Yukon's North Slope, on June 16 to July 4 (CE,BMa) hinted at the possibility of this species nesting in

the area. A pair of **Long-tailed Jaegers** was seen in display flight at Surfbird Mountain, Dempster Highway on June 2 (RA). Curiously, a group of 17 birds was seen at Wright Pass along the Dempster Highway on June 15 (CE,BMa), and 18 were seen there on June 21 (HG). One was also seen at Snyder Creek, Jarvis River area, southwestern Yukon on June 17 (MW). A 2nd summer **California Gull**, rare in the Yukon, was at the Whitehorse landfill on July 30 (CE,BD,HG). A 3rd summer **Thayer's Gull**, photographed at the Whitehorse landfill on June 12 (BMa), and a 2nd summer bird, photographed there on July 29 (BD,HG), provided rare summer records. A probable 1st summer **Slaty-backed Gull** discovered at the Whitehorse landfill on July 9 (BMa,CE,PS) remained there through July (CE,BD,HG); a 2nd summer bird made a short visit there on July 16-18 (CE,HG). An adult **Glaucous-winged Gull** at Inuvik, N.W.T. on June 15 (CE,BMa) added to the growing number of recent records from that location. Rare in summer in southern Yukon were an immature **Glaucous Gull** at Haines Junction on July 4 (LF) and an adult in Whitehorse on July 18 (HG) and on July 23 (CE). It's been seven years since the **Black Tern** colony at Blind Lake, southeastern Yukon was last surveyed (25 nests recorded then): this year, 20 nests were counted there on June 27 (PS,SO,BSI,JSt).



Breeding in the Yukon? A light morph Pomarine Jaeger, completely lacking a breast band but showing its conspicuous spatulate tail, sails over the tundra just south of Clarence Lagoon, Ivvavik National Park on June 20, 2003.

Photo by Cameron Eckert

A **Snowy Owl** was seen just south of Clarence Lagoon, Yukon North Slope, on June 30 (TE,FM,CE,BMa); a count of seven was made at Herschel Island during aerial surveys on July 19 (reported to DC). A **Great Gray Owl** was calling in the Pickhandle Lakes area of southwestern Yukon on June 7 (CE), and another was seen flying across the Dempster Highway just south of Eagle Plains on July 5 (CE,BMa); a nest with three downy fledglings (one still in the nest) was a nice find west of Burwash Landing on June 7 (NSE,CE,PS); and a fledgling was seen at the confluence of Fourth of July Creek and Jarvis River, southwestern Yukon on June 18 (MW). A **Short-eared Owl** was flying over the marshes of Rock Island Lake, Pelly Crossing area on June 9 & 10 (CE,PS,MCh) and on June 11 (BD,HG). A **Mourning Dove** was reported from Dawson in early July (JO), and one was in Faro on July 27-29 (IW).



Mourning Dove at Keno City, July 27-29, 2003.
Photo by Insa Wagner

A count of eight **Blue-headed Vireos** was a record high number for the Rancheria Breeding Bird Survey on June 17 (HG); a single male was at Blind Lake on June 27 (PS). A **Mountain Chickadee** nest was found in a knot hole of a dead aspen at Schwatka Lake near Miles Canyon in Whitehorse on June 14 (BBen,RMu). **Brown Creeper** sightings, all from southwestern Yukon, included two along the Auriol Trail at Kluane National Park on June 7 (MG,WN), one there on June 10 and 12 (HG), and three at Pine Lake on July 26 (CE,PS). A rare **Winter Wren** was singing at Brooks Brook near Teslin on June 20

(MG). Canada's 2nd and the Yukon's 1st record for **Arctic Warbler** was a singing male photographed in the Craig Creek area on the Yukon's North Slope on June 28 (CE,BMa). The quest to find Canada's first **Bluethroat** nest was a stunning success: 8-10 male and two female **Bluethroats** were located in the Craig Creek area on the Yukon's North Slope during surveys on June 16 and on July 1 to 4, and a nest with six eggs discovered on June 22 contained 6 young on July 2 (CE,BMa,BBel,JSe,ES).

A **Mountain Bluebird** nest was found in the engine compartment of an aircraft parked in private parking at the Whitehorse airport on June 29 (MW). It contained four nestlings with feathers; on July 6 the birds were no longer on the nest. Even in an area as rich and diverse as Craig Creek on the North Slope a singing **Dusky Thrush**, the Yukon's second, from June 28 to July 1 seemed over-the-top (BMa,CE,BBel). Three **Yellow Wagtail** nests found in the Craig Creek area from June 16 to July 4 significantly added to the few recorded nests in Canada (BBel,CE,BMa). A record number of eight **Tennessee Warblers** was tallied at the Rancheria Breeding Bird Survey on June 17 (HG), maybe establishing this species in that area. At the Albert Creek Road, Upper Liard, about ten individuals were singing during pouring rain on June 18 (HG). A singing **Cape May Warbler** was observed at the Albert Creek Road, Upper Liard on June 23 (TMK) at the exact spot where it was found last year, the Yukon's westernmost location. At the Albert Creek Road, Upper Liard, about ten individuals were singing during pouring rain on June 18 (HG). **Townsend's Warbler** sightings in the Teslin area included three birds singing north of the Morley River on June 11, two singing near Teslin on June 16, one singing near Hermit Lake on June 19, and seven singing at Brooks Brook on June 20 (MG); four were at White Mountain on June 15 (BD,HG,YBC). A small wave of extralimital **Black-and-white Warblers** was noted with one in Whitehorse-Mary Lake on May 28 (WN,BD,HG) for a first Whitehorse record; one banded at Albert Creek Road, Upper Liard on June 4 (TMK) for a first Watson Lake area record; and 850 km west of its known Yukon range was one singing at Swede Johnson Creek in southwestern Yukon on June 5

(MG). An adult male **American Redstart** was in Whitehorse on June 2 and on July 24 (JT;HG); another adult male was at the outer edge of its known range at Kloo Lake on June 3 (PS,CE); two were at McIntyre Creek wetlands in Whitehorse on June 5 (SF,HG). **MacGillivray's Warbler**, sparse in the Yukon, appears to have a foot-hold in the Teslin area; six males were singing in shrubby Trembling Aspen about 5 km west of Teslin on June 10, and one was near the Teslin bridge on June 16 (MG). Visitors from Connecticut had excellent views of a **"Timberline" Brewer's Sparrow** at Mt. McIntyre on June 5 (HG,SF and others). A female and two male **Smith's Longspurs** along with a nest were discovered in the foothills of upper Craig Creek on June 25 (CE,BMa). A female

Brewer's Blackbird was photographed at Nisutlin Bay Marina from June 14 to 19 (MG,BG,DG). Were it not for a distance of 800 km and a few mountain ranges, the Yukon might have had its first breeding record for **Common Grackle**: the territory's 2nd and 3rd records for the species were a male at Lhutsaw Lake near Pelly Crossing on June 10 (PS,CE,MCh), and a female at Craig Creek on the North Slope on June 25 (CE,BMa). Four **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches** were seen on the summit of Mt. Decoeli, Kluane National Park, west of Haines Junction gleaning insects from the summit snow field on June 14 (MW). A grey-hooded male filled its crop at a snow patch before disappearing toward a distant rocky peak on Montana Mountain, southern Yukon on July 8 (CE,BMa).

Observers Spring and Summer 2003: Rob Alvo, Ken Anderson, Libby Anderson, Paul Baker, Brian Bell (BBel), Bruce Bennett (BBen), Ian Boyce, Del Buerge, Linda Cameron (LiC), Damon Calderwood, Richard Cannings, Leslie Carberry (LeC), Michelle Christensen (MCh), Minnie Clark (MCl), Mark Connor (MCo), Dorothy Cooley, Boris Dobrowolsky, Teresa Earle, Wolfgang Eberlein, Cameron Eckert, Lloyd Freese, Sam Fried, Julie Frisch, Linda Gerrand, Mike Gill, Brandy Greenwood, Debbie Greenwood, Helmut Grünberg, Millie Hall, Jim Hawkings (JHa), Caroline Hayes, Suzanne Henry, Janne Hicklin (JHi), Nancy Hughes, Jukka Jantunen, Aida Johnston, Gavin Johnston, Tom Jung, Martin Kienzler, Kaz Kuba, Arlene Kubica, Lee Kubica, Paula Kubica, Brent Liddle, Bruce Mactavish (BMa), many observers (m.ob.), Ray Marnoch (RMa), Norma Maxwell, Sharon McHale (SMH), Fritz Mueller, Randi Mulder (RMu), Bob Murkett (BMu), Ted Murphy-Kelly (TMK), Mariko Nishikawa, Wendy Nixon, OBBC (Jeanette McCrie, Patti Nash, Elaine Couling, Heather Thompson), Mark O'Donoghue (MOD), Katie Ostrom, John Overell, Sasha Oysttryk, Doug Phillips, Ulla Rembe, Sonja Rueck, Thomas Rueck, Aedes Scheer (ASc), Judy Selamio (JSe), Pam Sinclair, Nigel Sinclair-Eckert (NSE), Brian Slough (BSl), Art Smith (ASm), Erin Spiewak, Jennifer Staniforth (JSt), Barbara Studs (BaS), Bob Studds (BoS), Betty Sutton (BSu), Jenny Trapnell, Insa Wagner, Gerry Whitley, Mary Whitley, Yukon Bird Club.



The Yukon's 2nd and 3rd Common Grackles – Left: a female at Craig Creek, Ivvavik National Park on June 25, 2003. Right: a male at Lhutsaw Lake near Pelly Crossing on June 10, 2003. Photos by Cameron Eckert

Birds of summer, 2003



Top left: This wreck of a gull at the Whitehorse landfill on July 9-31, 2003 showed characteristics consistent with a first-summer **Slaty-backed Gull** (Cameron Eckert). **Top right:** A second-summer **California Gull** at the Whitehorse landfill on July 30, 2003 (Cameron Eckert). **Below:** This second-summer **Slaty-backed Gull**, a charismatic vagrant from the Bering Sea, was at the Whitehorse landfill on July 16-18, 2003 (Cameron Eckert).





Counter-clockwise from top: A female **Brown-headed Cowbird** at Kloo Lake on June 3, 2003 (Cameron Eckert). Very rare in summer were single **Thayer's Gulls** at the Whitehorse landfill; a third-summer bird on June 12, 2003 (Bruce Mactavish) and a second-summer bird on July 29, 2003 (Helmut Grünberg). Participants on the Yukon Bird Club trip to **White Mountain** on June 15 celebrate bagging the peak and ticking off Golden Eagle for the day list (Boris Dobrowolsky).



YUKON BIRD CLUB

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

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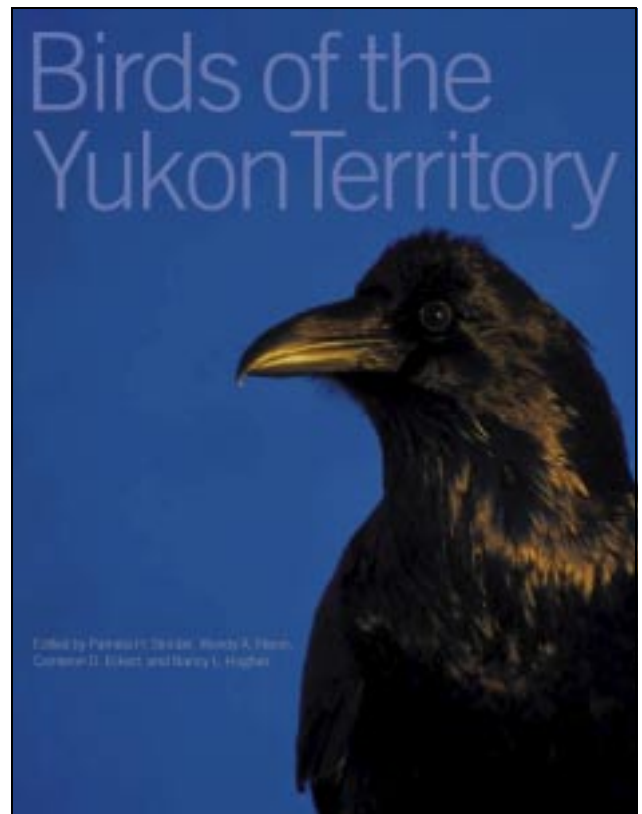
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