

YUKON WARBLER

Newsletter of the Yukon Bird Club

Spring 2020



Simon Blakesley photo
*Banding Snow
Buntings in Haines
Junction*
Story on page 8

In this issue:



*Community Owl
Challenge*
page 6



*Feature Birder
Taylor Belansky*
pages 7 and 14

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.

Membership fees are based on the Calendar Year (Jan 1 to Dec 31). The end of the year is a good time to renew your membership. If you have paid for multi-year memberships in the past and are unsure of your current status, feel free to contact us for clarification. If you receive a paper copy of "The Warbler" your mailing label will indicate the latest year for which your membership is paid up, i.e. 2019 or 2020.

For more information contact:

Yukon Bird Club
4061-4th Avenue Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 1H1
Canada
yukonbirdclub@yukonbirds.ca

YBC Website: yukonbirds.ca
Yukon Birds Facebook group: [facebook.com/groups/212509148852262/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/212509148852262/)
YBC Twitter: [yukonbirds](https://twitter.com/yukonbirds)

We want your birding photos and stories!

Thank you to all who contribute to make the *Yukon Warbler*. To make a submission, write to newsletter@yukonbirds.ca

Board of Directors

Jenny Trapnell - President/Chair
Jim Hawkings - Secretary/Treasurer
Cameron Eckert - Sightings & Checklist Coordinator
Pam Sinclair - Special Projects Coordinator
Shyloh van Delft - Events Coordinator
Betty Sutton - Birdathon Coordinator
Taylor Belansky - Youth Coordinator
Liz Hargreaves - Website
Ulrich Trachsel - Newsletter Editor
Scott Williams - Director
Glenn Rudman - Director

NEW PAYMENT OPTION: You can now join the Yukon Bird Club or renew your membership online thanks to our non-profit charity partner Canadahelps.org.

Go to:
yukonbirds.ca/join/

You can also print the membership form and mail with your payment.

Yukon Warbler is published by the Yukon Bird Club. Copyright © 2020 Yukon Bird Club. All rights reserved. Printed material, artwork, or photographs may not be reproduced by any means without permission from the author, artist, or photographer. All other material may not be reproduced by any means without the Editor's permission.

Birding in our COVID-19 World

By Jenny Trapnell

In early April I heard an interview on CBC radio with retired Lt.-General Romeo Dallaire speaking about his horrific time in Rwanda. On the 26th anniversary of the Rwandan war, he was asked about his concerns around the pandemic, a new kind of war. At the end of the interview, he reflected on what was helping him cope. It was the beauty around him, he said. And it was the return of the birds.

“In those days when we entered villages that had been slaughtered the silence was absolutely overwhelming, he said. “Today, well, I am going outside and I’m seeing birds singing, and if I am seeing the birds singing, and geese come back from the south, I know we’re getting through this thing.”

His comments have stuck with me over the last two months as I have dealt with the loss of a loved one, and how COVID-19 has brought isolation into all of our lives. We are missing family and friends. Watching birds can make a bad day better. Their songs raise us from sorrow. They are faithful reliable friends we can turn to, connecting us to nature, to something more certain.

In May, the heart of spring, we’re truly caught up in nature’s renewal. Trumpeter swans herald long journeys back to ancient breeding grounds. Bright yellow warblers and earthy striped sparrows arrive and lift us up with their morning songs. Open your windows and step out the door into the sun - listen to the “dawn chorus” . We are welcoming the world: Yellow Warblers from Central America, Arctic Terns from the far reaches of Antarctica; brilliant iridescent Violet-Green Swallows

from Mexico and Costa Rica, to name a few migrants.

Soon the mating songs and territorial calls will lessen as life on the nest evolves. The Robert Service Way nest will slowly reveal this year’s eaglets. We’ll watch the Arctic Terns teaching their young to fly from perches near the SS Klondike. Purple Finches will sing out their sweet songs in open forest. Diving and dabbling ducks of all colours will leave our lakes and rivers, flashes of blue or green, brown, black and white. The Ravens, gulls and crows will pester Bald Eagles that fly too near. Chickadees will still dart in and out of trees for food. And you can find American Robins nesting in places they feel safe, even if you can almost reach up and touch them.

Birding in these COVID times is all about letting the birds come to you. Sit on your deck, find a spot on the trail nearby to stop and listen, sit down on a bench on the Millennium Trail, bring a cushion and perch at a viewing spot near your local wetland or pond to see what’s happening. Take a guide book, a pair of field binoculars, or use the Apps on your phone. Merlin ID can help you ID birds from photos. with info on 650+ North American birds. Did you know the popular app, eBird, is rated for children age 4 and up? These tools can help you observe and identify birds, and learn more about them, including eBirding locations in your community or neighbourhood.

Birds make our world a better place, but many species are in decline. Let’s do what we can to make their world better, too. Protect the habitat birds need to breed and to thrive, all year long; in summer

The 2020 Birdathon - closer to home

One event that might help you focus on birds is the Yukon Bird Club’s annual Helmut Grünberg Yukon Birdathon. This year it’s taking place from 5 p.m. May 29 to 5 p.m. May 30 . Take some time in that 24-hour period to sit, walk or bike somewhere nearby to watch birds. What are they doing? What are they eating? Consider the four tips for identifying birds: habitat, size and shape. colour pattern, and behaviour. The Yukon Bird Club Facebook page and website, and the Yukon government’s Wildlife Viewing site have lots of resource materials.. There’s prizes for some keen birders, but participation is what’s most important. This year donations are encouraged to support the Yukon Food Bank. Taylor Belansky is YBC’s Feature Birder this year (see page 7).

offer a bird bath, leave some leaf litter on the margins of your lawn. Don’t remove willows especially near creeks or rivers. Keep a pesticide-free yard and garden. Use fewer fossil fuels, put up your bird feeder again in the fall, and keep your cats inside. Read more on the Cornell Lab’s All About Birds and Birds Canada sites.

Birds bring us joy. They remind us we are resilient, that life has renewal, and that we are not alone in this pandemic.

Let’s welcome them into our world as we slow down, watch and listen, closer to home.

See yukonbirds.ca for more information or the Yukon Bird Club’s Facebook page.

Good Neighbours: Cliff Swallows and Us

by *Pam Sinclair*

Traveling the Yukon highways in summer, have you ever noticed a swarm of small birds as you cross a bridge over one of the larger rivers? These acrobatic birds dart and swoop, and disappear under the bridge. They are Cliff Swallows, but instead of a cliff, they have made the bridge their home. Their round mud nests are sheltered on the underside of the structure. It's mid-summer, when many Yukon birds become very quiet as they conceal their vulnerable offspring from predators. But these chattering Cliff Swallows make no attempt to hide; their strategy is safety in numbers, and building a nest that is just about predator-proof.

Industrial civilization may have spelled doom for some birds, but the unassuming Cliff Swallow has surely profited. Any newly-arrived alien visitor to the planet might conclude that there's a huge formal contract between humans and the Cliff Swallow: we spend billions of dollars constructing places for their nests, and they get rid of billions of the insects that torment us.

The natural nesting habitats of the Cliff Swallow, as its name implies, are cliffs, especially rocky cliffs with overhanging ledges that protect the mud nests from rain. This swallow was originally a bird of western North America, but over the past 150 years, the Cliff Swallow has expanded eastward across the continent as increasing numbers of bridges and buildings have provided abundant nesting habitat. Cliff Swallow populations are still increasing in the central and southeastern United States.

However, they appear to be declining in much of Canada, including the Yukon.

Building their nests is an important and time-consuming task for Cliff Swallows. Each nest is made of about 1,000 beak-sized pellets of mud, and may take two weeks to construct. That means that each pair carries all of those mud pellets, one at a time, to their nest from patches of mud of a suitably sticky consistency. It's not surprising that many Cliff Swallows choose to repair a nest from last year rather than start from scratch. Like most aspects of a Cliff Swallow's life, collecting mud is a very social activity. Many birds work at the same patch of mud, looking like oversized butterflies as they flutter their wings to avoid sinking in.

Why do Cliff Swallows nest in such dense, sometimes very large, colonies? There are pros and cons of living with a lot of close neighbours. For Cliff Swallows, which must catch hundreds of flying insects each day, being able to cue in to their neighbours' discoveries of insect swarms is a benefit. Also, in a dense colony there are many pairs of eyes on the lookout for predators, and colony members warn each other when they notice a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Merlin, or other predator. On the negative side, large colonies can become infested with parasites, such as swallow bugs and bird blow flies which feed on nestlings.

The presence of nest parasites can affect a Cliff Swallow's decision whether to re-use an old nest or build a new one. The "swallow bug", a relative of the bed bug,

infests Cliff Swallow nests and in southern areas, infestations can be so intense that they slow the growth of nestlings and can even cause the birds to abandon their nesting colony. Cliff Swallows have a short nesting season even in the south, because the birds' arrival at their nests triggers the swallow bugs to start multiplying. The sooner the birds can raise their young and leave, the better! Here in the north, cold winter weather may knock back numbers of these bugs. Indeed, the birds at a Haines Junction colony re-used old nests more frequently than well-studied Cliff Swallows in Nebraska, suggesting that nest parasites may be less of an issue here. More study is needed to determine if warmer winters are allowing the bugs to tip the balance against Yukon Cliff Swallows.

There are many threats to aerial insectivores (birds that catch insects on the wing) such as the Cliff Swallow. Insect populations around the world appear to be declining, due to factors such as pesticide use and habitat loss. On top of that, the availability of flying insects at crucial times can be jeopardized due to bad weather and storms which are becoming increasingly frequent and extreme, and the warming climate which is causing insects to emerge earlier. Cliff Swallows spend the winter thousands of kilometres away in South America. All year long, they rely on abundant flying insects, which provide the energy required for nesting, for migration, and for growing a whole new set of feathers each winter.

In the Yukon, Cliff Swallow numbers are going down. In the



A Cliff Swallow's nest is almost complete at Dempster Corner.



Nesting structures built in 2001 by Hans Nelles and Henry Henkel are very popular with Cliff Swallows in Haines Junction.



A Cliff Swallow swoops to its nest at the Dezadeash River bridge.



The bridge at Johnson's Crossing has hosted a large colony of Cliff Swallows for decades; in the 1970s and 1980s birds numbered in the thousands.

Pam Sinclair Photos

1970s and 1980s, huge numbers were reported nesting on some of the larger bridges, such as the one at Johnson's Crossing, and the Lewes Bridge across the Yukon River south of Whitehorse. Even at more northerly locations, such as the culvert at Willow Creek on the north Klondike Highway, flocks of 300 to 600 were reported. Now, numbers are lower. Data from the North American Breeding Bird Survey show the same thing in the

Yukon: consistent declines.

Next summer when you see a swirling flock of Cliff Swallows, take the opportunity to watch them for a while at their nesting colony. Even in mid-summer they may still be adding mud pellets to the tunnel-like entrances of their round mud nests. Apparently, blocking visual contact helps them avoid squabbles with close neighbours (out of sight, out of mind!). Maybe it helps these

social little birds focus on the task at hand: catching enough flying insects to raise a brood of youngsters healthy enough for the upcoming 10,000 kilometre journey to South America. These fascinating birds have a lot going on in their lives.

Pam Sinclair is a biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Service of Environment and Climate Change Canada in Whitehorse, Yukon.

Birding with Nicola Hanna

Nicola Hanna photos



Pine Grosbeaks observed at the feeder this winter.



Community Owl Challenge!

What owls are in your community?



Owl song surveys are usually done evenings within an hour or two after official sunset.

Submit 5 different owl evening singing locations within your community, and we'll draw one annual YBC membership from each of Yukon's communities:

Beaver Creek | Burwash Landing |
Carcross and Tagish | Carmacks |
Dawson City | Faro |
Haines Junction | Mayo |
Mount Lorne | Old Crow |
Pelly Crossing | Ross River | Teslin |
Watson Lake | Whitehorse

How to participate:

Between now and May 17, go for a sunset walk starting 30 minutes after official sunset time, and bring a compass. When you hear one of our Yukon owls, note:

- Time/Date
- Location (as best possible)
- Compass direction
- Strength of call (loud, medium, faint, you may also try to estimate distance if you like)

Send your 5 (or more!) submissions, with community, to owlchallenge@yukonbirds.ca. Draw will be held May 20.

To learn about Yukon owl songs, "Like" and "Follow first" our Facebook page : **Yukon Bird Club**, where we'll share a how-to about owl songs (and other night calls!).

Yukon's most common owls:

1. Great Horned Owl
2. Boreal Owl
3. Northern Hawk Owl
4. Great Gray Owl
5. Northern Saw-whet Owl
6. Northern Pygmy-Owl

Follow your Covid19 guidelines



Helmut Grünberg Yukon Birdathon

5:00 pm, Fri. May 29 – 5:00 pm, Sat. May 30

The Yukon Bird Club's annual 24-hour birding fundraiser is fun and easy! There are a few new twists for 2020:

It's COVID conscious

Go solo or with your household.

Explore close to home – avoid using fossil fuels if possible.

All funds raised will go to the Whitehorse Food Bank.

It's CORVID conscious

How many ravens, magpies and jays can you find? Big bonus for crows!

It's high-tech

In lieu of the traditional post-birdathon BBQ, we'll meet via Zoom.

Details: yukonbirds.ca/birdathon

**Yukon
Bird Club**

Feature Birder 2020 – Taylor Belansky

A relatively new birder, Taylor Belansky arrived in Whitehorse in 2016 to begin her studies towards a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental and Conservation Science (Yukon College/ University of Alberta). She says an ornithology class with Dr. Katie Aitken helped her “fall in love” with birds. Taylor is this year's recipient of the Yukon Bird Club's Conservation Scholarship Award, and the club's newly elected

Youth Coordinator. She plans to recruit more young people and her classmates to participate in this year's Birdathon. As well as raising funds for the Food Bank, Taylor is going to be an environmental and COVID-19-conscious birder. She says she'll be working on improving her bird ID skills while exploring her Riverdale neighbourhood. Happy birding, Taylor!



Correction Notice

I would like to note an error in my story, *25 Years of the Yukon Bird Club*, in our last newsletter which was not caught during proofing. The error was that I accredited the wrong person for the original idea of the Yukon Bird Atlas, *Birds of the Yukon Territory*. While I know and recognize (and highly admire) the authors and many

contributors of this incredible book, my personal understanding of where the original idea that inspired this book came from was wrong.

The person who came up with the idea for *Birds of the Yukon Territory* was Art Martell in January 1988, having been inspired by *The Birds of British Columbia*. Together with Jim Hawkings, Wendy Nixon, and Don

Russell (Canadian Wildlife Service and birders), Art initiated the creation of *Birds of the Yukon Territory*.

I sincerely apologize for this mistake, and hope you enjoyed the story anyways.

Greetings from YBC Events
Coordinator,

Shyloh van Delft

Snow Bunting Migration in Haines Junction

By **Julie Bauer**

What a great 2020 spring migration of snow buntings this year! Everyone in Haines Junction and Whitehorse saw huge flocks of buntings travelling the Alaska and Haines Highways. Most residents in the Junction had buntings below their bird feeders, not a common sight, in addition to the numerous common redpolls. Since 2014 Terry and I have been banding this early spring migrant in Haines Junction. The project started after I noted a request for banders to look at this species due to decreasing numbers. See the Snow Bunting Network, a citizen science project, that started in 2006 led by scientist Oliver Love, and connect to the most recent newsletters.

<http://www.oliverlovelab.com/canadian-snow-bunting-network/>

The focus of this work is on overwintering populations of snow buntings in eastern and central Canada.

Our work in the Junction is on the migration of the birds as they travel to their high Arctic and Yukon breeding areas. In 2014 I was still working as a community nurse so it was a slow start and steep learning curve to capture buntings in mid- March/April. Learning to use baited ground traps resulted in only 32 birds handled. This year we banded 2339 birds and handled an additional 799 recaptures! This exceptional year likely had to do with the deep snow and weather of southern Canada as well as in the Yukon. The birds stayed in the Junction for up to two weeks before moving north. Of note, no birds were captured in 2019 due to that warm spring resulting in no snow in the valley bottom. We have handled 5561 birds in total and have 24 significant year to year recaptures in our area. In 2020 we recaptured 10 birds banded in 2018 and 4 birds banded in 2017.

We have two buntings recaptures by other people that we banded in 2018. A bird was captured in Barrow, Alaska by a researcher working on nests in 2019, the band number was noted and there were some excited researchers. The other band was taken off a dead bird that was found in the grill of a truck in Dawson Creek, BC in October 2019.

Working with this unique species has been a treat. We have tried to involve youth and families in the project. During the busy times we have asked the birding community for assistance in banding, scribing and extraction of the birds from the traps. 2020 was different with Covid-19 so we worked alone and were very busy for 25 days. What a gorgeous bird to work with and in the short timeframe we see the snow buntings change plumage by wearing off their rusty brown edge of the feathers, this is done by the birds rubbing on the snow. The



resulting breeding male becomes all white and black. The colour of the bill changes from a bright yellow to black. All birds handled are aged and sexed which is easily done, the exception being some second year males. In all our years we have males arriving first to the area, the mature older birds followed by second year males. Females are infrequent, arriving later than the males and in small numbers. These mature males are first because they need to arrive on the breeding grounds and select the limited nesting sites in rock cervices and driftwood.

Snow buntings have been observed occasionally on Xmas bird counts in the Yukon as birds do overwinter in small numbers. There have been flocks observed in the last few years at the south end of Kluane Lake.



Julie Bauer photos



Coping with the Cold:

Winter tree cavity use by northern birds

By Jesse Vigliotti

I often marvel, from the comfort of my heated home, at the resilience of over-wintering northern birds. Just as humans do, many bird species make or use shelters as a way of withstanding extreme cold conditions. For example, grouse burrow into the snow, while woodpeckers, chickadees and nuthatches often roost in tree cavities. But unlike humans, birds don't burn wood or oil to help maintain their body temperatures; amazingly, they can get by with only the little insulation that snow and tree-cavities provide. It was a curiosity about how and where northern boreal birds roost at night, and the strategies they use for surviving cold winters, that led to my master's research on winter tree-cavity use by birds and mammals, beginning in 2017. I had predicted that cavity-users would prefer warmer cavities, and that they would select cavities based on characteristics that reflect their insulative qualities. This behavior would make sense for over-wintering, northern species as it would reduce the amount of energy spent on thermoregulation and, thus, reduce the risk of starvation. To test these predictions, I spent three winters locating and surveying over 300 tree-cavities throughout southern Yukon, and recording the cavity, tree and habitat characteristics of each roost site.

Over three winters, I

observed 18 American three-toed woodpeckers, 2 boreal chickadees, 1 hairy and downy woodpecker, and a pair of brown creepers roosting in tree-cavities. It is not surprising that three-toeds were observed more than other woodpeckers as they are the most abundant woodpecker species in Yukon. However, despite chickadees being Yukon's most abundant cavity-using birds, they were only found using two cavities for roosting. So, where do boreal and black-capped chickadees spend winter nights? It may have been due to chance that chickadees were only observed twice, but it may also have been that they were roosting in other types of shelters such as rock cracks or snow burrows, as they are known to occasionally do in more southern forests. There were two other surprising results from my research; the first being that no mammals had rested in tree-cavities as they are known to do elsewhere, and the other being the first known observation of brown creepers roosting in tree-cavities. Creepers are known to use the spaces between a tree's bark and the trunk for nesting and roosting but using a woodpecker cavity for roosting has never been documented. Furthermore, creepers are somewhat rare in Yukon, so finding them at all was a pleasant surprise. The pair of young creepers were communally roosting in a downy woodpecker cavity, but not in the conventional way that other birds do. They were clung to the sides

of the cavities, headfirst, with their tails poking out of the entrance. The pair had used the cavity many times throughout December of 2018, as was apparent from temperature data obtained from dataloggers I had installed in some of the cavities. The data showed that the difference between the air temperature and the internal cavity temperature was noticeably greater on some nights than on others, which indicated that something had been using the cavity at night and had warmed the cavity with their body heat. However, I had only observed the creepers on one of those nights, so how was I sure that other species had not also used the same cavity? Most cavity-using birds rest on the floors of cavities and tend not to defecate where they sleep; however, the creepers did not sit in the cavity and had defecated many times inside the cavity, which resulted in the accumulation of a large mound of feces that filled much of the cavity. Another telling clue was that some of their tail feathers had become frozen within the mound while roosting and had to be abandoned for them to leave the cavity.

So, do northern birds select warmer cavities as a winter survival strategy? Well, for scientific analysis, I could only use my three-toed woodpecker data as too few cavities were used by other species. But, as predicted, the cavities selected by three-toed woodpeckers were



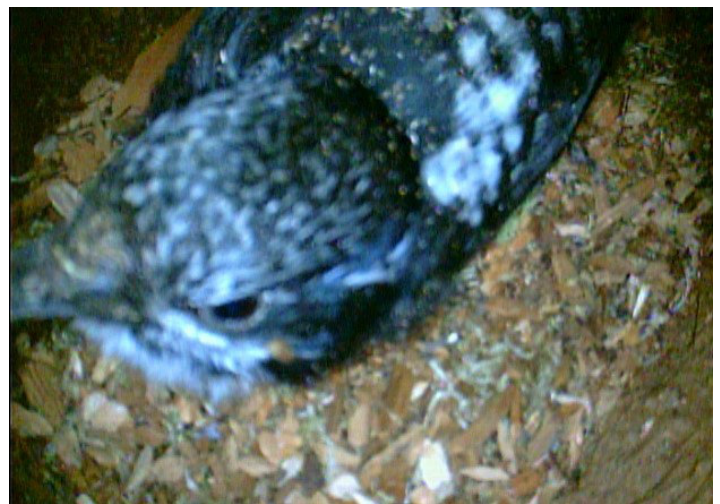
American Three-toed Woodpeckers using tree cavities.

Jesse Vigliotti Photos

warmer than unused cavities, particularly at sunset when individuals scout out potential roost sites. Furthermore, as they preferred roost sites with characteristics that related to temperature, it seems as though three-toed woodpeckers had selected sites with characteristics that indicated their thermal quality. The woodpeckers selected relatively small cavities within forests with dense live conifer tree cover and avoided cavities with south-facing entrances. Smaller cavities were warmer and were preferred by three-toed woodpeckers, likely because smaller cavities tend to have thicker walls and are more easily warmed by their body heat. The density of tree species that retained their leaves throughout the winter (i.e. spruce and pine) also affected the temperatures of the cavity sites as the denser foliage likely reduced heat dispersion by wind, and all used three-toed woodpecker cavities were within dense conifer forest. Cavities with south-facing entrances were

colder than those with other orientations as they were more exposed to the southwestern prevailing winter winds, and three-toed woodpeckers had avoided these cavities, preferring cavities on the leeward sides of trees. Finally, it appeared that, once woodpeckers selected their ideal roost sites, they formed a thick layer of woodchips by chiseling away at the inner cavity walls. And though I could not easily measure the relationship between the thickness of the woodchip layers and cavity temperature, the cavities used most frequently appeared to have the thickest layers and were warmer as a result.

So, there you have it! Three years of work summed up in a few paragraphs. The results of this research provide a glimpse into the winter survival strategies of northern birds. Migratory birds



fly south to avoid cold temperatures, while some of our resident species tough it out and use tree-cavities to reduce the risk of over-winter mortality. Woodpeckers usually excavate new cavities every year for nesting, and this may be a strategy for avoiding nest predators or parasites; however, it may be also a way to increase the availability of winter roost sites so that they have many options when choosing the ideal cavity. As with most research, we are left with more questions than answers. One such question I hope to further explore someday is what strategies do chickadees use to withstand northern winters?

Yukon's Christmas Bird Counts 2018

By *Clive Osborne*

First, I would like to apologize for the delay in reporting Christmas Bird Count results. In the past several years, this summary has been presented in the fall following the year of the count. However, the 2018 data was not available to me in the fall of 2019.

Ten Christmas Bird Counts were conducted by citizen scientist birders in 2018. Climate change continues to produce some interesting observations. This article summarizes the information collected from the Yukon Christmas Bird Counts conducted in 2018 as posted to the Audubon Society's website, the official sponsor of the Christmas Bird Count throughout North America. A total of 8090 birds comprising 42 species were counted by 119 participants from the first counts on December 16 to the last counts on December 29. Bohemian Waxwings numbers remain high in Whitehorse and are increasing in some of the communities and flocks of waterfowl appear to be hanging around for Christmas. The location of the counts is shown in Figure 1 and the counts are summarized in Tables 1-3.

Figure 1. Locations of 2018 Yukon CBCs

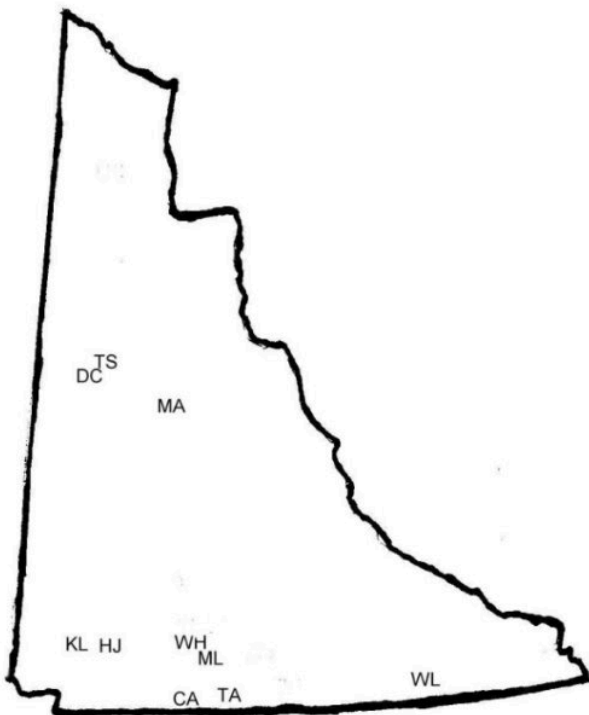


Table 1. Summary of Yukon Christmas Bird Counts.

Count	Date	No. of Field Observers	No. of Species Observed	No. of Birds Observed
Whitehorse (WH)	26/12	45	25	5304
Haines Junction (HJ)	22/12	14	19	615
Carcross (CA)	23/12	13	17	171
Marsh Lake (ML)	23/12	12	16	279
Tagish (TA)	16/12	11	19	535
Dawson (DC)	16/12	6	13	200
Kluane N.P. (KL)	29/12	6	11	78
Tombstone (TS)	27/12	6	6	52
Mayo (MA)	29/12	5	12	567
Watson Lake (WL)	26/12	1*	16	289

* suspected reporting error

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

Species	No. of Birds	Rank
Common Raven	3159	1
Bohemian Waxwing	2073	2
Pine Grosbeak	732	3
Black-capped Chickadee	359	4
Common Redpoll / redpoll sp.	362	5
Boreal Chickadee	242	6
Common Goldeneye	209	7
Black-billed Magpie	152	8
Gray Jay	122	9
Mallard	100	10

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

Species	No. of Counts
Gray Jay	10
Common Raven	10
Boreal Chickadee	10
Black-capped Chickadee	9
Pine Grosbeak	9
Common Redpoll	9
Black-billed Magpie	7
American Three-toed Woodpecker	7
Spruce Grouse	7
Ruffed Grouse	6

This year's Audubon designated unusual sightings were: Trumpeter Swan (1 – Whitehorse), Northern Pygmy Owl (1 – Whitehorse), Eurasian Collared Dove (2 – Carcross), (2 – Watson Lake), American Robin (1 – Mayo), Common Merganser (4 – Mayo), Bufflehead (3 – Tagish), Brown Creeper (2 – Tagish) and White-throated Sparrow (1 – Watson Lake).

It seems that every year some Counts report record high numbers for some species and this year was no exception: Bald Eagle (83 – Whitehorse), Eurasian Collared Dove (4 – Whitehorse), Spruce Grouse (25 –

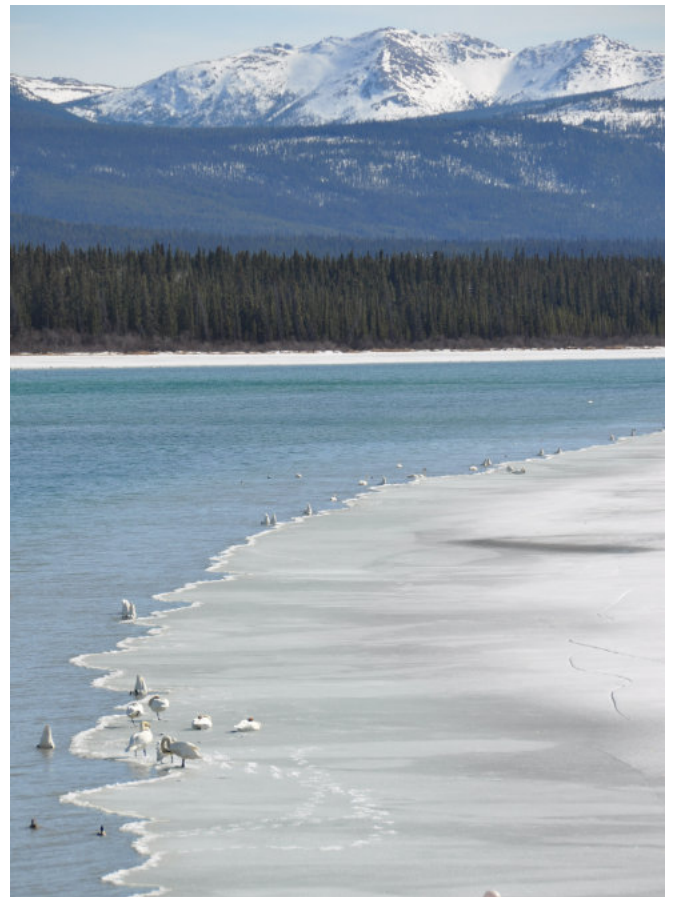
Haines Junction), Common Goldeneye (207 – Tagish) and Common Merganser (56 – Tagish).

Of conservation concern, two Counts recorded record low numbers: Pine Grosbeak (1 – Kluane National Park) and Red Crossbill (7 - Tagish).

Diligent observers recorded some sightings of species during count week that were not counted on count day: Haines Junction (Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Hawkowl, Snow Bunting), Carcross (Downy Woodpecker, Horned Lark, Red Crossbill) and Kluane N.P. (Boreal Owl, Spruce Grouse).

Birding with Al Cushing

Al Cushing photos



There was some fabulous swan watching late April at the Tagish bridge. One swan, top left photo, dug her own hole in the ice so that she could reach down to feed. The bottom left image of two swans with duck escorts is so typical of waterfowl behaviour at this time of the year.

Taylor Belansky wins the YBC Student Award

We congratulate Taylor Belansky on winning our YBC Student Award. Following is the essay which she submitted with her successful application.

Yukon Bird Club Award Application Essay

Jan 30, 2020

My name is Taylor Belansky and I am presently enrolled in the Environmental and Conservation Science program through the University of Alberta and Yukon College. My goal is to graduate in the winter term of 2021 with my B.Sc.! This program – like Class Aves – is wonderfully diverse! I have been introduced to a broad range of disciplines within conservation, including conservation biology, ecology, endangered species management and science policy. These courses have been paired with microeconomics, history of Yukon First Nations and many more. I have been incredibly fortunate to learn so much about our natural world – particularly in the north. It is our responsibility as students to apply and share this knowledge as much, and as often, as possible. This is where the birds come in! After taking an introductory ornithology course at the College, birds became an avenue for me to share my knowledge.

Birds are dinosaurs!!! They are a living link to the world that existed long before the present forms of nature that we are familiar with today, including humans. They represent the resiliency and persistence of nature. The goal of conservation is to preserve biodiversity. Birds are a ubiquitous example that the diversity of species and genetics that we aim to conserve are the product of millions of years of

evolution – and include dinosaurs! Birds connect us to nature – even in the centre of the densest cities – birds are there to remind us of the beauty of nature and the world that exists from long before our cities rose up. That is why sharing knowledge and love for birds is so critical to all kinds of conservation action.

One aspect of bird conservation that I find so exciting is the opportunity for cooperation between

jurisdictions. The conservation of Yukon birds does not rest solely on Yukon residents, but is indeed a shared responsibility between citizens of the world. My academic goals include pursuing further education in environmental economics and to learn more about how we can change human habits and behavior in a way that benefits society, birds and all of nature. I hope to learn more about how science and traditional knowledge can inform economic decisions so that our natural world is valued as it

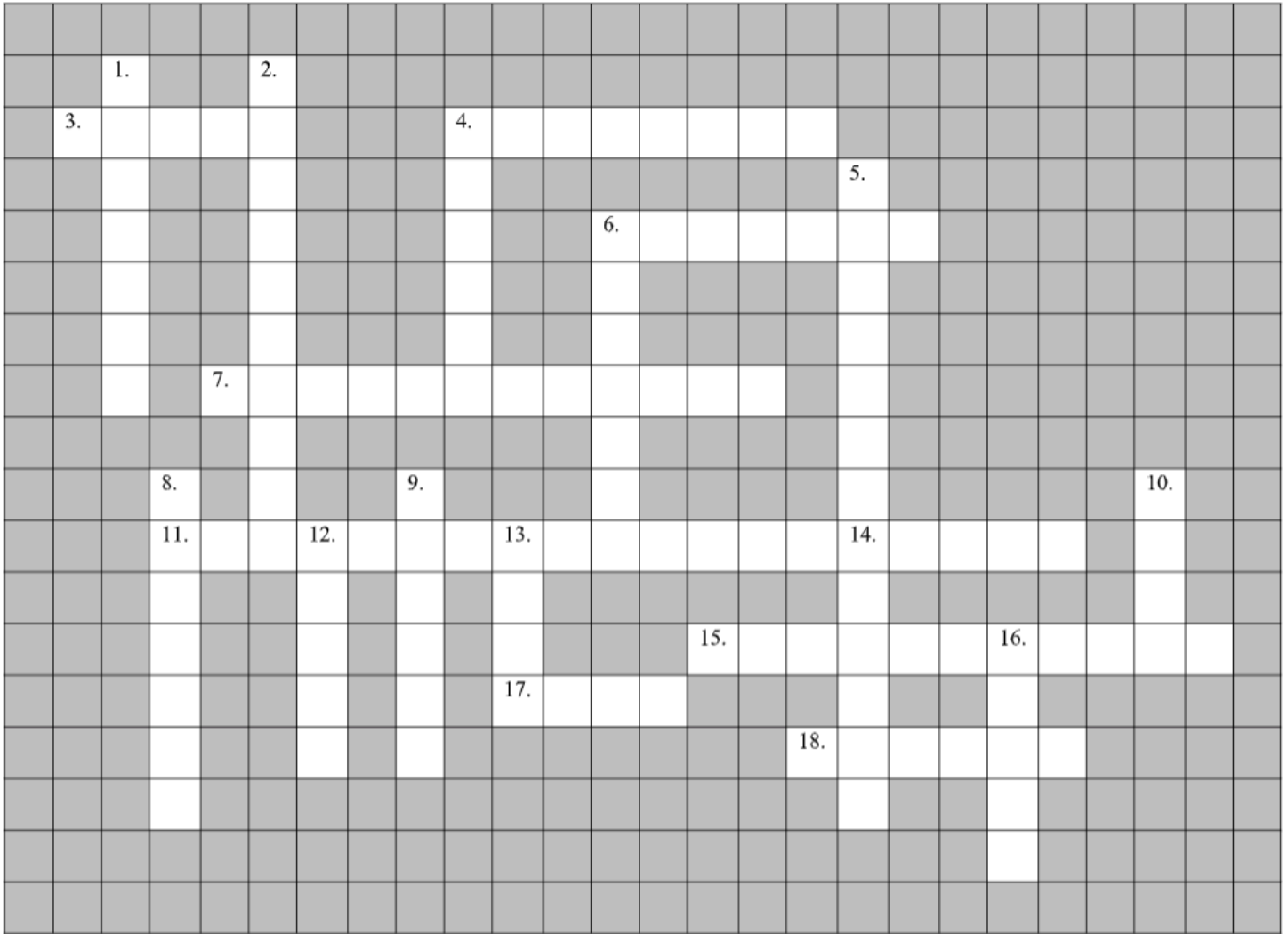
should be. Not just for the ecosystem services that nature provides, but also for the intrinsic value that cannot be assigned a number. Another one of my academic goals is to continue to learn as much as I can about birds, so that I can share this knowledge with others! I have been taught that once you know the name of something, you care more about it. Therefore getting people excited about birds, or even



just teaching them the names of their avian neighbours will have huge beneficial impacts on conservation efforts. I also hope to contribute to the growth of Yukon University in whatever capacity I can, to empower Yukon youth to pursue higher education with access to mental health care and all the resources they need to succeed in the rapidly changing north.

Thank you for your consideration,
Taylor Belansky

Springtime Bird Crossword



By **Ruth McCullough**

ACROSS:

- 3. This "purple" bird is common at feeding stations
- 4. The male of this species looks like a larger version of 3 across
- 7. This bird resembles the American Robin in appearance and habits
- 11. This bird has a white stripe above and black strip through the eye and a very nasal call
- 15. Told from other birds of this species by their pink legs
- 17. This water bird is named after Alaska

18. The Yellow Warbler is commonly found in these thickets

DOWN:

- 1. This duck is common throughout Canada. The male has sharp tail plumes
- 2. This owl gets its name from having ears that are hard to see.
- 4. Where Spruce Grouse prefer to build their nests
- 5. The color of this bird's breast, but not necessarily what we call it
- 6. What a lot of our birds do in spring and fall
- 8. Commonly known as a Whiskey Jack

9. The colour of this Warbler's rump

- 10. What ducks use to obtain food from the bottom of ponds
- 12. This goose has a heavy black bill with an orange band near the tip
- 13. This will no doubt attract woodpeckers and Chickadees to your feeder
- 14. This Thrush has the habit of raising its tail several times a minute
- 16. Named for our country, it has a black head and neck with broad white cheeks.

Solution

		1. P		2. S																		
	3. F	I	N	C	H			4. G	R	O	S	B	E	A	K							
		N			O			R										5. O				
		T			R			O			6. M	A	L	L	A	R	D					
		A			T			U			I											
		I			E			N			G											
		L		7. V	A	R	I	E	D	T	H	R	U	S	H							
					R							A										
					R																	
		8. G			E			9. Y				T							10. B			
		11. R	E	D	12. B	R	E	A	13. S	T	E	D	N	U	T	14. H	A	T	C	H	I	
		A			E				U							E					L	
		Y			A							15. H	E	R	R	I	N	16. G	G	U	L	L
		J			N				17. T	E	R	N				M			O			
		A														18. W	I	L	L	O	W	
		Y																				

For more information contact:

Yukon Bird Club
4061-4th Avenue
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 1H1
Canada
yukonbirdclub@yukonbirds.ca

YBC Website: yukonbirds.ca
Yukon Birds Facebook group: [facebook.com/groups/212509148852262/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/212509148852262/)
YBC Twitter: [yukonbirds](https://twitter.com/yukonbirds)

