



# Y u k o n *WARBLER*

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE YUKON BIRD CLUB - FALL 1994 (Vol.2,No.2)

P.O.Box 31054, Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada, Y1A 5P7

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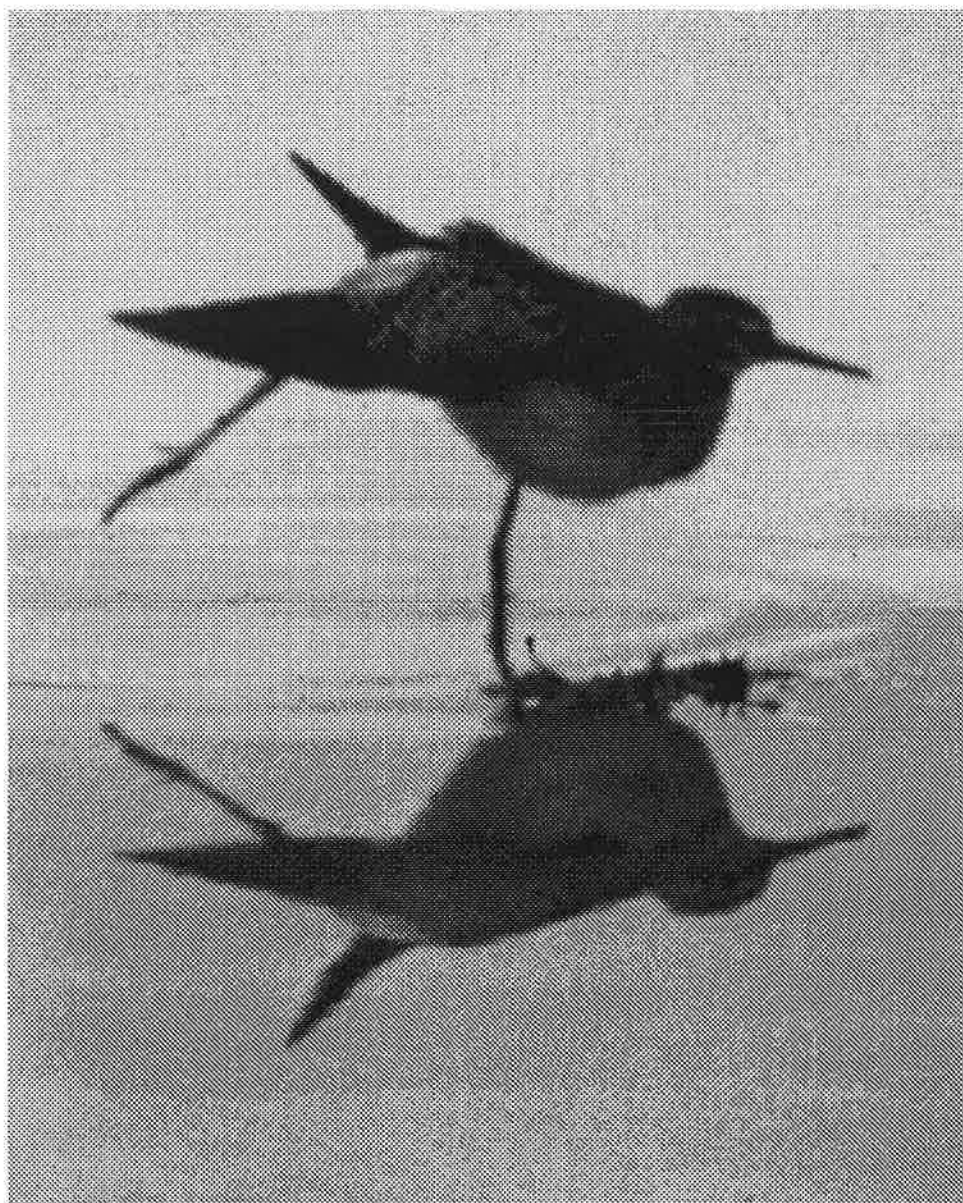
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*A Lesser Yellowlegs reflects on fall migration at the Takhini Salt Ponds*

*Photo-illustration by Cameron Eckert*

## **Fall Field Trips and Events**

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**WEEKEND DAY TRIPS:** *Dress for the weather, wear appropriate footwear, bring a lunch and binoculars. For more information or to arrange a ride call Pam Sinclair at 667-4630.*

**Saturday 17 September. *Fall Migration in Full Swing at Swan Lake!*** Swan Lake is without a doubt one of southern Yukon's true birding treasures. Join Helmut Grünberg for a tour of this very special area in search of migrating waterfowl, kinglets, warblers, Bohemian Waxwings, American Tree Sparrows, and perhaps a Peregrine Falcon!. **Meet at the SS.Klondike at 9:30 am.**

**Saturday 24 September. *On the Ptarmigan Trail at Stony Creek!*** This day hike will explore the rather rugged uplands of Stony Creek in search of Rock and Willow Ptarmigan. On last year's Stony Creek hike at least 6 Golden Eagles put on a dazzling show! Wear sturdy walking shoes or boots, bring a lunch and **meet at the SS.Klondike at 10:00 am.** Leader: Lee Kubica.

**Sunday 2 October. *The Glory of Fall Birding at Shallow Bay!*** Don't miss this opportunity to observe migrating raptors such as Northern Harriers, and Rough-legged Hawks, late lingering shorebirds such as Pectoral Sandpipers and Common Snipe, and the passage of fall swans. Wear waterproof footwear (i.e. rubber boots) and **meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 10:00 am.** Leader: Jim Hawkings.

**Saturday 8 October. *The First Annual Great Skagway Birding Adventure!*** This very special field trip will explore the best bird habitats of Skagway, Alaska. While the drive is somewhat lengthy (180 km Whitehorse to Skagway) we expect to see a variety of the unique and beautiful coastal land and sea birds including Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Winter Wren, Steller's Jay, Marbled Murrelet, Glaucous-winged Gull, and the elusive yet majestic Brown Creeper! Interested birders who lack suitable transportation should not hesitate to call Cameron at 667-4630 to arrange a ride. **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 8:00 am.** Leaders: Pam Sinclair and Cameron Eckert.

**Saturday 26 November. *The Second Annual Feeder-Hopping Extravaganza!*** Last year's feeder-hopping search for hardy winter birds turned up 3 species of chickadees, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Grosbeaks, a lone Bald Eagle, and the motherlode of hot chocolate! Who knows what avian treasures await this year's adventurers! **Meet at the Porter Creek Super A at 10:30 am.** and join Wendy Nixon and friends for a tour of Whitehorse's best feeders!

### **SPECIAL EVENTS**

**Wednesday 28 September. *The 1994 Annual General Meeting.*** Don't miss this opportunity to meet some of Yukon's friendliest birders. The main order of business is to elect of the 1995 Board of Directors. In return we will be treated to a slide show presentation by one of Yukon's best bird and wildlife photographers! **Meet at the Whitehorse Public Library at 7:00 pm.**

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## Yukon Bird Club's 1994 Annual General Meeting

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*The Yukon Bird Club's 1994 annual general meeting -- an excellent opportunity to meet some of Yukon's friendly and enthusiastic birders!!*

**7:00 p.m. on Wednesday September 28th, 1994**  
**at**  
**The Whitehorse Public Library**

The AGM is an annual social/business event where YBC members elect their new Board of Directors (generally a fairly quick affair) and are treated to an excellent slide show highlighting the Yukon's fascinating bird life.

*This year we are very fortunate to have Lee Kubica, an outstanding bird and wildlife photographer, presenting a slide show entitled "Images of Birds in a Northern Land."*



***A Bonaparte's Gull in bouyant flight.***  
***Photo by Cameron Eckert***

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## A New Yukon Bird Book: *Birds of Swan Lake, Yukon*

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*Review: by Cameron Eckert*

This summer, a most remarkable book quietly appeared on the nature shelf of Whitehorse book stores. The publication of *Birds of Swan Lake, Yukon* by one of Yukon's most enthusiastic birdwatchers, Helmut Grünberg, is a major event for all of Yukon's bird enthusiasts. This wonderful new book is most certainly the best source for information about southern Yukon's bird life and is a great achievement by a very dedicated and knowledgeable birder.

Swan Lake is located twenty kilometres north of Whitehorse and about nine kilometres south of Lake Laberge. For the past sixteen years Helmut Grünberg has been visiting Swan Lake through spring, summer, fall and occasionally in winter and carefully recording his observations of the area's diverse and abundant bird life. Helmut has also collected many observations from other naturalists and birdwatchers who have explored Swan Lake. *Birds of Swan Lake, Yukon* details the occurrence and breeding status of over 150 species that have been observed in the Swan Lake area. The book is very well organized with a very attractive layout and design. The pages are occasionally spiced with lovely drawings by Pam Sinclair. The introductory chapters provide interesting information about the geology, weather and habitats typical of the Swan Lake area. Helmut has identified many plant species which occur in the wetland areas of Swan Lake. *Birds of Swan Lake, Yukon* includes excellent maps with corresponding descriptions of a variety of landmarks. This ensures that birders who are not familiar with Swan Lake can make the most of their first visit to the area. *Birds of Swan Lake, Yukon* will guide you there and the beauty, richness and natural surprises of Swan Lake itself will draw you back again and again.

The book's foreword, by Gavin Johnston and C. McEwen describes very well the wonderful natural experiences typical of a visit to Swan Lake;

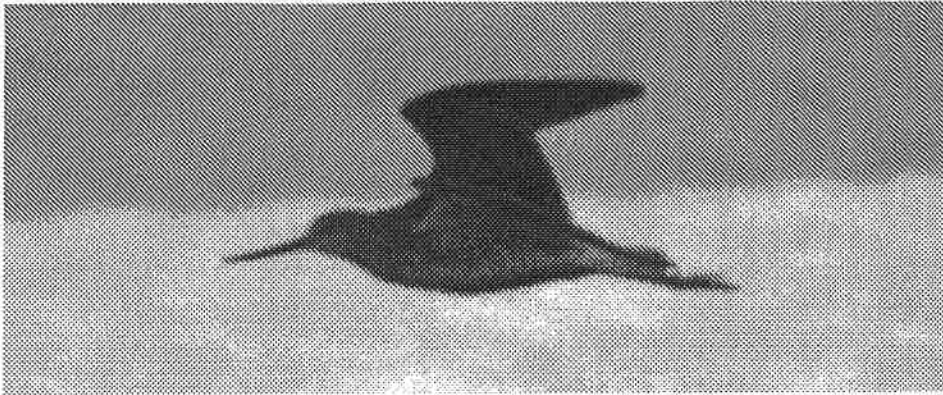
*"There is {a} place not far from Whitehorse - Swan Lake - a rather unassuming wetland nestled in the rolling boreal forest north of town, which offers an astounding variety of birdlife. From spring thaw until winter freeze-up, the area teems with continually changing bird sounds and sights. For birdwatchers and other naturalists each trip to Swan Lake is different. Sometimes your attention is drawn to the hollow tremolo of a Boreal Owl or to the burlesque movements of a Red-necked Phalarope spinning on the water surface of Rarity Ponds. At other times you may observe Ruddy Ducks, Bohemian Waxwings or Pectoral Sandpipers, and occasionally you may see Cinnamon and Blue-winged Teal Swimming side by side."*

My own visits to Swan Lake have always had a magical twist to them. Last fall it was the dramatic sight of a boldly powerful grey phase Gyrfalcon appearing on the far side of the lake and blazing a trail through the air just a few metres over my head. *Birds of Swan Lake, Yukon* is a book that I will be reaching for from my library shelf a great many times for many years to come. Thanks Helmut!

Copies of *Birds of Swan Lake Yukon*, by Helmut Grünberg (published by Keyline Graphic Design) can be obtained from the Yukon College bookstore, Mac's Fireweed Books on Main Street, Yukon Conservation Society at 302 Hawkins St., or directly from Helmut (call 667-6703).

## 1994 Yukon Bird-a-Thon Brings Birders Together

This year's Bird-a-Thon was a great success due to the dedicated efforts of YBC's Bird-a-Thon Coordinator, René Carlson. Over 20 Yukon birders spent the 24 hour Bird-a-Thon period on May 27 and 28th exploring every available habitat for as many bird species as possible. Participants rendezvoused at Wolf Creek Campground for the annual post Bird-a-Thon potluck Bar-b-Que. This festive social event gives participants a chance to compare notes, swap stories and tally the grand total. This year's grand total reached 129 species!



*One of the Yukon's more elusive shorebirds - the Greater Yellowlegs.  
Photo by Cameron Eckert*

As always there were many unusual and interesting sightings. The indefatigable team of Greg and Lee Kubica reached the "century mark" with an impressive tally of 100 species including a unique array of grouse. They sighted Willow Ptarmigan, Spruce Grouse, and the first Blue Grouse ever seen on the Bird-a-Thon. Greg and Lee also found nesting Osprey at Squanga Lake. Cameron Eckert and Pam Sinclair birded from

Lake Laberge over the top of MacIntyre Mountain and down to Judas Creek in pursuit of 101 species. Their sightings included such notables as Dusky Flycatchers and a Golden Eagle at treeline on MacIntyre, Wilson's Phalaropes at the Saltponds, and a lone Cinnamon Teal at Lewes Marsh.

Jim Hawkings spotted a variety of interesting waterfowl including five Oldsquaw on Marsh Lake, two Blue-winged Teal at Judas Creek, and Jim scooped all other participants with a pair of Harlequin Ducks at the Yukon River bridge! Jeremy Baumbach did all his birding without the use of a car and won the *Enviro-birder* award for the second year in a row! Jeremy's tally included a Townsend's Solitaire, three Bohemian Waxwings, a Hairy Woodpecker and the only Northern Goshawk sighted on this year's Bird-a-Thon. This year a new team with members Heather Thompson, Patti Nash, Elaine Monaghan and Jeannette McCrie took to the field and flushed out a very interesting tally of birds including a pair of Blue-winged Teal, a Bald Eagle, six Arctic Terns, a Northern Waterthrush, and two Pectoral Sandpipers! Wendy Nixon and her son, Michael did an excellent job guiding the news media on the Bird-a-Thon trail and spotting birds. Their tally included both Least and Hammond's Flycatchers as well as Red-breasted Nuthatch, Warbling Vireo, Wilson's Warbler, and Bonaparte's Gull! Helmut Grünberg spent most of his Bird-a-Thon at the very productive Swan Lake and observed a number of "hard to find" birds such as Sora, Purple Finch, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Orange-crowned Warbler. Helmut must have figured that Wilson's Phalarope was a sure thing when he observed 17 at Swan Lake on May 23. To his astonishment only one was still present at Swan Lake on May 28. However, one is infinitely better than none on the Bird-a-Thon! As well, Helmut tallied 20 Lesser Yellowlegs! René Carlson not only did an excellent job of organizing this year's Bird-a-Thon but she also sought out an impressive variety of species including Red-winged Blackbird, Yellow Warbler, Horned Grebe, Red-tailed Hawk and the very elusive Northern Rough-winged Swallow.

The event was well covered by the news media - CBC Radio interviewed Lee Kubica the day before the Bird-a-Thon and the Yukon News sent a reporter into the field with Wendy Nixon. The money raised by the Bird-a-Thon is shared between the Yukon Bird Club and the Yukon Conservation Society and goes toward conservation education projects in the Yukon. Thanks again to René for organizing such a fine event!



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## **Takhini Elementary does their B.I.T for birds!**

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*by Heather Thompson*

The look on the caretaker's face was one of puzzled incredibility as I explained that our reason for being at the landfill site was not to dump garbage but to count the birds. We were part of the Bird Identification Tally (B.I.T.) Challenge and with other Canadian children were counting birds last May 29th.

The B.I.T. Challenge is open to all students whose school is involved in working toward environmental awareness and protection. It was first introduced in 1991 when seventy students participated. The rules were simple:

- Students could include the wild bird species that they saw and identified on Sunday, May 29th.
- Students viewing the birds could include sightings in any area where they wished to look, including their own backyards.
- An adult, in most cases a parent, was required to validate the sightings. All entries had to be signed by an adult.

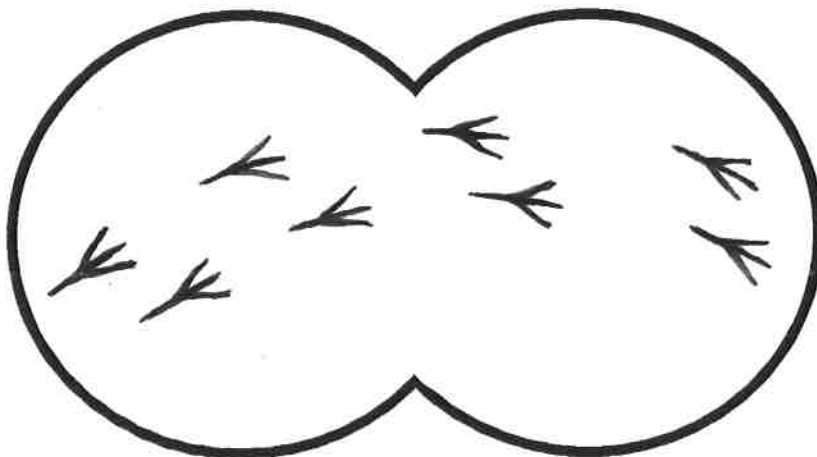
The children with us at the landfill site counting birds were students from Takhini Elementary. Some children went with their parents to visit ponds and lakes; others just walked down their back lane. Sixteen children aged six to nine participated.

As expected, American Robins, gulls, and Common Ravens were seen most often. The wide range of birds sighted by the children included Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Northern Flickers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Bald Eagles, loons, Killdeer, Bohemian Waxwings, Spruce Grouse, Canada Geese, and Green-winged Teal -- for a total of thirty species in all!

When the data from across the country were tallied, some interesting results emerged. We had been part of a group of 4,993 students from across Canada who spent time on May 29th bird watching. Takhini was the only Yukon school that participated. Most exciting was the news that we reported seeing more species and more birds in total than any other group in Canada!

Not every child who wanted to be involved in the B.I.T Challenge participated. Not every child could find an adult with the knowledge, the time, or the desire to look for birds that Sunday. Next year a bigger B.I.T. Challenge is planned. If we want children to value their environment, then we must find ways to help them learn more about the interconnectedness of all things.

***What are you doing on the weekend of May 26, 1995?***



## Lark Sparrow visits the Yukon

by Cameron Eckert

This past spring, Pam Sinclair and I spent the breeding season surveying forest birds along the Liard River. On July 15th, 1994 we were camped on the Liard River near an old sawmill site about two kilometres downstream from the mouth of the Frances River. At about 9:30 a.m. we were just tucking into a second cup of coffee listening to the last summer songs of the Alder Flycatcher when a boisterous flock of foraging kinglets erupted from the willows along the river's edge. Unable to resist the lure of the kinglets I set down the coffee in favour of my binoculars. As I headed toward the kinglet flock I flushed a large sparrow from a lone willow up into taller riverside willows. A wide flash of white outer tail feathers on a bird that was



*Lark Sparrow, Liard River, July 15, 1994*  
*Photo by C.Eckert and P.Sinclair*

obviously not a Dark-eyed Junco immediately captivated my attention. A brief look at the bird as it moved through the willows revealed a bright chestnut ear patch, white throat, and a small black spot in the centre of an otherwise unmarked white breast. The bird quickly disappeared from view. My thoughts raced ... *could this chunky sparrow possibly be a Lark Sparrow!*

I dashed back to the campsite and beckoned Pam to come quickly ... *and bring your binoculars!* Somewhere between a very fast walk and a slow run we arrived back at the river's edge and searched the leafy willows for a *maybe* Lark Sparrow. Nothing moved. Slightly frantic we could only wonder where the bird could have gone. Then suddenly it popped into the top of the tallest willow. From only a few metres away we were astonished by the sight of a beautiful sparrow with a bold chestnut crown, a white central crown stripe, and a bright chestnut ear patch on a white face. As the bird briefly turned toward us it displayed a pure white throat, breast and belly with a single black spot in the centre of its breast. Its pale greyish-brown back was broken by short blackish stripes. A Lark Sparrow in the Yukon!

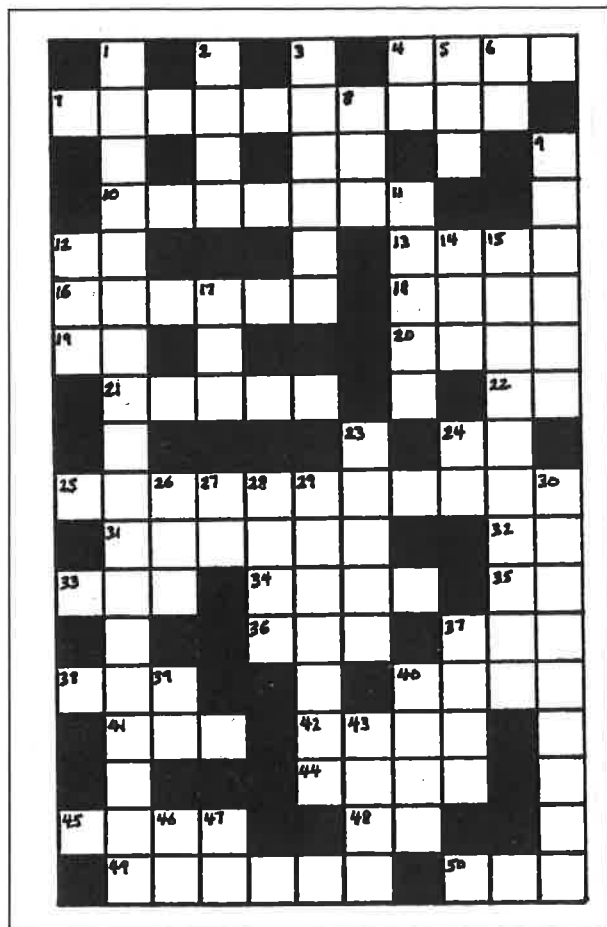
With a flash of white outer tail feathers the sparrow flew from the willows onto a large riverside log pile. I raced for the camera while Pam kept track of the bird. The bird stayed on its perch and within moments I was edging over the top

of the log pile precariously balancing camera and binoculars while trying to find a stable foot hold for a photo. As I came over the top I could see the Lark Sparrow rested about twenty-five feet away -- not close enough for an artistic portrait but good enough for a record shot. I managed to snap only a few quick photos before the bird flew again. Calling out a few sharp "tsip" notes the Lark Sparrow disappeared down the river. We never saw it again.

The Lark Sparrow is a bird of open country with scattered trees and bushes. Normally the Lark Sparrow only ranges as far north as southern British Columbia and across the southern Prairie Provinces. However, occasionally they are known to wander rather far. In eastern Canada, the Lark Sparrow has turned up as far north as Churchill, Manitoba, and last Summer, a Lark Sparrow was sighted at the Tetlin Wildlife Refuge in east-central Alaska. Our sighting is the first documented record of Lark Sparrow in the Yukon.

# A Yukon Birder's Crossword

by Jeremy Baumbach



## Across

4. Rare bird: birder :: \_\_\_\_ : fish (4).
5. This bird makes the longest migratory journey of any bird, summering here and wintering in the Antarctic (6,4).
10. This sociable bird will pass food along to the bird beside it on the branch (7).
12. Increasingly, birding is \_\_\_\_ (2).
13. Gardening tool that becomes a bird's name with the addition of one letter (4).
16. This bird is called the "butcher bird" because, lacking talons, it will impale its prey on thorns or barb wire (6).
18. Way out (4).
19. My name for this crossword-maker (2).
20. Tern's wings are \_\_\_\_ at the elbow (4).
21. A bird's built-in anti-stall device (5).

## Across con't

22. "To business that we love (birding) we rise betime, And \_\_\_\_ to 't with delight" - *Shakespeare* - (2).
24. Birds \_\_\_\_ a feather flock together (2).
25. A link between birds and reptiles that lived about 70 million years ago (11).
31. People act like this bird, but take a sauna first (6).
33. "And thou wilt give thyself relief, if thou doest every \_\_\_\_ of thy life as if it were the last" - *Marcus Aurelius* - (3).
24. A mid-month marker in the ancient Roman calendar (4).
35. First two letters of a flamboyantly coloured duck's name (2).
36. An alternative to Canada Post, for parcels at least (3,abbr.).
37. A wading bird: \_\_\_\_ on (3).
38. This bird's feathers are fluffy at the edges allowing it to fly noiselessly (3).
40. A knot (4).
41. A wetland ecosystem, preferred habitat of the Palm Warbler (3).
42. This bird can dive 50-80 metres (4).
44. What some birds do to other birds' nests (4).
45. An omnivorous and intelligent bird (4).
48. Old term for gym class (2,abbr.).
49. What Yukon birders have in the winter about the return of the birds in spring (6).
50. Some YBC members work here (3,abbr.).

## Down

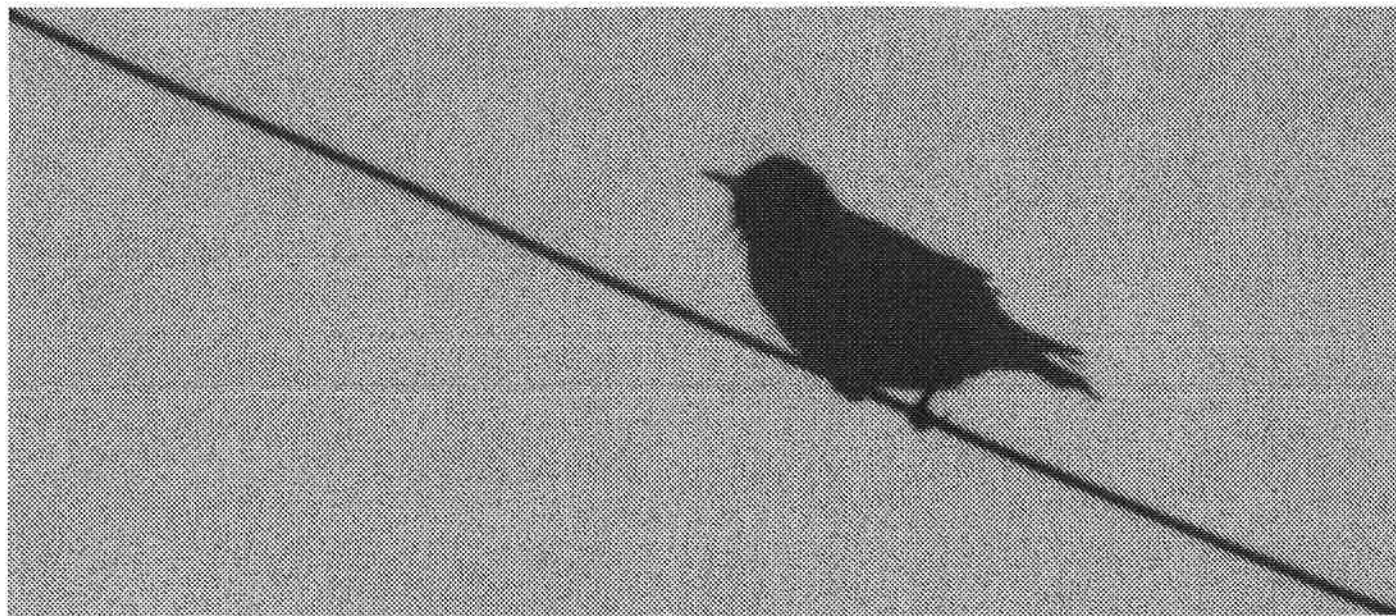
1. Yukon's cuckoo (parasitic nester) (5-6,7).
2. Souls of the dead were ferried across this river (4).
3. Opposite of dormant (6).
4. This is our question: To \_\_\_\_ or not to \_\_\_\_ a birder (2).
5. "All \_\_\_\_ is but an imitation of nature" - *Seneca* - (3).



## **Down con't**

6. Bird bander's motto: A bird \_\_\_\_ the hand is worth two in the bush (2).  
8. Arrival of birds in the spring: \_\_\_\_ic (3).  
9. Human equivalent of a bird colony (6).  
11. This bird can alter its specific gravity, lowering itself in the water so only its head and bill show (5).  
12. Characteristic of birders: A birder \_\_\_\_ (3).  
14. Nature uses a beaver, humans use an \_\_\_\_ (3).  
15. This bird digs a nesting burrow in the riverbank (10).  
17. Those who haven't paid their membership dues should at least write YBC one of these (3,abbr.).  
23. Area between the bill and the eyes (5).  
24. Province in which a migratory bird hotspot, the most southerly point in Canada, is located (2,abbr.).  
26. What a bird does on a nest (3).  
27. Initials of an endangered bird that nests on sandy beaches (2).  
28. Describes Cameron's work with the newsletter (4).  
29. This bird's feathers appear to change colour in the spring (a brighter red) without molting (7).  
30. Some of these were released in Central Park in 1890 by the American Acclimitization Society, with the goal of establishing in the USA every bird species mentioned in Shakespeare. Now they are even here (plural)(9).  
37. What some birds do for a living (4).  
39. Look, behold (a bird) (2).  
40. I almost lost one last spring at Shallow Bay (4).  
43. Exclamation after knocking spotting scope off target (4).  
46. YBC field trips occur rain \_\_\_\_ shine (2).  
47. A shorebird: \_ill\_t (2).

*(Solution to Yukon Birder's Crossword on Page 16)*



*The American Acclimitization Society would be proud of this bird ... seen in Whitehorse on April 15, 1994*

*Photo by Cameron Eckert*

## **Birding in the Bering** *by Pam Sinclair*

Birding in the Yukon is exciting and varied, but one thing we do miss is birding the open ocean. This August, Cameron and I ventured to Gambell, Alaska, for a good dose of seabirding. Situated at the northern tip of St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea, Gambell is about 300 km from the western shore of mainland Alaska, and less than 100 km from eastern Russia.

When we arrived on the island it was enshrouded in fog, a condition that would persist for most of the week. After being whisked off to our rustic accommodations on a four-wheeler (there are no cars or trucks in Gambell, which is on a peninsula of deep soft gravel), we eagerly headed out to explore. We didn't go far on our first trek, just the 300 metres to the nearest beach. There, we sat ourselves down, set up the spotting scope, and gazed out expectantly at the sea. Seabirds were streaming by, in and out of the fog. Murres, guillemots, puffins, and auklets were speeding by faster than we could make sense of them. We caught on to the puffins (mostly Horned, some Tufted) and guillemots (mostly Pigeon) fairly quickly, but the murres and auklets took a little longer. Finally a group of murres flew by a little closer and we could discern the diagnostic thin white line on the bill of a Thick-billed Murre which was flying with several Common Murres. We had some trouble with the auklets, which, although easily distinguishable at close range by their colourful bills and the bizarre plumes on their heads, just looked plain grey and white at a distance in the fog.



*A Least Auklet emerges from its nest on St. Lawrence Island.  
Photo by Cameron Eckert*

We had heard, much to our amazement, that tens of thousands of seabirds nest right in town in Gambell. Locals who had stopped to chat on the beach had said the birds nest on 'the hill', and pointed vaguely off across town. When the fog lifted the next morning, we could see that the inland side of town was sheltered by a steep boulder-strewn slope. We headed that way, set ourselves up in the shelter of a large boulder at the base of the hill (rain is also a persistent feature of the local weather), and pointed our binoculars upward. Ah!

Puffins and auklets were perched on boulders all over the hill, and many were busy coming and going with food for their young. On the closest, lowest boulders we could see tiny Least Auklets, which are spotty grey and white and only a few inches tall. Higher up were comical Crested Auklets, smooth grey birds with a jaunty tuft jutting from the forehead, along with handsome Parakeet Auklets, in tuxedo-style black and white with a bright red bill. Rounding out the crowd were Horned Puffins and an unexpected pair of Dovekies, abundant in Canada's eastern Arctic but rare in western North America. From our vantage point we were able to watch at leisure, without disturbing the birds as they strutted and jostled on their rocky perches.

We enjoyed watching the seabirds all week, especially when wind conditions changed and they were flying along the beaches quite close to shore. Farther out at sea was a constant stream of graceful Short-tailed Shearwaters, along with a few Northern Fulmars. The birds we saw on land were also exciting. We encountered Yellow Wagtails, White Wagtails, Red-throated Pipits, Arctic Warblers, Northern Wheatears, and Rufous-necked Stints - all headed to wintering grounds in Asia, while Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, Western Sandpipers, and others would migrate down 'our' continent.

Our stay in Gambell was made especially interesting by our many chats with the local Siberian Yupik people, whose traditional way of life depends largely on the sea. We thoroughly enjoyed our exotic holiday in Alaska!

## Focus On: *The Siberian Tit*

by Cameron Eckert

What is this bird that lingers just beyond the surface of our consciousness, an enigma among Yukon's bird life ... *the Siberian Tit*. Even its name is foreign to us. The word *Siberian* conjuring up images of a bleak lifeless landscape somewhere in northern Russia. And what is meant by *tit*? A chickadee with an eastern European accent? But there it is on the Yukon Checklist, right between Mountain and Boreal Chickadee, *the Siberian Tit*.

Its Latin name, *Parus cinctus*, sheds little light on the nature of this elusive bird. *Parus* is Latin for titmouse or chickadee, and *cinctus* is Latin for "girdled" which means banded. However, it is not obvious as to how a Siberian Tit would be considered banded. In fact, the Siberian Tit *is* a

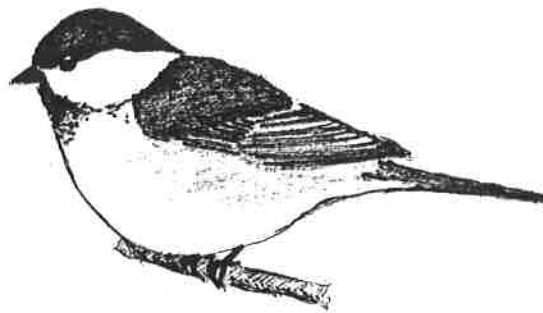
chickadee and is known to many as the *Gray-headed Chickadee*. The Siberian Tit looks very similar to our familiar Boreal Chickadee. The Siberian, like the Boreal, has a grey-brown cap and black throat with a pale grey breast and a grey-brown back.

Birders generally use two main field marks to separate the two species. The Boreal Chickadee shows rather richly coloured rusty-buff flanks, while the Siberian Tit's flanks are rather faded buff; and the Boreal Chickadee's white face patch is mostly masked with grey, while the Siberian Tit's face patch is large and white almost to the back of the head. This large white face patch is the Siberian Tit's most distinctive feature.

The Siberian Tit can be found much closer to home than Siberia. It was first discovered in North America in 1894 near Fort Anderson by Roderick MacFarlane, and was named the Alaska Chickadee. In North America it is now known to frequent the riparian willow edges across northern Alaska to the MacKenzie River Delta. It does not tend to frequent spruce forests and thus does not generally associate with Boreal Chickadees which prefer spruce and pine and spruce forests over willows. North

American birders most often travel to Inuvik and then boat to Reindeer Station in pursuit of this most northern chickadee. Records of Siberian Tit in the Yukon are few. On July 8, 1926 it was discovered by Olaus Murie at the mouth of the Old Crow River. Murie notes that after this date they were very

common. In 1928, Murie published excellent descriptions of his observations in the journal *The Auk*. Few birders have observed this species anywhere in the Yukon since. However, it was reported in 1983 by birders visiting Old Crow.



*Siberian Tit by Pam Sinclair*

Last winter, a birder in Fairbanks, Alaska, was stunned to find a Siberian Tit visiting his feeder. Even more astonishing was the Siberian Tit spotted in Whitehorse by Wilhelm Harms on March 6, 1979. The story has become legendary. Wilhelm was birding by a beaver pond along the Long Lake Road when he spotted an unusual chickadee foraging with a group of Boreal Chickadees. In 1981, Wilhelm would travel the MacKenzie Delta with Helmut Grünberg and become more familiar with the Siberian Tit. However, this was his first encounter with the species and not only did he recognize the unusual chickadee, but he also managed to take a clear photograph showing the large white face patch!

The Siberian Tit is a mysterious and poorly understood Yukon bird. As more birders watch for it, we may learn much more about this elusive chickadee.

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## Field Notes: *Observations from the Field*

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Helmut Grünberg, Yukon Bird Club's Sightings Coordinator, has done an excellent job compiling the following account of the spring and summer birding seasons. Please consider sending your sightings to Helmut Grünberg, (807 Wheeler, Whitehorse, YT, Y1A 2P8). We are interested in hearing from all Yukon birders. Observations from feeders are also most welcome. Include as many details as possible such date, location, number of birds, sex and age, and observers' names. Highlight any observations that you think are particularly interesting or unusual. Please send your sightings according to the following seasonal schedule:

Winter:	December 1 - February 28 (deadline = March 5)
Spring:	March 1 - May 30 (deadline = June 5)
Summer:	June 1 - July 31 (deadline = August 5)
Fall:	August 1 - November 30 (deadline = December 5).

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### *The Spring Season*

March and April in the southern Yukon were warmer than normal, while May appeared to be about normal. The result was that many early migrants arrived even earlier than usual and moved through rather quickly. For example, swans had mostly moved through by the time of their usual peak about April 24. Late migrants such as Yellow Warbler and Alder Flycatcher arrived just about "on time" in the last week of May.

A breeding pair of **Pacific Loons** that returns to Shadow Lake every year lost their eggs this year to an unknown predator (DR,SR). A pair of **Pied-billed Grebes**, very rare in southern Yukon, was seen mating and nest building at Rat Lake on May 29. Breeding, a Yukon first, was confirmed when the grebes were seen at a nest with one egg on June 4 (HG), and with one young later in June (DVW). A **Great Blue Heron** near McRae was a rare find on May 26 (DD).

**Greater White-fronted Goose** sightings included one at the "old dump" site at MacIntyre Creek on April 21 (CE,GK,LK,PS), and three at M'Clintock Bay on April 26 (JH,YBC). A flock of 7-10 **Brant** was encountered at Marsh Lake on May 27 (GK,LK). Initially, **Blue-winged Teal** were unusually scarce this spring. Finally a few observations were made including two males at Judas Creek on May 18 (CE,PS), a pair on the Takhini Ponds on May 28 (JM,EM,PN,HT), and three at Lewes Marsh on May 28 (JH). A male **Cinnamon Teal** was hugging the marsh edge at Swan Lake on April 23 (CE,PS). **Eurasian Wigeons** put on a good showing this year with one male at McIntyre Creek on April 21 (CE,GK,LK), two males at M'Clintock Bay on April 26 (JH,YBC), and a male near Beaver Creek on May 4 (CE,PS). Two **Redheads** were spotted among the hundreds of ducks at M'Clintock Bay on April 26 (JH,YBC). A lone male **Oldsquaw** was on Schwatka Lake on May 27 (RC,SS), and a group of five floated on Marsh Lake on May 28 (JH). A pair of **Harlequin Ducks** was observed at the Yukon River Bridge on May 15 (HG) and May 28 (JH). Four males and a female **Ruddy Duck** were seen 8 km south of Pelly Crossing on May 21 (CE,PS).

A **Sharp-shinned Hawk** was on MacIntyre Mountain on May 18 (CE,SO). **Northern Goshawks** were sighted at a few locations including one at Kookatsoon Lake on April 2 (DR), another at the Takhini Salt Ponds on May 19 (CE,PS), and a third at Hidden Lakes on May 28 (JB). A soaring pair of **Red-tailed Hawks** over the Alaska Highway delighted birders on May 17 (MW,YBC). A **Swainson's Hawk** was unusual at Drury's Farm on April 30 (GK,LK). A **Merlin** was seen flying in hasty pursuit of **Lapland Longspurs** at Shallow Bay on April 21 (NH,RM,YBC).

A window-killed!! **Blue Grouse** was a first for Pine Ridge on April 10 (JH). Five **Willow** and seven **Rock Ptarmigan** in winter plumage were on Haekel Hill on March 20 (CE,PS) and **Willow Ptarmigan** were heard calling on MacIntyre Mountain on May 18 (CE,SO). A **Sharp-tailed Grouse** was a delight at km 3 along the Dempster on May 24 (CE,PS).

The 2 subspecies of **Lesser Golden-Plover**, *dominica* and *fulva*, have recently been given full species status - **American** and **Pacific Golden-Plovers**. Only the **American Golden-Plover** has been observed in the Yukon. Eight **American Golden-Plovers** on migration were at Lewes Marsh on May 12, and territorial birds were commonly observed performing breeding displays on alpine tundra just north of Tombstone Campground on May 23 (CE,PS).

## *More Observations from the Field ...*

A **Greater Yellowlegs** in full song flight was an impressive sight over Swan Lake on April 23 (CE,PS). Another **Greater Yellowlegs** was sighted at a pond near Squanga Lake on May 28 (GK,LK). Single **Upland Sandpipers** were observed flying over MacIntyre Mountain on May 16 and May 18 (CE,SO). **Whimbrel** sightings included two at Lewes Marsh on May 12-13 (CE,PS), two at Judas Creek on May 18, one at M'Clintock Bay on May 28 (CE,PS), and one at Lewes Marsh on May 28 (JH). Four **Hudsonian Godwits** were at M'Clintock Bay on May 8 (GK,LK), and one was at Lewes Marsh on May 9 (CE). A breeding plumage **Western Sandpiper** was at Duke Meadows on May 5 (CE,PS). Perhaps the earliest **Baird's Sandpipers** on record were four at M'Clintock Bay on April 22 (JH), and a high count of 50 was made at Duke Meadows on May 5 (CE,PS). A breeding plumage **Dunlin** made a rare appearance at Swan Lake on May 11 (HG,MU). Another breeding plumage **Dunlin** was the rarest of 14 species of shorebirds observed at Lewes Marsh on May 12 (CE). Seventeen **Wilson's Phalaropes** were observed at Swan Lake on May 23 (HG) where surprisingly only one was still present on May 28 (HG).

**Long-tailed Jaegers** were commonly observed around Tombstone Campground on the Dempster on May 22-23 (CE,PS). Spring brought a flurry of unusual gull species to the Whitehorse area. An adult **Ring-billed Gull** made a brief appearance on May 26 and a first summer **Thayer's Gull** in Whitehorse on April 22 was perhaps the first spring record for this species in southern Yukon (CE,PS). An adult **California Gull** was a prize find in Whitehorse on April 25 and 27 (HG). Two first summer **Glaucous-winged Gulls** were spotted on April 22 and a lone first summer **Glaucous-winged Gull** was seen on April 24 (CE,HG,GK,LK,PS). A first summer **Glaucous Gull** was at M'Clintock Bay on April 12 and an adult was there on April 17 (CE). An adult **Glaucous Gull** was in Whitehorse on May 6 (CE,PS).

A male **Black-backed Woodpecker** was unusual at Lewes Marsh on May 15 (HG). Perhaps the woodpecker sighting of the year was a pair of **Pileated Woodpeckers** frequenting a fire break near Watson Lake through early May (RF).

The first **Western Wood-Pewee** of spring was sighted at MacIntyre Creek on May 14 (WN,PS). An **Alder Flycatcher** sang at Squanga Lake on May 27 (GK,LK). Last year the record early arrival of **Hammond's Flycatcher** on April 26 seemed astonishing. This year two **Hammond's Flycatchers** were foraging along the Copper Haul Road on April 24!! (CE,PS). **Hammond's** were commonly observed at the Icy Waters Fish Farm throughout May with a high count of 8 on May 28 (CE,PS). **Dusky Flycatchers** were present at their traditional treeline locations on MacIntyre Mountain as early as mid-June (CE,PS).

**Crow** identification is problematic in southern Yukon where both **American** and **Northwestern Crows** are possible and the only collected specimen proved to be intermediate between the two species. A lone **crow** was at Lewes Marsh on May 12-13 (CE). Its call was suggestive of **American Crow**.

The bold song of the **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** was heard at Paddy's Pond on May 17 (MW,YBC). Three **Northern Wheatears**, one male and two females, were a lovely sight on breeding territory in the high alpine at km 100 along the Dempster on May 23 (CE,PS). Two **Townsend's Solitaires** were singing along Marsh Lake on April 9 (RM), and the first nest for the Swan Lake area was discovered in the cut bank of the Swan Lake Road on May 28 (HG). Another **Townsend's Solitaire** appeared to be building a nest near Lewes Marsh on May 28 (JH).

Two **European Starlings** in breeding plumage were skulking along 2nd Avenue in Whitehorse on April 15 (CE).

The first **Warbling Vireos** of spring were at Swan Lake on May 23, and a high count of five was made there on May 28 (HG). Other **Warbling Vireos** included one in Whitehorse on May 28 (WN), and two more at Mary Lake on May 28 (JH). Very unusual was the third Yukon record for the **Audubon's** race of **Yellow-rumped Warbler** observed at Judas Creek on April 29 (PS). The **Audubon's** race has a bright yellow throat whereas our very common **Myrtle** race has a white throat. **Wilson's Warblers** seemed to be in every bush at Paddy's Pond on May 17 (MW,YBC).

After a poor showing in spring 1993, **Lapland Longspurs** were very common in the southern Yukon this spring from early April through mid-May. Two **Smith's Longspurs** were on MacIntyre Mountain on May 28 (CE,PS). **Brown-headed Cowbirds** seem to be having no problem surviving in the Yukon. One was at Kishwoot Island on May 17 and another was at Shallow Bay on May 27 (CE,PS). Three **cowbirds** were at Judas Creek on May 28 (GK,LK). A **House Sparrow** in Dawson City on May 13 was a true oddball (LK).



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## **Field Notes: *Observations from the Field***

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### ***The Summer Season***

This must have been one of the warmest, driest summers on record for the southern Yukon. While it made for pleasant birding, the lack of water seemed to slow down the productivity except near rivers that were fed by melting glaciers. Water levels in major rivers were very high.

**Trumpeter Swans** apparently had an amazing population increase over the last few years. Reports indicate that over a dozen families were found in the Nisutlin River area in 1992 and again this summer (DD,JH). Two **Trumpeter Swans** at Swan Lake on June 24 were first summer records for the area (HG). On July 2 a cygnet **Trumpeter** managed to escape the attack from a Northern Pike on Murray Lake, 150 km east of Mayo (GK,LK). Two male **Blue-winged Teal** and four **Ruddy Ducks** were seen 8 km south of Pelly Crossing on June 22 (RDM).

A **Peregrine Falcon** and a grey phase **Gyrfalcon** were sighted along the Yukon section of the Dempster on June 23 (RDM). An adult **Peregrine Falcon** was at Swan Lake on July 8 (HG,WN).

Both **Willow** and **Rock Ptarmigan** were cavorting in the alpine above Fairweather Lake, 200 km east of Mayo, on July 23 (GK,LK). On July 6 a female **White-tailed Ptarmigan** with four chicks confirmed their breeding status on Montana Mountain near Carcross. A male was also observed in the vicinity (CE,PS). The female and her four young were still present at that location on July 24 (CF,TF,HG).

Single **Soras** were heard east of Rancheria on June 4 (HG), about 30 km north of Twin Lakes along the Klondike Highway on June 22 (RDM), and near Ross River on June 29 (HG). **Soras** were confirmed breeding at Swan Lake when two young were observed on July 8 (HG). A pair of **American Coots** with two young were at Rat Lake on July 6 (CE,PS). One **American Coot** was found 8 km south of Pelly Crossing on July 2 (RC,HG).

A single **Sandhill Crane** made a surprise visit to Swan Lake on June 24 (HG).

A pair of **American Golden-Plovers** and a pair of **Whimbrel** were at km 92 along the Dempster on June 23 (RDM). **Greater Yellowlegs** were fairly common along the Liard River throughout June and July (CE,PS). An adult with two independent young, seen at the Meister River delta on July 27 was the only "near Proof" of nesting (CE,PS). Four **Baird's Sandpipers** were spotted among 250 **Least Sandpipers** foraging around the Salt Ponds on July 31 (AK,GK,LK,PK). Single **Short-billed** and **Long-billed Dowitchers** as well as a female **Wilson's Phalarope** were at Swan Lake on July 8 (HG).

Two lone **Long-tailed Jaegers**, 30 km apart, were sighted along the Dempster on June 23 (RDM).

A **Northern Hawk-Owl** did a fly-by at Tombstone Campground on June 27 (RDM). An adult **Great Gray Owl** at a nest with three fledglings in mid-June near Watson Lake provided one of very few nesting records for this species in the Yukon (CE,PS).

A pair of **Downy Woodpeckers** was found nesting again at Swan Lake where several young were heard calling from the nest on June 23 (HG). A female **Black-backed Woodpecker** was feeding a dependent young male (out of the nest) at Swan Lake on June 24 for the first breeding evidence in that area (HG).

Two **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** were heard along the Rancheria River Loop Road, 15 km northwest of Watson Lake on June 18(CE,PS). As well, **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** were heard at a number of locations along the Tungsten Road on July 1 and along the Campbell Highway on July 2 (CE,PS). The known range of **Dusky Flycatcher** was extended north and east in the Yukon with observations of singing birds at treeline near Rancheria on June 22 (CE,PS) and at Murray Lake, 150 km east of Mayo on July 3 (GK,LK). An **Eastern Kingbird**, rare in the southern Yukon, stopped briefly after a violent rainstorm on the Meister River Delta on July 29 (CE,PS).

## *More Observations from the Field ...*

The known range of **Mountain Chickadee** was pushed northward with the observation of a single bird at treeline above Murray Lake on July 3 (GK,LK).

**Red-breasted Nuthatches** were heard at a variety of locations with a high count of 4-5 at Swan Lake on July 8 (HG,WN). A **Winter Wren** discovered on June 12, spent the rest of the month singing at the same location along the Liard River (CE,PS). This bird was seen carrying nest material, but no second bird was confirmed.

Two **Townsend's Solitaires** and a **Hermit Thrush** were on Dom Hill near Dawson City on June 23 (RDM). **Gray-cheeked Thrushes** were heard at a number of locations along the Campbell Highway in early July (RC,CE,HG,PS).

The second documented record of a **Solitary Vireo** for the Yukon was that of a singing bird along the Liard River, 2 km downstream from the Meister River on June 13 (CE). **Tennessee Warblers** were regularly observed in appropriate habitat, moist riparian shrubs in the Liard River area in June and July (CE,PS). Six **Tennessee Warblers** were discovered at five locations along the Campbell Highway on June 30 (RC,HG). **Magnolia Warblers** were first discovered and confirmed breeding in the Yukon in 1993 on the Liard River. More extensive surveys along the Liard this past June conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service revealed that they are quite common along the riparian areas (CE,PS). **American Redstarts**, previously thought to be rare in the southern Yukon, were perhaps the most common breeding warbler in shrubby riparian areas along the Liard River in June (CE,PS). Quite startling was the discovery of a singing subadult male **American Redstart** at the Army Beach marsh, only 50 km south of Whitehorse, in mid-June (WN).

A **Western Tanager**, considered accidental in the Yukon, was observed in Teslin in early June (DD,PD). Two male **Western Tanagers** were heard singing 0.8 km apart along the Rancheria Look Road on June 20 (CE,PS) and one was at the same location as late as July 12 (HG). Another male **Western Tanager** was singing at the junction of the Francis and Liard Rivers on June 26 (CE,PS).

Very rare was a male **Clay-colored Sparrow** singing at Judas Creek on June 7 (WN). Yukon's first **Lark Sparrow** was flushed from a bush along the Liard River on July 15 (CE,PS). **Swamp Sparrows** were common in marshy breaks in the spruce forest along the Rancheria River Loop Road through June and July (CE,PS,HG). A singing **Swamp Sparrow** at Sequence Creek, km 12 of the Tungsten Road on June 30 was pushing the northeastern edge of the known range (CE,PS). A **White-throated Sparrow** in Teslin in early June was the westernmost record for this species in the Yukon which is very common in dry shrubby habitats around Watson Lake (DD,PD). Three **White-throated Sparrows** were observed as far north as km 105 of the Campbell Highway on July 13 (HG,JP,RP). **Smith's Longspurs**, always cause for excitement, were in the alpine tundra above Fairweather Lake on July 13 (GK,LK). Two subspecies of **Rosy Finch** were confirmed in the Yukon. "*Gray-crowned*" **Rosy Finches** were observed above Murray Lake on July 3 (GK,LK) and were commonly seen in the high alpine near MacMillan Pass on July 4 (CE,PS). The more coastal "*Gray-headed*" **Rosy Finch** was seen on Montana Mountain on July 6 (CE,PS).

**Observers (Spring and Summer):** Doug Davidge, Denny Dennison, Patty Dennison, Cameron Eckert, Carol Fawcett, Tom Fawcett, Rob Florkiewicz, Helmut Grünberg, Jim Hawkings, Nancy Hughes, Arlene Kubica, Greg Kubica, Lee Kubica, Paula Kubica, R.Doug McRae, Elaine Monaghan, Jeanette McCrie, Richard Mueller, Patti Nash, Wendy Nixon, Sue Olsen, Juanita Peterson, Richard Peterson, Don Russell, Sharon Russell, Sheila Serup, Pam Sinclair, Heather Thompson, Mitsuka Ueda, Debbie Van de Wetering, Mary Whitley.

Send your observations to:  
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*"The goals of the Yukon Bird Club are to promote awareness, appreciation, and conservation of Yukon birds and their habitats."*

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## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

*Please remember that our membership year runs from April 1 to March 31 and that the 1994/95 membership dues were due this past April. Please send in your renewals as soon as possible!*

## WHITEHORSE CHECKLIST PROJECT UPDATE

This spring the Yukon Bird Club was successful in obtaining a grant from the City of Whitehorse Environment Fund to produce a bird checklist for the Whitehorse area. A committee of five YBC members spent a number of long evening sessions compiling the checklist describing the seasonal occurrence and abundance of all species recorded within the Whitehorse area. Breeding status is indicated for all species which have been confirmed breeding (an active nest or dependent young) in the Whitehorse area. The checklist is currently in its final draft form and will go to the printers this fall.

*Solution to the Yukon Birder's Crossword...*



*Birders are invited to submit articles, stories, or drawings to the newsletter.*

**Please send your submissions to:  
Cameron Eckert, 14-11th Ave., Whitehorse, Yukon,  
Y1A 4H6 (Ph.667-4630)**