

# Notes on Birds Observed at Netitishi Point, Southern James Bay

by

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Late fall bird movements in southern James Bay are highly correlated with weather systems. Previous studies during October and November at Netitishi Pt. and East Pt. revealed large movements of waterbirds leaving James Bay during substantial gales (McRae 1992, Sinclair 1986). We wanted to examine the nature of bird movements on the coast during the relatively quiet period of early fall, before the major fall gales arrived.

We spent from 21 September to 4 October 1992 watching birds in the Netitishi Pt. (pronounced Nest-i-she) area of southern James Bay (Figure 1). One hundred and sixteen species were seen (Table 1). Recent signs of Pileated Woodpecker were also found. The species accounts detail birds which are either considered rare or uncommon in southern James Bay, or for which interesting information was gathered.

Our birding effort was focused on the shore and the forest area immediately inland from the coast. Typically, we covered the area from Netitishi Creek to the west, to Little Netitishi Pt. on the east. Occasionally we made further forays, west to Buoy Bluff, and east to Big Stone Pt. Our methods of observation were not strictly controlled, but we generally watched the coast for at least four hours each day usually centred around the high tide(s). Forest coverage included a regular 1 km

walk to the east of camp. When the coast was quiet, we sometimes spent several hours intensively birding the forest paralleling the coast.

Weather during our study was highly variable, with temperatures ranging for  $-2^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $25^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Prevailing winds were from the southwest to northwest, and bird movement was generally steady, although no enormous flights were recorded. Precipitation was negligible during the two weeks except for a few brief periods of drizzle, sleet and light snow. A stalled high pressure cell brought a prolonged warm spell from 24 to 27 September, and migration was light during that time. The most significant weather event of the period occurred on 27 September. In mid-afternoon the barometric pressure and temperature dropped dramatically and brief, but stiff, north winds up to 60 kph developed, followed by sleet and rain. Despite the brevity of the blow, it was enough to stimulate a large movement of birds the next day (28 September) and produced our highest daily species total (69; average = 52) and number of individuals (3090; average = 1878). Many "new" passerines had arrived the preceding night including large numbers of Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Swamp and White-crowned Sparrow. Accompanying this movement was a large flight of

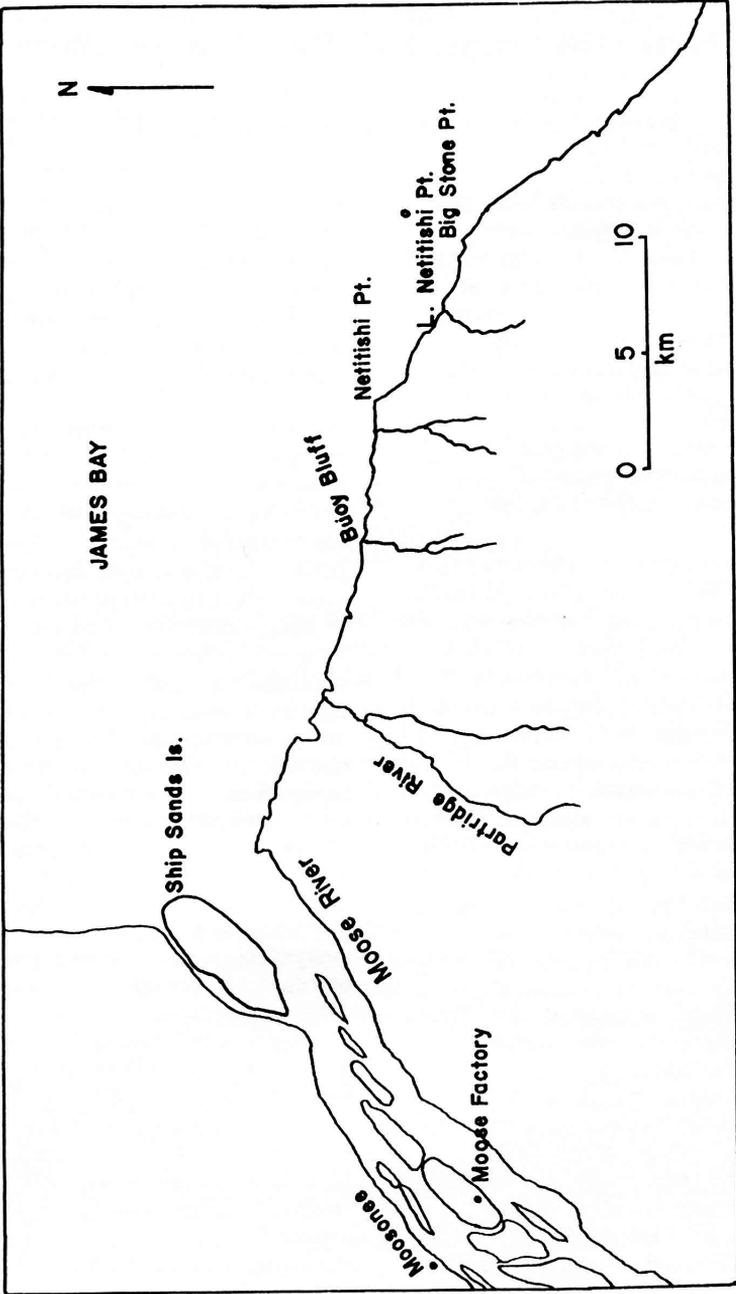


Figure 1: Nettishi Pt. area of southern James Bay.

Peregrine Falcons (day total of 11) and the first Gyrfalcon. Many of the falcons observed were arriving from the north, over the waters of James Bay.

The cold spell and high pressure persisted until 1 October and migration slowed to normal. On 1 October the barometric pressure dropped once again and the temperature rose to 17°C with light southwest winds. Rough-legged Hawks moved in numbers for the first time, with a high count of 60, and there were also seven Peregrine Falcons and two Gyrfalcons. The following day, winds were out of the

north and the second largest species total (64) was recorded. The last few days were cold, with a noticeable drop in the number of passerines and shorebirds, although the passage of Peregrine Falcons and Rough-legged Hawks continued.

While it is unwise to try to draw any conclusions about weather and bird movements based on only two weeks of observation, it is interesting to note that the days with the greatest species diversity (28 September and 2 October) occurred on days immediately following warm days with steep pressure drops, associated with a north wind.

Table 1: Birds observed at Netitishi Point, 21 September - 4 October 1992.

Species	(a) # of days	(b) max./day	(c) avg./day
Common Loon	1	1	1
Double-crested Cormorant	2	2	1.5
Great Blue Heron	4	1	1
Tundra Swan	1	3	3
Snow Goose	14	300	101.4
Brant	5	40	11.6
Canada Goose	14	550	256.8
Green-winged Teal	3	5	3
American Black Duck	13	110	26.2
Mallard	10	175	42
Northern Pintail	9	175	41.1
Northern Shoveler	3	7	3.3
American Wigeon	5	25	12.8
Redhead	1	1	1
Ring-necked Duck	1	1	1
Greater Scaup	4	6	2.8
Lesser Scaup	3	13	5.7
Oldsquaw	1	20	20
Black Scoter	9	30	8
Surf Scoter	2	4	3
White-winged Scoter	2	15	8
Common Goldeneye	4	10	5
Bufflehead	2	8	4.5
Hooded Merganser	1	1	1
Common Merganser	12	5	2.8
Red-breasted Merganser	10	5	2.3
Osprey	2	1	1
Bald Eagle	6	1	1
Northern Harrier	13	3	1.8

Species	(a) # of days	(b) max./day	(c) avg./day
Northern Goshawk	4	1	1
Red-tailed Hawk	4	1	1
Rough-legged Hawk	12	60	8.1
Golden Eagle	1	1	1
Merlin	11	2	1.1
Peregrine Falcon	13	11	3.9
Gyrfalcon	3	2	1.3
Spruce Grouse	1	1	1
Ruffed Grouse	7	1	1
Black-bellied Plover	13	75	19.3
Lesser Golden-Plover	14	75	20.2
Semipalmated Plover	8	10	4
Greater Yellowlegs	13	15	5.5
Lesser Yellowlegs	1	2	2
Hudsonian Godwit	10	120	34.1
Ruddy Turnstone	4	4	2.5
Red Knot	7	12	4.1
Sanderling	13	300	119.7
Semipalmated Sandpiper	4	7	3
Least Sandpiper	2	2	1.5
White-rumped Sandpiper	8	3	2.1
Baird's Sandpiper	5	15	4.6
Pectoral Sandpiper	14	70	22.7
Dunlin	14	450	256.3
Long-billed Dowitcher	2	1	1
Common Snipe	11	6	2.7
Red Phalarope	1	3	3
Bonaparte's Gull	1	1	1
Ring-billed Gull	14	35	15.9
Herring Gull	14	45	24.3
Glaucous Gull	1	1	1
Great Black-backed Gull	1	1	1
Sabine's Gull	1	2	2
Caspian Tern	1	2	2
Mourning Dove	8	2	1.1
Great Horned Owl	4	2	1.5
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	2	2
Downy Woodpecker	11	5	1.5
Hairy Woodpecker	5	2	1.2
Three-toed Woodpecker	1	1	1
Black-backed Woodpecker	1	1	1
Horned Lark	14	800	350
Gray Jay	10	7	3.6
American Crow	6	1	1
Common Raven	14	10	5.2
Black-capped Chickadee	7	5	2.6
Boreal Chickadee	14	15	7.7
Red-breasted Nuthatch	8	8	2.1
Brown Creeper	1	1	1
Winter Wren	12	5	2
Golden-crowned Kinglet	13	35	11.3
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	12	100	31.3
Hermit Thrush	8	10	2.8

Species	(a) # of days	(b) max./day	(c) avg./day
American Robin	13	35	14.2
Gray Catbird	3	1	1
American Pipit	14	40	16.1
Cedar Waxwing	13	16	4
Solitary Vireo	1	1	1
Red-eyed Vireo	1	1	1
Orange-crowned Warbler	4	6	2.8
Northern Parula	3	1	1
Yellow Warbler	1	3	3
Magnolia Warbler	1	1	1
Yellow-rumped Warbler	12	75	22.5
Palm Warbler	9	8	4.2
Black-and-white Warbler	1	1	1
Common Yellowthroat	2	1	1
American Tree Sparrow	8	33	6.6
Savannah Sparrow	12	53	15.8
Le Conte's Sparrow	3	6	3.7
Sharp-tailed Sparrow	1	1	1
Fox Sparrow	7	7	2.6
Song Sparrow	2	1	1
Lincoln's Sparrow	5	4	2
Swamp Sparrow	11	28	9.2
White-throated Sparrow	14	50	15.2
White-crowned Sparrow	6	11	4.3
Dark-eyed Junco	9	10	4.6
Lapland Longspur	14	500	173.2
Snow Bunting	6	3	1.8
Red-winged Blackbird	1	2	2
Rusty Blackbird	4	7	3.8
Pine Grosbeak	1	2	2
Purple Finch	1	4	4
White-winged Crossbill	7	19	7.4
Common Redpoll	3	3	2
Evening Grosbeak	1	1	1

(a) The number of days, out of a total of fourteen, that a species was recorded.

(b) The maximum one day count for each species.

(c) Total number seen/total number of days seen.

## Species Accounts

### Double-crested Cormorant:

A sub-adult on 24 September and two unaged birds on 29 September were moving west. Reports of this species in southern James Bay have increased dramatically in the past few years.

### Tundra Swan:

Three birds arriving at dusk on 1 October were early.

### Snow Goose:

The near total breeding failure of this species in 1992 was well illustrated by the finding of only 14 juveniles out of a total of 1674 birds.

### Redhead:

A female on 22 September was the only report. This species is rare but annual in southern James Bay.

**Red-tailed Hawk:**

All sightings refer to the same adult which frequented the forest at Little Netitishi Pt., rather than to migrant birds.

**Peregrine Falcon:**

There were 51 sightings over the period, believed to represent a conservative minimum of 35 different birds. Eleven birds on 28 September, all moving east along the coast, was the highest single day total. All birds identified to subspecies were of *F. p. tundrius*.

**Gyrfalcon:**

Four birds were seen; one on 28 September, two on 1 October and one on 4 October. While Gyrfalcons are frequent on the coast in late October and November, these birds were somewhat early.

**Black-bellied Plover:**

A late adult, still in breeding plumage, was seen with juveniles on 24-25 September.

**Ruddy Turnstone:**

A late adult, still in breeding plumage with an injured leg, was seen on 2 October.

**Long-billed Dowitcher:**

Single birds, thought to be juveniles, were seen and heard flying overhead on 24 and 28 September. There is only one previous observation for southern James Bay, but with increased coverage, the species will likely prove to be a regular but rare fall migrant.

**Red Phalarope:**

Three birds were seen from shore on 4 October. In addition, single birds were seen from the boat near the mouth of the Moose River on 21 September and off the mouth of Partridge River on 4 October.

**Bonaparte's Gull:**

A single adult on 23 September was the only observation. Curiously, this species becomes very scarce in southern James Bay after early September.

**Great Black-backed Gull:**

A first-winter bird was seen on 2 October. Recent field work in the area suggests that this species, although not common, is a regular migrant in southern James Bay.

**Sabine's Gull:**

Two juveniles were seen feeding over rough water on 3 October, representing one of the very few records for this species in southern James Bay. The only previous fall record is of a juvenile seen on 26 September 1940, about 10 miles south of Charlton Island (Lewis and Peters 1941). Fall reports of this species should prove to be more frequent with increased coverage of the coast.

**Mourning Dove:**

One bird was seen almost daily near camp from 21 to 30 September and a second bird was located 2 km east of camp on 24 September. Both birds frequented the debris at the high tide line.

**Gray Catbird:**

One bird was present at camp from 26 to 27 September. The same bird, or possibly a second individual, was found 2 km east of camp on 28 September. This species is a rare, but annual, visitor to the region and breeding has been reported once.

**Northern Parula:**

Two birds were seen; one from 22 to 23 September and another on 28 September. This species is a very scarce migrant in the region.

**Yellow Warbler:**

Three birds on 24 September was the only report. Interestingly this species often remains in the James Bay area until early October, much later than do birds in southern Ontario.

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**Publication Notice**

**Bird Trends: A Report on Results of National and Regional Ornithological Surveys in Canada. Number 2, Autumn 1992.** Migratory Birds Conservation Division, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H3. No charge.

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Opportunities for participation in volunteer monitoring programs are discussed. (**Bird Trends** is distributed free to interested amateur ornithologists; the next issue will focus on shorebird trends.)