

British Columbia/ Yukon Region

JACK BOWLING

Hot, dry weather prevailed in Yukon, allowing observers to enjoy a bumper birding season. Farther south, a warm beginning to the period for British Columbia soon deteriorated into the unsettled pattern of a "cold low" summer, replete with numerous showers and cool temperatures. Whether the inclement weather had more of an effect on bird observers than the birds themselves is debatable, but either way, this was likely one of the quieter summers on record in British Columbia. In fact, Peter Hamel from the Queen Charlotte Islands lamented the lack of any interesting records whatsoever! Compilers did not note any weather-induced nesting failures, although this may come to light later in the year. Highlights included a long overdue Blackburnian Warbler near Fort Nelson, a Black-billed Cuckoo in the

Okanagan Valley, and a major census effort in southeastern Yukon which "netted" eight new species for the Territory.

Abbreviations: B.C. (*British Columbia*); D.C. (*Dawson Creek*); Ok. L. (*Okanagan L.*); Ok. Vly (*Okanagan Valley*); P.G. (*Prince George*); p.v. (*pending verification by responsible bird records committee*); STP (*sewage treatment plant/ponds*); Van. (*Vancouver*); Van. I. (*Vancouver I.*); Vic. (*Victoria*); Whse. (*Whitehorse*).

Loons to Herons

A breeding plumaged ad. Red-throated Loon was off Parksville, Van. I., July 21 (DM), likely dispersed from an inland breeding location. Pied-billed Grebes continue to reach Yukon in small numbers, with one near the La Biche R., June 15 (CE, HG, WN), three on the Beaver R., June 23 (CE), and another at Km 332 Klondike Hwy near Carmacks July 3 (RM). A count of 32 ad. and five chick W. Grebes at the n. end of Ok. L., July 28 (CS) was on the low side. Is increasing recreational use of jet-ski machines taking its toll on nesting waterbirds? Summer occurrences of Am. White Pelicans have been on the upswing the past few years. Whether these birds are from B.C.'s only breeding colony at Stum L. on the Chilcotin Plateau or from farther south in Washington State is unknown. This period's sightings included 13 on Vaseux L., S. Ok. Vly, July 12 (PL *et al.*), and two at Wasa in the E. Kootenays July 31-Aug. 1 (DF, SJ). A single Brown Pelican flew past E

Pt., Saturna I, in s.w. Georgia Strait June 28 (R. Baird), 6 weeks earlier than the normal late-summer influx. This is perhaps indicative of nesting failures farther south along the w. coast. There was a noticeable movement of Double-crested Cormorants, with nine at Tranquille, Kamloops, June 10 (SR) constituting the highest count on record for the interior of the Region. Another Double-crested at the Needles ferry terminal July 14 (GSD) provided the first record for the Arrow Lakes. Two Double-crested at Jackfish Bay, L. Laberge in s.w. Yukon through the period were joined by an imm. bird July 19 (BD, RM), while another wandering ad. Double-crested showed up at Eagle L., P.G., July 20 (HA, MA). The only report of Am. Bittern was a single bird

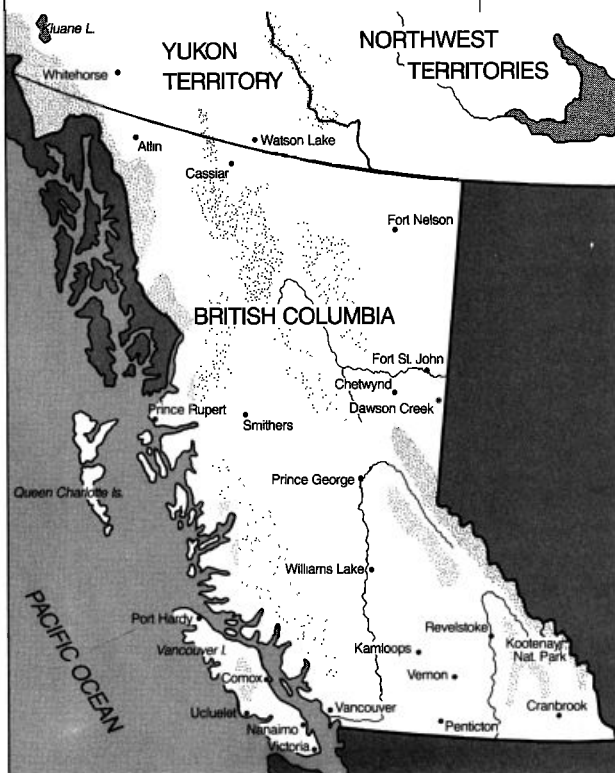


Cattle Egret [right, with one of the cattle] at Dawson Creek, British Columbia, June 5, 1995. First record for the Peace River region. Most previous records in British Columbia have been in fall or winter. Photograph/Marilyn Oltmanns.

at Chichester Bird Sanctuary, Kelowna, July 7 (CC). The Great Blue Heron colony in downtown Vernon, B.C. consisted of 34 active nests in June (J. Boss), an increase of 8 over the previous year. Cattle Egrets usually irrupt into B.C. in the autumn. Surprising, then, was one at D.C., June 5 (PB, RY, ph. MO), the first record for the Peace R. area of n.e. B.C. Normally a late-summer vagrant to s. B.C., an imm. Black-crowned Night-Heron along the Ok. R. near Oliver July 24 & 27 (CM) was unusually early.

Waterfowl to Cranes

There are few summer records of Tundra Swan in B.C., thus a sighting of five near Fairmont Hotsprings July 27 (GR) was noteworthy. Also of note was a pair of Trumpeter Swans near Whse. at Swan L., June 3 (HG, G&LM), where locally rare. A Mute Swan was seen on the same small lake near Princeton, B.C., July 11 where another had been seen 2 years earlier to the day (PL *et al.*). Determination of origin would be interesting. A pair of Snow Geese with three downy chicks was on Nunluk Spit at the mouth of the Firth and Malcolm rivers along the Yukon Arctic coast June 26 (RJC). A photo of the nest with 3 recently hatched eggshells was taken. This is the first breeding record for Yukon, and rather unusual in being an isolated pair; Snow Geese usually nest in loose colonies. A Brant at Judas Cr., Marsh L., s.w. Yukon June 4 (HG, LK) provided the first local summer record. An ad. ♂ Wood Duck on an oxbow of the Sikanni Chief R., 100 km s.e. of Fort Nelson, B.C., June 10 (TG) provided the most northerly record for the species in the Region by some 300 km. A ♂ Eur. Wigeon at Moose L., km 100 Dempster Hwy, Yukon June 21 (G&LM) was an interesting northerly sighting. Both Redheads and Ruddy Ducks reach the n. edge of their range in Yukon, where



they have been increasing in recent years. Two ♂ and three ♀ Redheads were at Judas Cr., June 4–6 (HG, LK, PS). A Ruddy Duck was at km 332 Klondike Hwy June 11 (MaW), three were there July 3 (RM), and another male was at Faro STP July 5 (BrB).

Northern Harriers are very uncommon in summer on s. Van. I.; this year single birds were noted over Goldstream P.P., June 30 (ViRBA) and Triangle Mt., Colwood, July 7 (DA). A breeding Cooper's Hawk survey of Greater Victoria, coordinated by Andrew Stewart of the Ministry of Environment, tallied 16 active nests. Banding totals comprised one adult, four fledglings, and 54 nestlings (*vide* BRG)—astonishing!

Observers elsewhere were treated to displays of avian predation: A N. Goshawk snagged a large duckling from in front of a frantic mother Mallard in the Salmon Valley, P.G., June 18 (NK, VB); a Merlin snatched a Pine Siskin from a powerline in P.G., July 11 (JVD) and was then chased by the whole siskin flock; and another Merlin captured a Purple Martin at the Cowichan Bay Estuary, s.e. Van. I., July 27 (DVM). A rufous-morph Swainson's Hawk at Creston June 14 (†P&BSp) was watched as it hunted earthworms like a giant robin. The Broad-winged Hawk population in the n.e. quarter of B.C. seems to have been slowly expanding the past few years; however, they are still hard to find. There were a couple of sightings this season: an adult 30 km s.w. of D.C., July 15 (MPh), and two ad. birds over the University of Northern B.C. campus, P.G., July 19 & 21 (MAi). A very late light-morph Rough-legged Hawk with a molted-out tail soaring over the sagebrush flats of Chopaka, s.c. B.C., June 3 (CC, m.ob.) provided the latest spring migrant record for the Okanagan checklist area. Golden Eagle nests are always hard to find, thus the one housing a large eaglet on cliffs n. of D.C. along the Kiskatinaw R. was a good find (MPh, SK, LL, LD).

It was "chicken heaven" when hikers stumbled onto two separate Blue Grouse females with broods of four each on Torpy Mt., 80 km n.e. of P.G., July 22 (CA, JB, NK, TM, MPh), as well as a mother White-tailed Ptarmigan with seven chicks! Sandhill Crane nesting records for s. B.C. are very rare, especially so for the s.e. corner. Interesting, then, were two 2nd-year birds on Bummer's Flats in the Kootenays during June (MiW), which may have been the two which were hatched there the previous summer.

Shorebirds to Woodpeckers

Shorebird migration, as usual, was erratic—some compilers noted a good passage, while others described it as a trickle. One of the better reported aggregations was at the D.C. STP July 5 (MPh, SK, LL); three Hudson-

ian Godwits, 12 Semipalmated Sandpipers, three Least Sandpipers, five Baird's Sandpipers, eight Stilt Sandpipers, and 42 Long-billed Dowitchers. An alternate-plumaged **Wood Sandpiper** at the Pacific Rim National Park STP on the s.w. coast of Van. I., July 21 (†RP, AD, p.v.) was the 2nd in less than a year to show up in B.C., assuming this was not the same bird seen on the Q.C.I. last November. Two Black-bellied Plovers at Judas Cr., June 4–6 (HG, LK, PS) and two Whimbrels at McClintock Bay, Marsh L., June 11 (GK, LK) provided the first summer records for the Whse. area. A breeding-plumaged Red Knot at Judas Cr., June 6 (HG, PS) provided the first record for s. Yukon. A flock of 45 Semipalmated Sandpipers at Iona I. STP, Richmond, July 8 (PL *et al.*) and three at Tranquille, Kamloops, July 22 (SR) were good numbers for each area. A single Short-billed Dowitcher was feeding alongside its bigger-beaked cousins at Robert L., Kelowna, July 27 (DB, m.ob.), where the species is a very rare migrant. A Red-necked Phalarope near Swan L., Vernon, July 31 (CS) was an early arrival.

A **Pomarine Jaeger** moving N over Duck L., Creston, June 20 (†JAM, HNM) added to only a few inland B.C. records for any season. A full-tailed ad. Long-tailed Jaeger spotted halfway across Juan de Fuca Strait between Port Angeles and Victoria July 7 (PL *et al.*) may have been the same bird which had been spotted in the vicinity occasionally during the summer (*vide* PL). One

ad. and one 2nd-year Franklin's Gull at Iona STP, Richmond, June 11 (†JAM, HNM) were out-of-season. Usually this species shows up on the coast toward the end of July. A quarterly gull count of the Hartland Landfill, Vic., June 29 (BWh) tallied a peak of 60 Glaucous-winged Gulls. A gull abatement program began at the site 3 years ago using a network of closely spaced aerial wires and has been quite effective, reducing numbers to 20% of preabatement totals. However, it was suggested that the presence of Bald Eagles would be the ultimate deterrent! Caspian Terns wander irregularly into the s. interior in the late spring. Two adults flew over the marshes at the n. end of Osoyoos L., June 4 (CC, DW, m.ob.); additional sightings from the Kamloops area included one on Sciutto L., June 5, two on Nicola L., June 6, and three just n. of Nicola L., June 6 (RRH). A Com. Tern at Tranquille, Kamloops, June 10 (SR) was a late northbound migrant. Black Tern has apparently been extirpated as a breeding species in the Ok. Vly, with the last colony at Rawlings L. near Lumby now devoid of these lovely birds. However, an adult winging over Swan L., June 4 (CS) at least holds out some hope that the situation may one day turn around. An imm. **Cassin's Auklet** in Vancouver's Inner Harbour July 30 (†JL, DTy, CG, MPr) was a complete surprise as very few records exist for Georgia Strait itself, let alone even farther inshore.

A Band-tailed Pigeon at Nakusp July 23



Long-eared Owl on nest on ground at Dawson Creek, British Columbia, July 8, 1995. (Two of the five large young are just visible under the diagonal cross branch.) Only a few ground nests of the species have been found in North America. Photograph/Laird Law.

(GSD) provided the first summer record for the w. Kootenays. Most inland records for this big pigeon are from earlier in the spring. Mourning Doves are very scattered n. of 53N latitude: This season reports of stray doves came from Willow R., 30 km e. of P.G., June 4 (SK,LL) and from Wolf Cr., Yukon July 14 (RM). A **Black-billed Cuckoo** was heard calling from the tangles along the shore of Vaseux L., July 14 (†CM), the first "sighting" in the s. Ok. Vly since 1986. A pair of Barn Owls, which nested in a camera tower at the Sandown Race Track, N. Saanich, Van. I., became media celebrities (m.ob.). The ground-nesting Long-eared Owl found in an aspen grove 25 km s.w. of D.C. in May was tending five large chicks July 8 (SK, ph. LL). Unfortunately, a check of the site July 18 (MPH) found the corpses of all five chicks, apparently ripped apart by a canine. A Short-eared Owl seen at the big hayfield at Giscome, e. of P.G., June 17 (G&RK, JK, BGS, NK) and again July 15 (EdG) hinted at a locally rare nesting.

As can be expected with a stormy summer, Black Swifts were more conspicuous in B.C. Some selected sightings included: 100 over Duncan, Van. I., June 6–7 (DM); >150 at Union Bay, Van. I., June 13 (BMS) followed an hour later by ≥100 Vaux's Swifts; and six in with 500 swallows at Tabor L., P.G., July 30 (CA). They were noted in "unprecedented numbers" from the Nakusp area with two–twelve seen daily July 14+ (GSD). The **Costa's Hummingbird** which had frequented a feeder in Port Coquitlam, n.e. of Van., since early May was last seen June 11 (KB, *vide* MPr), about the same time that the rainy weather set in. A Lewis' Woodpecker, formerly uncommon but now a vagrant to Van. I., was spotted along Hwy 1 near Cobble Hill June 2 (MH), perhaps the same bird which had been seen in January in the same area. Lewis' were more common than usual around Kamloops, with at least 3 pairs at the n. end of Nicola L., and ten pairs around downtown during the period (RRH). A pair of pure Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers raised a brood 15 km s.e. of P.G., with the male seen feeding three chicks July 12 (SK, LL), the farthest south breeding record for the species in the Region.

Flycatchers to Starling

Two Yellow-bellied Flycatchers singing in the Finlayson L. area of s.c. Yukon June 19 (HG) were joined by another July 1 (CE, PS). This may be the n. limit of their range in the Region. Alder Flycatchers turned up in several s. locations, where usually only a vagrant, with four or five from the Kootenays June 10–July 5 (GSD), one at Katzie Marsh, Pitt Meadows, June 9 (MPr, † DJ), and another near Kamloops June 18 (RRH)

Also showing up in increasing numbers in s. B.C. was Least Flycatcher, with males on territory from 5 Kootenay locations June 18+: Edgewood, Robson, Glenbank, Fauquier, and Nakusp (GSD). Another male seen all summer from the same area as last year, 10 km s.w. of Vernon (CS, CC *et al.*); still another at Cherry Cr. near Kamloops July 2 (EMcA). A pair of E. Phoebes found nesting under the La Biche R. bridge, s.e. Yukon in June provided one of few documented nesting records for the territory (S.Y.F.B.P.). Western Kingbirds may now be annual on the Sunshine Coast, with one at Sechelt June 23 (AS) providing the 7th local checklist record. A rare species in Yukon, three E. Kingbirds were at the La Biche R. bridge area June 6+ (CE, WN, HG, PS), while other single birds were at km 110 Dempster Hwy June 10 (G&LM), and Hidden L., Whse., June 25 (JeB, Y.B.C.). Eastern Kingbirds also showed up on s.e. Van. I., where rarely seen, with one at Cowichan Bay June 9 (S&EW) & 20 (DM), and ≤two birds at Blenkinsop L., Saanich, June 14–July 4 (OO, BB, BWh). Another E. Kingbird turned up at Sechelt June 21 (AS), furnishing the 5th Sunshine Coast record and the only one before the end of July. Purple Martins continue to make a comeback. On s.e. Van. I., observers totaled at least 118 adults at nestboxes along harbors and bays stretching from Sooke Basin to Nanaimo and Salt-spring I. (m.ob.). Meanwhile, 2 pairs of Purple Martins raised young in the Maplewood Flats log booming area of N. Vancouver (*vide* ErG). Both Tree and Violet-green swallows started to amass for the journey S at the end of July, with 400 Trees over a reservoir near Vernon July 27 (CS), and 430 Violet-greens along the w. side of Ok. L. halfway between Vernon and Kelowna July 31 (CS). A group of eight–ten banded Steller's Jays was still frequenting a feeder at Moses Pt., N. Saanich, Van. I. at the beginning of June, although only one was left by the end of July (TA, BB). An unusual display was witnessed July 4 (BMS) at Courtenay, e. Van. I., when a Northwestern Crow was seen begging for a fish from an Osprey. This was apparently only a ruse, since the crow occasionally tried to reach behind the Osprey to snatch the fish from between its legs!

Forty Com. Ravens engaging in aerial acrobatics over Cowichan Bay July 28 (DS) must have been quite a spectacle for an area where large flocks of ravens are uncommon. Singing Ruby-crowned Kinglets, an uncommon summer resident on Van. I., were heard on Mt. Washington, Courtenay: one June 8 (D&MI) and another two June 15 (VBC, BMS, EJB). Western Bluebirds have shown an upswing in s. interior valleys over the past several years in response to nestbox pro-

grams. A pair nesting in a box in Nakusp June 24+ provided the first breeding record for the Arrow Lakes Valley (SM). Conversely, there were no reports of Westerns from s.e. Van. I., where a small population is usually found. A couple of Townsend's Solitaires e. of Sechelt, one in alpine and another in a high elevation clearcut July 16 (TG, AS), suggests that the species may have moved into the Sunshine Coast mountains as a breeding species after its initial summer discovery there in 1994. An ad. Gray Catbird hung out in the shrubs lining the Sechelt Marsh June 11–17 (AW, TG, AS), furnishing the first record for the Sunshine Coast. Bohemian Waxings are rare anywhere s. of 54N latitude in summer; notable then was a pair at Dowitcher L., 50 km s.w. of P.G., July 13 (SK, LL). With only 2 previous sightings for the Territory, Cedar Waxwings staged an invasion into Yukon, complete with a couple of breeding records. In addition to the La Biche R. area, pairs were noted from 6 separate s. locations (m.ob.). Nests were found at Johnson's Crossing June 26 (CE, PS), and in Whse in early July (VC, WC). A pair of Eur. Starlings feeding young at Swift R., July 16 (BrB) furnished a rare Yukon breeding record.

Warblers to Finches

A Tennessee Warbler singing at Haunka Cr on the Yukon side of the Atlin Rd., June 29 (CE) constituted one of very few records for the Whse. checklist area. A singing ♂ **Blackburnian Warbler** 60 km w. of Fort Nelson in northeast B.C., June 5 (†P&BSp, p.v.) provided the first documented sighting in the Region, one long overdue. There have been a couple of "heard-only" encounters in the area during the past decade. An ad. ♂ Blackpoll Warbler at Katzie Marsh, Pitt Meadows, June 11 (†DSB), besides being a late migrant, provided a locally rare record for the Van. checklist area. A ♀ Am. Redstart feeding young at Dezadeash L., July 13 (MJ, WN) provided the 2nd documented breeding record for s.w. Yukon. Four ♂ Ovenbirds were singing along the Fort George Canyon Trail 20 km s.w. of P.G., July 2 (CA, JB) & 8 (JB, JVD, NK, G&LM); numbers continue to increase at this site, the most southwesterly known Ovenbird site in the Region. A MacGillivray's Warbler, rare in Yukon, was heard near Rancheria June 9 & 19 (HG) It would be interesting to determine the zone of contact between MacGillivray's and Mourning warblers in s.e. Yukon.

Lazuli Buntings, a recent arrival on the Sunshine Coast, returned to the Sechelt airport; three males were there June 18 (TG), while a couple of females arrived later in the month. Two flocks of ten ad.-plumaged Chipping Sparrows July 28 & 30 around

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Vernon suggested age-segregated migration (CS). A Clay-colored Sparrow at Chopaka along the B.C./WA border June 3 (CC, m.ob.) was a rare find, 130 km s. of its usual haunts near Vernon, and was perhaps a late migrant. There were 5 encounters with "Timberline" Brewer's Sparrows in s.w. Yukon during the period (m.ob.), including a nest with four recently hatched fledglings on Montana Mt. near Carcross July 22 (CE, Y.B.C.). A rare sighting from near the n.w. edge of its range, a Vesper Sparrow was observed just n. of Vanderhoof July 16 (NK). Although one of the more common meadow birds in the Region, a tally of 65 Savannah Sparrows in the fields bordering Lundblom L. near Merritt in s.c. B.C., June 25 (JK, G&RK, BGS) was an impressive total. Grasshopper Sparrows are reliably found only in the Ok. Vly, with 4 reported sightings this period: one at Chopaka June 3 (CC), another near Oliver June 4 (CC), and two on the Goose L. Range near Vernon July 1 (CC, DW, GW, DB). With only one previous Yukon record, the occurrence of up to *ten* singing Le Conte's Sparrows along the La Biche R. airstrip in June was amazing (SYFBP). Sharp-tailed Sparrows are perhaps the rarest of the Region's breeding birds, confined to sedge meadows and shallow ponds around the D.C./Boundary L. area. Notable, then, were 2 sightings: a pair 25 km n. of D.C. June 26, and a singing male at McQueen Slough, D.C., July 4 & 16 (SK, LL, MPh). An out-of-season ♀ Lapland Longspur was at Vernon July 9 (PG, EN). Summer sightings of Laplands are irregular in B.C.; whether these are birds that didn't make it north or are early southbound migrants has yet to be determined.

A Bobolink, rare in Kelowna, was seen in the Thomson's hayfield near downtown June 9 (BT). This site historically housed small numbers of Bobolinks, but urban pressure had extirpated them locally by the mid-1980s. A singing ♂ Bobolink heard near D.C., June 18 (MPh) provided the 2nd record for the Peace R. area. A pair of Western Meadowlarks which spent the summer at Partridge Cr. Farm, c. Yukon (DBu, VBU, †CE, PS) provided the first documented record for Yukon. Meanwhile in Whse., a pair of House Finches frequented a feeder through the period, furnishing the first documented summer Yukon record (†JeB, CE, PS, HG). When will they reach the North Pole?

After abandoning the Region last fall, White-winged Crossbills invaded all areas beginning in June, with numbers steadily swelling through the period (m.ob.). Singing males were common in the sub-alpine of the mountains near Vernon by the end of July (CS). However, the movement

into the c. interior was weaker, with only small numbers reported (v.o.). The only notable insurgence of Red Crossbills was into the Sunshine Coast (TG), where they had been absent since last September. Pine Siskins continued their southward push, which had begun in central areas earlier in the spring. While 100 swamped a feeder in P.G., July 26 (CA, HA), they were also noted as common around Vernon (CS).

SA For years, Yukon birders have pondered the potential avian riches of the s.e. corner of the Territory. In June, the Southeast Yukon Forest Bird Project (observers: BrB, CE, HG, WN, PS, JS), sponsored by the Canadian Wildlife Service and Yukon Parks and Outdoor Recreation Branch, explored the forests along the La Biche R. in the extreme s.e. corner, as well as 50 km farther northwest along the Beaver R. The findings were dramatic, with 8 new species added to the Yukon checklist: Marsh Wren (only at La Biche); Philadelphia Vireo (uncommon La Biche, absent Beaver); Bay-breasted Warbler (very common both sites); Black-and-white Warbler (common La Biche, breeding confirmed; absent Beaver); Ovenbird (common La Biche, uncommon Beaver); Mourning Warbler (common La Biche, rare Beaver); Canada Warbler (uncommon La Biche, absent Beaver); and Rose-breasted Grosbeak (common La Biche, uncommon Beaver). This bumps to 19 the number of documented wood warblers in the Territory. Also striking is the finding that a number of species previously considered rare in Yukon were common and widespread in the census area, including Cedar Waxwing, Solitary Vireo, Tennessee Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Am. Redstart, W. Tanager and Evening Grosbeak. Other locally common species were Red-eyed Vireo and Cape May Warbler. The mature mixed forests of the La Biche R. lowlands are unlike any found elsewhere in Yukon; indeed, the bird species mix would indicate they are an extension of those found farther southeast in the Fort Nelson lowlands of n.e. British Columbia. There is considerable interest in the area's timber resources, and extensive clearcut logging operations are planned for the upcoming winter. It is now obvious that these forests are extremely important to a unique community of birds—birds whose survival will depend on the cautious management of their preferred habitat.

Addendum

Inadvertently omitted from the Spring 1995 report in *AFN* was a ♂ Yellow-headed Blackbird 100 km s.e. of Fort Nelson May 5 (TG), 300 km n. of its usual marshes near Fort St. John.

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