

A productive breeding season in the Yukon produced an abundance of warblers and sparrows during fall migration. Normal numbers of migrant juvenile shorebirds and gulls reflected an apparently successful breeding season in the far northwest. Moderate temperatures through the fall allowed a few species to linger into the onset of winter. In the Northwest Territories, southern parts of the Mackenzie and Liard River valleys experienced above-average fall temperatures, resulting in a slightly delayed freeze-up, while the Yellowknife area received early and persistent snowfall. Typical cold winter temperatures were widespread by the end of the fall season. Reports from Nunavut continue to raise concerns about the health of seabird populations. The Canadian Wildlife Service has found declines in several Arctic seabird species (e.g. Glaucous and Ivory Gulls), presumably linked to changes in climate and ice conditions (GG, *vide* CBC). Further, increasing levels of mercury and flame-retardant chemicals have been detected in seabird eggs (BB, *vide* CBC); and in Northern Fulmars, one in five birds examined had plastic in its stomach (MM, *vide* CBC). These sensitive northern populations are serving us with a much needed wake-up call; our collective actions have global consequences.

Abbreviations: Albert Cr. (Albert Creek Banding Station, se. Yukon), Whse. (Whitehorse, Yukon)

### GREBES THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

About 150 Horned Grebes were recorded at the Whse. sewage lagoons 5 Sep (HG). An estimated 10,000 Northern Fulmars were recorded in the rich waters off nw. Bylot I., Nunavut 10 Aug (MJI). An imm. Northern Gannet seen at Pond Inlet 9 Aug (JF) provided a rare record for Nunavut. An aerial survey of the American White Pelican colony at Slave R., NWT found 50% chick survival to the end of Aug (JVP *vide* CBC), a great improvement over last year's 1% survival. A Great Blue Heron, rare in the Yukon, was at Haines Junction 18–27 Aug (DH; LF). Thousands of resting Greater White-fronted, Snow, and Canada Geese along the shores of the Mackenzie R. at Radar I., NWT 18 Sep was an unusual fall sighting for the Norman Wells area (SP).

The Yukon's 2nd documented Wood Duck, a female, was at the Whse. sewage lagoons 26 Aug (†CE). A record-high count of 224 Gadwall was made at the Whse. sewage lagoons 8 Sep (CE). An American Black Duck was banded at Willow L., near Tulita, NWT in Aug (JB, RP). The Mackenzie R. was already running ice when a lone Mallard was seen at Ft. Simpson, NWT 17 Oct (DT). A female Northern Pintail was well n. of typical range at Pond Inlet, Nunavut 9 Aug (MJI). A summer survey of King Eiders on w. Victoria I., NWT revealed the lowest count there in

# Northern Canada



over a decade (LD, *vide* CBC). Two male Hooded Mergansers were at Swan L. near Whse. 28 Sep (BD, HG). A flock of 300 Common Mergansers was noted at Dezadeash L., sw. Yukon 20 Oct (CE), a sizeable number. A high count of 154 Ruddy Ducks was made at the Whse. sewage lagoons 1 Sep (HG).

Two Bald Eagles flying south past Ft. Simpson, NWT 16 Oct were the last reports for the area (DT). An ad. Peregrine Falcon and several falcon eyries were noted along the cliffs at Dundas Harbor, Devon I., Nunavut 10 Aug (MJI). Migrant Peregrine Falcons were seen regularly at the Whse. sewage lagoons 25 Aug–14 Oct (CE, HG), with a high count of 4 on 23 Sep (HG).

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Ruffed Grouse are near their n. range limit at Norman Wells, NWT, so the single birds there 25 Sep and 24 Oct were noteworthy (RP).

The annual build-up of American Coots at the Whse. sewage lagoons seems to grow larger every year: a count of 179 was made

there 12 Sep (HG). A well-described Whooping Crane near Tulita, NWT 3 Aug (†FT) was an amazing 700 km nw. of its breeding grounds. Rare shorebirds at the Whse. sewage lagoons included up to 2 juv. Pacific Golden-Plovers on 30 Aug, 29 Sep, and 3 Oct (ph. CE, HG); a Black Turnstone 5 Sep (HG); single juv. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers on most days during 25 Aug–13 Sep (CE, HG), with high counts of 3 on 1 Sep and 6 on 7 Sep (CE); and a Dunlin 20–21 Sep (ph. HG). A trip to Pond Inlet, Nunavut 9 Aug



This first-summer Slaty-backed Gull in Whitehorse on 25 (here) through 28 August 2004 was the Yukon Territory's fifth since the species was first documented in 1997. Photograph by Cameron Eckert.

**SA** The summer and fall of 2004 saw a remarkable incursion of extralimital songbirds into the Yukon and parts of Northwest Territories, well beyond the nw. limit of their normal breeding ranges. Evidence of this surge included Pacific-slope Flycatchers at the Beaver River; Red-eyed Vireos at Watson Lake and at Whse.; Philadelphia Vireo at Watson Lake; Clark's Nutcrackers at Printers Pass, the Watson R., and the Coal R.; high numbers of Cedar Waxwings at Watson Lake; Cape May Warblers at Watson Lake, Little Atlin L., and Inuvik; Bay-breasted Warblers at Watson Lake; Scarlet Tanagers at Big Salmon Lake; Western Tanagers at Little Atlin Lake and McQuesten; White-throated Sparrows near Pelly Crossing and Whse.; and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at Watson Lake. Northern Canada features a vast and largely inaccessible landscape where observers are exceptionally thin on the ground. While there is no estimating the extent of this year's songbird surge, even the small numbers available seem to suggest that it was dramatic. The driving force remains uncertain, although weather/climate should be considered a potential factor. The Yukon and western Northwest Territories did experience a record-setting warm spring and summer, while areas to the east suffered miserably cold conditions. Climate-change models predict that these types of extreme weather events will become increasingly common, and we should attend closely to changes in bird distribution that may be connected to them.

produced a total of 14 (including 7 juv.) Common Ringed Plovers (ph. MJI); the birds' frequent calls helped confirm the identifications. A count of 6 juv. White-rumped Sandpipers and 27 juv. Baird's Sandpipers made at Pond Inlet, Nunavut 9 Aug (MJI) was indicative of at least some successful breeding in the eastern Arctic in the summer.

## GULLS THROUGH FINCHES

A second-summer California Gull, rare but regular in fall, lingered in Whse. 24 Aug–7 Oct (ph. CE, HG). Three ad. Thayer's Gulls were reported from Pond Inlet, Nunavut 9 Aug and one was seen at Dundas Harbor, Devon I., Nunavut 10 Aug (MJI). The first migrant ad. Thayer's Gull appeared in Whse. 25 Aug and peaked at 230 (80 ads., 150 juvs.) 8 Oct (CE). A ratty first-summer Slaty-backed Gull was at Whse. 25–28 Aug (ph. CE). Two first-winter Glaucous-winged Gulls, rare in fall, were at Whse. 14 Oct (ph. CE). In the Yukon, few gulls are reported away from Whse. in fall; thus a juv. Thayer's Gull at the Ogilvie R. along the Dempster Hwy. 11 Oct (ph. DC) and a moribund juv. Glaucous Gull found at Watson Lake 11 Nov (TP), while not unexpected, each provided new records for those areas. Four ad. Ivory Gulls were seen off Broughton I., Nunavut 1 Aug (ph. MJI). An impressive 2000 Dovekies were counted in the waters along the ice edge in Davis Strait, Nunavut 11 Aug (JF, MJI). Low chick survival at Thick-billed Murre colonies on Digges and Coates Islands in n. Hudson Bay, Nunavut, is thought to be linked to change in diet, which may in turn be a result of changing ice conditions (TG); unfortunately for the murre, the community of Coral Harbour voted earlier this year against establishment of a proposed conservation area that would at least protect the nesting area of the Coates I. colony. At Cape Hay, Bylot I., Nunavut, an estimated 5000 ad. Thick-billed Murres were flying back and forth from

cliffs 10 Aug, many carrying fish (MJI).

The Yukon's dwindling and increasingly wary population of Rock Pigeons, which



**Clark's Nutcracker had not been reported in the Yukon Territory for over a decade; this one photographed as it scavenged on moose antlers at Pike Lake near the Coal River 5 October was one of three reported in 2004. Photograph by Donn Wilkinson.**

now stands at 5 (2 ads., 3 imms.), made it through the fall without any losses. A Mourning Dove seen in Yellowknife, NWT 20 Sep (BO) provided a rare record for the capital city. A Snowy Owl found injured in Ft. Simpson, NWT 10 Nov (ph. DA, KD,



**The Yukon Territory's long-awaited first documented record of Harris's Sparrow was established by this bird, banded at Watson Lake 25 September 2004. Photograph by Ted Murphy-Kelly.**

CL) was rare for the area; unfortunately, the bird died a few days later. Another tame, possibly weakened bird was seen for a few weeks at Prelude L., near Yellowknife in late Nov (TH). Great Gray Owls were noted near Norman Wells, NWT 20 Oct and 28 Nov

(RP). Four Rufous Hummingbirds were at Haines Jct., sw. Yukon feeder 1 Aug (LA). Two imm. Least Flycatchers and 2 imm. Alder Flycatchers in Whse. 11 Sep (CE) provided late dates for both species. An impressive 219 Alder Flycatchers, the highest fall total for any species, were banded through the "fall" (20 Jul–22 Sep) at Albert Cr. (TMK). A migrant flock of 26 Eastern Kingbirds seen in Ft. Simpson, NWT 26 Aug (DT) was an unusually large group.

Six Blue-headed Vireos (including 4 HY birds) were banded at Albert Cr. 14 Aug–4 Sep (TMK). A Philadelphia Vireo banded at Albert Cr. 23 Aug (ph. TMK, BS) was about 280 km w. of its range. Following a decade without any Yukon reports, single Clark's Nutcrackers seen at Pike L., near the Coal R., se. Yukon 5 Oct (ph. DW) and near the Watson R., s. of Whse. 29 Sep (JL) represented the 2nd and 3rd reports for the year. The lonesome Black-billed Magpie of Norman Wells, NWT was seen through the fall (RP, AV). An unidentified crow was at the Watson Lake airport 9 Aug (ph. SC).

A wave of Red-breasted Nuthatches hit s. Yukon from mid-Sep through Oct. A single Northern Wheatear near Deline, NWT 7 Aug (SdB) was unusual. A record-late imm.

American Pipit at the Whse. landfill 2 Nov–1 Dec relied on the heat and food supplied by the compost pile to survive numerous very cold nights (CE). The "fall" banding season (20 Jul–22 Sep) at Albert Cr. provided an interesting snapshot of warbler migration in the Liard Basin, with totals of 203 Wilson's, 199 Orange-crowned, 159 Yellow, 138 Yellow-rumped, 107 Common Yellowthroat, 95 Northern Waterthrush, 44 Blackpoll, 35 American Redstart, 26 Magnolia, 12 Tennessee, and a Bay-breasted (TMK). By far the most outstanding rarity of the

year was a pair of Scarlet Tanagers seen at Big Salmon L., s. Yukon 10–11 Jul; the female died in a window-collision and was not collected, and the male (a first-summer bird) was photographed (ph. LT, TT).

A productive breeding season could ex-

plain the large numbers of sparrows seen during migration in s. Yukon and Northwest Territories. In Whse., a Porter Creek feeder hosted an impressive 32 Fox Sparrows 15 Sep, an imm. Golden-crowned Sparrow 24–27 Sep, and a peak of 90 Dark-eyed Juncos 10 Oct, along with a well-documented ad. male Oregon Junco 7–12 Oct (ph. CE, PS). Elsewhere in s. Yukon, a Canyon Cr. feeder had single White-throated and Golden-crowned Sparrows 26–29 Oct (RR); another White-throated Sparrow appeared at a Whse. feeder in late Nov and stayed into the winter (RE). To the east, hundreds of Dark-eyed Juncos, along with a few White-crowned and Fox Sparrows, were noted at a Norman Wells, NWT feeder 18 Sep (RP). The Yukon's long-awaited first-documented Harris's Sparrow, an imm., was banded at Watson Lake 25 Sep (ph. TMK). A flock of 300 Snow Buntings was at the Mendenhall R., sw. Yukon 21 Oct (CE). A male and a female-type Rose-breasted Grosbeak were at Albert Cr., about 150 km w. of the species' range, 31 Jul–1 Aug; the begging and quivering wings of the female-type raised the possibility that it was in fact a young bird (RB,



This adult male Brewer's Blackbird at Whitehorse provided the Yukon Territory's first fall record 30 October 2004 and lingered through the season to establish the first winter record as well. Photograph by Cameron Eckert.

TMK). A tardy but noteworthy report was of a male Yellow-headed Blackbird near Little Atlin L., s. Yukon 9–11 Jul (ph. KG, SG). The fall build-up of Rusty Blackbirds at the Whse. landfill peaked at 150 birds 12 Sep (CE); a flock of 50 was noted at Albert Cr. 6 Sep (TMK). An ad. male Brewer's Blackbird that lingered in Whse. from 30 Oct into winter (ph. CE) provided the Yukon's first fall and winter records for the species. An imm. Gray-crowned Rosy Finch was at Summit L.,

sw. Yukon 25 Aug (JB); a single interior-race bird was at a feeder at Horse Cr., L. Laberge, Yukon 9 Nov (CM, KO). A leucistic Pine Siskin was seen at a feeder at Haines Jct., sw. Yukon 14–21 Oct (ph. ET). Equally eye-catching was an albino Evening Grosbeak seen in Ft. Smith, NWT in late Nov (ph. MB).

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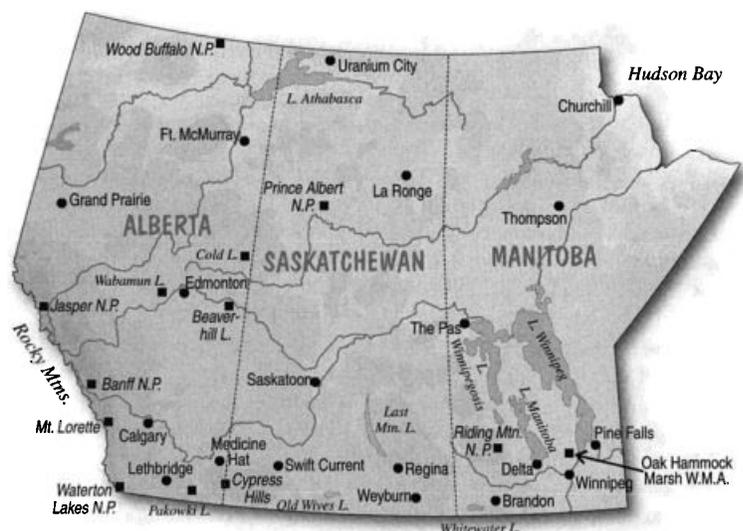
August and September continued wet and cool, after one of the coldest and dampest summers on record. October and November were more normal, but fields remained waterlogged and many crops were spoiled or could not be harvested, creating a feast for many geese, swans, and dabbling ducks. Breeding success in the north had been miserable during the summer, and this was reflected in the low percentage of young geese and shorebirds seen on migration. The season was highlighted by numerous rare gulls, a notable incursion of some owls, and a string of rare and lingering warblers. Among passerines, *Catharus* thrushes, Brown Creepers, and White-crowned Sparrows stood out by their scarcity.

**Abbreviations:** B.R.D. (Brady Road Dump, Winnipeg, MB); L.M.L. (Last Mountain L., SK).

### LOONS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

It was a poor season for observing loons, the only Yellow-billed Loon being one at Wabamun L., AB 13–18 Nov (SG, DN, TT, m.ob.). An Eared Grebe at Clear L., AB 27 Nov was late (TK), as were 4 American White Pelicans at Lockport, MB 28 Nov (GM). Besides 5 Great Egrets seen in Manitoba, there were 2 at Weyburn, SK 13–19 Sep (MB, CB, JW), 2 at Condie Res., SK 14–25 Sep (m.ob.), and one at Taber, AB 15–19 Sep (LB). A Snowy Egret

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