

# Northern Canada



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Northern Canada enjoyed a record warm spring, at least in the west, with seemingly endless warm blue sky days. This combined with last winter's heavy snow falls, especially in southeast Yukon, set the stage for an epic insect season. The Yukon's premier rarity hotspot, Marsh Lake, hosted numerous outstanding vagrants, including one new Yukon species. In Northwest Territories, high snowfall accumulation in late winter caused speculation about flooding this spring, but in fact a relatively uneventful ice breakup occurred on both the Liard and Mackenzie Rivers. Breakup was also early—one of the earliest in the past 40 years at Norman Wells. Early spring migrants appeared somewhat later than last year, but events sped up as spring advanced; much of May was warm and clear, resulting in few if any significant fallouts of migrant birds in the southern Northwest Territories.

### WATERFOWL THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

Canada Geese, typically at the vanguard of waterfowl migration in the Mackenzie Valley, NWT were reported during the first week of

Apr at Trout L. (DD) and Nahanni Butte (EB), with singles reaching Ft. Simpson 10 Apr (SC) and Norman Wells 21 Apr (JA). Relatively few migrant waterfowl were seen staging along the Mackenzie R. this spring at Ft. Simpson, NWT (DT), presumably due to the early ice breakup. At Norman Wells, NWT an estimated 2000 Canada Geese were present 25 Apr, but few geese staged there during May; larger numbers were present downstream near Little Chicago (RP). A single Ross's Goose that stopped in to graze on a ball field in Yellowknife, NWT 29 May was an odd sight (JB). In s. Yukon, swan migration peaked at M'Clintock Bay 18 Apr with a count of 1378 Trumpeter and 944 Tundra (JJ). Diligent checking of tens of thousands of swan heads during s. Yukon migration counts turned up 2 ad. Whooper Swans, the Yukon's 2nd, at Johnson's Crossing 14 Apr, and the Yukon's first Bewick's Swan, an ad., at Johnson's Crossing 19 Apr (JJ).

Early Gadwall reports included a female at M'Clintock Bay, s. Yukon 15 Apr (JJ) and a pair at Norman Wells, NWT 16 May (LA). Cinnamon Teal were well reported in s. Yukon, with single males at Johnson's Crossing 26–29 Apr (JJ) and Tagish 3–4 & 9 May (JJ; CE), a pair at Haines Junction 6–7 May (CD, LD), a pair at s. Lake Laberge 11 May (ph. CE), 2 males at Judas Cr., Marsh L. 18 May (CE, PL), and 3 males at Swan L., Whitehorse 26 May (ph. CE). Northern Pintail migration peaked in s. Yukon on 21 Apr with impressive counts of 2040 at Tagish and 2355

at M'Clintock Bay (JJ, CE). Single male Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal, now considered annual in spring in s. Yukon, were seen at Tagish 4–5 May (JJ), and s. Lake Laberge 16 May (CE); a male Common Teal x Green-winged Teal hybrid was at the later location 11–16 May (CE).

A Redhead, locally rare, was at Norman Wells, NWT 20 May (DW). An ad. male King Eider at Tagish, s. Yukon 12 Apr (JJ, BD, HG) provided a very rare interior spring record for w. North America. Scoter migration peaked in s. Yukon on 17 May with counts of 500 Surf and 100 White-winged at Marsh L. (CE) and 80 Surf at Teslin L. (BS). Pairs of Hooded Mergansers, a species suspected but not yet confirmed breeding in s. Yukon, were at km 7 on the Tagish Rd. 1 May (HG et al.), at Judas Cr., Marsh L. 4 May (JJ), and at Annie L. 10 May (ph. JH).

A remarkable s. Yukon raptor migration recorded at Johnson's Crossing and Tagish on 14 Apr yielded a one-day total count of 560 raptors (464 at Johnson's Crossing) including 292 Red-tailed Hawks, 73 Rough-legged Hawks, 98 Northern Harriers, 66 Bald Eagles, 24 Golden Eagles, 4 Sharp-shinned Hawks, one Merlin, one Peregrine Falcon, and a dark/rufous-morph Swainson's Hawk (JJ). In Northwest Territories, the first Sahtu report of Golden Eagles was a pair seen at Gayna R. 12 Apr (RP). Among the first Northwest Territories reports of Bald Eagles were 2 at Norman Wells 4 Apr (DW), one at McNally Cr. 5 Apr (DA), and one on the ice at Ft. Simpson 8 Apr, feeding on a lynx carcass (KL). North America's best-studied Gyrfalcon nest, at km 158 on the Dempster Hwy., cen. Yukon was occupied by one ad. 15 May (HG, NM).

Tens of thousands of migrant Sandhill Cranes were right on cue for the annual "crane weekend" 6–8 May at Faro, which is ideally situated right on the Yukon's Tintina Trench flyway. Whooping Cranes are doing well this year and have expanded their nesting area; Canadian Wildlife Service surveys of their breeding grounds in Wood Buffalo N.P. in mid-May found 54 breeding pairs, including pairs in previously unoccupied areas (BJ). American Golden-Plover migration was thin throughout the Region; the usual late-May fallout of shorebirds in Ft. Simpson, NWT did not occur this year, presumably due the excellent flying conditions (and possibly high water, which eliminated local mudflat habitat). Pacific Golden-Plover is now being recorded annually in s. Yukon; single females were at M'Clintock Bay 5 May (JJ) and in Whitehorse 19 May (ph. CE, HG, vt. PL).

In Norman Wells, NWT, the spring Whimbrel flocks, which are carefully scanned for Eskimo Curlews, never materialized, again probably because of clear conditions (RP). Partridge Creek farm in cen. Yukon has hosted many fine rarities over the

years; this spring, it was the Territory's 2nd documented **Marbled Godwit**, which frequented the farm's manure pile during 8–22 May (MB, ph. DB, VB). Good numbers of migrant shorebirds were at s. Lake Laberge through late May, with a high count of 800 Pectoral and 200 Semipalmated Sandpipers 15 May (CE). Two early Least Sandpipers were at M'Clintock Bay 15 Apr (JM, JJ). A White-rumped Sandpiper at s. Lake Laberge 20 May (CE) provided the Yukon's only report for the season.

## GULLS THROUGH FINCHES

Two ad. Long-tailed Jaegers at Watson L. 24 May (vt. PL) provided the first record for se. Yukon. Two ad. **Franklin's Gulls**, the Yukon's 4th, were at M'Clintock Bay 19 May (vt. PL; ph. CE; ph. BD). A second-year Ring-billed Gull at the Whitehorse sewage ponds 26 May (vt. PL, HG) provided the season's only Yukon report. The early and rapid breakup of the Mackenzie R., NWT left large sheets of ice on Seagull I. at Norman Wells; on 30 May, at least three pairs of Herring Gulls had nests atop these ice chunks, nearly 5 m above ground level (RP). A first-year Thayer's Gull, rare in spring in s. Yukon, was at Whitehorse 28 May (ph. CE). Few Glaucous-winged Gulls made it to the Yukon this spring; single first-year birds were at Whitehorse 6–14 May and Judas Cr. 17 May (ph. CE), and a second-year bird was in Whitehorse 16–26 May (ph. CE, vt. PL). A flock of 88 Sabine's Gulls, an unprecedented number in the Yukon interior, was a striking sight at Judas Cr., Marsh L. 25 May (ph. CE; JH, HG et al.).

Mourning Doves were reported in Ft. Smith, NWT this May (*vide* SI), and a single bird was in Ft. Simpson, NWT for several days in late May as well (DT, AN). A Boreal Owl that struck a window in Ft. Simpson 4 Mar (NL) did not survive; another was seen at very close range in the town campground 23 Mar (DS, TW). The Ft. Simpson owl survey 22 Apr detected 3 Boreal Owls this year (DT). Two male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker × Red-breasted Sapsucker hybrids were at Shallow Bay, s. Yukon 25–26 Apr (ph. CE); curiously, the date was earlier than previously recorded for Yellow-bellied Sapsucker but later than the usual window for vagrant Red-breasted Sapsuckers. Migrant Dusky Flycatchers were recorded for the first time in s. Yukon lowlands, with singles banded at Teslin 20 May (ph. BS) and at Albert Creek Banding Station, se. Yukon (hereafter, Albert Cr.) 14–20 May (TMK, JJ); also noteworthy was a record-early bird singing on its breeding territory at White Mt. 7 May (HG). A singing Blue-headed Vireo was at Albert Cr. 23–25 May (PL). Warbling Vireos were early this year in s. Yukon, with singles at Teslin 8 May (BS), Whitehorse 10 May (ph. CE), M'Clintock Bay 11 May (CE), and Albert Cr. 12 May (TMK).

In Northwest Territories, American Crows were reported in Ft. Simpson 4 & 5 Apr, at Trout L. ca. 8 Apr (DD), and more significantly, at Norman Wells 21 May for the first local record (DW, RP). A pair of American Crows, a species not yet confirmed breeding in the Yukon, was behaving very territorially at Watson Lake airport 18–24 May (JJ; vt. PL). A Winter Wren banded at Teslin 29 Apr (ph. BS) established an early spring Yukon record; 2 were heard singing on the lower slopes of Montana Mt., s. Yukon 12 May (MW).

In Northwest Territories, only 2 Mountain Bluebirds were reported this spring: one n. of Ft. Providence 14 Apr (NL, PL) and one at Norman Wells 22 Apr (NW, JP). An amazing 700 migrant American Robins were recorded at Johnson's Crossing, s. Yukon 14 Apr (JJ).



This photograph shows one of two adult Franklin's Gulls present at M'Clintock Bay on Marsh Lake, southern Yukon 19 May 2005; these birds established the Yukon's fourth record. Photograph by Cameron Eckert.

Exceptional numbers of Tennessee Warblers were seen from Albert Cr. e. to at least Contact Cr., se. Yukon in late May and early Jun (CE; PL; TMK; GR, TT); the species was also unusually abundant at Norman Wells (DW). A record-early Orange-crowned Warbler was at Shallow Bay, s. Yukon 25 Apr (CE). The first Magnolia Warbler of the season was reported from Albert Cr. 25 May (PL). Ovenbirds were found well w. of their normal Yukon range, with one singing right on the Yukon/British Columbia border (along the Alaska Hwy. 1.8 km w. of the Irons Creek settlement) and another singing 6.2 km farther w. into British Columbia 24 May (PL); a check of the area 1 Jun turned up 5 singing males in mature Trembling Aspen forest along the East Cosh Creek Rd. just n. of the border (ph. CE). At Albert Cr., the banding station lived up to its nickname of "The Wilson's Warbler Factory" with a one-day total of 105 on 21 May (TMK). The season's first Western Tanager, record early, was at Albert Cr. 12 May (TMK).

A Le Conte's Sparrow at Norman Wells 23 May (DW) was well n. of range; however, one was also seen in the area last year. An early Swamp Sparrow was at Norman Wells 3 May (DW). A White-throated Sparrow at Inuvik, NWT 29 May (vt. IM) was n. of its typical

range. Fox Sparrows put on a strong showing in s. Yukon, with 142 banded at Albert Cr. 24 Apr–7 May (TMK), and 106 banded at Teslin during the same period (BS). Its been about 60 years since the last report of Sooty Fox Sparrow in the Yukon; this year, 5 males and one female were seen at treeline along the Haines Rd., just n. of the British Columbia border 30 May (PL), near the same spot where they were first seen so many years ago. A singing first-year male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, well w. of its regular range, was at Albert Cr. 25 May (PL).

A Yellow-headed Blackbird was at Niven L. in Yellowknife, NWT (PD), and a single male was in Ft. Simpson, NWT for about two weeks in late May (DT, HP, SC, B&JM, DN). Common Grackles were seen in Ft. Simpson, NWT 28 Apr–23 May (DT), and at Norman Wells 19 & 21 May (DW; RP). The Region's mega-rarity of the season was a stunning male Hooded Oriole, 2500 km beyond its range, which appeared at a Marsh L., s. Yukon suet feeder 12 May (ph. DO, JF, SF, EK, JD, ph. CE, HG, NM, PS); a quick call and the generosity of the home owners Jim & Stevie Fordyce allowed numerous birders to enjoy this once-in-a-lifetime Yukon bird. It frequented the yard for about four days until, sadly, a small pile of black and yellow feathers was found; it had been eaten, apparently by an avian predator.

Redpoll numbers peaked in the 2nd week of Apr along the Mackenzie Valley, NWT with an estimated 200 at a Ft. Simpson feeder (DT) and "hundreds" at feeders in Norman Wells (RP); Commons outnumbered Hoary Redpolls by an estimated 10:1 at this time. By the last week of Apr, most redpolls and Pine Grosbeaks had vacated feeders in Dehcho and Sahtu regions (DT, RP); flocks of up to 25 Evening Grosbeaks were seen in Ft. Simpson through mid-Apr (DT), after which time they too seemed to disperse.

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