

Exciting reports from across the Region underscored that every new pair of eyes can make a tremendous contribution to our knowledge of birds in the North. This summer played havoc with the Yukon's freshly printed bird checklist with the addition of one new species, four new confirmed breeders, and various assorted rarities! A late July trip to Yohin Lake, in the southwest corner of Nahanni National Park Reserve (N.N.P.R.) revealed a number of new park birds and first confirmed breeding records. Elsewhere in Northwest Territories and Nunavut, observers turned up a variety of surprising finds and new breeding records. While the birding was great, the weather was less than sensational. The weather gurus at Environment Canada issued forecasts throughout the summer promising idyllic conditions for the Yukon; well, the weather may have been great for fungus and frogs, but the rest of us grew a little tired of a few too many cold and wet days. Likewise in Northwest Territories, water levels in the Mackenzie and other rivers remained somewhat higher than average throughout the summer, with relatively cool, wet weather prevailing throughout much of July. On the bright side, Northerners, particularly in the Yukon, were spared the harsh smoke-laden atmosphere that prevailed last summer as a result of extensive forest fires.

## LOONS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

An ad. Red-throated Loon on a nest on a small pond at km 118 Dempster Hwy., cen. Yukon 11 Jun (WE, HG) proved successful, as a pair with one nearly full-grown young was seen there 18 Jul (CE, PS). A Pied-billed Grebe, well n. of the species' regular range, was at Gravel L., N. Klondike Hwy., cen. Yukon 3 Jul (RF). The American White Pelican colony on the Slave R., NWT had a relatively high number of nests this year, with 568 recorded on four nesting islands (JVP, DJ). A count of 33 American White Pelicans, very rare in James Bay, was made at Akimiski Strait, Nunavut 3 Jun (KA, KR, DF); At-tawapiskat residents have been reporting small numbers (<10) the past few years, as have residents of other small Cree villages in the Hudson Bay Lowland (*vide* KA). Two Double-crested Cormorants were seen at Akimiski Strait 3 Jun (KA, KR, DF); this is not a regular species in this part of James Bay, but it seems to be increasing in recent years (*vide* KA).

Range counts for little when identifying summer swans in cen. Yukon; a close look at 4 ad. swans on Chapman L., km 116 Dempster Hwy. 18 Jul revealed 2 Tundras and 2 Trumpeters (CE, PS). One has to admire the tenacity of a visiting birder from Germany who called from a pay phone in northern British Columbia to report, through a non-birding interpreter, that a male Tufted Duck,

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the Yukon's 2nd, that she had first seen on a pond near Rancheria Falls 4 Jun was still present two weeks later (ph. IG, HS); it remained there through 23 Jun (ph. CE; SH; HG). Three male Harlequin Ducks were reported from Klukshu Cr., sw. Yukon 2 Jun (JB). Flocks of 25 and 60 Surf Scoters on the lower South Nahanni R. 9 Jul were indicators of post-breeding aggregations (DT, JT).

Five ad. White-tailed Ptarmigan, including 2 females with broods seen 23 Jun on the Tlogotsho Plateau (DT, MC), confirmed breeding status of this species in N.N.P.R. An aerial raptor survey of the South Nahanni and Flat R. valleys, NWT 15 Jun located active nests of Osprey and Bald Eagle (DT, MC) but found no evidence of nesting Peregrine Falcons; however, other reports of Peregrines from the South Nahanni corridor suggest breeding may occur in the vicinity. North America's northernmost Swainson's Hawk nest, and the Yukon's first confirmed breeding record, was established by a dark-morph pair at a nest with at least one young at km 256 Dempster Hwy., about 112 km s. of Eagle Plains 5 Jul (ph. UN); a check of the nest again 19 & 29 Jul noted at least one quickly growing young (ph. CE).

A Yellow Rail heard calling and seen briefly in a sedge marsh near Yohin L. 29 Jul (DT, KS) established the first N.N.P.R. record and added to the mere handful of records for this secretive species in Northern Canada. An ad. American Coot with 5 young noted at a pond near the Jarvis R. 23 & 25 Jun (KC;

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PS, CE) extended the species' known breeding range into sw. Yukon. The Yukon's first confirmed breeding record for Greater Yellowlegs was provided by a frantically mobbing ad. with its fluffy, flightless young at an expansive sedge fen near the Hyland R. 11 Jul (CE); it is apparently a fairly common breeder in the area, as agitated pairs were seen at other fens from the Hyland R. w. to the Liard R. and n. to the Meister R. (CE). A Wandering Tattler, possibly a breeder from the nearby mts., was seen feeding at the s. end of Aishihik L., Yukon 29 Jun (HG, RH). A survey for Upland Sandpipers on the Prairie Cr. alluvial fan, N.N.P.R. 6-7 Jul found only 2 birds (DT, JT, RL, MM); 2 were also seen on fence posts at the Ft. Simpson airport, NWT 21 Jul (DT). Hudsonian Godwit has not yet been found breeding in the Yukon, so 2 seen at the Babbage R., North Slope 8 Jun (PS, LC) were intriguing. A Marbled Godwit nest with one egg at Akimiski I., Nunavut 18 Jun (LN) was only the 2nd nest found on the island by the "Canada Goose research crew" in the past 10 years (*vide* AJ). Two confirmed breeding records

for Surfbird were reported this summer: a total of 5 ads. and one downy young came from at Trapper Mt., Tombstone Territorial Park, cen. Yukon 22 Jun (ph. BB, MK), and an ad. at a nest with 4 eggs found 21 Jun in the Ruby Range, e. of Kluane L., sw. Yukon was ultimately depredated (SN).

## GULLS THROUGH FINCHES

A count of 9 Pomarine Jaegers was made at Clarence Lagoon, North Slope, Yukon 9 Jun (PS, LC, MG, IM). Summer breeding records for Long-tailed Jaeger in the Yukon included a pair with a large fluffy young near Surfbird Mt., km 91 Dempster Hwy. 18 Jul (PS, CE); and an ad. with a nearly full-grown young at Herschel I. 24 Jul (ph. BB, CK). An ad. Ring-billed Gull was scrounging scraps at grocery store parking in Whitehorse, Yukon 17 Jul (CE). An unusual-looking gull with bleached-white wing coverts in Ft. Simpson, NWT 5 Jun (vt. DT) was subsequently identified as a first-year California Gull (*vide* CE). A large dark-mantled gull, possibly a Slaty-backed, in Norman Wells, NWT 3 Jul (DW) was not photographed and could not be positively identified to species. Glaucous-winged Gull reports, all from the Yukon, included a freshly dead ad. found on the Alaska Hwy. at Johnson's Crossing 6 Jun (AdM); a ratty first-summer bird in Whitehorse 13 Jul (ph. CE); and a pristine ad. that provided the first record for Herschel I. 22-23 Jul (ph. CE). Eight Arctic Tern nests were recorded on Akimiski I., Nunavut this season (*vide* AJ).

Two Mourning Doves spent much of Jun at a feeder in Haines Junction, sw. Yukon (VO, WO); another was reported from the Slims R. west access rd., sw. Yukon 22-24 Jun (*vide* DH). Researchers at Squirrel Camp, Sulphur L., sw. Yukon reported a good year for Great Gray Owls (*vide* AB); additional reports from the area included one seen 20 km s. of White R. 20 Jun (PS) and one at Boutelier Summit 23 Jun (KC). One of the most amazing Yukon records of the summer was of a Long-eared Owl nest, about 700 km nw. of the species' breeding range, at Sulphur L., sw. Yukon; a downy fledgling was first discovered at its nest 9 Jul, followed by numerous other sightings of 2 ads. and the fledgling through 31 Jul (MA, ph. AB, CS). A Common Nighthawk nest found at Prairie Cr. alluvial fan, N.N.P.R. 17 Jun contained two eggs (JT, DT); another nighthawk was seen about a km away doing a distraction display 7 Jul (JT).

Three Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were noted on the Rancheria Breeding Bird Survey



This Western Kingbird, a second for Northwest Territories and the first to be photographed, was seen at Fort Liard on 4 (here) and 5 June 2005. Photograph by Craig Machtans.

route, se. Yukon 24 Jun (HG). A nest-building Eastern Phoebe, rare anywhere in the Yukon, was well n. of its range at Dawson City 13-14 Jun (RDM, ph. BG); another was singing at Dezadeash L., sw. Yukon 23-26 Jun (PS, ph. CE). A Say's Phoebe was reported from Rankin Inlet, Nunavut 3 Jun (RR). A pair of Eastern Kingbirds seen near Ft. Good Hope, NWT 21 Jun (PL, DM) suggests possible breeding at this location, near the n.



This male Spotted Towhee was seen at Arviat on 7 and 8 (here) June 2005—a first record for Nunavut and for the Northern Canada region. Photograph by Lisa-Jo van den Scott.

edge of their known range. Another Eastern Kingbird, a rare-but-regular summer visitor to the Yukon, turned up at the DuLac farm near Haines Junction 19 Jun (ph. LAN, JB). A Western Kingbird, only the 2nd recent Northwest Territories record for the species, was at Ft. Liard 4-5 Jun (ph. CM, TH, GK). A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, the Yukon's

2nd, made a brief appearance near Haines Junction 9 Jun (TH, ph. LH, ph. JB). A pair of Blue-headed Vireos, one carrying nest material, was noted at Albert Cr., se. Yukon 3 Jun (ph. GR, TT). A Red-eyed Vireo, well w. of the species' typical range, was singing at Little Atlin L., s. of Whitehorse, Yukon 27 Jun (PS). A Northern Rough-winged Swallow, rare in the Region, was reported from Ft. Smith, NWT 10 Jul (RR). A pair of ad. Barn Swallows, a used nest, and 2 recently fledged young at Yohin L. 9 Jul (DT, JT) provided the first breeding record for N.N.P.R.

Two ad. Marsh Wrens (including one accompanied by 2 juvs.) at Yohin L., N.N.P.R. 29 Jul (DT, KS) provided the first park record as well as establishing breeding status for the species. The Yukon's long overdue first confirmed breeding record for Golden-crown Kinglet was provided by an ad. feeding 3-4 recently fledged, dependent young in old-growth, mid-elevation Subalpine Fir forest in the lower La Biche R. valley 8 Jul (CE). A University of Alberta research crew working near Ft. Simpson, NWT found remarkably high densities of Swainson's Thrush in their study areas (*vide* EB); this thrush was also the most common species on forest bird surveys in Deadmen Valley, N.N.P.R. 16 Jun (DT, MC). Swainson's Thrush numbers were up this year at Akimiski I., Nunavut (AJ).

Tennessee Warbler abundance showed pronounced fluctuations across the Region; while the species was in higher-than-normal numbers in the Whitehorse area, s. Yukon (CE, PS), and extremely numerous in the Watson Lake area, se. Yukon (CE, TMK, GR, TT), it was less common than in previous years and stopped singing earlier in the season at Ft. Liard, NWT (TH), with similarly low numbers noted in the nearby La Biche R. valley, in the extreme se. Yukon (CE); farther e., there was a notable increase in numbers this year at Akimiski I., Nunavut (AJ). While knowledge of Orange-crowned Warbler subspecies in s. Yukon increased somewhat this spring and summer, so did the questions; a bright yellow bird banded at Teslin 4 May (ph. BS) looked right for the coastal subspecies *lutescens*; also, numerous breeding birds seen from

Dezadeash L. s. along the Haines Rd., sw. Yukon 22-26 Jun appeared quite yellow and had the drier, faster song of *lutescens* (ph. CE, PS). However, it remains unclear how these birds fit with the presumed range of the Rocky Mountain subspecies *orestera*. The Albert Creek banding station in se. Yukon reached a notable milestone on 28 Jul

with its 10,000th bird banded since the station opened in 2001; the celebrity bird was a hatch-year Magnolia Warbler, an appropriate "southeast Yukon specialty" (TMK). Cape May Warblers seem to have a small foothold at Albert Creek; 2 males were on territories there 3 Jun (ph. GR, TT); and single males were banded at the station 25 & 27 Jul (TMK). A male Bay-breasted Warbler singing at Congdon Cr. campground, Klunane L. 21 Jun (PS) established the Yukon's westernmost record. A first-year male Black-and-white Warbler, well w. of its range, was seen at Albert Cr., se. Yukon 3 Jun (GR, TT). An imm. American Redstart, a rare breeder in sw. Yukon, was reported from Haines Junction 18 Jul (DH). MacGillivray's Warbler was found to be common in deciduous shrubs along the Haines Rd. from Dezadeash L. s. to the British Columbia border 22-26 Jun (CE, PS); elsewhere in s. Yukon, a pair carrying food was observed just w. of Rancheria Falls 2 Jul (HG).

An extralimital male Western Tanager singing on territory in Whitehorse, Yukon 16-17 Jun managed to find a good patch of habitat but not likely a mate (ph. CE). A male Spotted Towhee, Nunavut's first, was a surprising find at Arviat 7-8 Jun (ph. LS). Sooty Fox Sparrow was confirmed breeding

in the Yukon with the observations of 5 ads., one feeding 2 juvs. at treeline along the Haines Rd., just n. of the British Columbia border 24-26 Jun (ph. CE, PS). Three Song Sparrows were also noted along the Yukon section of the Haines Rd. 26 Jun (PS). Those in search of Smith's Longspur on its breeding grounds need look no farther than Tombstone Territorial Park, cen. Yukon; this year a singing male was noted at km 98 Dempster Hwy. 13 Jun (HG), and one was seen at the same spot again 2 Jul (RF). Late but noteworthy was the report of a one-day count of about 2000 Snow Buntings, including one flock of at least 1000 birds, along the Alaska Hwy. between Haines Junction and Beaver Creek, sw. Yukon 24 Mar (JW). Herschel Island's reputation as n. Yukon's top rarity hotspot was further enshrined by the territory's first McKay's Bunting, a well-studied male, which looked right at home in the driftwood around Pauline Cove 16-28 Jul and possibly later (ph. LJM, ph. CE et al.). A singing Western Meadowlark was seen near Ft. Liard, NWT 10 Jun (vr. ph. GK, TH, LAr). A silent and skittish meadowlark, beyond its range regardless of species, was seen at Akimiski I., Nunavut 2 Jun (KA, LN); Easterns seem to stray shorter distances out of range than Westerns, which have been

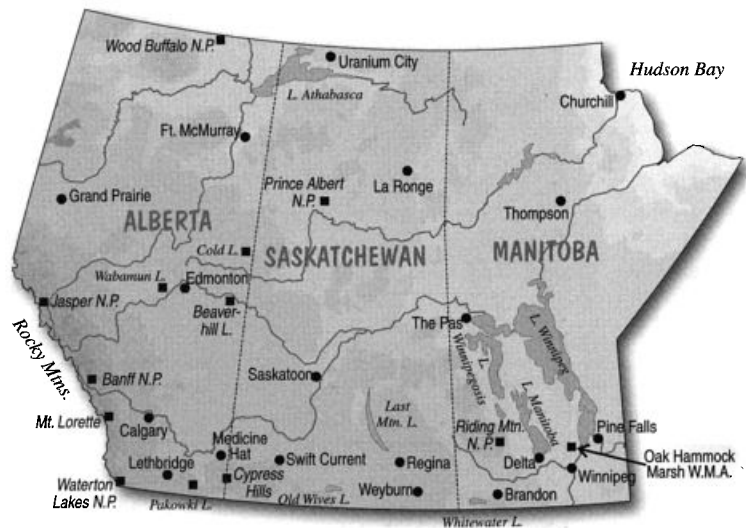
recorded in Siberia. A prolific White Spruce cone crop provided food for an abundant and widespread population of White-winged Crossbills in se. Yukon and sw. Northwest Territories this summer (CE; DT).

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Exceptionally heavy rains in June and the first half of July brought widespread, record-breaking floods across the southern third of the Region. Riparian species such as Spotted Sandpiper, Belted Kingfisher, and Bank Swallow probably suffered heavy nesting losses, and many Western Grebe and Franklin's Gull colonies were disrupted or displaced by high lake levels. The impact on other colonial waterbirds is difficult to assess because of the remote locations of major colonies. Exceptional numbers of American White Pelicans benefiting from floodwater across s. Manitoba and s. Saskatchewan may have been displaced from northern lakes or from abandoned colonies in the Northern Great Plains.

Impending flooding of Lake Diefenbaker, Saskatchewan led to a heroic Piping Plover captive-rearing effort coordinated by the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority. With 113 nests threatened by inundation, 260 eggs were collected and over 100 young were eventually released at Chaplin Lake. Word on grassland sparrows was mixed but was generally bad in Saskatchewan. Baird's Sparrow continued to decline in southwestern Manitoba, but Grasshopper Sparrow numbers were above average there and in southern Alberta. Moisture-loving Le Conte's Sparrows appeared to thrive, as did Black Terns and most dabbling ducks. Bobolinks

# Prairie Provinces



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