

# Northern Canada



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Questions as to how climate change is affecting bird ranges arise with each new unusual sighting—be it a Wilson's Warbler in Igloodik, a Lesser Goldfinch in Whitehorse, or an invasion of Steller's Jays. While there are no easy answers as to what drives such events, it is clear that climate change is having profound impacts in the North. The necessity of dramatic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions is now critical. Generally mild temperatures and low snowfall amounts prevailed over much of the Northwest Territories through early fall; in November, temperatures plummeted and record snowfalls arrived mid-month for the southern Mackenzie Valley. In the Yukon, all hopes for an extended fall season were quashed by November's record-breaking cold spell, when temperatures plunged to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

## GEESE THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

Greater White-fronted Geese are typically among the early fall migrants in the Mackenzie Valley, NWT, so a flock seen 7 Oct at Norman Wells was relatively late (FP). Flocks of 100 Greater White-fronted Geese and 300 Snow Geese were flying northwestward over Herschel I., n. Yukon 15 Aug (CE). A lone Snow Goose, rare in fall, was trailing a southbound flock of 42 Tundra Swans over Marsh L., s. Yukon 25 Sep (CE). The annual fall staging of geese at Shallow Bay, s. Yukon peaked 29 Sep with 60 Greater White-fronted Geese and about 2000 Canada Geese; the Canadas appeared to be of the subspecies *parvipes* (ph. CE). Also at Shallow Bay were 300 Tundra Swans 28 Sep (CE). Waterfowl banding at Willow L., Sahtu region, NWT showed good local production of Northern Pintail, the most common dabbling duck in the study (RP); unusual captures this year were a Gadwall

and an apparently "pure" American Black Duck (with no signs of hybridization) (RP, JB). High numbers of waterfowl were recorded at the Whitehorse sewage ponds, s. Yukon, with peak counts of 1500 American Wigeons and 80 Ruddy Ducks 22 Aug and 1200 Northern Shovelers 11 Sep (HG). Late waterfowl at Ft. Simpson, NWT included 9 Lesser Scaup and 2 Red-breasted Mergansers 23 Oct (StC, DT); also tardy were 2 Harlequin Ducks on the Yukon R. in Whitehorse, s. Yukon 21 Nov (HG, CM). A male King Eider, rare in fall at Herschel I., n. Yukon, was at Pauline Cove 19 Aug (CE).

In Northwest Territories, few Willow Ptarmigan were seen in the Norman Wells area this fall (RP), and none were reported in the Dehcho region through Nov. A juv. Yellow-billed Loon, a species seen annually in low numbers in s. Yukon, was at M'Clintock Bay 23 Oct (CE); another was seen nearby at Lewes Marsh 3 Nov (HG, BSu). An ad. Red-necked Grebe at Pauline Cove provided the first record for Herschel I., n. Yukon 19 Aug (CE). An estimated 200 Red-necked Grebes were on Marsh L., s. Yukon 25 Sep (CE). An ad. Eared Grebe, casual in s. Yukon, first seen at the Whitehorse sewage ponds in late Jul, was last seen 7 Aug (HG). A Great Blue Heron, rare anywhere in the Region, was at

DT). Similarly, a weakened Golden Eagle, with no obvious injuries, captured at the landfill in Nahanni Butte, NWT in late Oct (PM) was released in Ft. Simpson 31 Oct (DA, NL); it continued to be seen through 11 Nov at the local airport, where it was eating Snowshoe Hares (TB). Six Golden Eagles were seen heading southward from McIntyre Mt., s. Yukon 19 Oct (JP, RP). A juv. *anatum* Peregrine Falcon was seen eating a large juv. gull near Checkpoint, NWT 23 Sep (ph. DT, MC).

The annual build-up of American Coots at the Whitehorse sewage ponds, s. Yukon peaked at 153 on 11 Sep (HG). Sandhill Crane migration was evidenced by flocks totaling an estimated 1000 birds passing over Ft. Simpson, NWT on the evening of 24 Aug (DN, PT, HP). A pair of Sandhill Cranes lingered at Kookatsoon L., s. Yukon 8-14 Oct (MEJ). A juv. Greater Yellowlegs was record late at the Whitehorse sewage ponds, s. Yukon 19 Oct (ph. HG). A flock of a dozen Red-necked Phalaropes was at the Norman Wells sewage lagoons, NWT in Sep (DW). The Region's shorebirding season closed out 26 Oct with a juv. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (ph. CE) and a basic-plumaged Dunlin (ph. CE, HG, CO) in Whitehorse, s. Yukon.

## GULLS THROUGH FINCHES

A single jaeger was harassing gulls over the Mackenzie R. at Ft. Simpson, NWT 17 Aug (StC). An ad. Glaucous-winged Gull, likely



Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is seen annually in southern Yukon in fall; this juvenile closed out the shorebirding season in Whitehorse on 26 October 2006. Photograph by Cameron Eckert.

Ft. Simpson, NWT 9-13 Aug (MO, DN, DT). A first-year Rough-legged Hawk found on the ground at Trout Lake, NWT 14 Oct (VJ) was flown to Ft. Simpson for examination and subsequent release two days later (NL, DA, PK, CL); it was last seen 21 Oct (NL, ph.

the same bird as reported in early Jun, was at Herschel I., n. Yukon 15-20 Aug (ph. CE). Two Glaucous-winged Gulls, rare in fall, were at the Whitehorse dump 13 Aug, and a juv. was there 10 Oct (ph. CE). An ad. Thayer's Gull, not unexpected for the date, provided

**SA** An invasion of Steller's Jays to s. Yukon this fall proved to be a sensational birding phenomenon! By late Nov, we had received 119 reports by 137 observers of birds at 62 different locations. (To imagine the scale in "per capita" terms, this would be like receiving reports from 55,000 birdwatchers in Ontario.) The number of reports accompanied by photographs was remarkable. The first Steller's Jays appeared in early Sep around Carcross and spread over the Whitehorse area n. to L. Laberge by 16 Sep, e. to the Atlin Rd. and Atlin by 26 Sep, w. to Haines Junction by 28 Sep, and n. to Ethel L. (an amazing 430 km n. of Skagway, Alaska) by 14 Oct. It seems likely that hundreds of birds were involved.

The pattern of the invasion indicates that the jays came over the White Pass from Skagway, Alaska. All were of the coastal subspecies, and the many we were able to age from photographs were hatch-year birds. The only previous Yukon Steller's Jay invasion came in fall 1994, when jays were recorded at about eight Whitehorse-area locations. Prior to 1994, there had only been a total of nine Yukon reports of this species. So while this type of invasion is not unprecedented, the scale of this year's event was well beyond anything previously recorded. There are various possible explanations as to what drove the invasion, but none seems entirely satisfactory and in that way it remains somewhat of a mystery. However, the enthusiastic response demonstrated by Yukon birdwatchers and naturalists that enabled us to document and track this year's invasion will no doubt enhance our ability to understand future events.

the first well-documented record for Herschel I., n. Yukon 14-19 Aug (ph. CE). An ad. four-year gull photographed at Arviat, Nunavut 28 Sep (ph. MG, MS) displayed features suggestive of Kelp Gull (or a Kelp Gull hybrid): it was near in size to Herring Gull; the upper parts were the correct shade of blackish; the outermost primary showed a single white mirror; the legs and feet were greenish pink; and the head was unstreaked. The plight of the Ivory Gull was not helped by late, deep snow on n. Baffin I., Nunavut this summer; there were no breeding birds recorded at the Brodeur Pen. (MM). Recently, Caspian Tern has been rare but regular in late summer along the Mackenzie R. at Ft. Simpson, NWT; this season, one was seen in Aug (DT). Black Guillemot surveys at Herschel I., n. Yukon this year recorded 40 ads., nine successful nests, and 13 chicks—down from 2005's counts of 60 ads., 12 successful nests, and 22 chicks (CE, Herschel I. rangers).

Mourning Dove is now reported near annually in spring at Ft. Simpson, NWT; one seen there in Nov (EC) provided one of few fall records. Single Snowy Owls, rare in s. Yukon, were reported from McIntyre Mt. 19 Oct (JP, RP) and Whitehorse 4 Nov (SyC); the latter was eventually found dead. A Barred Owl was heard calling in Ft. Simpson, NWT 28 Sep (DT). Two Blue-headed Vireos were banded at Albert Creek banding station, se. Yukon (hereafter, Albert Cr.) this fall; a hatch-year bird 5 Aug and an ad. 2 Sep (TMK). Black-billed Magpie seems to be keeping a toehold in the Sahtu region, NWT, with at least one visiting Norman Wells feeders 30 Sep—late Nov (RP). Two American Crows, casual in fall in s.

Yukon, were seen around Whitehorse Aug–Sep (SD, PS, AP, dR). Two late Bank Swallows were fleeing southward over Shallow Bay, s. Yukon 29 Sep (CE), and a late Barn Swallow was at Swift R., s. Yukon 21 Sep (BSc). A Northern Mockingbird, possibly the same one reported in Jun, was seen in Ft. Simpson, NWT 10 Aug (DT). Ruby-crowned Kinglet was by far the most common species (412 of 2577 birds banded) at Albert Cr. this season (TMK). Young Northern Wheatears



This female Lesser Goldfinch, an amazing 2200 kilometers beyond its breeding range, frequented a Whitehorse, Yukon feeder 22 September through 5 October (here) 2006. There are no previous records for Northern Canada or Alaska. Photograph by Cameron Eckert.

were common around Iqaluit, Nunavut late Jul–Aug, suggesting the species had a good breeding season on s. Baffin I. (MM). Cedar Waxwing reports from Whitehorse, s. Yukon included 2 juvs. 28 Aug (BSt) and one juv. 7 Sep (SD, HG).

An ad. female Townsend's Warbler was banded at Albert Cr. 29 Aug (TMK). A hatch-year Bay-breasted Warbler and a hatch-year Ovenbird were banded 12 & 20 Aug, respectively, at Albert Cr. (TMK), adding to the growing number of Watson Lake area records for these two se. Yukon specialties. The fall banding season at Albert Cr. saw a battle for warbler

supremacy between Common Yellowthroat (228 banded) and Wilson's Warbler (218 banded) (TMK). A Wilson's Warbler, well n. of its range, was a surprise at Igloolik, Nunavut 19 Sep (ph. SA). A juv. Brewer's Sparrow of the Timberline subspecies was banded at Teslin L. 3 Sep (ph. BSc), furnishing one of very few lowland records for this species in the Yukon Single Song Sparrows, rare in fall in s. Yukon, were seen in Whitehorse 10 Sep (MB) and 28 Sep (HG). A late Fox Sparrow lingered in Dawson, cen. Yukon through through Nov, surviving temperatures down to  $-35^{\circ}\text{C}$  (ML). An estimated 1000 Lapland Longspurs were at Pauline Cove on Herschel I., n. Yukon 18 Aug (CE). Migrant Snow Buntings were abundant on Hwy. 3 between Yellowknife and Ft. Providence, NWT 15 Oct; an estimated 1900 were tallied during the three-hour drive (DT, HP). The fall flock of Rusty Blackbirds at the Whitehorse dump, s. Yukon peaked at about 200 on 5 Sep (PS, SD); a total of 267 Rusties were color-banded this year in the Yukon, and we encourage birders to be on the lookout and report sightings of these birds. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch reports, both from s. Yukon, included an interior-race bird at Horse Cr. 5 Nov (KO) and a coastal-race bird in Whitehorse 13 Nov+ (HG). Late Oct saw thousands of redpolls, predominantly Commons but with many Hoaries, moving through the Whitehorse area. The most bizarre record of the season was that of a female Lesser Goldfinch, a Yukon first, in Whitehorse 22 Sep–5 Oct (HG, BD, ph. CE).

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