



Cameron D. Eckert

The novelty of increasingly warm winters has worn thin in the North. The long-term health of northern ecosystems depends on deep and persistent cold winter temperatures—conditions that are disappearing with the rapid onset of climate change. In southwestern Yukon, a decade of above-normal winter temperatures has spawned a massive Spruce Bark Beetle outbreak that now covers more than 350,000 hectares. Elders and people living on the land can no longer rely on their traditional knowledge to understand and predict winter conditions. This year, the trend continued, with temperatures well above normal (e.g., 5° C above) throughout Northern Canada. Along with the warmer temperatures, much of the Yukon experienced unusually high snowfall. In contrast to the general trend, southern Northwest Territories had below-normal temperatures in February. As always, our winter report benefits from Christmas Bird Count and Great Backyard Bird Count observations, and participation was record high in both this year.

Abbreviations: NU (Nunavut), NWT (Northwest Territories), N.N.P.R. (Nahanni National Park Reserve).

WATERFOWL THROUGH GULLS

The Yukon has the Region's highest number of wintering waterfowl, largely due to Whitehorse's reliable winter flock of Mallards, which this year numbered 17 on 24-26 Dec (HG, TH; CE). Rankin Inlet, NU had 13 Common Eiders on its 26 Dec C.B.C. (*vide* BZ). A late but noteworthy fall report was of a single Black Scoter, a rare migrant in N.N.P.R., in the company of 9 Surf Scoters 7 Aug at Rabbitkettle L. (DT). Norman Wells, NWT continues to be among the Region's most reliable locations for Sharp-tailed Grouse, with

16 recorded on the 23 Dec C.B.C. (RP). Willow Ptarmigan were plentiful (414) on the Yellowknife C.B.C. 31 Dec (*vide* RB); 51 were recorded on the Norman Wells, NWT count 23 Dec (*vide* RP) and 15 in Cambridge Bay, NU 17 Dec (*vide* BZ), the latter location a mere 300 km n. of the Arctic Circle. The Region's only report of Rock Ptarmigan was turned in by Rankin Inlet, NU, with 3 on 26 Dec (*vide* BZ).

The ever-reliable pair of Bald Eagles was present at McIntyre Cr. in Whitehorse, s. Yukon 24 Dec (HG, TH); however, one was subsequently injured and spent the rest of the winter in rehabilitation, while the other made good on the 26 Dec C.B.C. (CE). An ad. Sharp-shinned Hawk photographed at Marsh L. 28 Dec provided the Yukon's first winter record (ph. DP, DS). The Yukon's rarity of the season was an imm. Ivory Gull, which came to a sad end when it was found starving at Johnsons Crossing 1 Jan and subsequently died (SP). The circumstances were similar to the two previous records for Ivory Gull in the area; an imm. bird found starving in late Nov 1999 at nearby Tagish, Yukon also died; and one on Atlin L., British Columbia in mid-Nov 1987 showed up in weak condition but fed on fish entrails and meat until its departure. In Northwest Territories, an Ivory Gull was found dead in Aklavik in late Feb, apparently killed by Common Ravens (MM).

DOVES THROUGH WEAVER FINCHES

A Mourning Dove seen at Rabbitkettle L., N.N.P.R., 30 Aug (GS, DT) furnished a rare park record. Wintering Great Horned Owls in the Yellowknife, NWT area got a boost this winter from high Snowshoe Hare and ptarmigan populations (RB). A Great Gray Owl was heard in the Norman Wells, NWT C.B.C. circle during count week (CM). A Boreal Owl was seen nearly daily through most of the period on Joliffe I., Yellowknife, NWT (AS, ph. RB). Three Downy Woodpeckers, near the n. limit of their winter range, were recorded on the 29 Dec C.B.C. in Mayo, cen. Yukon (MOD). A Black-backed Woodpecker was observed at Pontoon L., near Yellowknife, NWT in mid-Jan (RS). Northern Shrike reports included one in Whitehorse, s. Yukon 5 Jan (BoS), one in Haines Junction, sw. Yukon 13 Jan and 28 Feb (RJ, WJ), and one in Yellowknife, NWT 5 & 21 Jan (DR; RB, MB).

It seemed there was no turning back for many of the Steller's Jays that poured into the Yukon last fall; small numbers were reported

throughout the season from Whitehorse, Teslin, Tagish, and Carcross. Now, having survived the winter, will they remain to breed? Black-billed Magpie was first seen in the Sahtu region, NWT only a few years ago and has now been seen in all five Sahtu communities (RP); this winter, singles were recorded 29 Dec in Deline (RP, BH) and 30 Jan in Tulita (RP, BH). Whitehorse edged closer to Common Raven supremacy this year, with 1318 tallied on the 26 Dec C.B.C. (*vide* WN); but it wasn't enough to beat Yellowknife's 1377 recorded 31 Dec (*vide* RB). Inuvik, NWT recorded 466 Common Ravens (*vide* CD), and Nunavut's highest total (105) was turned in by Cambridge Bay 17 Dec (*vide* BZ), with Arctic Bay posting a close second with 87 on 5 Jan (*vide* CK). Common Ravens demonstrated their opportunistic capacity for predation by killing the aforementioned Ivory Gull in Aklavik, as well as a Snowshoe Hare near Yellowknife, NWT (BC).

The Region's only American Robin was reported from Haines Junction, sw. Yukon 4 Jan (BaS, ET). Bohemian Waxwings had to look to other food sources around Whitehorse, Yukon, as a hard frost back in May resulted in a very poor Mountain Ash crop; however, a few flocks of up to 100 birds were seen there through Dec. Elsewhere in the Region, 43 Bohemians along with 2 Cedar Waxwings were



This adult Sharp-shinned Hawk, nicely documented at Marsh Lake, southern Yukon Territory 3 January 2007, established the Yukon's first winter record for the species. Photograph by Doug Phillips.

reported on the Hay River, NWT C.B.C. 17 Dec (*vide* RR), 17 were reported on the Yellowknife, NWT C.B.C. 31 Dec (*vide* RB) and 16 there 19 Feb (JS), and a flock of 26 was seen in Haines Junction, sw. Yukon 21-23 Feb (IW, RW). Small numbers of Dark-eyed Jun-

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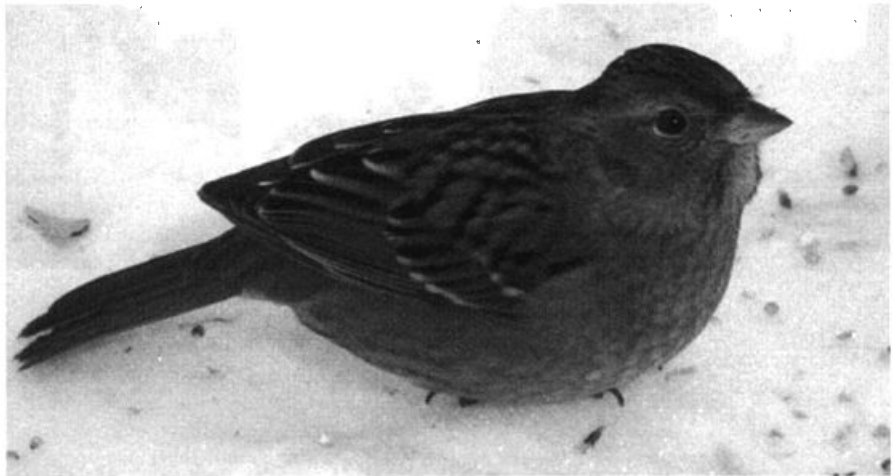
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NORTHERN CANADA



A handful of rare sparrows seen across Northern Canada this winter included this immature Golden-crowned Sparrow, which successfully wintered (here 3 January 2007) at Canyon, furnishing the Yukon's second winter record for the species. Photograph by Robyn Rufiange-Holway.

cos were reported in s. Yukon from Carcross (DK, NM), Teslin (MG; BeS), and Haines Junction (SR, WR), and in sw. Northwest Territories, 2 were present through the season at a Norman Wells feeder (RP). Rare winter sparrows reported in the Yukon this year included a Lincoln's Sparrow through the season at Carcross (DK, NM), an imm. Golden-crowned Sparrow through the season at Canyon, sw. Yukon (RRH), single imm. White-crowned Sparrows through the season at Shallow Bay (CG) and Haines Junction (SR, ph. WR), an imm. White-crowned at Teslin 31 Dec–1 Jan (MG, BeS), and an ad. in Whitehorse 23–28 Dec (HG, CO; BD, YS). However, the champion survivalist was a Fox Sparrow that wintered in Dawson through temperatures as low as -48°C (ML). Hay River, NWT also hosted several rare sparrows: a White-throated 16 Dec (BG, RR) and a Fox on the 17 Dec C.B.C. (*fide* RR). Small numbers of Snow Buntings were reported across the Region including one in Ft. Simpson through 8 Dec (DT); 22 in Whitehorse, s. Yukon on the C.B.C. 26 Dec (*fide* WN); 13 in Teslin, Yukon on the C.B.C. 2 Jan (*fide* BeS); and most unusual were 6 in Iqaluit, NU 23 Jan (MM).

Pine Grosbeaks were present in relatively high numbers in the Mackenzie Valley, NWT this winter (RP, DT). Redpolls, both Common and Hoary, were fairly common in the Yukon this winter but were conspicuous by their absence in the sw. Northwest Territories, with only 2 recorded on the Ft. Simpson C.B.C. 23 Dec and few noted throughout the period (DT); elsewhere in Northwest Territories, redpolls were seen more commonly, though in numbers somewhat lower than normal. Small flocks of 15 and 8 Hoary Redpolls were reported at Iqaluit, NU 26 Dec and 11 Feb, re-

spectively (MM). A Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (of the coastal subspecies) was observed through the winter in Whitehorse (HG; BSw, PSw). Evening Grosbeak's winter distribution appeared to be limited to sw. Northwest Territories this season, with 25 on the Ft. Simpson C.B.C. 23 Dec (DT) and 19 on the Hay River C.B.C. 17 Dec (*fide* RR). House Sparrow still has not infiltrated the Yukon; elsewhere in the Region, C.B.C. reports included 207 at Yellowknife, NWT 31 Dec (*fide* RB), 70 at Ft. Simpson, NWT 23 Dec (*fide* DT), 16 at Hay River, NWT 17 Dec (*fide* RR), and 15 at Arviat, NU 1 Jan (*fide* MS).

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