



NWT/Nunavut Bird Checklist Survey

Spring 2009 Newsletter

A program coordinated by Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service since 1995

News from the Survey

REVISED NUNAVUT CHECKLIST AVAILABLE

The 2002 version of the Nunavut bird species checklist has been updated by Jim Richards and Tony White. Significant updates included the addition of 10 species known to breed in the territory (now 134 species), and the addition of 14 species reliably observed in Nunavut. To request a copy of the updated list email NWTChecklist@ec.gc.ca

MAGPIE WATCH!

The checklist survey first reported on the movements of Black-billed Magpies in 2002. At that time, the species was over-wintering in Yellowknife and several other more southern communities in the NWT. Since then we have had reports of magpies on the move in NWT. Here are some of the more recent NWT records:

- First observation from Brackett Lake - May 2007
- Probable over-wintering birds - Deline, Colville Lake, Fort Good Hope, and Tulita in January 2008
- Confirmed over-wintering - Norman Wells



NOTEWORTHY OBSERVATIONS FROM 2008

New breeding records:

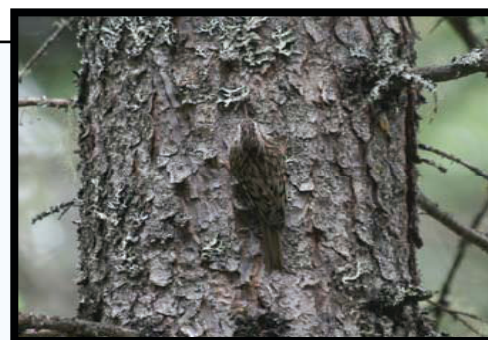
- **Brown Creeper** - Fort Liard (June/July)
- **Stilt Sandpiper** - nest near Kiggavik (July)
- **Barred Owl** - two fledged young north of Fort Liard (July)
- **Say's Phoebe** - nesting at Nauyak Lake - Bathurst Inlet area (June)
- **Varied Thrush** - fledged young near Fort Simpson (July 2007)



This Tennessee Warbler was observed well out of its normal range - northwest of Baker Lake, NU. Photo: Damian Power, 2008.

Extra-limital records:

- Tennessee Warbler at Meadowbank, NU - June
- Mourning Dove at Fort Providence, NWT - June
- Northern Flicker at Baker Lake, NU - June
- American Redstart at Yellowknife, NWT - June
- Ring-billed Gull at Inuvik, NWT - June
- Lesser Black-backed Gull at Inuvik, NWT - July
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Norman Wells, NWT - June
- Western Tanager at Cambridge Bay, NU - June
- Wilson's Phalarope at Duck Lake (near Yellowknife), NWT - May
- Common Goldeneye at Cambridge Bay, NU - July
- Gray Catbird outside of Yellowknife, NWT - July



A creeper displaying the typical 'creeping' behaviour up a spruce tree. It was observed along with several immature creepers north of Fort Liard. Photo: Cory Olson, 2008.



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NORTHERN BIRDER PROFILE: Vicky Johnston

Vicky founded the NWT/NU Bird Checklist Survey program in 1995. She has lived and worked in Yellowknife since 1992. Vicky not only invented the checklist but she has also submitted over 2000 bird observations to the program. As Shorebird Biologist, Vicky also spear-headed the Arctic PRISM Program.

How long have you been birding?

"I have birding as a hobby since university. I wanted to be a biologist from the age of eight when my uncle (then a technician for the Canadian Wildlife Service) took me to a gull colony on Lake Ontario. We collected eggs for pesticide analysis and I was hooked! I could not believe that he was paid to have so much fun. So here I am in my 17th year with Canadian Wildlife Service."

What is your most memorable northern birding moment?

"Well, the funniest one must have been in 2000. I was just outside of Norman Wells, creeping along a floating mat of cattails trying to get to a Mew Gull nest. The mat broke and I fell into the water up to my chest! I slogged on and checked the nest and made my way out of the pond - grateful that I was by myself! But I was not alone! Local birder Dave Wilderspin was standing on shore watching the whole folly!"

What is your favourite bird observed in the north?

"That is tough to answer. There are three: Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, and Sabine's Gull. They are all so beautiful and have such neat behaviour - like the Buff-breasted sandpiper's 'wing-up' behaviour. It looks like they are lifting their wings to say 'Hey! Want to buy a watch?'" See photo [left] of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper performing the wing-up behaviour.

Vicky's advice for Northern birders?

"There is really good birding on foot in these communities:
 rt Simpson, NWT in late May,
 ellowknife, NWT in June,
 Inuvik, NWT in late June, and
 Bay, NU in early July."



Photo: Charles M. Francis 2007



Vicky enjoying a break on the tundra during a shorebird survey in the McConnell Bird Sanctuary, NU. Both Snow and Ross's Geese are in the background. Photo: Nadine Lamoureux, 2008.

Checklist Challenge Results: Marsh Wren

In last year's newsletter, we challenged NWT birders to help confirm the breeding range of Marsh Wrens in the territory.

Special thanks to Gary Viznioski and Mike Beauregard who spent extra time nest searching in 2008, and who provided us with historical records from around Hay River. Cris Gray, Kevin Hannah, and Cory Olson were able to find an active nest near Fort Liard in June 2008.

Please continue to send us your Marsh Wren records!

This nest was found near the Muskeg River, north of Fort Liard, NWT. The nest had two eggs inside. Several other inactive nests were constructed in the area - a behaviour typical of the Marsh Wren. The arrow points to the nest entrance. Photo: Cory Olson, 2008.



Arctic PRISM and the NWT/NU Bird Checklist Survey

We first reported on the Arctic PRISM (Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring) program in 2002 when it was in the development phase. The program was started to address an overall population decline in shorebirds that was detected from long-term migration monitoring programs throughout North America. Arctic PRISM surveys are bi-national and include surveys in Alaska as well as in NWT, NU, and the Yukon. Data are not only collected by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS), but also by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), the United States Geological Survey (USGS), and by private industries working in the north (mining and oil and gas companies). The surveyors include CWS and USFWS employees, countless volunteers, and local Aboriginal youth.

How are Arctic PRISM Plots Surveyed?

There are three tiers of surveying in the PRISM program: (1) extensive surveys across the Arctic to estimate abundance, (2) annual surveys at permanent sites to estimate density, and (3) collection of checklist data. Tier 1 and 2 use similar methods. Two to three observers thoroughly cover a twelve hectare area by walking transects through the plot or, in the case of more intensive surveys, drag a rope through the entire plot to find nests. While passing through the plot, surveyors record observations of all bird species, bird behaviour, and any nests or young that are found.

PRISM and the NWT/NU Bird Checklist Survey: Progress

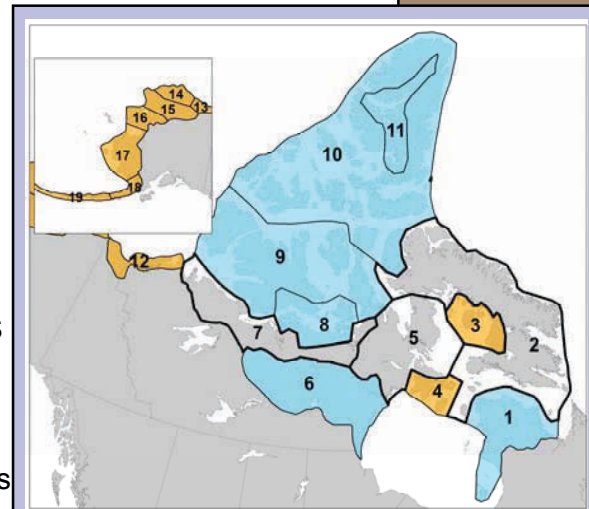
The checklist survey is actually built-in to the sampling protocol for Arctic PRISM as Tier 3. The objectives of collecting this data over time are to (i) determine breeding range of Arctic shorebirds, ii) detect annual variation of shorebird distribution, and (iii) provide general trends in shorebird abundance. The most progress to date has been made on the first objective - learning more about the breeding ranges of Arctic shorebirds. Checklist data contributed both by PRISM participants and checklist survey volunteers has helped CWS revise breeding ranges for shorebirds. Some species ranges have expanded substantially from what was initially assumed. As more data are collected on Arctic shorebirds, CWS will determine specific sites that could be surveyed annually or semi-annually to improve its ability to reach the other Tier 3 PRISM objectives.

PRISM and Arctic Passerines

Another key role that the Arctic PRISM program plays is that of monitoring Arctic passerines: Common and Hoary Redpolls, Snow Buntings, Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur, and Northern Wheatear. Although the focus of PRISM surveys are shorebirds, surveyors also record and report the passerine species that they observe on and off of plots. Aside from observations provided to the checklist survey program, Christmas Bird Counts, and data from North American migration monitoring programs, no other programs provide quantifiable data. These data can be used to explore abundance, occurrence, and breeding habits for an otherwise under-monitored group of birds.

How you can participate!

Repeat surveys from Arctic locations are needed to improve the data. If you live in or visit the same Arctic community each year, you can help by completing checklist surveys. Email to find out more - NWTChecklist@ec.gc.ca



Since 2001, much of the Canadian Arctic has been surveyed. Orange regions are complete, blue regions are started, and hollow regions have yet to be started. The first round of Arctic surveys will be complete in 2016. Second and third survey rounds will start after that depending on monitoring needs and shorebird population levels. Map: Jennie Rausch, 2009

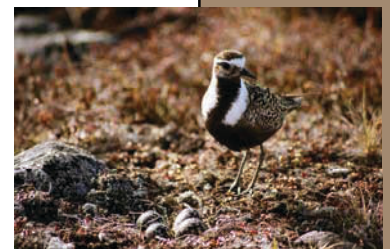
Shorebird facts from the NWT/NU Bird Checklist Survey 1995-2008

Shorebird breeding status reported on on checklists as:

Possible breeders - **17%**
Probable breeders - **12%**
Confirmed breeders - **14%**
Observed - **57%**

• Total count of shorebirds reported on checklists: **111, 246**

• Top three reported shorebirds:
American Golden Plover - 1823
Semipalmated Plover - 1535
Semipalmated Sandpiper - 1292



American Golden Plover near its nest. American Golden Plovers are the most reported of all shorebird species. Photo: Jennie Rausch, 2008

2008 Checklist Birder's Hall of Fame

Thanks to everyone who submitted checklists in 2008. We extend our appreciation by devoting this part of the newsletter to listing people and programs who contributed checklist data in the past year. Only primary observers are listed.

Lindsay Armer	Neil Firth	Devin Letourneau	Jennifer Provencher
Christian Bacher	Martin Gebauer	Thomas Lewis	Garnet Raven
Patricia Baldwin	Christine Gray	Nicole Lights	Jennifer Redvers
Olivier Barden	Ryan Grieg	John Lucas	Shannon Ripley
Ryan Bearry	J.E. Hall	Craig Machtans	Lynne Rollin
Mike Beauregard	Kevin Hannah	Sarah Mackenzie	Carl Savignac
Claudio Bianchini	Brad Heath	Kevin Martee	Mike Settrington
Dave Britton	Jim Hines	Céline Maurice	Paul Allen Smith
Mike Bryan	Ross Hodgetts	Mike Maximuchuk	Wayne Starling
Susan Bryan	Geoff Holroyd	Laurie McGregor	Doug Stern
Scott Cameron	Jason Hudson	Jonathon Michel	Candice Sy
Nicole Chatel	Vicky Johnston	Anthony Miller	Jeff Van den Scott
Marcel Cholo	Jones-Morris family	Steve Moore	Lisa-Jo Van den Scott
Gary Davidson	Clare Kines	John Nagy	Gary Vizniowski
Lynne Dickson	Leah Kines	Cory Olson	Leslie Wakelyn
Rian Dickson	Rich Klakowich	Damian Panayi	Hugh Westerheuser
Craig Dockrill	Adam Knight	Lisa Pirie	Dave Wilderspin
Ron Doctor	Rudolf Koes	Richard Popko	Brian Zawadski
Garry Donaldson	Alicia Korpach	Damian Power	
Kyle Elliott	Josée Lefebvre	PRISM volunteers	
			Parks Canada: Nahanni, Western Arctic Unit, Outtinirpaaq, Auyuittuq, Ukkusiksalik, Sirmilik
	Uluhaktok	Wha'ti Environmental	
Ducks Unlimited	Environmental Monitor	Monitor Training	
Cardinal Lake Crew	Training Program	Program	

The "Species Spotlight" is a new feature for the newsletter.

Send a picture of your favourite bird in NWT or NU and it may be featured in next spring's newsletter!

Species Spotlight: SORA (*Porzana carolina*)



This Sora was photographed at Niven Lake (Yellowknife) in 2008. Photo: © John A. Nagy 2008.

- Occurs in southern and central NWT
- A secretive marsh bird, one often hears the Sora without ever seeing it
- Checklists where sora is reported - 153
- Highest breeding evidence reported - T (territory presumed)
- Most northern location recorded - Norman Wells, NWT

Questions? Suggestions? Contact us!

NWT/NU Bird Checklist Survey

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