

# NWT/NUNAVUT BIRD CHECKLIST SURVEY

## NEWSLETTER

## APRIL 2002

*A program coordinated by the Canadian Wildlife Service since 1995*



### IMPROVING WITH AGE

The Checklist survey is entering its 8<sup>th</sup> season and our documentation of birds in the north gets better each year. Participants sent in a record number of checklists during 2001 – about 650! This is substantially more than last year and is double the average number received earlier in the program. Each year there is a wonderful variety of submissions. Several people making canoe or bird watching trips sent in numerous checklists (Melinda Welton, Sandra Kinsey and Laird Law), some sent rare bird reports (Stewart Holohan, William Stott, Jr.), and some took extra time to document the ever important, but often overlooked, regular sightings (Doug Tate in Fort Simpson). Parks Canada continues to increase its submissions, using the Checklist as a standard monitoring tool. All the checklists (long and short) sent in are equally important. They all contribute to an ever growing, and very accessible, bank of information on birds in the north.

### THE BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE IS MOVIN' NORTH

Twenty years ago Magpies were unheard of in Yellowknife. When the *Birds of Canada* was published in 1986, the range for Black-billed Magpie did not reach the southern border of the NWT. Magpies were not in northern Alberta when the *Birds of Alberta* was published in 1976. They were virtually absent from all of Alberta a century ago.

Today these adaptable birds are resident breeders in Yellowknife, and have been for several years. The birds established a breeding area on Joliffe Island in Old Town in the early 1990s. They are regularly seen by the shores of Yellowknife Bay and in other parts of the city.

We also have magpie records in the Checklist database from the north arm of Great Slave Lake, Fort Providence, Hay River, Lutselk'e, Fort Simpson, and Wrigley. This year there was a report of a magpie attempting to over-winter in Norman Wells. Clearly, the birds are well established in the Northwest Territories.

The range of this omnivorous, intelligent bird may be limited by climatic factors more than by food availability. All magpie records come from settled areas of the NWT, and this is no coincidence. These areas provide ample scavenging opportunities for the birds. However, these areas have been "available" to magpies for much longer than the birds have been present. A warmer climate may be one reason these birds have become established in the NWT in the past 10 years.

### REQUESTS FOR DATA WELCOMED

The checklist database is now sufficiently proofread requests is easy. We welcome your requests for have not already been screened out) is to place determine if they wish to use the record. Observer experience can lend significant credibility to an unusual record. More detailed observation notes may help make a determination in other cases. Money from the **Canadian Museum of Nature** helped significantly in proofreading and correcting longstanding problems with data quality in the database.



Original image courtesy of Georgia John,  
members.aol.com/cascadebirdwatch

# A NEW PROGRAM TO MONITOR ARCTIC SHOREBIRDS

Recent analyses of shorebird population trends have shown persistent declines in most arctic-nesting shorebirds. The worrisome trends are mostly derived from counts made during the spring and fall migration of these species, in southern Canada and the United States. These counts indicate that there is a problem, but they do not indicate which populations of birds are declining, the magnitude of the decline, or how the entire population is being affected. Estimates of breeding populations and trends on the breeding grounds are necessary to get a more accurate picture.

Canadian and American biologists are developing a program to monitor the population trends of arctic-breeding shorebird species. The Arctic Shorebird Monitoring Program is composed of three types of surveys:

- an extensive survey, to be carried out at 10-20 year intervals, that estimates abundance (not just an index to it) across all arctic regions of North America;
- surveys at 10-20 permanent shorebird sites, conducted two consecutive years out of every ten; and
- annual collection of checklist data, using our very own NWT/Nunavut Bird Checklist Survey.

We are entering the second of two test years for survey methods for the extensive survey. The test surveys will have the additional benefit of revealing some previously unknown "hotspots" for breeding shorebirds. We discovered in



*A White-rumped Sandpiper from Creswell Bay, Somerset Island.*

2001 that Melbourne Island (near Bathurst Inlet) had high numbers of Red Phalaropes, White-rumped Sandpipers, and Pectoral Sandpipers, along with lower (but still significant) numbers of Dunlin, Semipalmated Sandpipers, American Golden-Plovers, Baird's Sandpipers, and Stilt Sandpipers. We will re-visit Melbourne Island this summer to do some more intensive surveys. Other locations for this final year of methods testing are the Kent Peninsula (Nunavut) and the east coast of Quebec, near Puvirnituq.

The first of the permanent sites in Canada has been chosen. A site in the East Bay Bird Sanctuary, Southampton Island, will be surveyed in 2002 and 2003. A number of other potential permanent sites have also been identified.

monitoring survey and (of course) is already fully active! The best checklist survey data for this purpose will come from sites where checklists are completed every year. If you are in a position to fill out checklists at the same arctic sites every year, we encourage you to do so. You are an important part of the overall effort to track the status of arctic breeding shorebird species.

The Checklist survey is the third shorebird

## LIMITED ON-LINE ACCESS TO THE DATABASE AVAILABLE NOW!

Some data fields from the checklist database are now accessible via the Internet. The Canadian Biodiversity Information Facility has a copy (periodically updated) of our database linked to their site on bird specimens (Species Analyst) in Canada. Species Analyst Canada provides on-line access to the label data associated with natural history specimens in both private and public collections in Canada. Similar sites are being developed in the United States and other countries as part of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility.

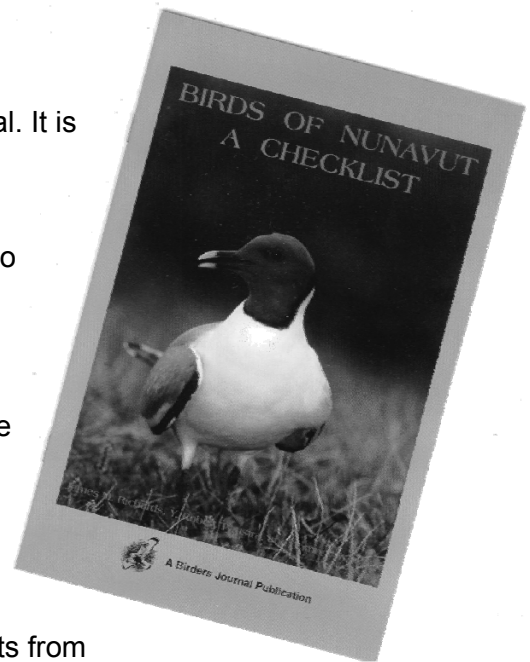
There are a variety of ways to search for information, including by species or geographic area. Date, observer and location (including coordinates) are the only data currently returned. There is no way to aggregate the data, or to request additional fields, but this is a good start to making our data available. We are sending them a copy of our database from April 2002, and it should be on-line when you receive this newsletter. Visit their site today!

[http://www.cbif.gc.ca/speciesanalyst/access\\_e.php](http://www.cbif.gc.ca/speciesanalyst/access_e.php)

# NEW BIRDS OF NUNAVUT SPECIES LIST

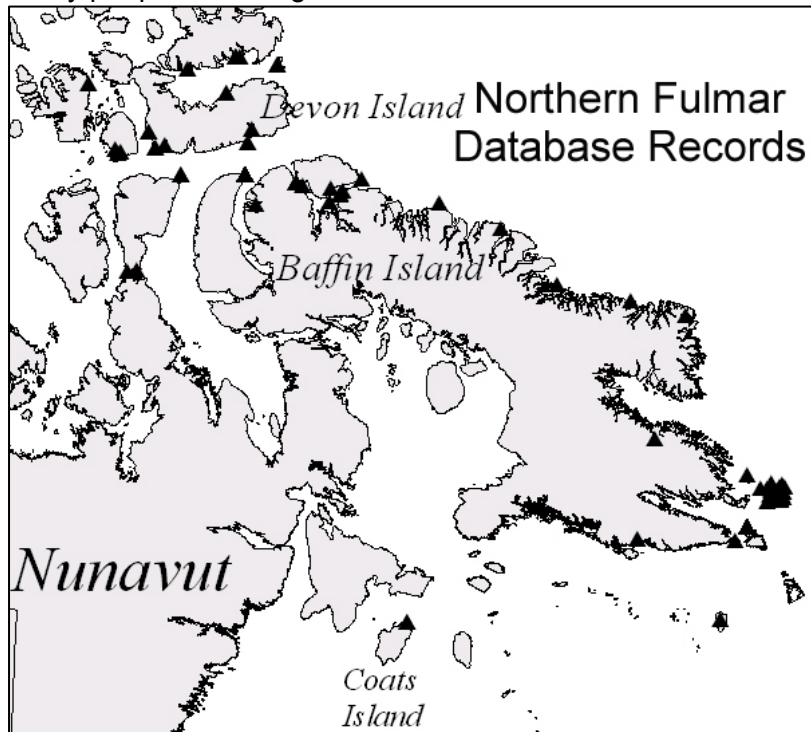
"Birds of Nunavut – A Checklist" has recently been published by Birders Journal. It is a very well researched and beautiful booklet, updating the accepted number of species identified in Nunavut to 254 (124 confirmed breeders). Authors James Richards, Robert Tymstra and Anthony White relied on extensive first hand experience, a thorough literature review and the NWT/NU Checklist database to compose this list. The list is divided into three geographic areas: mainland Nunavut, islands north of 60° and the islands of Hudson and James Bay (all south of 60°).

The cost is \$8.00 plus postage of \$1.50 for single copies, or \$5.00 plus postage for lots of 10 or more. They can be ordered through Birders Journal, 701 Rossland Road East., Suite 393, Whitby, Ontario, Canada. L1N 9K3.



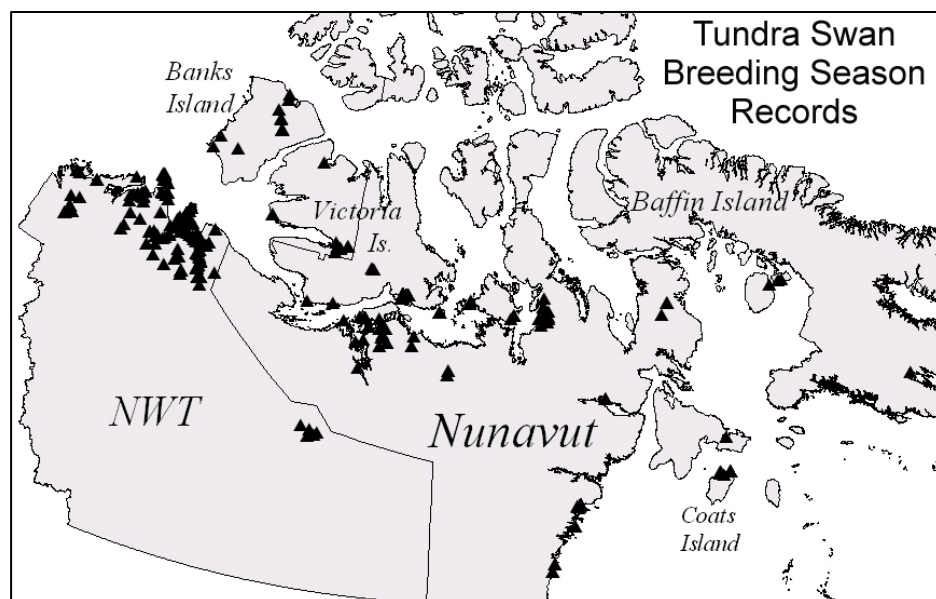
## WHO USES THE DATA?

Many people are using information from the database. We had 16 data requests from



individuals and organizations in 2000. Requests varied from asking for information regarding specific areas (parks, land claim areas) to data requests for species such as Upland Sandpipers, Baird's Sandpiper and Northern Wheatear.

We get more requests each year as the existence of the database becomes more widely known and the data quality improves. In 2001, we contributed significant data to the new Nunavut Checklist described above. We provided detailed breeding season maps for the Long-tailed Duck "Birds of North America" account and also answered a data request regarding Caspian Terns, both in the last month. We also made distribution maps for over 250 species. This information was used to provide detailed range data for an upcoming revision of the Sibley bird guide. This exercise also allowed us to identify out-of-range records for verification purposes and gave us a nascent "bird atlas" of the NWT and Nunavut! Two samples of the range maps are reproduced on this page.



*These distribution maps from the database compliment published range maps. This is excellent considering the relatively short period of time the survey has existed. The Northern Fulmar records are interesting for the absence observations anywhere on southern Baffin Island – confirming the validity of information in The Birds of Canada. The records of Tundra Swan near Lac de Gras (centre of mainland area) would be a southern extension of their published range, but these are not confirmed breeding records. The records from northern Banks Island do confirm breeding and extend the northwest portion of the range.*

## 2001 BIRDERS HALL OF FAME

We are very appreciative of everyone who submits checklists. We extend that appreciation by devoting part of the newsletter to listing persons who submitted data in the past year. Only primary observers are listed. Please accept our sincere apologies if names are misspelled or if we omitted someone.

Patricia Baldwin  
 Jamie Bastedo  
 Mike Beauregard  
 Malcolm Boothroyd  
 Wendy Boothroyd  
 Christian Bucher  
 Linda Burr  
 Robin Carpenter  
 Suzanne Carriere  
 Nicole Chatel  
 Doug Clark  
 Glenn Coady  
 Sam deBeer  
 Chris Doupe  
 Jason Duxbury  
 Jaida Edwards  
 Al Fontaine  
 Mike Fournier  
 Anthony Gaston  
 Sue Hall  
 Brad Heath  
 Jim Heather  
 C.W. Helleiner

Karsten Heuer  
 Stewart Holohan  
 Gregory Horne  
 Vicky Johnston  
 Paul Jones

Ken Madsen  
 James McCormick  
 Ian McDonald  
 John McKay  
 Steve Moore

Philip Robinson  
 Werner Schumann  
 Mike Setterington  
 Angus Simpson  
 Terry Skjonsberg  
 Wayne Starling  
 Doug Stern  
 William Stott,  
 Douglas Tate  
 Colin Taylor  
 Michelle Theberge  
 Peter Torvik  
 Dennis Verbeek  
 Randy Wedel  
 Bob Weden  
 Melinda Welton  
 David White  
 Dave Wilderspin  
 Gustav Yaki  
 Monty Yank  
 Rick Yule  
 Brian Yurris  
 Brian Zawadzki



A Common Nighthawk on a nest, Fort Liard, NWT - a great demonstration of camouflage.

Dana Kellett  
 Sandra Kinsey  
 Nick Larter  
 Laird Law  
 Craig Machtans  
 Bruce MacTavish

Damian  
 Panayi  
 Sylva Pijamini  
 Roger Pilling  
 Richard Popko  
 Jennie Rausch



## QUESTIONS? SUGGESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT US!

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