

NWT/NUNAVUT BIRD CHECKLIST SURVEY

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2005



this year.

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

NEWS FROM THE SURVEY

Online Data Entry: The data entry and mapping features of the website will be available later

Noteworthy records from 2003 and 2004:

- Black Scoters on the Baillie River (11 Jul 04)
- Yellow Rail at Fort Simpson (17 Jun 04)
- Blue-winged Teal at Deline (10 Jun 04)
- American Dipper at Firth River, YT (3 Jul 03)
- Song Sparrow at Deline (8 Jun 04)
- Barn Swallow at Cambridge Bay (Jun 04)
- Western Tanagers at Norman Wells (29 May, 17 Jun 04)
- Yellow-rumped Warbler at East Bay, Southampton Island (12 Jun 04)
- Fork-tailed Flycatcher at Akimiski Island, NU (the most northern for this species and Nunavut's first record, it was published in *Birders Journal* by Ken Abraham, Vol.12, No.4, Aug & Sept 2003)

NORTHERN BIRDER PROFILE: DOUG TATE

This is a new feature for the newsletter this year; we thought we would share some of the North's birders with you. Our inaugural interview is with Doug Tate. Doug has been submitting checklists since 1999 from the Nahanni region.

(1) How long have you been birding?

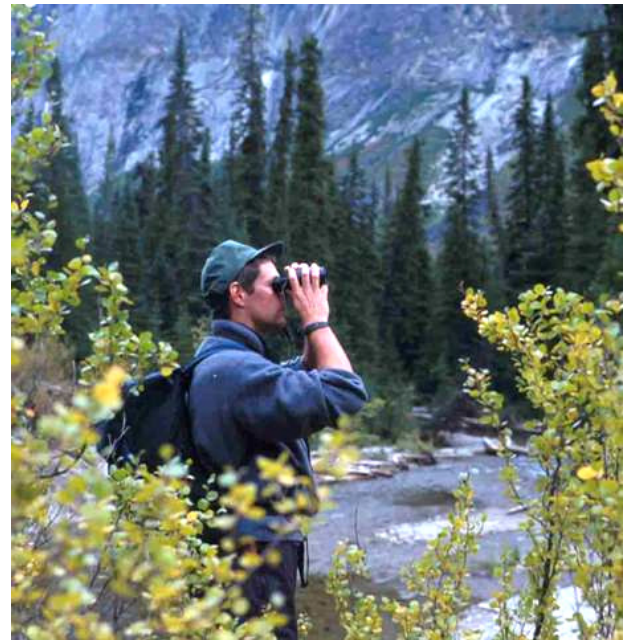
"In terms of serious bird identification, I have been birding for about 18 years now. As a youth I enjoyed pretty much everything in the natural world, but paid more attention to things like frogs that I could actually catch."

(2) What is your favourite bird observed in the north?

"I have had a number of good sightings in the north. I will say the White-tailed Ptarmigan. It was a new species for me, and was at about 5000' in elevation on the Tlogotsho Plateau."

(3) What is your most memorable northern birding moment?

"This would be a spectacular encounter in Nahanni National Park Reserve, in May, a couple of years ago. I was standing on an open ridge overlooking the Rabbitkettle River when a grouse flew past along the treetops of the valley below. There was a sudden rush of air and flash of gray as a large raptor rocketed past me out of the sky and into the forest after the grouse. Somehow the grouse avoided the attack, because moments later up came a Gyrfalcon, a gray-morph individual, with empty talons. The falcon then cruised past almost at eye-level, providing a wonderful close view."



Doug at his finest. Perhaps he is tracking down another Gyrfalcon...

HOW TO REPORT A RARE BIRD SIGHTING

Imagine this: It is a beautiful, sunny day in June. You are having a BBQ on your patio in Yellowknife. Suddenly you hear a strange “bzzzzzzzzzzzzzz...ti ti”, and what you think is the largest mosquito you have ever seen zips by. But before you run away to avoid the biggest sting ever, you see that the “gigantic mosquito” is hovering above your hanging geranium and is drinking nectar with its long proboscis.



© Jason Duxbury

*Was it a hummingbird or something that looks deceptively like one? Could it have been a Hummingbird Clearwing Moth (*Hemaris thysbe*)? With only a quick glance, they can appear very similar.*

This scenario is unlikely in NWT or NU. Hummingbirds are rarely observed in the north. Most reports of hummingbirds turn out to be a moth (see photo to left).

However, weather patterns and unexplained phenomenon sometimes lead birds away from what would be classified as their ‘normal’ distribution. In such cases it is important to know how to properly document your sighting. There are several steps you should follow:

Step 1: Observe the bird for as long as possible without referring to your field guide

When you observe a bird and are unsure of its identification, your first instinct may be to start leafing through the pages of a field guide to figure out what it is. While you are leafing through your field guide, the bird can disappear before you have made a positive ID. Your chances of making a correct identification increase by observing the bird’s appearance and behaviour for as long as possible. You may find it helpful to make notes in a field notebook or whatever is handy to review later.

Step 2: Make a sketch of the bird in the field

The importance of a sketch cannot be underestimated when identifying a bird. Not only will it help you when referencing a field guide later on, but it will help others verifying your observation. Illustrations are more reliable than photographs since so many photographs do not turn out.

Non-artists should not panic though. “Stick-birds” are acceptable. As can be seen from our depiction of the “hummingbird in question” (right), a sketch does not need to be elaborate. Point out features that you notice on the bird (e.g. shiny red throat), and draw certain body parts separately to show distinct features (e.g. a detailed drawing of the head). The more detail that you provide, the easier it will be for others to confirm the bird’s identity. Do not neglect your sketch just because you took a picture – there is no guarantee that the photo will turn out when developed. Murphy’s Law would almost guarantee that it will not turn out!

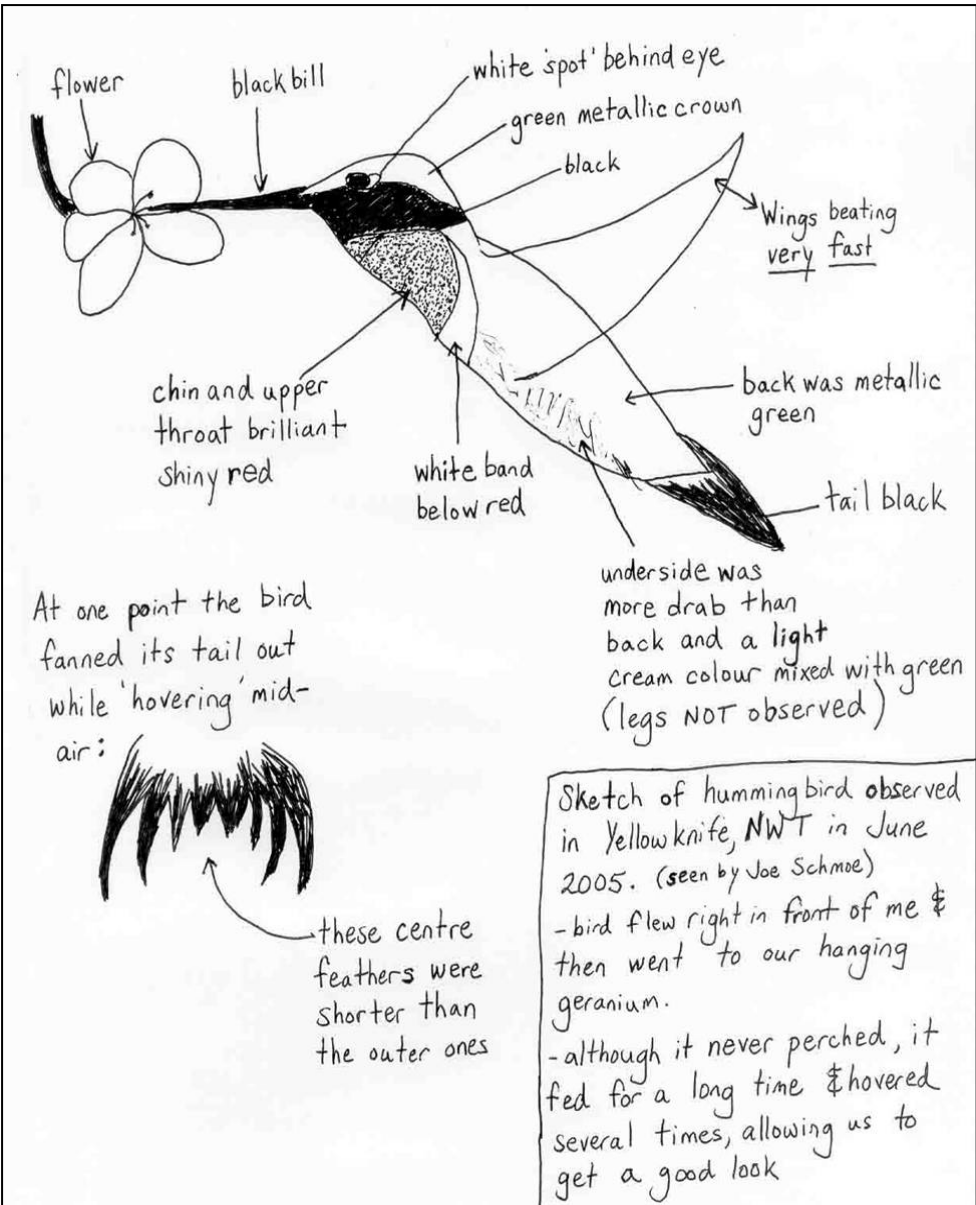
Step 3: Get a photograph and take as many photographs from different viewpoints as possible; if you are not using a digital camera, check the exposure carefully to ensure photos will be exposed correctly

Photographs are excellent, but not everyone has a zoom lens that can capture a crisp image of a bird. Most often birds are observed through scopes or binoculars, so photos with a standard lens will not always turn out. Do not let this deter you from taking photos though. Even the blurriest photo can reveal a distinctive feature to use for identification.

Step 4: Write detailed notes on the size, shape, and plumage of the bird; also take notes on behaviour or vocalizations observed

Describing the bird:

You will find a section outlining terminology used to describe bird anatomy (bird topography) in most field guides. Being familiar with this terminology will allow you to better describe a bird. To describe a bird’s size, compare it to other birds nearby or standard-sized objects. You should attempt to describe the bird’s bill (shape, size and colour); and plumage colours and patterns on the bird’s head, wings, and tail.



The "hummingbird in question". Your sketch should include descriptions of colours, patterns, and the overall shape of the bird observed. You can also make notes on what the bird was doing while you observed it.

Other observations:

A bird's behaviour and vocalizations can be a great tool in keying out its identity. Try to note things such as tail-bobbing or foraging styles (e.g. "The bird was perched on a branch, then flew up into the air, and returned eating an insect").

Even if you are not familiar with identifying birds by ear, try to describe the song or call notes (e.g. the song started out with a few sharp notes followed by a long, rich trill "pik-a, pik-a, pik-a, chooo-wooo-rrrrr").

Step 5: Look at your field guide

Now that you have made a detailed sketch and notes on your observation, you can finally look at your field guide.

Do not be discouraged if the bird is common in your area – think of it as great practice for the next time you see a rare bird. If you are not sure about the identification, contact us for some assistance.

Step 6: Fill out the NWT/NU Checklist Survey Rare Bird Form

We have included one copy with your newsletter. You can request additional copies from us, and it will be available on the website later this year. The rare bird form is in four sections. These sections coincide with the information you would document for your observation.

Observer Information: Providing us with

good contact information is important – we need to be able to reach you if we have questions about your sighting.

Sketch of Bird: You can either re-sketch the bird or attach a photocopy of your original sketches. Remember to make notes about colours, patterns and shapes observed.

Observation details: Note the specific location where the bird was observed. Although UTM's or lat/longs are useful, a detailed description of where you were is acceptable (you can include a hand-drawn map on a separate piece of paper). There are also several general questions about the sighting and your birding experience.

Description of Bird: In this section we ask you to report specific details about the bird you observed. If you did not observe one of the characteristics, just leave that portion blank. It is better to leave it blank than to guess what it looked like.

Following these steps will enable you to confidently describe which bird you have observed, and your observation becomes more accountable when sharing it with others. To learn more about documenting rare bird sightings visit these websites: <http://www.greglasley.net/document.html>, & <http://www.mdbirds.org/mddcrc/rarities.html>.

2004 CHECKLIST BIRDERS HALL OF FAME

Thanks to everyone who submitted checklists for 2003 & 2004. We extend our appreciation by devoting this part of the newsletter to listing persons who submitted data in the past two years. Only primary observers are listed.

Ken Abraham	Macneill Ferguson	Ian McDonald
Marianne Abraham	Anthony Gaston	Olivier Mongeon
Christine Aitkens	Gebauer & Associates	Allison Moody
Daniel Allaire	Noel Gilbrough	Douglas Morris
Vicki Antoine	Eugene Green	Sarah Overinton
Amber Ashenhurst	Bill Gundlach	Damian Panayi
Aulavik Park Staff	D. Haogak	Roger Pilling
Patricia Baldwin	Sharon Hayes	Richard Popko
Mike Beauregard	Todd Heakes	Qaluzili Quvianaqtuliaq
Gilbert Billard	Jim Heather	Jennie Rausch
Rick Book	Stuart Holohan	Jim Richards
Jim Boyle	Todd Hunter	Greg Robertson
Peter Briglia	L. Hutcheson	Marcus Ruben
Robert Burn	Jeffrey Hutchings	Rand Rudland
Page Burt	Emily Jenkins	Carl Savignac
Evelyn Camp	Vicky Johnston	Kim Schlosser
Suzanne Carriere	Paul Jones	Mike Settington
Debra Catron	Dennis Kaleta	Jenny Skific
Nicole Chatel	Dana Kellett	Stuart Slattery
Lisa Christensen	Cecil Kersting	Paul Smith
Pete Cott	Richard Knapton	Jeremy St. Onge
Sarah Davies	J.P. Kors	Wayne Starling
Sam de Beer	Greg Kubica	Doug Stern
Marc D'Entremont	Joe Kudlak	Doug Tate
Dan Derbyshire	Manny Kudlak	Guy Thibideau
Loney Dickson	Ron Larsen	Helen Trefry
Lynne Dickson	Donna Lindsay	Sarah Trefry
Brian Dokum	Trevor Lucas	Eric Tull
Chris Doupe	John Jr. Lyall	Mike Vaydik
Dominique Doyon	Craig Machtans	Alasdair Veitch
Ducks Unlimited	Stuart MacMillan	Dave Wilderspin
Canada Inc.	Elise Maltin	Tracey Wolki
Pat Dunn	John Mattern	Gerry Wright
Jaelyn Ebert	Jim Mayerle	Brian Yurris
Kyle Elliot	James McCormick	Brian Zawadski

QUESTIONS? SUGGESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT US!

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Government of the Northwest Territories,
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada,
Parks Canada, & Canadian Wildlife Service

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