



NWT/Nunavut Bird Checklist Survey Newsletter

Spring 2007

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

News from the Survey

Noteworthy records from 2006

- Baltimore Oriole in Arviat (June 2006)
- Brown Thrasher in Arviat (June 2006)
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Arviat (May 2006)
- Slaty-backed Gull (3rd record for NU) in Cambridge Bay (August 2006)
- Lark Sparrow in Colville Lake (June 2006)
- Northern Mockingbird in Fort Simpson (June 2006)
- Golden-crowned Sparrow in Norman Wells (May 2006)
- Purple Finches with fledged young in Norman Wells (August 2006)
- Yellow-headed Blackbird north of Wrigley (June 2006)

eBird.ca and the Checklist program are now sharing data

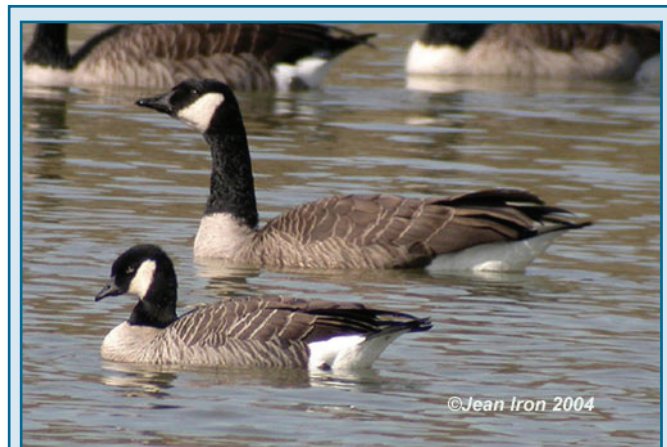
When you send your checklists to us, we will share the information with eBird.ca once a year. However, eBird does not track nests or breeding behaviour. It is important that you send us your observations so that we can learn more about northern birds.

Checklist returns were back up for 2006!

A big thank you to all of the dedicated birders and visiting researchers for sending in their observations last year. The grand total for 2006 was over 500 checklists. Since 2007 is an International Polar Year, we expect to receive even more checklists from researchers visiting the north this year.

We have made two changes to the checklist form

- **Blue Grouse** has been split into two species based on DNA evidence. The species found in the NWT is now called the **Dusky Grouse**.
- **Cackling Goose** has been added. For tips on differentiating Cackling and Canada Geese, see www.sibleyguides.com/canada_cackling



This photo highlights the size difference between Canada (*Branta canadensis*) and Cackling Geese (*Branta hutchinsii*). The smaller Cackling Goose (shown in front) has a stubby bill, and rounder head than the Canada Goose. The ranges of both species overlap in the NWT, but Cackling Geese are thought to be more of a tundra-nesting species. (Photo: Jean Iron, 2004)



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NORTHERN BIRDER PROFILE: Richard Popko

Richard is a frequent "Checklister" in Norman Wells, NWT. He has lived across the Northwest Territories and Nunavut since 1977. From Cape Dorset, Frobisher Bay, and Pond Inlet - Richard has been a keen naturalist and bird watcher.

(1) How long have you been birding?

"I started birding at the age of eight in Nottingham, England, where a park curator was my mentor. As a teenager I was drawn to woodlots and marshes in Pickering Township, Ontario. My first exposure to bird studies in NWT was from S. MacDonald. He inspired a lifetime of commitment to conservation in Arctic and boreal Canada."

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

"Ivory Gulls on Seymour Island, NU - I spent three awesome summers in a blind observing and recording their breeding biology."



Richard out on his snowmobile near Norman Wells. Perhaps he is looking for over-wintering birds? (Photo courtesy of Richard Popko)

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

"Watching the aeronautical acrobatics of a Brant defending its nest from a Polar Bear."

Robins Nesting in Rankin

Every year we receive records of robins in northern locales like Baker Lake, Kugluktuk, Arviat, and Iqaluit. This year we received confirmation of an American Robin nesting in Rankin Inlet. It made a nest in town under an apartment stairway.

Robins have been observed in Rankin before, but a nest has never been found. Brian Zawadski sent us photos and an account of this robin testing out northern life.

There were four eggs in the nest. The fate of the nest is unknown but suspected to be unsuccessful.

Be sure to send in your observations of birds nesting in your community, including any observations of unusual birds or bird behaviour.



The first confirmed nesting record for an American Robin in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut - 15 June 2006. (Photo: Brian Zawadski)

Rusty Blackbirds in the Mackenzie Valley: Are They Declining?

Over the last 30 years, there have been steep declines in Rusty Blackbird numbers in North America—up to 95%. These declines recently motivated COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) to list the Rusty Blackbird as a “Species of Concern”.

No one understands what has caused the decline, but possible causes include: changes in water quality, wintering habitat loss, drying of wetlands used for breeding habitat, and blackbird population control in southern USA.

The NWT has a large portion of the Canadian breeding population of Rusty Blackbirds, yet we know very little about Rusty Blackbirds in NWT.

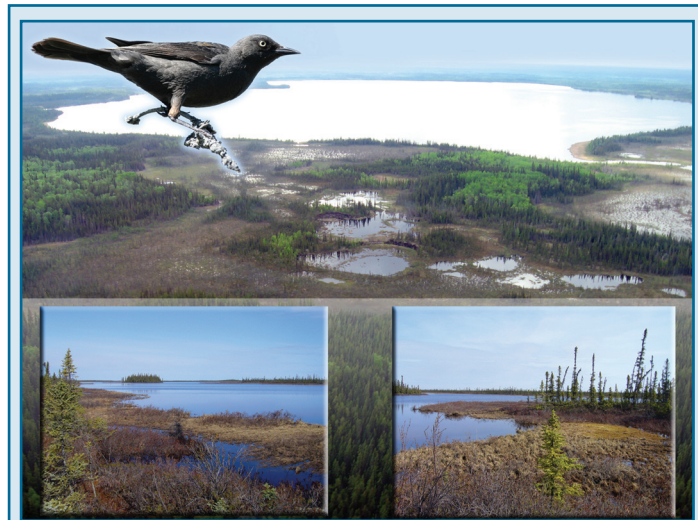
We wanted to know if Rusty Blackbirds had declined in the NWT as much as they have in other parts of Canada. We used historical data collected by LGL Environmental Ltd for the proposed Arctic Gas Pipeline. (This data was entered into the Checklist Survey database approximately 5 years ago.)

We revisited the sites from the 1970s in 2006 expecting to see a large decline in the number of Rusty Blackbirds observed. However, we ended up observing birds at about the same number of lakes as in the 1970s.

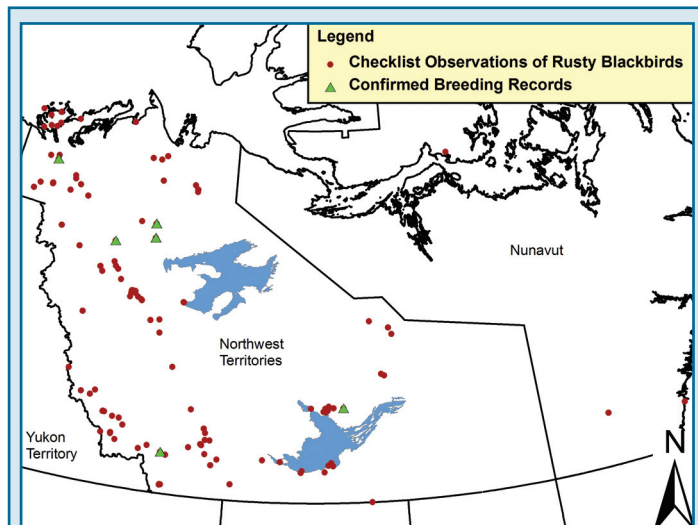
So what does this mean for Rusty Blackbird conservation and management? From our research, Rusty Blackbird occurrence has changed little in the Mackenzie Valley in the past 30 years. Where are the declines occurring? We are not sure, but several data sources may help explain the overall decline.

Some evidence from the southern boreal forest indicates that Rusty Blackbirds have disappeared from large regions of their former breeding range. Recent surveys of wetlands in the western boreal seem to confirm this. Only 14 of 937 wetlands from western Manitoba to north-central Alberta were occupied by Rusty Blackbirds.

For a copy of the research paper, visit Avian Conservation & Ecology at www.ace-eco.org



Rusty Blackbird and typical wetland habitat in NWT.
(Photos: Rusty Blackbird, S. Denault; Shorelines, K. Hobson; Aerial Shots, C. Machtans)



Checklist observations of Rusty Blackbirds in NT/NU up to 2006. Help us learn more about Rusty Blackbirds by sending us observations from spring or fall migration, breeding records, or casual sightings.

Rusty Blackbirds observed in the Mackenzie Valley:

1970s - Observed at 30/45 lakes

2006 - Observed at 26/45 lakes (adjusted for sampling effort)

2006 Checklist Birders Hall of Fame

Thanks to everyone who submitted checklists in 2006. We extend our appreciation by devoting this part of the newsletter to listing persons who submitted data in the past year. Only primary observers are listed.

Soheil Zendeh
Brain Zawadski
Gerry Wright
Leslie Wakelyn
Dave Wilderspin
Steve VanWilgenburg
Lisa-Jo Van den Scott
Richard Thomas
Doug Tate
Doug Stern
Wayne Starling
Vern Stanton
Kim Schlosser
Robert Schaefer
Carl Savignac
Rand Rudland
Lynne Rollins
Philip Robinson
Jim Richards
Bob Reid
Jennie Rausch

Bruce Rattray
Richard Popko
Damian Power
Damian Panayi
Joachim Obst
Erica Nol
Ian McDonald
Jay McConnell
Colin McCann
Chad McCallum
Stuart MacMillan
Mike Matou
Craig Machtans
Israel Mablick
Jim Mayerle
John Lucas
Norman Kudlak
Richard Knapton
Dennis Kaleta
Vicky Johnston
Billy Jacobson

Katie Hodson
Brad Heath
Chris Grooms
Martin Gebauer
Charles Francis
Alan Fehr
Kyle Elliot
Pat Dunn
Chris Doupe
Lynne Dickson
Samuel Denault
Sam de Beer
Marcel Cholo
Nicole Chatel
Suzanne Carriere
Susan & Mike Bryan
Malkolm Boothroyd
Claudio Bianchini
Olivier Barden
Patricia Baldwin
Lindsay Armer

Online Data Entry

In previous newsletters we reported that we were working toward an online data entry and access system. We have not given up! The system is fully developed, but there are still a few problem areas. We will keep you posted with new developments.



Photographs of notable observations from 2006:
[Left] This Golden-crowned Sparrow was at a feeder in Norman Wells in May. (Photo: Richard Popko);
[Right] A Northern Mockingbird was observed in the town of Fort Simpson in June and again in August. (Photo: Doug Tate)

Questions? Suggestions? Contact Us!

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