



## Cameron D. Eckert

Northerners put up with the cold but love the snow. The same is true for northern birds that use snow to their advantage to survive intensely cold conditions. The delight that greeted southern Yukon's copious late-fall snow turned to disbelief when an early December melt set in. The remainder of the winter saw very little snow, with one nasty cold snap toward the end of the season. Northwest Territories experienced the warmest winter on record: temperatures for the period were about 6° C above average, with the Slave River valley in the southeast experiencing the greatest increase over seasonal norms. A few unusual bird records may be attributable to these temperatures. Our appreciation, as always, goes to the diligent contributors who seek out signs of bird life during the long dark season.

## WATERFOWL THROUGH OWLS

The traditional wintering flock of Mallards at McIntyre Cr. wetlands in Whitehorse, s. Yukon numbered 22 on 26 Dec (CE). A male Lesser Scaup at Carcross, s. Yukon 9-17 Dec (CE; HG, RH; DK; PS) provided a rare winter record. A count of 9 Common Eiders was made on the Rankin Inlet, Nunavut C.B.C. 27 Dec (BZ). The waters below the Whitehorse dam, s. Yukon have proven to be the Region's winter hotspot for Barrow's Goldeneye; an ad. male seen there 29 Dec-31 Jan (BB; ph. HG) provided the only report of the season. Yellowknife's surprise C.B.C. bird was a lone Bufflehead on the Yellowknife R. 2 Jan (fide VJ). The count of 58 Willow Ptarmigan on the Norman Wells C.B.C. 27 Dec (RP) was up slightly from previous years and furnished the high total for the Northwest Territories counts. The Willow Ptarmigan count (7) narrowly edged out Common Raven (4) as the more common of the two species on the Arvi-

at, Nunavut C.B.C. 1 Jan (fide MS). Rankin Inlet, Nunavut reported the only Rock Ptarmigan, with 4 on 27 Dec (fide BZ), and the only Sharp-tailed Grouse recorded were at Normal Wells, NWT, with 4 on 27 Dec (fide RP).

A late Bald Eagle was seen during an aerial moose survey near the Northwest Territories/Alberta border w. of Ft. Smith, NWT 12 Dec (LG). The Yukon's ever-reliable wintering pair of Bald Eagles was right on cue at McIntyre Cr. for the 26 Dec Whitehorse C.B.C. (CE). Northern Goshawks seen in the Sahtu region, NWT included one on 9 Dec at Prohibition Cr., one eating a freshly killed Snowshoe Hare 7 Jan at Vermillion Cr., and one on 6 Feb at Norman Wells airport (RP). Unusual in winter was a dark-morph Gyrfalcon at Norman Wells 7 Jan (DF). Southern Yukon seemed poised for a strong showing of Northern Hawk Owls until the rapid melt in

## WOODPECKERS THROUGH WEAVER FINCHES

A Pileated Woodpecker seen during count week in Yellowknife, NWT (fide VJ) provided a rare winter record. A Northern Shrike, scarce in winter, was noted at Shallow Bay, s. Yukon 2 Dec (CM). A Steller's Jay at Tagish, s. Yukon 14 Feb+ (CA, CR) may be the same one that has been seen in the area for the past few years. It's a lonely life for the single Black-billed Magpie in Norman Wells, NWT, which has been counted on the C.B.C. for the past five years (RP). Yellowknife continues its reign as the Region's "Raven Capital," with a count of 1218 on the 2 Jan C.B.C. (fide VJ); Whitehorse was a close runner-up, with 1075 on 26 Dec (fide WN); and Nunavut's highest total was turned in by Cambridge Bay, 300 km n. of the Arctic Circle, with 54 on 14 Dec (BZ). Nunavut participants in the Great Backyard Bird Count (17-20 Feb) from Artic Bay, Iqaluit, and Kugluktuk reported Common Raven as the lone species seen (fide GBBC website). Mountain Chickadee is highly local-



The Yukon's first Northern Mockingbird, discovered in Whitehorse in November 2005, proved elusive until 19 December, when it finally posed for this photograph. Apparently, it survived until mid-January. Photograph by Cameron D. Eckert.

early Dec severely reduced the snow cover; as snow conditions slowly improved, a few were seen in the Whitehorse area, and 3 were recorded on the Haines Junction C.B.C. 27 Dec (fide DH). In Northwest Territories, single Northern Hawk Owls were reported at Norman Wells the last week of Dec (RP), at Hay River for much of the winter (BL), and at Ft. Simpson 25 & 27 Feb (PK, RK; JT). A Snowy Owl, first seen in Nov, lingered long enough to provide a C.B.C. record at Norman Wells, NWT 27 Dec (RP).

ized in the Region, occurring only in s. Yukon; C.B.C. totals this year included 5 in Carcross 17 Dec (fide DK), one at Marsh Lake 18 Dec (fide HG), 3 in Whitehorse 26 Dec (fide WN), and one in Haines Junction on 27 Dec (fide DH). A Red-breasted Nuthatch, a winter rarity in Northwest Territories, was at Ft. Smith through the season (SS, WS).

It has been just over 10 years since the last winter report of Golden-crowned Kinglet; this year, a count of 5 was made on the Carcross C.B.C. 17 Dec (fide DK), and 5 were



This Song Sparrow, first seen in Whitehorse in autumn 2005 (here 16 December), provided the Yukon's first winter record and was a hardy bird, surviving a cold spell with temperatures down to  $-40$  degrees C. Photograph by Cameron D. Eckert.

noted on the lower slopes of Montana Mt. at Carcross 28 Feb (ph. CE). The Yukon's winter prize, a Northern Mockingbird, first spotted 13 Nov, finally stayed in one place long enough for a photograph 19 Dec (ph. CE, PH, HG); it was seen infrequently through 14 Jan (CE; GP; AS, CS) but not thereafter. The Region's only reported American Robin lingered long enough to be recorded on the Ft. Smith, NWT C.B.C. 19 Dec (JM). Bohemian Waxwings wintered in Ft. Simpson, NWT, where 16 were on the C.B.C. 17 Dec (JC, JO). Large flocks of many hundreds of Bohemian Waxwings seen in Whitehorse, s. Yukon from late fall through early winter had all but disappeared by the 26 Dec C.B.C.; a late winter



Extremely rare in winter, a few Golden-crowned Kinglets were noted around Carcross in southern Yukon in winter 2005–2006 (here 28 February 2006). Photograph by Cameron D. Eckert.

flock of 30 in Dawson 28 Feb (ML) may have been a vanguard of spring.

Rare sparrows in Whitehorse, s. Yukon were a Song Sparrow first reported in late fall that apparently survived through the winter

(ph. CE; HG) and a White-throated Sparrow 26 Dec–18 Jan (MW; ph. HG; AR; HS). White-crowned Sparrow reports, all from s. Yukon, included an imm. in Whitehorse 8 Dec+ (BaS, BoS; HG), an ad. near Shallow Bay 1 Dec+ (CM, KO), and an ad. in Whitehorse 26 Dec (CO, HG). Dark-eyed Juncos were reported in small numbers in the Whitehorse area and Teslin, s. Yukon; elsewhere in the Region, 4 were recorded on the Norman Wells C.B.C. 27 Dec (*vide* RP); 3 were at Nahanni Butte, NWT through the winter (GB, MV); one was recorded on the Mayo, cen. Yukon C.B.C. 29 Dec (*vide* MOD); and most impressive was one that survived all winter in Dawson, cen. Yukon, where temperatures got down to  $-46^{\circ}$  C (ML). Small numbers of Snow Buntings were reported across s. Yukon through the season.

A Pine Grosbeak was picked from the top of a spruce tree and eaten by a Common Raven in Whitehorse, s. Yukon 16 Feb (MW). The bumper crop of White Spruce cones likely contributed to higher-than-average numbers of Pine Grosbeaks around Hay River, NWT (BL) and Ft. Simpson, NWT (DT, m.ob.). Red Crossbills were seen in higher-than-normal numbers through the season in Whitehorse e. to Teslin, s. Yukon. The abundant White Spruce cone crop in s. Yukon and sw. Northwest Territories attracted high numbers of White-winged Crossbills. Redpoll numbers were very low throughout much of the Yukon, and the typical late-winter build-up never materialized. Hoary Redpolls were common in Ft. Simpson, NWT in early winter, with 216 counted on the 17 Dec C.B.C.

(*vide* DT); however, both Hoary and Common Redpolls became much less common as winter progressed. A flock of a dozen Hoary Redpolls on 11 Dec was the only non-raven report from Iqaluit, Nunavut during this period (MM). It is not clear if 2 Pine Siskins seen 26 Feb in Teslin, s. Yukon (BeS) were wintering birds or early spring migrants. House Sparrows are found in just a few settlements in the Region, as evidenced by C.B.C. totals of 48 in Ft. Simpson, NWT 17 Dec (*vide* DT), 201 in Yellowknife, NWT 1 Jan (*vide* VJ), and 13 in Arviat, Nunavut 1 Jan (MS).

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A dramatic early December melt likely made life difficult for the numerous Northern Hawk Owls that turned up in southern Yukon in late fall 2005. A few, such as this one photographed 7 January 2006 at Whitehorse, toughed it out and remained in the area for the winter. Photograph by Cameron D. Eckert.

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