

YUKON TO THE ARCTIC OCEAN

June 5, 2010 to June 14, 2010

Guided by
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After a five-year break from the Yukon tour, I'd been really missing the north, and so I was thrilled to be able to bring this tour back in 2010. Because of the wonderful memories I had of tours past, my expectations were high, and I'm pleased to say that the Yukon delivered and met or exceeded my expectations on nearly every level. I'm already looking forward to the next time I lead this trip!

The "big" city of Whitehorse (as big as the cities get up here) was our gateway to the Yukon, and we kicked things off with a day of birding around the city. We started off with some excitement too, -a hot lead on some nesting Boreal Owls. Well the owls didn't show (apparently they had just fledged, I found out later), but our lone Spruce Grouse- a female walking warily through the woods nest to the road- and our only pair of Red Crossbills more than made up for the no-shows. We then headed up the slopes of Mt McIntyre for some super views and some alpine birding. With the mild winter and early spring the Yukon had been experiencing, it was a bit surprising that the "Timberline" Brewer's Sparrows didn't yet seem to be on territory. But no matter, as the other two main targets, Golden-crowned Sparrow and Dusky Flycatcher both put on excellent shows.

Further north, we spent a few days in the charming town of Dawson, in the heart of the Klondike. And from here we made our first exploration of the Dempster Highway, that fantastic ribbon of road that winds its way north all the way to Inuvik, well above the Arctic Circle. The Dempster is undoubtedly the main draw of this tour, and one of the most spectacular stretches - the Tombstone region in the Southern Ogilvie Mountains- is within an easy drive from Dawson. This section of the road brought us to some of our most exciting birds; Northern Hawk-owls, Golden Eagles, Long-tailed Jaegers, and Smith's Longspurs all showed up here first, and we had fantastic encounters with all of them. We also found our only American Dipper and Wandering Tattler of the tour here, as well as our only Northern Shrike, laboring over the stunted willows with a rather hefty vole in its claws!

The Tombstone region may be one of the most beautiful stretches of the road, but that doesn't mean its not worth driving further north. As we made our way across the Blackstone Uplands to Eagle Plains, and beyond to Wright's Pass at the Yukon/NWT border, Rock and Willow Ptarmigan, a gorgeous male American Golden-plover, a nesting Gyrfalcon, and a gorgeous pair of Northern Wheatears were among the avian highlights, while caribou, Dall's Sheep, a River Otter and a Grizzly Bear helped bulk up our mammal lists.

The northern "city" of Inuvik marks the endpoint of our tour, as well as the literal end of the road. We arrived there in weather hot enough to please even Sam McGee, only to have it turn much more arctic-like two days later. That cold, rainy weather put a bit of a damper on our Mackenzie River boat trip and quest for Gray-headed Chickadee, but the previous day's scenic flight out over the delta and onto the north coast was nothing short of spectacular. The scenery from the air was breathtaking, and it certainly didn't hurt to have great views of Muskox and another Grizzly on Herschel Island. Finally, our north coast landing at Shingle Point gave us a bunch of nice sightings, from velvety Pacific Loons to a marauding dark-morph Parasitic Jaeger to flat-faced Hoary Redpolls and a pesky pipit. All in all it was a day to remember!

This was a wonderful return to the Yukon for John, and me. We just want to thank you all for signing up and making the tour a "go". It was a lot of fun sharing the birds with you, seeing Jan get her much-anticipated Varied Thrush, watching Bob and Kit meet up with their nemesis Hawk-owls, and proving to Heather and Marty that pipits really do exist! Helping Andy and Ellen work on their Yukon big year list, working out Canadian crossword puzzle clues with Norma, and reminiscing about the '05 trip with Peter,

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were just a few of the great memories I'll be taking home from this trip. And I mustn't forget Anne's close encounter with a Red-backed Vole (or her equally close encounter with "Smokies";-) While I must admit that I'm disappointed in all of you for not joining me for a Sourtoe Cocktail (you were so close, Heather!), the fact that you all made this trip so much fun has helped me find forgiveness. Looking forward to seeing you all again real soon. Jay.

List total: 128 bird taxa and 19 mammal taxa

*If marked to left of list, * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic,
N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant*

Triplist file: yuk10

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*)

Our only ones were the only waterfowl present at Shallow Bay, which is sometimes teeming with ducks. Most White-fronted Geese move through the southern Yukon in mid-May, en route to their breeding grounds further north, so these birds were likely just late migrants.

SNOW GOOSE (*Chen caerulescens*)

We also had just one pair of these, though they were seen only by the folks on the right side of the plane as we flew over Herschel Island.

N CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*)

Few of these were seen away from the Mackenzie Delta. In fact, the only ones outside of the delta were the nine birds that were present almost daily on the playing fields just outside of Dawson.

N TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*)

A couple of different pairs south of Dawson, including a pair on a nest at Gravel Lake. The distant swans seen on Chapman Lake on the drive back south could have been either of the two species.

N TUNDRA SWAN (*Cygnus columbianus*)

Our first were a pair of birds on the shore of the Arctic Red River as we took the ferry across the mighty Mackenzie. We saw many more as we flew over the delta, including numerous birds on nests.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

Mainly south of Dawson, with quite a few on Coot (aka Stinky) Lake near Pelly Crossing. The furthest north we encountered Gadwalls was on Two Moose Lake. FYI, the name Coot Lake is the one used by the book "Birds of the Yukon Territory", and is the name I'll use in this report.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

Easily the most numerous dabbling duck on the tour, with large numbers seen daily throughout.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Small numbers were seen throughout the tours, mainly drakes, which is to be expected during the nesting season.

BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*)

Mainly in the south, though we had a few birds along the first 100 km of the Dempster.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

After wigeon, probably the second most common dabbling duck of the tour, seen almost daily and with several large concentrations of drakes at some of the lakes.

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

Seen on only a few days and on a few lakes, with the largest number probably being about 15-20 birds on Lake Laberge.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (*Anas crecca*)

Quite common everywhere with the exception of the Mackenzie Delta, where we saw very few.

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*)

Present in small numbers on a few large lakes, as far north as Two Moose Lake.

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*)

Not a common duck in the Yukon; about a dozen birds on Coot Lake were the only ones on the tour.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)

Seen commonly through most of the tour, though we failed to note any in the Mackenzie Delta.

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*)

A couple of birds on Gravel Lake, though this species was more common on some of the tundra ponds much further north. Admittedly, once we'd had good looks at both scaup species, we didn't spend a lot of time sorting them out.

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

Generally the more numerous scaup species, especially in the south.

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*)

One or two birds were present on Two Moose Lake on each visit there, with just a few birds elsewhere. A pair of dark-winged scoters during our choppy Mackenzie Delta boat trip were likely this species, though it's possible they were actually Black Scoter which are rare in the region.

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (*Melanitta fusca*)

Nicest views came on Two Moose Lake where we had good scope views of a drake. There was also a pair seen during the boat trip and quite a few on Rock Island Lake on the extension.

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*)

With the early spring this year, there weren't many lingering in the south. A lone bird on Coot Lake was our only Yukon record away from Shingle Point (where there were a few pairs). All other sightings were in the NWT.

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*)

None in the Mackenzie Delta, but otherwise commonly seen throughout.

BARROW'S GOLDENEYE (*Bucephala islandica*)

Two beautiful males were scoped on Rock Island Lake on the return drive back; sorry Heather :-)

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*)

A group of six birds were seen on the Blackstone River on the drive north, a single female along Engineer Creek on the southward return.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*)

A lone female was at the Quartz Road wetlands on our first day around Whitehorse. Elsewhere we saw just one pair on a pond at Shingle Point.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

A rather uncommon, local breeder in the Yukon. Our first were on a small roadside pond south of Pelly Crossing, and subsequently we saw fair numbers on both Coot Lake and Rock Island Lake.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

SPRUCE GROUSE (*Falciptennis canadensis*)

A female that showed very well south of Whitehorse was a nice first bird of the tour, even though we were actually there looking for Boreal Owls. Incidentally, I learned at tour's end that the owls had already fledged, so we were about a day too late for them.

WILLOW PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus lagopus*)

A close roadside male in the Tombstone area was our first, though certainly not our only one. Shingle Point hosted good numbers of male Willows, calling, displaying, and chasing each other around. Our only female was with her mate on the road south of Eagle Plains during the drive back south.

ROCK PTARMIGAN (*Lagopus muta*)

With females on nests by this time of year, this species can be pretty tough to find, so we were lucky to find a couple of males in the tundra north of Eagle Plains. The first just couldn't refrain from croaking softly, giving away his location in a patch of roadside willows, and we managed to herd him up to the edge of the road for some great views and photos. Folks in the second van saw a second, whiter, male a bit further north.

Gaviidae (Loons)

RED-THROATED LOON (*Gavia stellata*)

We never did connect with one of these loons on the water this trip, but we did have a single bird fly over calling at Shingle Point, then a group of 4 the following day flying over the Mackenzie River on the outskirts of Inuvik.

PACIFIC LOON (*Gavia pacifica*)

It may not have been such a good idea to stop for our first one on a traditional nesting pond near the Mackenzie River ferry, as it put us behind a large truck and resulted in a very dusty finish to our drive to Inuvik. Had we only known we would have such good views later on at Shingle Point and around Inuvik.

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*)

A couple of birds on Riser Lake, and another on Chapman Lake, where it's likely there was a nest on the island in the middle of the lake.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

HORNED GREBE (*Podiceps auritus*)

Seen in small numbers on a number of lakes in the Dawson region.

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*)

Just a couple of birds on the main tour, then quite a few during the return drive on Rock Island Lake.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

N BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Seen almost daily, with nests right in Whitehorse and in the Blackstone uplands. Impressive were the large number at the Whitehorse landfill, where a few birds posed beautifully, allowing us to get photos with no garbage in the background!

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

Small numbers throughout, including a male on the north coast at Shingle Point.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Most of the ones we saw were the all-dark Harlan's form, which is the Yukon's most common form of Red-tailed Hawk. But a bird in the Eagle Plains area that initially had us confused was finally identified as a light morph Harlan's, supposedly the least common form of Red-tail here!

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

It was a good year for Golden Eagles, and we probably saw at least a dozen in total. Memorable was the one near Tombstone being mobbed by a Merlin and a Short-eared Owl, a close one circling over the road near Wright's Pass on the drive back.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

One flashed across the road in front of the vans as we drove north to Dawson, and a second one was seen by all but the guides as we prepared our picnic breakfast at the Klondike River campground.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*)

Two birds were seen in the Tombstone region, both of them playing David to two different goliath Golden Eagles. Talk about feisty!

N GYRFALCON (*Falco rusticolus*)

A well-known nest site at km 158 on the Dempster gave us our only gyrs. On the way north, Ellen spotted one perched on a high clifftop and we all saw it take off and circle above the cliff a couple of times before disappearing. Views were better on the drive back south, as a gyr took off from the nest and circled quite low a few times before gaining altitude and disappearing.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

Andy and Ellen saw one on the cliffs near Dawson on a post-dinner stroll on our first night there. Unfortunately, the experience wasn't repeated on either of the next two nights, though it was fun riding the ferry across the Klondike River.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

* AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

We heard a couple calling from the reeds at Rock Island Lake during the return drive to Whitehorse.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*)

The sight and sound of three birds flying low overhead as we ate our picnic breakfast near Dawson got one day off to a wonderful start. Further along, Heather spotted a flock of 11 birds winging by as we waited for the Peel River ferry, and quite a few were spotted during our scenic flight over the Mackenzie delta.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

N AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER (*Pluvialis dominica*)

The early spring in the Yukon meant that many species that are usually displaying and easily seen at this time of year were already nesting and tough to find, this bird being a good case in point. A lone male was seen at the same site on both the northbound and southbound trips (and we stumbled across the nest on the way south, but where was the female?). The only other bird was flushed by Norma as we climbed up to the first ridge on Surfbird Mountain.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Only in the south, with three birds at Quart Road wetlands in Whitehorse, and a couple on the marge of Lake Laberge.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

A few birds scattered throughout, including two or three along the Mackenzie during our boat trip.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*)

Singles at several sites, with wonderful performances by a couple of birds calling and displaying directly overhead. The first one at McIntyre Marsh was the best, though, as it dropped into the marsh right in front of us after one display flight.

WANDERING TATTLER (*Tringa incana*)

Incredibly tough to see in its preferred habitat along rocky upland rivers. Several of us had already scoured one such river in the Tombstone region when Ellen picked out this cryptic bird feeding among the rocks. Nice spotting, Ellen!

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

Surprisingly few, with just a couple of sightings at Meadow Lake and along the lower part of the Dempster.

UPLAND SANDPIPER (*Bartramia longicauda*)

Three distant birds at Lake Laberge were bettered when Jan picked out a couple more in the tundra north of Eagle Plains. A third bird here treated us to a performance of its display flight, directly overhead. I just can't get used to seeing this species on the arctic tundra.

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Marty picked out a lone Whimbrel on the shores of Lake Laberge, was a late migrant and one of the few migrant shorebirds seen on the trip. Our only other ones were a trio on their breeding grounds in the tundra north of the Arctic Circle.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*)

We heard a few displaying in the Dawson region and along the lower part of the Dempster, but the only one we saw was also displaying right up on the Arctic coast at Shingle Point.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

Quite a few of these beautiful, endearing shorebirds were seen whirling around in tundra ponds from the Tombstone region north to Shingle Point.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*)

Where were all the Bonies? We saw just a single bird perched in a tree alongside Riser Lake.

N MEW GULL (*Larus canus*)

Numerous throughout the tour, with nice views of nesting birds at several sites, including the largest Yukon colony right in Whitehorse at the Quartz Road wetlands.

N HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)

Everywhere but up near the Arctic coast, this is the common large gull at this time of year. A couple of folks even found some nesting on the cliffs at Dawson. A small number of "Nelson's" Gulls, a hybrid between this species and Glaucous, were also found at the Inuvik landfill.

GLAUCOUS GULL (*Larus hyperboreus*)

Fair numbers of these large gulls in the Inuvik region and at Shingle Point. Most of the birds were in adult plumage, though we did see one first-summer bird at the Inuvik landfill.

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*)

Single birds were seen on Schwatka Lake near Whitehorse and in the Blackstone uplands, and fair numbers during the scenic flight over the delta, but we never did get nice close-up views of this species.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers)

PARASITIC JAEGER (*Stercorarius parasiticus*)

One (or possibly two) dark-morph bird showed beautifully as it hunted over the tundra at Shingle Point.

I LONG-TAILED JAEGER (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)

Quite numerous this trip, with a high count of 10 birds loafing on the tundra at Shingle Point, and a feisty pair chasing off a pair of Golden Eagles at Tombstone on the drive back.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

I ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*)

Jan spotted a pair on a side street in Whitehorse as we made the final approach to our hotel at tour's end.

Strigidae (Owls)

SNOWY OWL (*Bubo scandiacus*)

A couple of birds were seen from the plane as we flew low over Herschel Island.

N NORTHERN HAWK OWL (*Surnia ulula*)

Superb close views of a pair that were almost certainly nesting (they'd been present for at least several days) near the new Tombstone Interpretive Center, putting an end to the constant scanning of spruce tops. One of Bob's few lifer possibilities, and this sighting finally ended his long run of near-misses with hawk-owls!

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*)

Our first was seen as it dive-bombed a Golden Eagle several times before disappearing over a ridge top in the Tombstone region. Three other birds were noted in the tundra north of the Arctic Circle as we headed towards Inuvik.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megasceryle alcyon*)

A single along Fish Lake Road near Whitehorse, and a couple of birds along the lower stretches of the Dempster.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*)

A male in aspen woodland near Lake Laberge appeared to be at an active nest hole. Our only other bird was seen by some at the Klondike River Campground.

N HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

One at a nest hole at Gravel Lake was initially mistaken for a Three-toed Woodpecker. On the drive back we also saw a couple of birds at the feeders at Mom's Bakery near Lake Laberge. John remarked on how large these Hairies appeared, and with good reason: they belong to the largest race, septentrionalis.

AMERICAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER (*Picoides dorsalis*)

Andy found our only one while the guides prepared a picnic breakfast one morning at the Klondike River Campground. Fortunately we were able to relocate the bird and get pretty good views, though it would have been nice if it had stuck around a little longer.

N NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*)

Fairly common throughout (even seen as far north as Inuvik), with active nests at a couple of sites, including a wooden post right outside the Braeburn Bakery (home of humongous, mouth-watering cinnamon buns!) Yukon birds are all of the "yellow-shafted" variety.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus cooperi*)

Our only sighting was of a calling bird ("Quick! Three beers!") in boreal forest along the Klondike River stretch of the Dempster.

WESTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus sordidulus*)

Nice views of a close bird in aspen forest near Lake Laberge. We also heard this species several times as far north as Gravel Lake.

ALDER FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax alnorum*)

Pretty common in wet areas up into the Klondike River region of the Dempster. Aside from Say's Phoebe, this was the most-northerly recorded flycatcher on the trip.

* LEAST FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax minimus*)

One was calling from an aspen stand across the highway from the Shallow Bay track.

HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax hammondi*)

Nice scope views of a couple of these small Empids at the Klondike River Campground.

DUSKY FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax oberholseri*)

Numerous this year on Mt. McIntyre, but they were pretty furtive and it took us some work to get good views.

SAY'S PHOEBE (*Sayornis saya*)

Great looks at a couple of these attractive phoebes in the Lake Laberge region. There was also a bird present on the Gyrfalcon nesting cliff at Km 158, the most northerly flycatcher we encountered on this trip.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

N NORTHERN SHRIKE (*Lanius excubitor*)

We only saw one, but what a great sighting! As we scanned for dippers along a rocky river in the Tombstone region, a shrike flew in and perched briefly atop a willow before dropping to the ground out of sight. A little while later it flew out with a vole in its claws, and we watched as it flew with labored wing beats, carrying its prize a long way across the scrubby landscape, undoubtedly to a nest full of hungry chicks.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

N GRAY JAY (*Perisoreus canadensis*)

Pretty common throughout, with many birds already accompanied by their fledged youngsters. These birds really are early nesters. We learned along the way that Gray Jays can give an uncanny imitation of Northern Goshawk, raising hopes of that large Accipiter on a few occasions!

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE (*Pica hudsonia*)

Only in the south, where we saw small numbers around Whitehorse and Lake Laberge.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Abundant throughout, as the official bird of the Yukon Territory should be!

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*)

*We had a hard time locating our first on Mt McIntyre, until I looked up and saw it displaying and singing directly overhead. We then watched it plummet to the ground, landing on the nearby tundra for excellent views. We also heard (and saw on the drive back) Horned Larks at the Arctic Circle crossing, and at Shingle Point. Yukon birds belong to the very whitish race, *articola*, also known as "Pallid" Horned Lark.*

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

Common and seen daily as far north as the Klondike River region of the Dempster.

N VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOW (*Tachycineta thalassina*)

This beautiful swallow was also common in the south, and we found a couple of nests in the Lake Laberge region.

N BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*)

Though they occur right on up to the Arctic coast, all our records were in the Whitehorse region. It was especially fun watching several birds excavating nests in banks high above the Yukon River. The dirt was really flying out of the holes!

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

A single bird (and possibly a second one) was flying over the tundra just south Wright's Pass and the Yukon/NWT border. There are very few records of Barn Swallow from the Central Yukon, and this may be one of the first for the Yukon portion of the Dempster Highway.

N CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*)

Easily the most common and numerous swallow on the tour, and only missed in the Inuvik region. My favorites were the ones nesting on the ferry at the Mackenzie River crossing. The birds followed the ferry along its triangular route, gathering mud at each of the points of call before riding the ferry or following it across to the next.

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*)

A couple of records near Whitehorse included an active nest in a nest box near Shallow Bay. We also had a single bird at Gravel Lake that was singing its spring song, which sounds significantly different from the song of birds elsewhere. For those with a musical background, Yukon birds sing a "mournful-sounding minor second" as opposed to eastern birds' "cheery sounding major second" (quote from "Birds of the Yukon Territory").

BOREAL CHICKADEE (*Poecile hudsonicus*)

We kicked off the tour with excellent studies of a couple at Nick's feeders south of Whitehorse, then heard these birds several times along the Dempster, and saw a few more south of Eagle Plains and near Dawson on the drive back south.

Cinclidae (Dippers)

N AMERICAN DIPPER (Cinclus mexicanus)

After initial scans of a rushing river in the southern Ogilvies along the Dempster yielded nothing, in quick succession we found the tattler, the northern shrike, and this bird, all three of which we saw nowhere else on the tour. The dipper entered a large culvert under the road several times, and John had a look and found an active nest just inside the culvert's opening.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

* **RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (Regulus calendula)**

Though heard daily from Whitehorse up to the Dawson region, we never did see one.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (Oenanthe oenanthe)

This was probably our best experience ever with this species on this tour. Driving up to a rocky slope at the Yukon/NWT border, we almost immediately spotted a male sitting on a fence, and shortly thereafter saw its mate as well. For the next few minutes we had several beautiful close views as the male foraged among some nearby boulders. The birds remained nearby throughout our picnic lunch at the site, and were likely nesting nearby. We were pretty much right at the border, so I'm not 100% certain whether the birds were in the Yukon or NWT, but I think we can safely add them to both lists;-)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD (Sialia currucoides)

At least three birds (two males and a female) were seen beautifully in partially open, grassy habitat near Lake Laberge.

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE (Myadestes townsendi)

At least half a dozen birds were encountered on the slopes of Mt. McIntyre on our first day. Thereafter we had singles on each of the following three days in the Tintina Trench area near the start of the Dempster.

GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH (Catharus minimus)

Fairly common by voice in scrub willow patches in the Southern Ogilvies. Our only sighting was a bit further north along the Dempster, in the Northern Ogilvie sector, where we had good scope studies of a single bird.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (Catharus ustulatus)

Aside from American Robin, probably the most commonly recorded thrush species, with lots heard, and a few seen, pretty much throughout, wherever spruce trees occurred.

* **HERMIT THRUSH (Catharus guttatus)**

Heard regularly in the Dawson region and along the lower part of the Dempster, but we never did see one.

AMERICAN ROBIN (Turdus migratorius)

One of the most abundant species recorded on the tour. We saw robins daily throughout the tour, including in areas of tundra where only a few scrub willows were present.

VARIED THRUSH (Ixoreus naevius)

Wonderful views of a male of this gorgeous thrush along the first part of the Dempster. We tried for it again on the way back down, but never got a good response, and then couldn't locate any on the drive south of Dawson, despite there being plenty of suitable habitat. This was one of Jan's most-wanted birds for the trip.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (Anthus rubescens)

Probably because Marty and Heather were looking so hard for one, we failed to find any until right near the end, where we had excellent views of a single bird among the piles of drift wood on the northern coast at Shingle Point.

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

BOHEMIAN WAXWING (Bombycilla garrulus)

Great looks at a trio of birds fly-catching from treetops at Lake Laberge. A single bird was also seen south of Dawson, and we also found a small group at Rock Island Lake on the drive south.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

TENNESSEE WARBLER (Vermivora peregrina)

There are few records for this species from along the Dempster, so our sighting of a singing male at about km 25 was fairly unusual, though apparently it was a good year for them in the southern Yukon at least

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Vermivora celata*)

Quite common throughout, and we saw or heard this species almost daily, including a couple of birds around Boot Lake in Inuvik.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Dendroica petechia*)

Numerous throughout the tour, and recorded daily, including on the Arctic coastline at Shingle Point.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Dendroica coronata coronata*)

Pretty common throughout, and seen as far north as Inuvik (around Boot Lake).

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER (*Dendroica townsendi*)

Super views of a couple of males at eye-level next to the road in a tall white spruce stand along the lower section of the Dempster. Also heard and seen at the Klondike River Campground.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Dendroica striata*)

Our only sighting was of a singing male atop a tall dead spruce at Lake Laberge. We also heard one along the lower Dempster, and another just outside of Inuvik.

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Seiurus noveboracensis*)

We had a few sightings in the Dawson region, and heard this species on a few other days right on up to Inuvik.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

A couple of birds seen at McIntyre Marsh were our only sightings, though we heard yellowthroats as far north as Gravel Lake.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Wilsonia pusilla*)

Common throughout, including on the Arctic coastline at Shingle Point, but especially numerous in scrub willows near tree line on Mt McIntyre.

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows, and Allies)

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW (*Spizella arborea*)

Known to many of us as a winter resident, this sparrow is common near tree line throughout the Yukon. We saw our first in scrub willows above tree line on Mt. McIntyre, then went on to record them almost daily.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

Pretty common in the south, and seen as far north as around Dawson.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

First seen in open scrubby habitat at the top of Mt. McIntyre, then almost daily in open habitats right up to the north coast.

FOX SPARROW (RED) (*Passerella iliaca zaboria*)

We heard the sweet song of the Fox Sparrow throughout the tour, and added a few nice sightings as well. Fox Sparrow is destined to be split into 4 species someday; the Yukon birds belong to the same group as the ones seen regularly on migration in the east.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*)

Great looks at a couple of birds on our first day up Mt. McIntyre, and heard a couple of other days further north. Our only other sighting came in the Inuvik region.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (GAMBEL'S) (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*)

Very common across the Yukon, and we saw and heard many of these every day.

GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia atricapilla*)

Super looks at a couple of these beautiful sparrows in scrubby willow habitat near tree line on Mt McIntyre. Unfortunately we missed our other target sparrow here ("Timberline" Brewer's Sparrow) which may have been a little late to arrive on territory this year.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED) (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*)

Though the "Cassiar" form of junco also occurs in the Yukon, we only saw birds of the nominate race, which is the common form in most of the territory.

LAPLAND LONGSPUR (*Calcarius lapponicus*)

It took a bit of work, but we finally located a couple of fine males in tundra north of Eagle Plains. There were also a few birds present in the open tundra at Shingle Point.

SMITH'S LONGSPUR (*Calcarius pictus*)

We struck out completely on our first attempt to find these gorgeous birds, but a retry two days later netted us incredible views of at least 3 stunning males. The males seemed reasonably tolerant of each other, and their breeding strategy might have something to do with that. Females apparently mate with 2 or 3 different males resulting in a clutch of eggs with mixed paternity, and more than one male may also assist in rearing the young at a single nest. Males also mate with several different females. Polygynandrous is the scientific term for this breeding strategy.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

This was a heard only species (McIntyre Marsh) until the final day of the drive back south when we saw a couple of males at Rock Island Lake.

RUSTY BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus carolinus*)

A single bird played hard to get at McIntyre Marsh, and some distant ones were at Gravel Lake. But a small roadside marsh south of Dawson gave us our best views of one of these that responded and showed quite well. Despite the dust on the last part of the Dempster, through the Mackenzie delta region, we also saw quite a number along that stretch of road.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*)

Seen only on the drive back south. We first had a backlit pair that dropped in below us at the Peel River Valley overlook on the Eagle Plains, then had far better views of a rather tame male on the feeders at Mom's Bakery near Lake Laberge.

* PURPLE FINCH (*Carpodacus purpureus*)

Heard only during a stop near Lake Laberge.

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*)

Another highlight of our unsuccessful Boreal Owl hunt south of Whitehorse was our only pair of Red Crossbills, the male of which teed up nicely atop a nearby spruce for long scope studies.

* WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL (*Loxia leucoptera*)

Heard a couple of times near Dawson, but we never got onto this species this trip.

COMMON REDPOLL (*Acanthis flammea*)

Heard often along the Dempster, with lots of good sightings, too. Most of the males seen were bright pink on the breast, much more intense than the pink on Hoary Redpolls, though John pointed out one Common that was quite pale and approached Hoary in plumage, if not in shape.

HOARY REDPOLL (*Acanthis hornemanni*)

At this time of year, Hoary Redpoll is pretty much only known from the north coast, and that's where we saw our only ones. The wind made it difficult but we ultimately got good views of the birds' pale plumage with few streaks, and the distinctive "pushed-in" faces. Apparently even here on the north coast, Common Redpoll is the more numerous species, outnumbering Hoary by about 3:1.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

I HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

Andy and Ellen saw some in Whitehorse the day before the tour, and Jan found one on our return to Whitehorse at tour's end.

Mammals

COLLARED PIKA (*Ochotona collaris*)

*We had some discussion about the pronunciation of this animal's name, and it appears that both are correct. While the original pronunciation is "peeka", in the USA, this has been altered to "pie-ka". However you say it, we had great looks at one that Peter spotted in the scree slope opposite the Gyrfalcon nest. One other note, though here treated as a separate species from the more southerly American Pika (*Ochotona princeps*), some authorities treat them all as a single species.*

SNOWSHOE HARE (*Lepus americanus*)

Good numbers of these were about, raising our hopes of seeing a lynx, but we had to be satisfied just the prey.

LEAST CHIPMUNK (*Tamias minimus*)

A couple of sightings on Mt McIntyre.

ARCTIC GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus parryii*)

Lots of these were seen, including one right on the Arctic Circle.

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

A common denizen of conifer forests; we saw them most days.

BEAVER (*Castor canadensis*)

There were plenty of signs of beavers about, but we didn't see our first until the boat trip on the Mackenzie, where we saw a couple. We also saw a pair at the beaver pond near the Tombstone campground on the way back south.

TUNDRA RED-BACKED VOLE (*Clethrionomys rutilus*)

Wonderful looks at one of these attractive voles as it wandered around Ann's feet in search of crumbs dropped during our picnic lunch in the Tombstone region. Incidentally, I looked it up and this is the species of red-backed vole found here, not Gapper's, as we initially thought.

MUSKRAT (*Ondatra zibethica*)

One at Two Moose Lake was our first, and we saw a few more around Inuvik.

NORTH AMERICAN PORCUPINE (*Erethizon dorsatum*)

One appeared on the road ahead of us south of Dawson during the drive back south. Not everyone saw it, so John and I herded it back towards the road, but it wasn't easy... they're much faster than they look!

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*)

On this trip, we saw more of the color phase known as Silver Fox, then of normal red phase animals. Our first one was a beautiful silver just next to the road on the outskirts of Dawson. The next day we found a den of foxes at Two Moose Lake. The parents were a mixed pair, as were the pups (2 red, one silver). Finally another silver was seen on the tundra during the drive back south.

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*)

A lone coyote was scavenging at the Whitehorse land fill, and the folks on the extension saw another one near Lake Laberge.

BLACK BEAR (*Ursus americanus*)

Our only one was a healthy looking individual feeding on the grassy slope below the highway, south of Dawson.

BROWN (INCL. GRIZZLY) BEAR (*Ursus arctos*)

Andy spotted one miles away near Wright's Pass, but by driving a couple of kilometers further along, we were able to get great scope views as it hunted in a patch of scrub willows, standing on its hind legs a few times, and really giving us a great show. A second grizz was seen during our flight over Herschel Island.

RIVER OTTER (*Lutra canadensis*)

Ellen spotted this animal slinking out of the Blackstone River as we drove by an opening in the willows. We quickly reversed back to the opening, and quite a few of us got to see the otter plop back into the water and swim briefly on the surface before diving and disappearing for good.

RINGED SEAL (*Phoca hispida*)

Quite a few on the sea ice during our flight over the north coast.

MOOSE (*Alces alces*)

Well, Two Moose Lake might have been totally moose-less, but there was one that was in view at the same time as the lake, seen from the low ridge on Surfbird Mountain on the drive back. There were 6 other moose seen during the trip, four of which were seen during the flight over the Mackenzie delta.

CARIBOU (*Rangifer caribou*)

A couple of animals were scoped in the Tombstone region as they rested on the lower slopes of Surfbird Mountain, and we had great looks at a much closer one at Shingle Point. There were also quite a few on Herschel Island, and a lone animal on a mountaintop near Tombstone on the drive back south.

MUSKOX (*Ovibos moschatus*)

Super views of a group of about 20, including one small calf, on Herschel.

DALL'S SHEEP (*Ovis dalli*)

Late afternoon is good for these animals as they come down to Engineer Creek (aka Red Creek) to lick up minerals. We saw a total of about 25 animals, including a group of half a dozen rams trundling along a hillside, a couple of them with full curls.