



# Wildlife Watch

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (NORTH SLOPE)  
COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

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## Yukon North Slope Research 2006– 2007

WMAC (NS) reviews proposals for research projects related to wildlife management and ecological monitoring on the Yukon North Slope. Some of these projects are funded through the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. Projects supported by the Council are recommended to Parks Canada, the Yukon Government Department of Environment, and the Canadian Wildlife Service. Reports on the Council's recommendations are given to the Inuvialuit Game Council, the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee (HTC), WMAC(NWT), the Government of the Northwest Territories' Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development and the Environmental Impact Screening Committee.

Recommendations are based on research priorities identified in the Yukon North Slope Long Term Research Plan, the Yukon North Slope Wildlife Conservation and Management Plan, the Porcupine Caribou Management Plan, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) Grizzly Bear Management Plan, meetings with the Aklavik HTC, community consultation at public meetings in Aklavik, and research priorities identified at the Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op Annual Gatherings. WMAC(NS) monitors the progress of the projects and requests status reports and final reports from agencies that receive funding. This newsletter summarizes research projects that were supported and recommended by the Council for 2006-2007.

### Herschel Island Fieldwork

Programs to monitor vegetation, permafrost and wildlife on Herschel Island will continue



over the summer of 2006. In addition to the ongoing programs, Yukon Government researchers will conduct the first measurements of two land slumps close to the settlement area at Pauline Cove. These slumps are increasing in size as the ground thaws at their edges. The intent of the project is to document annual growth of the slumps by measuring changes in their size every year.

Researchers will also be starting a new study to monitor small mammal populations.

The Herschel Island Rangers are responsible for carrying out many of the long-term monitoring programs. Yukon biologists Dorothy Cooley, Catherine Kennedy and Tom Jung will also be involved in the fieldwork this summer. Long-term monitoring is very important in order to learn about changes to the island that may be caused by climate change.

### **Black Guillemot Population Monitoring and Nesting Success at Herschel Island**

The black guillemot is a seabird that nests in a breeding colony on Herschel Island. This is the Yukon's only nesting colony and is one of just a few in the western Arctic. The main nesting site on Herschel Island is the old mission house where the guillemots occupy nest boxes and crevices. There are currently about 60 birds in this colony.

The colony has been monitored for population and nesting productivity since 1986. In recent years, the monitoring has been done by the Herschel Island Territorial Park Rangers, as directed by the Park's Environmental and Resource Monitoring Plan.

Monitoring of the guillemot population and nest success will continue over the summer of 2006. A related activity is to improve the way the nest box surveys and population counts are done. Another study hopes to identify what type of fish the guillemots are eating. In addition, a project to colour band some of the chicks will be started as a way to monitor their survival and dispersal. The methods used in some of this work will be similar to those being used by biologists doing research at Point Barrow, Alaska. Working with the Alaskan researchers will improve our understanding of the ecology of black guillemots across the entire North Slope.

Potential changes in the physical environment associated with climate change and the resulting impact on animal populations are of great concern to the Inuvialuit. The black guillemot colony at Herschel Island provides an opportunity for monitoring, measuring and understanding those changes.

Partners in this project are the Herschel Island Territorial Park Rangers, Cameron Eckert, the Yukon Government's Conservation Biologist and Yukon Regional Biologist Dorothy Cooley.



### **North Coast Rare Species Inventory**

This is the second year of fieldwork to look for and collect rare species of plants, butterflies, birds, snails and small mammals along the Yukon coastal plain. The objective of the study is to gather some baseline inventory information that is needed to monitor the status and distribution of these species. This information is important for monitoring environmental change in the area that may be occurring because of climate change.

In the first year (2005), employees of the Yukon Government and Parks Canada traveled along the Yukon coast by boat from Blow River west to the Alaskan border. During the summer of 2006, biologists will survey the coast from Blow River east to the NWT border. Traveling from Aklavik by boat, the team will set up one

base camp and work out of that site for three days. The fieldwork is being lead by Bruce Bennett, a botanist with NatureServe Yukon (Yukon Government). As in 2005, a resident of Aklavik will be hired to assist with the work.

### **Yukon North Slope Breeding Shorebird Surveys**

This will be the second year of a two-year survey to study shorebirds and other tundra birds on the Yukon North Slope, Mackenzie Delta and Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula. The objective of the program is to record the number and location of nests, and to estimate overall numbers of these birds in the region. As part of an Arctic-wide monitoring program, information on the current status of birds helps biologists track changes in numbers and distribution over time.

The fieldwork in 2006 will expand the total area being covered as part of the survey program. On the Yukon North Slope, biologists will conduct the surveys for six days in early to mid-June. The work is timed for when birds are laying eggs and doing courtship flights. The crew of four will be based at Herschel Island, and will be transported by helicopter to three or four sites each day. The surveys will be conducted on foot.

With its focus on the coastal plain, this project is a valuable complement to the Breeding Bird Survey project in Ivvavik National Park, which only surveys birds at inland locations in the Firth River valley.

This project is being lead by Pam Sinclair (Canadian Wildlife Service, Whitehorse), in partnership with personnel from Parks Canada (Western Arctic Field Unit, Inuvik) and Canadian Wildlife Service (Yellowknife). An Inuvialuit field technician will be hired to work

in the intensive survey camp in the Mackenzie Delta, in June-July.



### **Porcupine Caribou Herd Satellite Location Program**

This is an ongoing cooperative project between a number of wildlife agencies and boards. Thirteen caribou are currently fitted with satellite collars. These collars automatically report the location of the animals and provide biologists with regular information about the timing and routes of the migrations. The location of these collared caribou can be followed on [www.taiga.net/satellite/index.html](http://www.taiga.net/satellite/index.html)

### **Yukon North Slope Grizzly Bear Research Project**

The Yukon Government, Parks Canada, the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee and WMAC (NS) are working together on a six-year study to learn more about grizzly bears on the Yukon North Slope. This is the third year of the study.

The main focus of the summer's work is to set up the first DNA mark-recapture grid. The study will begin with a hair snagging program to survey the number of bears in the study area. Yukon Government biologists Ramona Maraj and Al Baer plan to set up 100 hair trapping stations and will sample each station every nine days from June through to August. Fieldwork in 2006 will also include recovering and replacing any dropped collars, as well as

putting collars on five new bears. Telemetry flights will continue once every two to three weeks throughout the active season to get information on grizzly bear habitat use and survival. More information on the grizzly bear research project can be found at [www.taiga.net/wmac/species/grizzly/index.html](http://www.taiga.net/wmac/species/grizzly/index.html)

### North Yukon Marmot Study

In 2003, Barney Smith (Yukon Government), the Aklavik HTC and WMAC(NS) conducted a traditional knowledge study in Aklavik to learn about birds and animals on the Yukon North Slope. This study, as well as some follow-up interviews, reported the occurrence of marmots in the area. Biologists want to find out more about these animals because they don't know what species they are.

In June 2006, Barney Smith and Mervin Joe (Parks Canada) will travel to Ivvavik National Park with Inuvialuit Elder, Mrs. Nellie Arey. They will spend a week in an area where she reported trapping marmots with her father in the 1950's. The group hopes to find some marmots still living in the area and determine what species they are. This trip will also provide an opportunity to document historical camps and stone deadfall traps near the reported marmot colonies and to videotape Mrs. Arey describing her previous activities at the site.

### Community-base Monitoring in Aklavik

The Arctic Borderlands Ecological Knowledge Co-op's annual community-based monitoring project will continue for its eleventh year in Aklavik. A local researcher will be hired to conduct interviews with 20 Inuvialuit experts to find out about the conditions and changes they observed during the year. An additional 20 Gwich'in experts are also interviewed in Aklavik. Other communities participating in the monitoring are Old Crow, Arctic Village (Alaska), Tsiigetichic, Tuktoyaktuk and Fort McPherson. A summary of the Co-op's activities can be found at [www.taiga.net/coop](http://www.taiga.net/coop)

### Aklavik Harvest Data Collection

The objective of this program is to collect information on the harvest of moose, caribou, sheep, and furbearers (spring only), in the Yukon and NWT, by Inuvialuit residents of Aklavik. 2006 is the fifth year this program has been operating in Aklavik. Regular harvest reporting is important to assist in the management of wildlife. It is also important in order to assess wildlife compensation claims in the ISR. This program is run by the Yukon Government, in partnership with the Aklavik HTC.

#### Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope)

**Inuvialuit Game Council:** Members: Danny C. Gordon and Ernest Pokiak; Alternates: Evelyn Storr and Lawrence Amos  
**Government of Canada:** Member: Ron Larsen, Parks Canada; Alternate: Wendy Nixon, Environment Canada

**Government of Yukon:** Member: Doug Larsen, Dept. of Environment; Alternate: Dorothy Cooley, Dept. of Environment  
**Chairperson:** Lindsay Staples  
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