erschel Island lies just off the Yukon's Arctic Coast and is known to the Inuvialuit as Qikiqtaruk <kee keek ta ruk> which means "it is island". The island was given its English name on July 17, 1826 by Sir John Franklin in honour of British chemist and astronomer, Sir John Herschel. In 1890, the island hosted 1500 whalers who were followed by Anglican missionaries in 1893 and the Northwest Mounted Police in 1903. By 1907, the whaling era was over and the non-native population dwindled. The R.C.M.P. bred sled dogs on the island until 1964 when they permanently closed the post. Qikiqtaruk is now a Yukon Territorial Park where the Inuvialuit continue to hunt and fish and visitors from all parts of the world travel to experience its very special natural character.

This checklist summarizes the occurrence and breeding status of 94 species of birds which have been recorded on Herschel Island. Breeding has been confirmed for 40 species. Frequency codes indicate relative abundance from spring through fall. Species names and taxonomic order follow the A.O.U. checklist (1998).

## FREQUENCY and BREEDING CODES

- C Common: expected in appropriate habitat.
- U Uncommon: expected but not always seen.
- **R** Rare: expected annually, but easily missed.

ca Casual: at least two records but not seen every year. ac Accidental: recorded only once.

Confirmed Breeding: Observations of an active nest or dependent, flightless young.

## DOCUMENTING BIRD SIGHTINGS

Please contribute to our knowledge of the Yukon's bird life by sending written or photo documentation of rare. casual, or accidental species or those not on the checklist, and details of breeding observations to:

The Yukon Bird Club Box 31054, Whitehorse, Yukon, Y1A 5P7, Canada



A Yukon Bird Club publication, April 2000. Compiled by: Cameron D. Eckert, Pam Sinclair, and Helmut Grünberg with data provided by the Birds of the Yukon Database (Canadian Wildlife Service), and reports by Eckert (1996), and Talarico and Mossop (1986). Produced with the support of the Yukon Birdathon and the Yukon Territory Government, Department of Renewable Resources, Parks and Outdoor Recreation Branch.

SPECIES Red-throated Loon * C	Α	В	С	D
Pacific Loon U				
Common Loon R				
Yellow-billed Loon U				
Horned Grebe ac				
_Tundra Swan * C				
_Greater White-fronted Goose U				
_Snow Goose U				
_Brant * U				
_Canada Goose R				
American Wigeon R				
_Mallard * U				
_Northern Shoveler * U				
_Northern Pintail * C				
Green-winged Teal * R				
_Greater Scaup ca				-
_Lesser Scaup ca				-
_King Eider * R				
_Common Eider * C				
_Harlequin Duck U	-			
_Surf Scoter C White winged Sector U				
_White-winged Scoter U Black Scoter ca				
Long-tailed Duck * C				
Common Goldeneye ca				-
Red-breasted Merganser U				
Common Merganser ca				
		1		
Northern Harrier U				
_Rough-legged Hawk * C				
_Golden Eagle ca				-
_Merlin ca 				
_Peregrine Falcon * U				
_Gyrfalcon ca				
Willow Ptarmigan * R				
_Rock Ptarmigan * C				
Sandhill Crane * C				
Black-bellied Plover ca				
_American Golden-Plover * C				
_Semipalmated Plover * C				
_Lesser Yellowlegs ca				
_Wood Sandpiper ac				-
_Spotted Sandpiper ac				-
Whimbrel * R	-			
_Ruddy Turnstone * C				
_Sanderling R Semipalmated Sandpiper * C				
_Semipainated Sandpiper * C Western Sandpiper ca				
_western Sandpiper ca Least Sandpiper * ca	<u> </u>	<u> </u>		
White-rumped Sandpiper ca				
Baird's Sandpiper * C	<u> </u>			
Pectoral Sandpiper * C				

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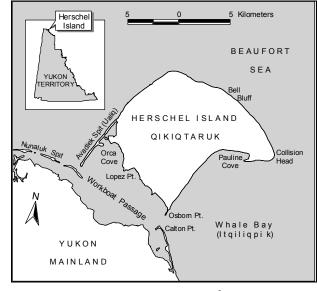
C	D	<ul> <li>✓ SPECIES</li> <li>Stilt Sandpiper R</li> <li>Buff-breasted Sandpiper R</li> <li>Long-billed Dowitcher U</li> <li>Common Snipe * R</li> <li>Red-necked Phalarope * C</li> <li>Red Phalarope R</li> </ul>
		Pomarine Jaeger U Parasitic Jaeger C Long-tailed Jaeger * C Bonaparte's Gull ca Mew Gull ca Herring Gull R Glaucous Gull * C Sabine's Gull ca Ross's Gull ac Arctic Tern * C
		Thick-billed Murre ca Black Guillemot * C
		Snowy Owl * U Northern Hawk Owl ac Short-eared Owl * U
		Say's Phoebe ca
		Common Raven R
		Horned Lark * C
		Tree Swallow ca Bank Swallow ca Cliff Swallow ca
		Northern Wheatear ac American Robin * R
		Yellow Wagtail ca American Pipit * C
		American Tree Sparrow R
		Savannah Sparrow * C White-crowned Sparrow R
	1	Dark-eyed Junco ca Lapland Longspur * C
		Smith's Longspur * R
		Snow Bunting * C
		Red-winged Blackbird ac
		Yellow-headed Blackbird ac Rusty Blackbird ac
		Common Redpoll * U Hoary Redpoll * U
		Additional Species:

Α	В	С	D

Common Redpoll * U
Hoary Redpoll * U

# NOTES:

# **A UNIQUE ARCTIC ISLAND**



Herschel Island has an area of 112 km<sup>2</sup> and is unique in the Beaufort Sea region. Separated from the Yukon mainland by a five kilometre stretch of water known as Workboat Passage, the island supports a diverse mosaic of terrestrial and marine habitats with remarkable wildlife, plant, and bird communities.

Grizzly Bears, Muskox, Porcupine Caribou, Arctic and Red Foxes, and Arctic Ground Squirrels are found on the island, while Beluga and Bowhead Whales, Bearded and Ringed Seals, and Polar Bears frequent the shores and waters around Herschel. In July, a rich floral carpet blooms over Herschel. The sandy coastline hosts such Arctic beauties as Sea Lungwort (*Mertensia maritima*), Seabeach-sandwort (*Honckenya peploides*), and Seashore Chamomile (*Matricaria ambigua*).

The Island is renowned among birdwatchers as a special place to view Arctic breeders such as eiders, shorebirds, jaegers, Willow and Rock Ptarmigan, and Lapland and Smith's Longspurs. It is home to the Western Arctic's largest breeding colony of Black Guillemots, and an exceptional density of nesting Rough-legged Hawks. Workboat Passage is a key migration corridor and fall staging area for scoters and Oldsquaw. The Island's position on the outer Yukon coast makes it a hot spot for rarities such as Yellow-headed Blackbird, the Yukon's first Ross's Gull, and Canada's second Wood Sandpiper.

Tour companies in Inuvik, NWT run regular trips to Herschel. In terms of weather, June and July is an ideal time to visit, and a fresh breeze off the sea usually keeps the bugs at a minimum. Visitors in late spring or early fall will enjoy different but equally rewarding experiences.

# YUKON BIRD CLUB

Checklist of the BIRDS of HERSCHEL ISLAND



#### **OBSERVERS**:

Awareness ~ Appreciation ~ Conservation

# **A SENSITIVE ENVIRONMENT**

Arctic environments are sensitive with fragile habitats

- ✓ Observe birds and wildlife from a responsible distance, and avoid nesting areas.
- Leave plants, animals, and cultural and ecological artifacts untouched.
- Practice no trace camping. Take out all that you bring in and keep a clean camp.

### **References and further reading:**

- Eckert, C.D. 1996. Wood Sandpiper a Yukon first at Herschel Island. Yukon Warbler 4(3):10-14.
- Grünberg, H. 1994. Great birding moments: A Yukon first on Herschel Island. Yukon Warbler 2(3): 10-11.
- Talarico, D., and D. Mossop. 1986. Herschel Island avifauna and interpretive report 1986. Yukon Dept. of Ren. Res.
- Yukon Bird Club web site: www.yukonweb.com/community/ybc/

**Photo credits:** Long-tailed Jaeger (cover) by Helmut Grünberg, Black Guillemots and Parasitic Jaeger by Cameron D. Eckert.