

McIntyre Creek Wetlands

Wetlands are critical to biodiversity and McIntyre Creek wetlands are the largest in Whitehorse. These wetlands provide essential habitat to diverse communities of birds and other wildlife. McIntyre Creek is well known to birders as a place to see species which are difficult to find elsewhere.

Directions: Take the Alaska Highway north from Two Mile Hill for 3 km and turn left onto Fish Lake Road. Follow Fish Lake Road, stopping at Pumphouse Pond at km 2.9, and then on to the wetlands at km 3.5 at the junction of Fish Lake Road and Copper Haul Road. Turn left onto Copper Haul Road to the overlook just off Fish Lake Road. Park here and explore the area by foot.

Birding Features: In May, Pumphouse Pond hosts hundreds of swallows, migrant Mew and Bonaparte's gulls, and Barrow's Goldeneye. McIntyre Creek wetlands offer superb birding. Old-growth White Spruce and Balsam Poplar forests, scattered dead trees, and lush shrubs create exceptional songbird habitat. Watch for Boreal Chickadee, Varied Thrush, Hammond's and Olive-sided flycatchers, Warbling Vireo, Bohemian Waxwing, Blackpoll and Townsend's warblers, Northern Waterthrush, Lincoln's Sparrow, Rusty and Red-winged blackbirds, and during migration, American Pipit, Golden-crowned Sparrow, and Lapland Longspur. Displaying shorebirds include Wilson's Snipe, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Solitary Sandpiper. In winter, Mallard, Bald Eagle, Ruffed Grouse, and American Dipper occur.

Haeckel Hill

Rising 915 metres above Whitehorse, Haeckel Hill provides a magnificent view of the town and the Yukon River Valley with Lake Laberge to the north and Marsh Lake to the south. A pair of wind turbines marks the summit.

Directions: Take Fish Lake Road from the Alaska Highway for 3.5 km and turn right at the junction of the Fish Lake Road and the Copper Haul Road. This rough gravel road continues about 6.5 km to the top. It is not passable in winter.

Birding Features: This area hosts both Rock and Willow ptarmigan, Golden and Bald eagles, and with luck you may spot a Gyrfalcon. In spring, flocks of Trumpeter and Tundra swans are seen moving up the valley. In the subalpine habitats listen for Townsend's Solitaire, Dusky Flycatcher, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Golden-crowned Sparrow.

Fish Lake & Mount McIntyre

The simple reward for making the relatively short trip to Fish Lake is an opportunity to experience the area's unique bird life in a truly inspiring setting.

Directions: From the Alaska Highway, take the Fish Lake Road past McIntyre Creek wetlands for about 16 km to the lake. Hikers can reach the alpine habitats of Mount McIntyre from the Fish Lake Road. Watch for a small dirt trail located on the left side of the road 1.5 km before Fish Lake. It is about a 4 km moderate hike, bike, or ski up this trail to treeline.

Birding Features: A marshy pond at the north end of Fish Lake has dabbling ducks and shorebirds in late May and June. Scan the open lake for loons, White-winged and Surf scoters, Greater and Lesser scaup, and Arctic Terns. Keep an eye skyward for soaring Golden Eagles. In winter, coveys of Willow Ptarmigan inhabit the willows, and American Dippers forage along Fish Creek. On Mount McIntyre, check the subalpine habitats for Willow Ptarmigan, Hermit Thrush, Townsend's Solitaire, Dusky Flycatcher, Wilson's Warbler, "Timberline" Brewer's Sparrow, Savannah, American Tree, and Golden-crowned sparrows. From treeline, the road continues about 3 km to the mountain top where the dry rocky alpine tundra supports Rock Ptarmigan, American Pipit, Horned Lark, and Hoary Marmot.



A "Timberline" Brewer's Sparrow on its breeding territory at treeline on Mount McIntyre, 22 June 2008.

Lower McIntyre Creek

Once the site of the Whitehorse dump, the confluence of McIntyre Creek and the Yukon River is now recognized for its ecological importance. Restoration work is underway to return this scenic location to its natural condition.

Directions: From the Alaska Highway, take Two Mile Hill towards downtown, and take the first left onto Range Road. Go 1.8 km to Mountain View Drive (or from downtown take Mountain View Drive north to this intersection). Continue straight on Range Road for 1.5 km and then go straight onto a small dirt road as Range Road swings left. This dirt road ends in about 300 metres with a spectacular view of lower McIntyre Creek and the Yukon River. A trail along McIntyre Creek to the Yukon River can be found by continuing another 500 metres further on Range Road past the small dirt road.

Birding Features: During spring migration this area hosts an impressive diversity of waterfowl with good numbers of Tundra and Trumpeter swans. Raptors include Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Gyrfalcon, and Northern Shrike. Watch for Mountain Bluebird and Townsend's Solitaire; and in migration, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting. Spring mudflats attract shorebirds and gulls. Search among the Herring and Mew gulls for Glaucous or Glaucous-winged gull.

Quartz Road Wetland

Natural spaces such as this wetland on the Yukon River, with its rich mosaic of grasses, mudflats, shrubs, White Spruce and Balsam Poplar, are an essential part of Whitehorse's special character.

Directions: In downtown Whitehorse, from the southeast corner of Industrial Road and Quartz Road, walk south along Quartz Road for 200 metres. Just past the large industrial yard, you can walk down to the old train tracks for a good view of the wetland.

Birding Features: May offers the best birding when migrant gulls, ducks, shorebirds, and songbirds are abundant. The mudflats feature species more typically found along Marsh Lake with rarer shorebirds such as Dunlin and Hudsonian Godwit. The shrubs come alive with migrant songbirds such as Yellow and Wilson's warblers, Western Wood-Pewee, and Olive-sided Flycatcher. Hundreds of gulls and a few Arctic Terns roost on the gravel bars; and in summer the wetland supports a large breeding colony of Mew Gulls with increasing numbers of American Crows in recent years. This is also a good location in late fall for lingering Wilson's Snipe and Rusty Blackbird.

The Yukon River Trail

Whitehorse residents cherish this scenic and easy-paced nature walk right downtown. The trail winds through mixed Lodgepole Pine, White Spruce, and Trembling Aspen – a little piece of wilderness in our own backyard. Various forks in the trail all follow a flow making it difficult to get lost.

Directions: This loop trail starts at the historic riverboat S.S. Klondike in downtown Whitehorse and can be taken in either direction to the Millennium Trail foot-bridge across the Yukon River, and then back.

Birding Features: Take any opportunity to scan the river and check the gravel bars and mud flats. Watch for Harlequin Duck, Bald Eagle, Belted Kingfisher, various swallows, and songbirds such as Bohemian Waxwing, Boreal and Black-capped chickadees, Warbling Vireo, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Pacific, Common and Yellow-billed loons are seen during migration. In summer, the islands host breeding Mew Gulls and Arctic Terns. A small Herring Gull colony is found at the power dam. Regular winter birds here are Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, American Dipper, Black-billed Magpie, American Robin, and Common and Hoary redpolls.

Schwatka Lake

Schwatka Lake is a widening in the Yukon River created by the Whitehorse power dam. It is the best downtown location for waterbirds which usually occur on larger lakes.

Directions: To access Schwatka Lake, either continue on the Yukon River Trail past the Millenium trail foot-bridge to the dam at the south end of the trail; or from the S.S. Klondike, take Robert Service Way out of downtown for 2.4 km, past Robert Service Campground, and take the first left past Yukon Energy. Go 100 metres to a T-junction and then right. This road follows the lake for 2 km to a fork. Here the paved road swings right up to the Alaska Highway via Miles Canyon, and a dirt road continues along the lake for 500 metres to the end.

Birding Features: During migration Schwatka Lake hosts numerous loons, grebes, and diving ducks. While Common and Pacific loons are most common, Red-throated and Yellow-billed loons also occur here, especially in fall. Mew, Herring and Bonaparte's gulls sometimes rest in high numbers on the lake. Check the adjacent woods for Townsend's Solitaire, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden and Ruby-crowned kinglets, Boreal Chickadee, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, and Three-toed Woodpecker.

Wolf Creek

Mature White Spruce and riparian shrubs along this forested creek provide habitat for a suite of forest birds. The watershed is the focus of long-term ecological monitoring and salmon enhancement. The Yukon government campground offers interpretive hiking trails, a day use area, and overnight camping.

Directions: Take the Alaska Highway south from Robert Service Way for 11 km and go left into the campground. Park and explore the area by foot. Trails lead from the south end of the campground along Wolf Creek and to the Yukon River.

Birding Features: Explore the White Spruce and deciduous shrubs for Spruce and Ruffed grouse, Boreal Chickadee, Hammond's Flycatcher, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red and White-winged crossbills, Bohemian Waxwing, Pine Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, and the occasional Mountain Chickadee. Listen for the soft tapping of a Three-toed Woodpecker. Follow the trail to the Yukon River to view Trumpeter and Tundra swans during migration. In winter, American Dippers frolic along fast flowing stretches of Wolf Creek.

Mary Lake

Small boreal lakes such as this often feature a complex of lake-side marshes and shrubs, Trembling Aspen and White Spruce forests, and a scattering of dead trees used by cavity nesters.

Directions: Take the Alaska Highway south from Robert Service Way for 12.2 km and turn right onto Fireweed Drive. Continue 500 metres to a T-junction and go right along Fireweed Drive for 1.4 km and take a right at the fork onto Booth Drive. Continue for 100 metres and go left onto a small dirt road for another 400 metres and then left again where it forks. From here the road continues 500 metres through open mixed Trembling Aspen and White Spruce forest to Mary Lake. Park here and explore on foot.

Birding Features: Scan the lake for nesting waterbirds such as Pacific Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Blue-winged Teal, Bufflehead, and Barrow's Goldeneye. Listen for Least and Hammond's flycatchers, and Warbling Vireo in the Trembling Aspen; and Red-breasted Nuthatch, Boreal and Mountain chickadees, and Golden-crowned Kinglet in the older White Spruce. The wetland areas support Lesser Yellowlegs, Lincoln's Sparrow, Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Blackpoll Warbler, and a variety of other songbirds during migration and the breeding season.

Lewes Marsh

Lewes Marsh is one of the Yukon's significant wetlands, and is identified as a Habitat Protection Area through the Kwanlin Dün and Carcross/Tagish First Nation Final Agreements. Impressive marshes, small ponds, and diverse forests put this area near the top of every local birder's list of favorite places.

Directions: Take the Alaska Highway south from Whitehorse (Robert Service Way) about 26 km to the Yukon River bridge. To view the open water, continue over the bridge and take the first left to a rest area and boat launch. To explore Lewes Marsh, turn right immediately before crossing the bridge. This road, known locally as "Gunnar's Road", runs along Lewes Marsh for about 7 km to a sawmill. Stop at the many openings in the shrubs and mixed forest along the road to scan Lewes Marsh.

Birding Features: In spring, migrant waterfowl and shorebirds occur in high numbers. Trumpeter and Tundra swans are common, and watch for Eurasian Wigeon and Harlequin Duck. Shorebirds sweep through in May, and it seems any species can turn up, even Wandering Tattler has occurred here. Raptors include Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, Osprey, Bald Eagle, with the occasional Golden Eagle soaring overhead. During migration, American Pipit, Say's Phoebe, and Lapland Longspur occur in good numbers. Listen for Three-toed Woodpecker and Golden-crowned Kinglet in the old-growth White Spruce forest; as well as Olive-sided Flycatcher along the forested slopes and wetland edges. Mountain Chickadees frequent bird feeders along the start of Gunnar's Road. Yellow-billed Loon occurs in fall.



A male Three-toed Woodpecker works at a White Spruce along Lewes Marsh, 23 May 2006.

M'Clintock Bay

Nutrient-rich waters flow from the M'Clintock River into Marsh Lake creating exceptional feeding habitat for migrant waterfowl and shorebirds. This site is recognized as nationally significant wetland.

Directions: From Lewes Marsh, continue on the Alaska Highway south for 11 km (37 km south of Robert Service Way) and turn right onto Swan Haven Drive (North M'Clintock Subdivision). The road follows the river for 2 km (take any opportunity to scan the river) to the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre. In April, an interpreter is on hand with spotting scopes.

Birding Features: In late April, M'Clintock Bay hosts spectacular concentration of migrating Trumpeter and Tundra swans. Snow and Cackling geese are regular, and a few Eurasian Wigeon can be seen. The first Arctic Terns of spring are usually seen here. In May, the mudflats are sensational for shorebirds, with uncommon species such as Pacific Golden-Plover, Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, and the occasional Sandhill Crane. The forests support Bohemian Waxwing, White-winged Crossbill, and Three-toed Woodpecker. Swan Haven's year-round bird feeder attracts Boreal, Black-capped, and Mountain chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Grosbeak, with Common and Hoary redpolls in winter.

Travel Lightly

- ✓ Northern ecosystems and habitats are sensitive;
- ✓ Observe birds and wildlife from a responsible distance, and avoid nesting areas;
- ✓ Leave plants, animals, and cultural artifacts untouched.

Documenting Bird Sightings

Contribute to our knowledge of the Yukon's bird life by sending written or photo documentation of rare species and details of breeding observations to:

Yukon Bird Club

Box 31054, Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada, Y1A 5P7
e-mail: yukonbirdclub@gmail.com

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YUKON BIRD CLUB

10 Great Places to go

Birding in Whitehorse



Whitehorse sits at the edge of seemingly endless wilderness in an extraordinary natural setting. Diverse habitats include wetlands, expansive boreal forest, and alpine tundra. This natural mosaic, with its mix of "southern" and "northern" species makes Whitehorse an attractive destination for birdwatchers and naturalists. About 276 species have been documented in the area, with 130 confirmed breeding. First time visitors may be surprised to see "southern" species such as Killdeer, American Robin, and Red-winged Blackbird. However, their first encounters with Pacific Loon, Northern Goshawk, Willow Ptarmigan, Spruce Grouse, Arctic Tern, Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, and the ever-present Common Raven reminds them that they have definitely arrived in the North.

Wildlife is an integral part of the North, and birders may encounter Coyote, Red Fox, Beaver, River Otter, Snowshoe Hare, Arctic Ground Squirrel, Grey Wolf, Lynx, Moose, Black and Grizzly bears, Dall's Sheep, Woodland Caribou, and Wood Frog to name a few.

The Yukon is a land of rich environments and pristine wilderness. The birds, wildlife, and ecosystems are sensitive and must be observed and explored with respect. In this way, the Yukon will continue to reward us with unparalleled natural experiences.

Awareness – Appreciation – Conservation