

Watson Lake lies in the heart of the northern boreal forest. This landscape, the traditional territory of the Kaska Dena First Nation, is dominated by the Liard, Frances, and Hyland rivers. These exceptionally rich river valleys feature impressive stands of White Spruce and Balsam Poplar, and are surrounded by rolling uplands of Lodgepole Pine and Trembling Aspen, small lakes and productive wetlands, and low mountains only just rising above treeline. The region's bird populations are under threat from climate change, logging, and other development, and their future health depends on true conservation – particularly of old-growth White Spruce forests, riparian habitats, and wetlands.

The Watson Lake Checklist summarizes the seasonal status of 214 species recorded in the area, with confirmed breeding records for 57 species. This is a transition zone where species such as Pileated Woodpecker, Blue-headed Vireo, Magnolia Warbler, Western Tanager, and Swamp Sparrow are found at the northwestern edge of their range. Yet southern birders travelling north for the first time will be thrilled by encounters with the likes of Great Gray Owl, Spruce Grouse, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, and Northern Goshawk, as well as a variety of distinctly different northern song dialects.

SEASONS

SP Spring: March 1 – May 31

SU Summer: June 1 – July 31

F Fall: August 1 – November 30

W Winter: December 1 – February 28

FREQUENCY and BREEDING CODES

C Common: expected in appropriate habitat.

U Uncommon: expected but not always seen.

R Rare: annual in low numbers or very localized.

ca Casual: at least 2 records but not every year.

ac Accidental: recorded only once.

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

DOCUMENTING BIRD SIGHTINGS

The Yukon is a place where true discovery is still possible, and much remains to be learned. Contribute to our knowledge of the Yukon's birdlife by sending written or photo documentation of rare, casual, or accidental species or those not on the checklist, and details of breeding observations to:

Yukon Bird Club

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

✓ SPECIES	SP	SU	F	W
Greater White-fronted Goose	U		C	
Snow Goose	R			
Brant		ac		
Canada Goose *	C	C	C	
Trumpeter Swan *	C	U	C	
Tundra Swan	C		C	
American Wigeon	C	C	C	
Mallard *	C	C	C	
Blue-winged Teal	U	U	R	
Cinnamon Teal	ac	ac		
Northern Shoveler	C	C	C	
Northern Pintail	C	C	C	
Green-winged Teal *	C	C	C	
Canvasback	U	R	U	
Redhead	R		ac	
Ring-necked Duck *	C	C	C	
Greater Scaup	U	U	U	
Lesser Scaup	C	C	C	
Harlequin Duck	R	R		
Surf Scoter *	C	C	C	
White-winged Scoter	C	U	U	
Long-tailed Duck	C	R	U	
Bufflehead *	C	C	C	
Common Goldeneye *	C	C	C	
Barrow's Goldeneye	C	C	C	
Hooded Merganser		ca	ca	
Common Merganser *	C	C	C	
Red-breasted Merganser *	C	C	U	
Ruddy Duck	R	R		
Ruffed Grouse *	C	C	C	C
Spruce Grouse *	C	C	C	C
Willow Ptarmigan				R
Red-throated Loon	U	R	U	
Pacific Loon *	C	C	C	
Common Loon *	C	U	C	
Yellow-billed Loon	R	ca		
Horned Grebe *	C	C	C	
Red-necked Grebe *	C	C	C	
Osprey *	U	U	U	
Bald Eagle *	C	C	C	
Northern Harrier	C	U	C	
Sharp-shinned Hawk	U	U	U	
Northern Goshawk	U	U	U	U
Swainson's Hawk			ca	
Red-tailed Hawk	C	U	C	
Rough-legged Hawk	U		U	
Golden Eagle	R		R	
Sora	U	U	R	
American Coot *	R	R		
Sandhill Crane *	C	R	C	
Black-bellied Plover	ca			
American Golden-Plover	R		ca	
Pacific Golden-Plover	ac			
Semipalmated Plover *	U	U	R	
Killdeer *	U	U	R	

✓ SPECIES	SP	SU	F	W
Spotted Sandpiper *	C	C	C	
Solitary Sandpiper	C	U	R	
Wandering Tattler	ca	ca		
Greater Yellowlegs *	U	U	R	
Willet	ac			
Lesser Yellowlegs *	C	C	U	
Upland Sandpiper	ca	ca		
Whimbrel	R	ca		
Hudsonian Godwit	ca			
Ruddy Turnstone	ac			
Stilt Sandpiper	ac			
Sanderling	ca	ca		
Dunlin	ac			
Baird's Sandpiper	U		R	
Least Sandpiper	U	U	U	
White-rumped Sandpiper	ca	ca		
Pectoral Sandpiper	U		U	
Semipalmated Sandpiper	U		U	
Western Sandpiper	ac		ca	
Short-billed Dowitcher	R	R		
Long-billed Dowitcher	U	R	U	
Wilson's Snipe	U	U	U	
Wilson's Phalarope	ca			
Red-necked Phalarope	R			
Red Phalarope	ac			
Parasitic Jaeger	ca	ac		
Long-tailed Jaeger	ac			
Long-billed Murrelet		ac		
Sabine's Gull	ac	ca	ac	
Bonaparte's Gull *	C	C	U	
Franklin's Gull	ca			
Mew Gull	C	C	C	
Ring-billed Gull	ca			
Herring Gull	U	U	U	
Thayer's Gull	ca	ac	ca	
Glaucous Gull	ca			
Black Tern *	ca	R		
Arctic Tern	U	U	R	
Mourning Dove	ac	ca		
Eurasian Collared-Dove	ca	ca	ca	ca
Great Horned Owl	U	U	U	U
Northern Hawk Owl *	R	R	R	R
Barred Owl	ca	ca	ca	
Great Gray Owl *	R	R	R	R
Short-eared Owl	R		R	
Boreal Owl	U	U	U	U
Northern Saw-whet Owl			ac	
Common Nighthawk	R	U	R	
Belted Kingfisher *	C	C	C	
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *	C	C	U	
Downy Woodpecker	U	U	U	R
Hairy Woodpecker *	C	C	C	U
Am. Three-toed Woodpecker *	C	C	C	C
Black-backed Woodpecker	R	R	R	R

✓ SPECIES	SP	SU	F	W
Northern Flicker *	C	C	C	
Pileated Woodpecker	R	R	ca	ca
American Kestrel *	U	U	U	
Merlin	R		R	
Peregrine Falcon		ac		
Olive-sided Flycatcher	U	U	R	
Western Wood-Pewee	C	C	U	
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	R	R	R	
Alder Flycatcher	R	C	U	
Least Flycatcher *	U	U	R	
Hammond's Flycatcher	C	C	U	
Dusky Flycatcher	ca	ca	ca	
Eastern Phoebe		ac		
Say's Phoebe	U	U	R	
Western Kingbird	ac			
Eastern Kingbird	ac	ca	ca	
Northern Shrike	U	R	R	ca
Blue-headed Vireo	R	R	R	
Warbling Vireo *	U	C	U	
Philadelphia Vireo			ac	
Red-eyed Vireo		R	ca	
Gray Jay	C	C	C	C
Steller's Jay			ac	ac
Clark's Nutcracker			ca	
Black-billed Magpie			ca	
American Crow	U	U	U	ac
Common Raven *	C	C	C	C
Horned Lark	U	U	U	
Tree Swallow *	C	C	R	
Violet-green Swallow	U	U	R	
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	ca	ca		
Bank Swallow *	C	C	U	
Cliff Swallow *	C	C	U	
Barn Swallow *	U	U	U	
Black-capped Chickadee	C	C	C	C
Boreal Chickadee	C	C	C	C
Red-breasted Nuthatch	U	U	U	ca
Brown Creeper		ac		
Pacific Wren		ac		
American Dipper	R	R	R	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	U	U	U	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet *	C	C	C	
Mountain Bluebird	U	U	U	
Townsend's Solitaire	U	U	U	
Gray-cheeked Thrush	R	R	R	
Swainson's Thrush *	U	C	U	
Hermit Thrush	U	C	U	
American Robin *	C	C	C	
Varied Thrush *	U	U	U	
European Starling *	R	R	R	
Red-throated Pipit	ac			

✓ SPECIES	SP	SU	F	W
American Pipit	C	U	C	
Bohemian Waxwing	U	U	U	U
Cedar Waxwing		U	U	
Lapland Longspur	C		U	
Smith's Longspur	ca			
Snow Bunting	U		U	ca
Northern Waterthrush *	C	C	U	
Black-and-white Warbler		ca		
Tennessee Warbler	U	C	U	
Orange-crowned Warbler	U	C	U	
MacGillivray's Warbler		ca		
Common Yellowthroat	C	C	C	
American Redstart *	R	C	U	
Cape May Warbler	R	R	ca	
Magnolia Warbler *	R	U	U	
Bay-breasted Warbler	ac	ac		
Yellow Warbler	U	C	C	
Blackpoll Warbler	U	C	U	
Yellow-rumped Warbler *	C	C	C	
Townsend's Warbler	R	R	R	
Ovenbird	ac	ca	ca	
Wilson's Warbler	C	C	C	
American Tree Sparrow	C	U	C	
Chipping Sparrow *	U	C	U	
Clay-colored Sparrow	ca	ca		
Vesper Sparrow	ca	ac		
Lark Sparrow		ca		
Savannah Sparrow	C	U	C	
Fox Sparrow	C	C	C	
Song Sparrow			ca	
Lincoln's Sparrow *	U	C	U	
Swamp Sparrow	U	C	U	
White-throated Sparrow *	U	C	U	
Harris's Sparrow	ac		ac	
White-crowned Sparrow	C	C	C	
Golden-crowned Sparrow	R	R		
Dark-eyed Junco *	C	C	C	R
Western Tanager	R	U	R	
Rose-breasted Grosbeak		ac		
Red-winged Blackbird *	C	C	U	
Western Meadowlark	ac			
Yellow-headed Blackbird	ac			
Rusty Blackbird	C	C	C	
Brewer's Blackbird	ac	ca		
Brown-headed Cowbird *	U	U	R	
Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch	ca		ca	ca
Pine Grosbeak	C	C	C	C
Purple Finch	U	C	U	
Red Crossbill	U	U	U	
White-winged Crossbill	U	U	U	U
Common Redpoll	C		U	C
Hoary Redpoll	U			U
Pine Siskin	U	C	C	
Evening Grosbeak	ca	ca	ca	ca

Where to find birds around Watson Lake

This checklist encompasses the towns of Watson Lake and Upper Liard, west to the Little Rancheria River, east to the Hyland River, north to Simpson Lake, and south to the B.C. border.

Wye Lake Park: This park located right in Watson Lake's town centre offers a pleasant mix of forest, wetland, and lake habitats as well as a grassy picnic area. Boardwalks through the marsh and trails along the lake edge make for easy walking. Watch for Common Loons and Red-necked Grebes, as well as feeding flocks of Mew and Bonaparte's gulls, and various swallows in summer. Lesser Yellowlegs, Savannah Sparrows, and Red-winged Blackbirds all add to a wonderfully layered sound-scape.



Swamp Sparrow is a common songbird of Watson Lake area marshes – listen for its short, rich trill.

Watson Lake: The lake can be viewed from the Watson Lake Campground, located 4 km west of town off the Alaska Hwy; or from the Watson Lake airport, located 10 km north of town off the Robert Campbell Hwy. Birding is very good along the airport road which runs around the airport fence and along the lake edge to an open parkland area. Take any opportunity to scan the lake for loons, grebes, and other waterbirds. Park at the end of the airport road and walk the trails and paths between the open aspen groves. A variety of songbirds are common here through spring and summer, and a small fen along the lake edge often hosts shorebirds in spring and early summer. Surprise finds in the area have included Long-tailed Jaeger, Swainson's Hawk, and Smith's Longspur.

Albert Creek: This highly productive creek and wetland complex is home to a rich diversity of forest and wetland birds, as well as the Albert Creek Bird Observatory. To bird this area, take the Albert Creek Road located 1.4 km west of the Liard Bridge in the village of Upper Liard (11 km west of Watson Lake). Stay right at the first fork (400 metres). If the road looks muddy or too rough, then walk. The road ends at a wash-out at Tanager Creek (km 6). This area is known for southeast Yukon "specialties" such as Pileated Woodpecker, Magnolia Warbler, Western Tanager, Swamp and White-throated sparrows which become rare further west. Common wetland species include Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Sora, Northern Waterthrush, and Common Yellowthroat. Moose and bears, along with a good variety of dragonflies are also commonly seen.

Robert Campbell Highway: Southern birders may feel like they're heading into uncharted territory as they travel north along the Robert Campbell Highway – and in some ways they are. This landscape can rightly be described as "under-birded." Be aware that there are no services on the 385 km stretch between Watson Lake and Ross River. Travel slowly and take time to enjoy the changing landscape – stop at wetlands or where the habitat looks different. Watch the spruce tops for Northern Hawk Owl and Great Gray Owl, and listen for songbirds such as Yellow-bellied and Olive-sided flycatchers, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Blackpoll Warbler, and Lincoln's Sparrow. Birding highlights along the way include Tom Creek (km 36), Frances River (km 58), Simpson Lake (km 83), and Miner's Junction (km 110) at the Nahanni Range Road which heads 200 km northeast to Tungsten, NWT – definitely off the beaten path.

Staying safe in Bear Country

This region offers great opportunities to view Black and Grizzly bears. Take care to minimize the chance of negative encounters with wildlife. For more information contact Environment Yukon or refer to: www.env.gov.yk.ca/pdf/howyoucanstaysafe.pdf

Checklist of the Birds of Watson Lake, Yukon. May 2015. A Yukon Bird Club publication. Compilation and photos by Cameron D. Eckert. Cover – the White-throated Sparrow's familiar "Oh sweet Canada-Canada" song is one of the signature sounds of the shrubby forests, rivers, and wetlands of southeast Yukon.

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Yukon Bird Club



Yukon Environment

YUKON BIRD CLUB

Checklist of the

BIRDS of WATSON LAKE YUKON



OBSERVERS: _____

DATE: _____

LOCATIONS: _____

Awareness – Appreciation – Conservation