

# British Columbia and Yukon - A Travelogue

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## Introduction

With lots of time at hand, there were 2 areas that I had always wanted to bird: The Peace (Dawson Creek, Ft. St. John) including Ft. Nelson (which I originally thought also belonged to the Peace) and the Dempster Hwy. About midway through the trip I got anxious about not getting up to the Dempster before July so I rushed it a little bit.

The main goal for this birding trip was to learn calls and habitat for some of the northern breeders (including the eastern birds), better understand the range of some species and – of course – take in the scenery of the epic Canadian north. It was also very interesting to study subspecies (Junco, Fox Sparrow, Merlin, ...) and to be in hybridization zones (sapsuckers).

## Some important travel stuff

When travelling in Northern Canada, the first thing you should do when you come to a new town is to go to the visitor center. Good things are going to happen when you do.

- Water: They will fill your water bottles. I had issues getting water occasionally. In Whitehorse, they were out of bottled water or had no filling stations, for example.
- WiFi: Almost all visitor centers in Canada had free WiFi and wouldn't mind if you came in for it again and again. Note that visitor centers are province-funded.
- Flyers and information material: I picked up a gazillion of flyers while at the various visitor centers. Some of it I had never heard of, for example Keno Hill. I'm so glad I saw it, because the site was awesome. Yukon has a free little brochure called "Yukon – Wildlife Viewing Guide" which was must-have. For each highway (there are few), it tells you where to stop and what to look for.
- Road conditions, weather: They will be able to help
- Showers: Ask for the best options

Places that I found public showers at were public pools, recreation centers (gyms), truck stops and some RV Parks. Several times I worked out at rec centers and took a shower there afterwards. As this is Northern Canada, many towns will have often free indoor running tracks (Ft. Nelson, Ft. St. John and Whitehorse).

Motels are expensive up north (budget for \$80-120 Canadian a night). Staying at provincial parks (or even regional or municipal ones) also adds up; they are between \$12 (Yukon) to \$20 (BC). If you do stay at provincial parks, note that you might be locked in from 11pm – 7am (to me this generally is a no-go unless I want to bird in that park the next morning; this was the case for Beaton PP). In BC, watch for Recreation Sites and Forest Roads, they usually offer free camping. Trailheads are often also very good to camp at. If you are birding an area throughout the day, check it out for possible camping opportunities (I stayed many times at places I birded a few hours prior). On most roads up north you will find gravel pits of some kind. Unless it says no trespassing, you are free to camp there. In general, there are not many places where you are told that overnight parking is not permitted. One other consideration is that if you are going to consume alcohol, you need to have an official campsite (and even then there will be exceptions such as Smithers Riverfront Park).

Food is expensive in the north, so stock up when you get to a larger town (Ft. St. John or Whitehorse). Especially pricey are fruit/vegetables, cheese, meats and alcohol. Gas is expensive as well, about up to twice as much as in the US. Again check carefully and fill up wherever it is cheap. Whitehorse had the cheapest gas at \$1.049/liter.

It is very easy to pay with a chip-based credit card. My American debit card mostly did not work, but I could use it to withdraw cash at ATMs. Remember to register a travel notice for your cards.

### **Risks and Annoyances**

In the Peace Region and Northern Rockies (Ft. Nelson) in BC, it was raining a lot when I went through. As a consequence, dirt roads were very muddy and it is easy to get stuck even with a 4WD vehicle. In the Yukon, the problem was steep, rocky and narrow roads that require extra clearance and good tires. I had to turn around a few times when I felt that I was taking too much risk.

In about 6000mi of driving I got 2 flats. One was repairable (on the Dempster), the other one required me to replace the tire as a nail went through the side wall. A couple with a camper told me that they had gotten FIVE flats on the Dempster. So, the morale is to carry at least one full spare. I also had an extra donut. It is probably true that you can reduce the risk of flats on the Dempster by reducing your speed.

Also a big issue on any dirt or gravel road is rock chips. Any vehicle coming at you (even the smaller ones) may kick up loose gravel flying against your front screen. The only rock chip I got on the Dempster was caused by a Prius! I recommend pulling over and coming to a complete stop when you see a large vehicle coming at you on a dirt/gravel road.

The biggest annoyance up north may be the mosquitoes. They vary from spot to spot and you can't necessarily predict them. Bring plenty of repellent. Spray with 100% deet cannot be bought in Canada, it may even be illegal to import it from the US. I also successfully used a netted bug jacket in Ft. Nelson, but it does limit your view and use of binoculars. What worked like a charm for me was the use of a hoodie since the side and back of your head/neck are major targets. I often wore it with the hood up and did not spray, and did fine.

Less of an issue were no-see-ums and Black Flies. Especially Black Flies may become more of a nuisance in mid summer.

One needs to understand that up north at any point in time a bear with cubs may pop out of the understory. This means that even if you are in a small town and you go for a walk/run, you will need to be prepared. I was using a bear bell whenever I went into areas that had thick vegetation. I did not have bear spray, but it may be advisable to get. When bringing bear spray into Canada, you need to declare it. It can also be bought there for about \$50.

Northern Canada is exceptionally safe. In cities and towns, there is of course a problem with alcohol and drugs, so it is advisable to be careful not to be in the path of that. I was considering staying overnight in the parking lot of Gunn Park in Prince George, but just after 9pm several cars arrived and behaved oddly. I suspect that it is a place where drugs are sold. Away from towns, you are 100% safe.

## References

- For BC, I used Cannings & Cannings "Birdfinding in British Columbia". This is a vital resource, even though there are lots of smaller errors. It also seems that some spots hadn't been checked for a while as several recommended trails were overgrown and not walkable any longer.
- For the Yukon, I didn't have anything, except for Cam Finley's "Bird-finding Guide to Canada". At some visitor center, I picked up the Yukon Wildlife Viewing Guide which proved to be essential and is not to be missed. The Gyrfalcon nest was in there for example and, lo and behold, there were 3 chicks in it when I got there.
- I occasionally went on eBird to look for hotspots, but did not chase any sightings other than 3 (Connecticut Warbler and 2 Upland Sandpiper). I missed all those.
- Visitor Centers all across BC and the Yukon. I found the flyer about Keno Hill at the visitor center in Watson Lake and it turned out to be great

## High/Lowlights/Reflections

- I drove around 5000mi. My 9-year old Subaru Outback did outstanding! One patched tire along the Dempster ran me \$31, getting 4 new tires in Prince George was \$540. The only other equipment failures were an iPhone charge cable (replaced in Ft. St. John) and a leaky air mattress. The mattress would lose air sometimes when you applied pressure in the wrong spots. Nevertheless, I bought a decent sleeping pad in Dawson Creek that I padded the air mattress with and that worked out fine. I stayed away from parks and was able to survive with only \$30 spent on lodging (\$20 for Beaton Provincial Park and \$10 more for a small commercial campground). Gas and food were the only real expenses for me on this trip.
- Was the Dempster really worth it? Honestly, I can't really affirm this positively. The Blackstone Uplands were disappointing except for the ponds. The drive out to the Richardson Mountains is long and boring.
- After 5 days in the Peace, I became anxious to reach the Dempster in late June, so I pushed on. I probably should have birded longer in the Peace, I really like the birding there.
- Misses: Upland Sandpiper, Nelson's Sparrow, Timberline Sparrow, Palm Warbler, maybe Northern Wheatear. I tried 8 times for Rock Ptarmigan, and dipped [that's what I thought, but after looking at my pictures I realized I had gotten one]. For Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting and Harris's Sparrow, I just didn't go far enough.

## 6/07: From Hillsboro, OR to the Omak, WA

I left town at around 7am, so when I reached Brooks Memorial Park near Satus Pass, it was still early enough for some good birding. Yet, I could not hear the reported Veeries.

My next stop was the Cassimer Bar near Brewster, listening for Least Flycatcher, but I didn't hear any.

Finally, I checked for the Ovenbird reported by Charlie Wright along Lyman – Moses Mountain Rd. It must have had departed. I found a nice campsite taking the dirt track at 1.5mi up. A little evening birding yielded Veery, Red-naped Sapsucker, Vesper Sparrow and White-headed Woodpecker.

### **6/08: From Moses Meadow, Okanogan, WA to Williams Lake, BC**

I stopped at Ellisforde bridge early in the morning and heard no less than 3 different singing Least Flycatcher. A good start!

Then I crossed the border, where my passport was thoroughly checked when I told them that I was planning to stay up to 6 weeks in Canada.

At Road 22 just north of Osoyoos, there were Yellow-headed Blackbird, Willow Flycatcher, Gray Catbird, Veery and 2 male Bobolink.

At Camp McKinney Rd outside of Oliver I succeeded with Gray Flycatcher, but didn't spend enough time on White-headed Woodpecker. Lewis's Woodpecker, Hammond's Flycatcher, Cassin's Vireo and Nashville Warbler plus Pileated Woodpecker were all up there along the road.

A quick stop for Long-billed Curlew at L & A Cross Rd near Vernon was unproductive, but there were Savannah Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Osprey and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

The change that is occurring as you climb from Cache Creek (which the lady at the gas station called the top of the desert) up to Clinton is surprising and you finally leave sagebrush and shrub steppe behind for good. Soon the first Black Spruce muskegs appear along the highway and you are in the Caribou.

My final birding stop after several hours of driving was the little marsh and pond behind the 100 Mile House visitor center. It was very windy. Eared Grebe, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Blue-winged Teal and a pair of Mountain Bluebirds were notable.

Overnight at a small commercial campground called Whispering Aspen, where I stayed for \$10 and got a free shower in the morning. It was right next to 97 and therefore quite noisy, so I had to use my earplugs, but then I slept nice and sound.

### **6/09: From Prince George to Chetwynd**

At the campground early morning, my first American Redstart was singing. It was a young male, essentially looking like a female. I saw a few of these young male American Redstarts. Also heard were Warbling Vireo, Swainson's Thrush and Dusky Flycatcher.

I was itchy to get up to the Peace, so my only longer stop of the day was Forests of the World in Prince George. It was very mellow mid morning. Northern Waterthrush, American Redstart, MacGillivray's Warbler, Alder and Least Flycatcher were quite nice, but I was thrilled to see my first Magnolia Warblers.

I pulled into the north end of McLeod Lake and, even though it started raining, it was quite active with birds being similar to FotW. Wood Duck was new.

It was raining hard for many hours. I went over Pine Pass, but it was unbirdable. A quick stop at Bijoux Falls brought in 2 Steller's Jays.

In Chetwynd, I stopped at the visitor center and then tried for a stakeout Connecticut Warbler 5.4km down Jackfish Rd. He didn't show in the rain, but I was thrilled to see my first eastern birds like Ovenbird, White-throated Sparrow, Tennessee Warbler, Slate-colored Junco and Yellow-breasted Sapsucker. Lincoln's Sparrows are abundant in the Northern BC and you can hear them sing along road sides and edges. Not like down here in OR/WA, where you have to go to a high-elevation marsh.

At 7.2km, I had my first Black-and-white Warblers and a Purple Finch.

I stayed the night at Big Lake Recreation Site. This is a free little campground with 6 or so sites. Very beautiful, no people and birdy. Did I mention free? Of course it helped that it was raining. Eastern Phoebe, Clay-colored & Lincoln's Sparrow, Least Flycatcher and Tennessee Warbler were all good, White-winged Scoter, Common Loon, American Wigeon and Common Goldeneye were on the lake. A Mourning Warbler was heard singing nearby but didn't come out.

### **6/10: Chetwynd and the search for Connecticut Warbler**

The rain finally stopped at around 7am and the search for Connecticut Warbler was on. Just 200m south of the Big Lake turnoff, I heard an intriguing loud song. I ignored the no trespassing sign and investigated: Connecticut Warbler! I finally got on the bird, singing from mid level up in a tree. They prefer mature aspens with very little understory. The habitat was perfect. A second bird was singing nearby.

A little further south I drove into Prueckl Rd and had 2 more Connecticut!!! Amazing! Also in the same general area was my first Blackpoll Warbler, Ruffed Grouse, White-throated Sparrow, Tennessee Warbler and a Pileated Woodpecker.

After a little bit of bushwhacking I finally found what is called Beaver Lake and there were Lesser Yellowlegs and Wilson's Phalarope, quite a few ducks, Alder and Least Flycatcher and even a pair of Common Loons.

Long Lake was not too productive, but the community hall there makes for a good place for picnic (and to stay overnight). It was here that a guy in a truck asked me if I was a bear hunter. And that he hates bear hunting.

I then spent the rest of the day driving deeper into Del Rio. This is the wide expanse wedged into the Peace and Pine Rivers, without bridges nearby. The roads were quite tricky with all the recent rain. A Killdeer was along the road, as was a Rose-breasted Grosbeak that didn't want to show himself. A nice Philadelphia Vireo was finally tracked down at 5.6mi of the 10km-stretch mentioned in Cannings. I walked into the road towards the Yellow Rail ponds, but it was really muddy and I just didn't get close, so I eventually had to turn around. A thunderstorm was threatening as well. There were Purple Finch, a funny-sounding Red-eyed Vireo that I tried to make into a Philly, Olive-sided Flycatcher and Clay-colored & Lincoln's Sparrow.

It then did start raining again and I decided to get in position for Brassey Rd on the road down to Tumbler Ridge (I should have just waited it out at Big Lake). This was a 2hr drive. I drove the road up in the evening to see how driveable it was. It wasn't good and I turned around quickly. I found Three-toed Woodpecker, Tennessee and Yellow-rumped Warbler and a drumming Ruffed Grouse.

I stayed overnight at the gravel pit near the turn-off. It smelled of sewage.

## **6/11: Dawson Creek in the rain**

It again rained all night and the road got even worse. I pulled the plug on it and headed towards Dawson Creek. McQueen Slough was active even though it was raining. Redhead, Ruddy Duck, Blue-winged Teal and Red-necked & Eared Grebes were on the lake. 3 Black Terns eventually flew in, an American Bittern was pumping. Many Soras were calling. A Common Grackle was with blackbirds in the marsh. On the sparrow front, I saw Clay-colored, Song, Savannah, Swamp, but no LeConte's. Least and Alder Flycatcher as usual. My only Baltimore Oriole of the trip was calling near the parking lot. It was a good spot!

Uphill from Dawson Creek at Radar Lake, a bedraggled Sora was staring back at me at the boat launch. Northern Waterthrush, Purple Finch, Common Yellowthroat and Fox Sparrow were at the overgrown trailhead. Nearby, 2 Black-throated Green Warblers, a Myrtle Yellow-rumped, an American Redstart and a Warbling Vireo came it close to my pishing in the rain.

I positioned myself to watch for Upland Sandpiper (in the rain, of course) along Braden Rd, but didn't get one. A LeConte's Sparrow was singing, but I could only get on a Clay-colored.

At the Kiskatinaw Provincial Park, site of a unique wooden curved bridge erected by the US Army Corps of Engineers, I heard one bird in 30min of strolling around the campground in the rain: The ever-singing Tennessee Warbler.

The Pouce Coupe sewage ponds are now gated, so couldn't get in.

Back south, on the access road to Swan Lake Provincial Park early evening, I ran into a Blue Jay, a locally rare Great Blue Heron and heard another LeConte's Sparrow. A well-seen Beaver was cool to track in the small pond on the north side of the road.

At the day use area at Swan Lake, about 50 Franklin's Gulls were wheeling around. Franklin's Gull is not a breeding bird of BC, but nevertheless birding-plumaged birds show up every summer in the Peace. An Osprey, Northern Waterthrush, Hairy Woodpecker, Kingfisher, Spotted Sandpiper and Lincoln's Sparrow were also present. It was still raining.

Late, I drove up Cormack 201G (which is a road branching off 3 to the south right at the Alberta border). The road was passable, but it wasn't great. The only place to safely turn off for the night was a radio tower near the top. I pulled all the way in and was definitely violating private property. I resorted to this as I did not want to stay at Swan Lake (they lock you in between 11pm and 7am) and I was going to try for Mourning Warbler early next morning).

## **6/12: Around Dawson Creek and Taylor**

Finally, a nice sunny morning! The road was still very soggy though. I birded Cormack 201G mainly for Canada and Mourning Warbler. And did I find Mourning Warbler! A singing male was perched up nicely for minutes as I watched it in the scope. No good pictures though. Another one was further down. 2 singing LeConte's Sparrows with one showing well lower down in the wet meadows were a real treat. Despite what Cannings says about them being in sedges around wetlands, I only saw them in wet meadows. Sort of the Grasshopper Sparrow of the wet north. Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Northern Waterthrush, Redstart, Alder and Least Flycatcher, Fox, Clay-colored and Lincoln's Sparrow and Tennessee Warbler rounded out the supporting cast. A seemingly out-of-place Green-winged Teal was at the end of the road in a slough.

Bushwhacking in the wet thickets on Cormack 201G made me want to dry up in the car, so I resorted to driving down 52 towards Tumbler Ridge for a while. At Banditt Rd, I got good pictures of my first Blue-headed Vireo. A Junco did a Bohemian Waxwing song. I turned around at Peavine Ck where an Olive-sided Flycatcher, 3 Tennessee Warblers, Hermit Thrush and Chipping Sparrow were saluting me.

In Taylor, I checked out Peace Island Park, but there was nothing noteworthy. Today the winds were blowing at 20-30mph, so it made birding difficult. However, driving to the end of Big Bam Rd (redneck heaven) I heard a Canada Warbler sing by the side of the road. I jumped out of the car and was able to get on it! Nice!

I drove down Johnson Rd in Taylor, but it was really slow. Calliope Hummingbirds were at the first house along Taylor Suds Rd (yes, it was a feeder). A Bald Eagle was over the Peace River bridge.

In Ft. St. John, at the visitor center, I found out about the free running track in the building. So, I ran outside for a little while in the howling wind and then did another 8 laps indoor. Should have run indoor all the way! The \$2 shower at the pool 2 blocks away was better than a \$5 shower at the truck-stop on the north side of town.

After doing some shopping, I set off for Beatton State Park (\$20/night) and got my only campsite at a provincial park for the trip. I walked around a little bit in the evening scouting the Cape May grove of White Fir mentioned in Cannings and heard an odd song that I could not identify nearby. The bird also did not come out. I bagged it and went to sleep.

### **6/13: Around Ft. St John**

I left my campsite at around 4:30am. First off, while Cannings says that you should go at first light for Cape Bay Warbler, I found that they are singing pretty much all day in June. Nevertheless, I tried to go real early to be safe. The grove mentioned in Cannings was unproductive, so I let myself drift further away from the grove, but still with White Spruce mixed in. Soon enough I was on the Ptarmigan Trail and a Cape May was singing. I tried to get on this bird for about 45min until I got a migraine, stiff neck and aborted.

After taking a 30min nap at the campsite I headed back to the spot where I had heard the weird song the evening before. I quickly found the bird, it was a Canada Warbler. He was perched-up out in the open, but with his back to me. Amazing though! A few minutes later I heard another Cape May and while getting on him, I found a Bay-breasted Warbler and was watching him for a while. Never really saw the second Cape May. Still, it was great!

From Beatton, I headed east. First stop was Cecil Lake. While it was stuffed with waterfowl, there were no unusual birds here. There were 100s of Eared Grebes! Plus Redhead, Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, Shoveler, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead and usual assortment of sparrows. A Vesper Sparrow sang near where I was parked.

The muskeg described in Cannings to have "breeding Palm Warbler" did not. So, I turned back.

Next I followed up on 2 eBird reports of Upland Sandpiper near Rose Prairie (about 30-40min north of Ft. St. John). I never found the Uppies, but enjoyed 3 Sharp-tailed Grouse on the edges of a field and Western Meadowlark, Northern Harrier and Savannah Sparrow.

After stocking up on supplies in Ft. St. John (not forgetting my Hobnobs), I headed out to Watson Slough. I was thinking about trying for Yellow Rail there at night, but again was too exhausted. Walking the trail through the slough, I saw Trumpeter Swan, Gadwall, Blue-winged Teal, Marsh Wren and Swamp Sparrow.

I cooked dinner at the rest area just beyond. It was on a rise and the setting was beautiful, overlooking the Peace River. The light was real soft.

I stayed overnight at the Attachie River bottom just a few kilometers further yet. 2 Blue Jays were noteworthy as the furthest most eastern Blue Jay sighting of my trip.

#### **6/14: From Ft. St. John to Ft. Nelson**

I started at around 6am at Watson Slough for a final attempt at Nelson's Sparrow. I was too late for Yellow Rail as I was too exhausted from the day before. The usual suspects were all there: Swamp Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow (2 right where Watson Rd forks off), Least & Alder Flycatcher, Western Tanager and House Wren. Red-eyed Vireo, Ovenbird, Olive-sided Flycatcher and White-throated Sparrow were along Watson Rd.

I then spent 3+ hours at Fish Creek Community Forest and had a blast! There were too many highlights to mention, but I did have Bay-breasted, Cape May, Canada and Black-throated Green Warbler, Boreal Chickadee and a Three-toed Woodpecker nest and Pacific-slope Flycatcher (a local rarity).

I didn't really know how to bird South Sewage Lagoons. There was an open gate and a firm warning not to trespass. I drove in anyway, but I'm pretty sure I wasn't at the right spot. Nevertheless, there were several species of waterfowl, Eared and Red-necked Grebe, Clay-colored and Savannah Sparrow, but nothing special.

At the North Sewage Lagoons the gate was locked, so that was a no go.

After doing my 5K on the indoor running track at the visitor center and taking a shower at the indoor pool, I did some shopping (1<sup>st</sup> year Ring-billed Gulls in the Safeway parking lot) and took off for Ft. Nelson. A big rain storm was in the forecast and it looked somewhat "weaker" further north. [This was the very storm that caused widespread flooding and power outages in the Peace River region. It also washed out 97, the only road into the area from Prince George. Fixing 97 up, so that at least one lane was open, took over 2 weeks!]

It was raining already ... A large flock of over 100 Pine Siskins caused me to stop briefly. Pink Mountain was cold and it was raining hard. I was only about to get information on the road up the mountain, but the waitress convinced me to eat dinner. She was right, it was not-to-be-missed!!

I decided to push for Ft. Nelson and re-visit at a later time. It cleared briefly at around 8pm when I was driving through a burn, and I saw Varied Thrush, American Robin, a Richardson's Merlin and – drumroll – a Northern Hawk-Owl (which turned out to be my only one for the trip). Nice!!!

Overnight at Andy Bailey Regional Park. Cannings said that it was free, but that changed as it now was a regional park and \$17/night. Hmmm ...

#### **6/15: A failed attempt to escape the rain in Ft. Nelson**



At Andy Bailey Regional Park it was raining in the morning. Still, Ovenbird, Tennessee and Canada Warbler, Western Tanager, Swamp Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (which really made itself known at pretty much every stop in the Peace/Northern Rockies) and White-throated Sparrow were all active.

As I was coming into Ft. Nelson, my first 2 Sandhill Cranes were along 97.

The Ft. Nelson Demonstration Forest was the buggiest place of my trip, yet the birding was only spotty. The good birds were all there, but never showed themselves at the same time. With the solid rain this morning, the highlight was a really close look at a hen Spruce Grouse in a tree. The only singers in the rain were the Tennessee Warblers.

Cedar Waxwing, Brewer's Sparrow, Cliff Swallow, Savannah Sparrow and Wilson's Snipe all roughed it out near the airport. There was a single American Wigeon at the sewage plant by 97. American Crows were in town.

As I was sitting in the visitor center, I was checking the forecast for Ft. Liard in the Northwest Territories and it looked much better than for Ft. Nelson. So I decided to give it a go at around 10am and drive up there. About halfway into the Liard Hwy (about 100km), the check engine light came on. Dang! This also resulted in a loss of cruise control. I decided to turn around and made it back into Ft. Nelson. At Dalex Auto Repair, they first read the code as "Rich in bank 1". They then checked the oxygen sensors and they were all good. One was real dirty, so they cleaned it. [And that must have been it, since I never had any problems again]. Todd, the owner, was real nice and said that he couldn't charge for something he didn't fix. Wow!

I went shopping. It was still raining, so I didn't bird any more that day. Overnight the Demonstration Forest parking lot.

### **6/16: Still mostly rained out**

In the rain early morning at Beaver Lake Recreation Site about 10km into the Liard Hwy, I saw a Solitary Sandpiper in a puddle and heard a Bay-breasted Warbler but didn't follow up.

About 30 Sandhill Cranes were along 97 coming into Ft. Nelson.

The Demonstration Forest in Ft. Nelson was buggy even in the rain. An American Redstart, Tennessee Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a heard-only Blue Jay were just about all there was in 4.5km of hiking. With the exception of a hen Spruce Grouse with 2 babies!

I then slept in my car for several hours while it was raining.

In the evening it stopped and even the sun came out. I went to Parker Lake, walking the 1km long muddy road from the turnoff to the lake. That was a good idea, because about halfway in, I heard and then saw a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher perched up on a Black Spruce! Even got phone-scoped pictures of the bird in good light.

The lake was good too, with a female Long-tailed Duck, Swamp Sparrow, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, Common Loon, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup and Common Goldeneye (with young). Also in the woods along the walk to the lake were Tennessee Warbler, Ovenbird, Red-eyed Vireo (with a funny song that I tried making into a Philly), Least Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kingbird and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

My final stop for the day were the sewage ponds and woods behind it. I found 2 Magnolia Warblers, White-throated Sparrow, Western Wood-Pewee, the obligatory Tennessee, Cedar Waxwing and some swallows. The only duck was a Common Goldeneye with young, but there was a Common Loon as well. Killdeer and Spotted Sandpiper were in a puddle nearby.

Overnight at the Demonstration Forest parking lot.

### **6/17: Around Ft. Nelson**

Finally, no rain.

I started early morning at Beaver Lake Recreation Area along the Liard Hwy and both the Solitary Sandpiper and Bay-breasted Warbler were still at the same spots. Both were seen well this time. Also at this spot were an Ovenbird, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Tennessee Warbler, Winter Wren, Lincoln's and Chipping Sparrow and Hammond's Flycatcher.

Between there and the turnoff for the Liard, I also saw/heard Magnolia, Tennessee Warbler, Waterthrush, Alder Flycatcher, Winter Wren, Red-eyed Vireo, Black-capped Chickadee, Warbling Vireo, Ovenbird, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Swainson's Thrush and Red-tailed Hawk (not a Harlan's).

At Parker Lake, the Long-tailed Duck was still there. Swamp Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Marsh Wren, Common Yellowthroat, both goldeneyes, Red-eyed Vireo, Western Wood-Pewee and Bonaparte's Gull were all good.

It was mid morning. Then came the SYD, the Sierra Yoyo Desan Rd. This is actually a well-maintained road that sends you deep into oil/gas well country. I drove out to the 50km mark, it was paved up to 30 some kilometers out. The birding was phenomenal and traffic was light. I finished with over 40 species, with the highlights being Tennessee, Magnolia, Cape May (very visible this time!), 3 Mourning, Canada Warbler, Ovenbird, Common Grackle, Winter Wren, Greater Yellowlegs, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Philadelphia Vireo (great looks!) and red (probably altivangans) Fox Sparrow. I did not get Palm Warbler or Yellow-bellied Flycatcher which Cannings called common. A Black Bear, one of two today, was along the road.

In Canada, even rednecks are nice. I had a great chat with a guy who ended up educating me about diamond willows and even offered me a beer. There was something humble in him. Humility seems to be one of the great Canadian qualities.

Mid-afternoon, the Demonstration Forest was still active (with birds, and bugs of course). I wore my mosquito netting which worked like a charm. Cape May, Bay-breasted, Magnolia, Tennessee Warbler, Ovenbird, Western Tanager and Black-capped Chickadee were all still singing.

It started drizzling again ...

Overnight at the gravel lot at 97 & Liard Hwy.

### **6/18: Stone Mountain Provincial Park and Pink Mountain**

The plan for the day was to do a day trip to Summit Lake in Stone Mountain Provincial Park to try for ptarmigan. I left real early and embarked on the Summit Ridge trail by just past 6am. Going uphill in cold temperatures is difficulty for me, as I can't regulate the temperature properly. Since I sweat a lot and

the wind was blowing up on the ridge, I got cold very quickly. Also, it didn't help that the trail petered out after only about 1km. Early along the trail, I heard (and later saw) a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher which was flagged as rare by eBird. The habitat was odd for it for sure. A Tennessee Warbler and several Yellow-rumpeds were also around. Up in/near the alpine were Townsend's Solitaire, Savannah Sparrow and a few American Pipits (also displaying). An all-dark juvie Gray Jay was yelling at me from a distance. I briefly followed up the Summit Trail itself, but could not ford the swollen creek just 250m in.

While getting to the trailhead early morning I noticed a lighter brown bear along the roadside in the Tetsa area. He was still there when I drove back to Ft. Nelson. He even had a buddy with him. They ended up being Grizzlies and I got great pictures. Black bears were plentiful along the road all day (must have had 6 or so).

A quick stop at Kledo Creek revealed a road in perfect condition, behind the gate. Cannings mentions that it is ok to walk in. It was also mid day, but the birding was still fabulous and there were no bugs. Tennessee, Magnolia, Cape May and 2 Bay-breasted Warblers, an Ovenbird, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak and 3 Hammond's Flycatchers were the tally of the better birds.

Foolishly, I decided to double back and try Pink Mountain again. That's 220km one way. Once there, I took the access road to the park & mountain and the first 16km were fine, but after about 3.6km after the turn on the road that goes uphill I gave up. It was just too muddy and waterlogged from the many days of rain. Major bummer! I treated myself to another outstanding dinner at the Buffalo Inn in Pink Mountain (steak and scallops!) and drove all the way back to Ft. Nelson.

Overnight at the Demonstration Forest parking lot in Ft. Nelson.

### **6/19: From Ft Nelson to Liard Hot Springs**

It was the 4<sup>th</sup> time birding the Demonstration Forest early this morning. Also the first time in the morning. The eastern warblers were performing: I had Canada, Mourning, Ovenbird, Magnolia and the always singing Tennessee. Add to that a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in the muskeg, my Northern Rockies lifer Brown Creeper and various other lesser birds.

A final stop at Parker Lake yielded a Greater Yellowlegs, 7 Bonaparte's Gulls and the continuing Alder Flycatcher, Common Yellowthroat and Marsh Wren which were serenading me from the edge of the lake for the last few days. The road was real shitty this morning and I bet a non-4WD car would have gotten stuck.

Missing the Grizzlies from the day before, I zipped by Summit Lake and briefly stopped at a second smaller lake beyond it. I found both Canvasback and Lesser Scaup there. Several Stone Sheep (the brown version of Dall's Sheep) were at a lick by the side of the road a couple clicks on the way down from Summit Lake. It was a somewhat dangerous spot, both for the sheep, but also for the traffic going through.

A Red Fox was along the road somewhere.

The Toad River resort was very active midday, in particular with swallows: There Cliff, Barn, Tree and my first Violet-Greens for the trip. On the lake, it was ducks galore, a total of 13 species (including Redhead and Blue-winged Teal. Several Cedar Waxwing, Pewee, Alder and Least Flycatcher and the obligatory

Tennessee Warbler. Also 2 Trumpeter Swans on the lake. The woods behind the air strip were dead though.

Mid afternoon I decided to drive up the Nonda Creek Corridor. It was a long gravelly road, with the last stretch being quite iffy. There were some good birds though: Lower down a Ruffed Grouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Townsend's Warbler, many Tennessee's, Varied Thrush and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Halfway up you got to a series of ponds which held Northern Pintail and Barrow's Goldeneye. At or just above tree line (near the top of the road which was a radio tower), the more northerly species like Wilson's Warbler, Golden-crowned Sparrow and my first Blackpoll Warblers started to show. I checked the top for ptarmigan, but found none. On the way back it started to pour.

At Muncho Lake, my first Mew and Herring Gull sat on a gravel spit.

I got to Liard Hot Springs at around 7pm. What a great spot for birds! There is a 0.7km boardwalk through a marsh and a wooded area to get to the hot springs. A Swamp Sparrow was singing right at the beginning of the boardwalk (he got flagged on eBird as rare). The highlight was my first singing White-winged Crossbill for the trip. He was perched up nicely too, but too high up for good pictures. Also present were Blue-headed Vireo, Magnolia Warbler, Hammond's Flycatcher, Varied Thrush, White-throated Sparrow, Cedar Waxwing and lots of the lesser birds. Of course, I had brought my swimming gear and went for a soak. Quite relaxing, albeit too hot on this warm evening. ☺ I also caught up with Yellow Monkeyflower and Philadelphia fleabane, two uncommon flowers that far north.

Just before Liard Hot Springs, I saw my first Wood Bison, on both side of the Liard River.

Overnight just beyond Liard Hot Springs Park. It was a road leading to a trailhead. It was where I heard my last Ovenbird for the trip.

### **6/20: From Liard Hot Springs to Watson Lake**

Early morning I walked into Liard Hot Springs again after having more Wood Bison on the road. The trail again was pretty birdy, with many White-winged Crossbills singing. On top of the birds from last night, I also saw both waxwings, with Cedar seemingly involved in building a nest. A Solitary Sandpiper was new as well.

Then I was on my way to Watson Lake ...

At Whirlpool Canyon, I still found an Ovenbird, Hammond's and Least Flycatcher (when do you find those within feet from each other?!), Warbling Vireo and Tennessee Warbler.

At the Yukon border, a White-winged Crossbill was singing. A good sign for the excitement to come.

Contact Creek was quiet with only Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Warbling Vireo, Hammond's Flycatcher, Tennessee Warbler, Barn Swallow and Pine Siskin.

I arrived in Watson Lake early afternoon. It was warm. Immediately it was obvious that most of the eastern birds had disappeared and that it was - plain and simple – not that birdy. I hiked around First Wye Lake in Watson Lake, the highlights being Western Tanager (eBird flagged it as rare), a single Arctic Tern, Boreal Chickadee, Red-necked Grebe and Purple Finch.

At the visitor center and later at the gym I ran into all those sooty folks. They ended up being a crowd of young morel pickers. They are sooty because they hike fresh burns; morels come up within the first year after the fire.

Stops at the airport and at Albert Creek didn't yield anything new.

In the evening I visited Second Wye Lake. There were many gulls (Bonaparte's, Herring and Mew), several Arctic Terns, a Northern Pintail and – drumroll – another singing White-winged Crossbill. There were also a bunch of German kids ...

In the evening, just before heading out to find a place to sleep, a Eurasian Collared-Dove was on the ground at Wye Lake Park. Hmmm.

Overnight just south of the airport.

### **6/21: From Watson Lake to Whitehorse**

I briefly checked the area near the Wye Lake trailhead where I thought I heard a Vesper Sparrow in the morning. And yes, there was one singing.

The goal of the day was to make it to Whitehorse. A Black Bear appeared by the roadside shortly after leaving Watson Lake which felt like a good omen for more exciting things to come.

The first real stop was Rancheria Falls Recreation Site. It was birdy, albeit somewhat buggy. Tennessee and Blackpoll were nice, a loud Northern Waterthrush was also there. I also flushed a hen Spruce Grouse into a tree, but then got nice looks there.

Near Swan Lake, BC, I heard my first *gambelli* White-crowned Sparrow of the trip.

On this cold and rainy day, at least near Teslin, a White-winged Crossbill was singing from a tree top at the gas station. Fun! An Arctic Tern was patrolling the lake. A Porcupine was on the road somewhere.

At Marsh Lake CG during lunch, the only noteworthy bird were 2 Semipalmated Plovers by the beach. I also heard a suspicious chickadee, but couldn't track it down as I was cooking. A few minutes later, near Swan Heaven, I did find a small flock of Mountain Chickadees. Another Semipalmated Plover was on the beach.

At the river mile 0 of the Yukon River and Lewes Marsh I was surprised to find a Cedar Waxwing. The range map does not show them extending into the Yukon. I did see more of them in the Whitehorse area later, so the range map needs some updating. Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, White-winged Crossbill, Common Yellowthroat, Belted Kingfisher and a few duck species were at the edge of Lewes Marsh.

In the evening at around 9pm, with rain threatening, I drove up Haeckel Hill right outside of Whitehorse hoping for ptarmigan. The timing wasn't good, but a single Golden-crowned Sparrow up near the top was good.

Overnight just above McIntyre Marsh on Haeckel Hill.

### **6/22: From Whitehorse to Dawson City**

I was hoping for Rusty Blackbird early at McIntyre Marsh in Whitehorse. While it was active, there weren't many real good birds. Barrow's Goldeneye, Northern Waterthrush and Solitary Sandpiper being the best of the bunch. And only Red-winged Blackbirds, no Rusties.

I checked the area near the rodeo grounds for Upland Sandpiper, but only found a male Mountain Bluebird and Least Flycatcher.

At Lake Laberge CG and the drive to it, there were a Harlan's Hawk, Common Loons and Hermit Thrush. Otherwise it was noisy (too many people) and slow.

Driving north on the Klondike, I added Magpie, Orange-crowned Warbler, Canada Goose and Ruffed Grouse. The hen grouse was stopped in the middle of the road trying to coax her young to cross and I stopped the car. A big trailer was about to pass me and would surely have hit the hen, but I signaled him to slow. He stopped on the other lane and we were watching the successful crossing of the whole family. Disaster averted!

Rock Island Lake was hopping with water birds: 35 White-winged Scoters, 25 Barrow's Goldeneyes, many Bonaparte's and Mew Gulls, both Horned and Red-necked Grebe and a variety of other ducks.

Meadow Lake (also labelled Coot Lake as it is the northernmost location for breeding Coot) was also very active and sparrows (Fox, Lincoln's and White-crowned) were singing near the parking area, but no coots for me.

Gravel Lake yielded a drake Surf Scoter and a pair of Trumpeter Swans.

In the early evening I spent an hour up Bonanza Creek Road in the Goldfields. Common Redpoll, Bohemian Waxwing, Solitary Sandpiper, a Ruffed Grouse with 3 chicks, White-winged Crossbill, Alder Flycatcher and a few species of sparrows. I also got a glimpse of what looked to be a female Rusty Blackbird and vowed to return. What I do understand now is that Gray-cheeked Thrush is not possible in this area even though it is on the Dawson checklist. You need to go up the Dempster for that.

Overnight at the Ridge Road Heritage Trail parking lot where I also fixed dinner. While I was talking to a guy there who was hiking up the trail to spend the night on a parcel that he had a claim on, a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was turree-ing.

### **6/23: Around Dawson City**

At the Ridge Road Heritage Trail parking lot early, the turree-ing Yellow-bellied Flycatcher gave his primary call.

I drove the Goldfields loop this morning, Bonanza Creek Rd, Upper Bonanza Creek and then down Hunker Creek Rd. This is about 50km and traverses a variety of habitats. At the top there is access to King Solomon Dome, but other than White-crowned Sparrows I saw nothing of note up there. Down below I found a male Rusty Blackbird, 2 more Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, a Least Flycatcher (accidental) just a little ways up Upper Bonanza, a Tennessee Warbler at km 15.5 of Hunker Creek Rd, Pewee, Townsend's Warbler, Gray Jays, Boreal Chickadees, White-winged Crossbill and many Common Redpolls.

At Klondike River CG there were several Townsend's Warblers, Boreal Chickadees and singing White-winged Crossbills, but not much else other than mosquitos.

Henderson's Corner was very quiet midday. The only interesting bird was a Savannah Sparrow.

Driving up Midnight Dome I picked up a gorgeous male Pine Grosbeak and some Pine Siskin. At the top I ran into Gary, a local from Dawson, who tirelessly answered my many questions about the area. Later he even treated me to a beer and offered me a smoke when we met up again at the Crocus Bluff Trail lower down (Townsend's Warbler in the spruces, and singing Fox Sparrow down the bluff). Several Ravens came checking us out from only a few feet away.

After a \$3 shower at the RV Park in Dawson (which also had free potable water), I drove into the Dempster Hwy. I didn't really stop, and went straight to the Tombstone CG. Some common birds around there were Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Wilson's Warbler, Junco, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler plus Mew Gull and Green-winged Teal.

#### **6/24: Dempster Hwy (Ogilvie Mountains and Blackstone Uplands)**

Got up at 5:30am again and birded the Blackstone Uplands from km72 to km132. American Tree-Sparrow and a nicely perched-up Gray-cheeked Thrush were an excellent start near the pass. Fox Sparrow and Common Redpoll were numerous everywhere.

At km77 there was a yelling Northern Shrike, in the back 3 Arctic Terns were flying south.

The km86 ponds hosted 6 Red-necked Phalarope, one seemingly on a nest. A single swan was likely a Tundra, but I didn't verify. Also around there or a little further there were Cliff Swallow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Northern Waterthrush, Yellow Warbler, Savannah Sparrow and Wilson's Snipe.

At Moose Lake I only found Horned Grebe, Surf Scoter, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeon and many Bufflehead.

The series of lakes around Chapman Lakes, the announced Red-throated Loon put in a good showing. There also were my first confirmed Greater Scaup.

Finally, at km132 were Gray Jays and 2 Bald Eagles.

So ... You are wondering about the Blackstone specialties, right? Smith's Longspur, Long-tailed Jaeger, American Golden-Plover, for example. Zip on all fronts. Not even a ptarmigan.

At Windy Pass, I traipsed around a rocky mound trying to find a ptarmigan. Zip.

I was not in the best of all moods and decided to push on. Taking the long drive to the Richardson Mountains meant 350km each way on this stupid dirt road ...

At km158 I checked up on an old Gyrfalcon nest and lo and behold, 3 Gyrfalcon chicks were in it! Hard to believe! I waited around for an adult to deliver food, but gave up after an hour or so.

After about 2 hours of driving through Eagle Plains (which is actually on a ridge), the tire pressure light on my Subaru went on. I was able to roll into Eagle Lodge and it was immediately determined that I needed a patch since there was a small hole in the tire. It only took 20min, and cost \$31. The day was saved and I celebrated with an Alexander Keith's IPA (ok, it wasn't so special). I then found a place to camp just a little further.

A side note on the Eagle Plains ... It is a dead place birdwise and it's not worth stopping for anything. While Northern Hawk-Owl surely occurs, I had to concentrate on the road too much to constantly scan the treetops. I went 35-40mph, using cruise control wherever possible.

### **6/25: Dempster Hwy (Richardson Mountains)**

Another early start and this time I was not denied! It started with a Short-eared Owl at km403. I had also just passed north of the Arctic Circle.

At km415, I flushed what I originally thought was a Willow Ptarmigan! It turned out that there were a total of 3 adult female birds in the area. This was Willow habitat and I wasn't even thinking Willow. When I later looked at the pictures of bird 1 I started doubting my original id and a few folks confirmed in the meantime that it was a Rock. A second bird was a Willow Ptarmigan. What these 3 birds were doing there is not clear to me.

I then scanned uphill a little ways and found a pair of Long-tailed Jaegers!!! Both with nice long tails.

A kilometer further, I heard the rattle of a Smith's Longspur and briefly got on the bird in flight. It landed and disappeared. But, at km425, when I again heard the rattle, I was able to get on a bird perched on a little mound. I watched it for a loooong time!

At km436, an immature Golden Eagle was on the ground right by the side of the road.

At the pass at km467, I drove up the short road to a fenced-in repeater. Walking around just 5 minutes yielded an American Pipit, but nothing else.

I then finally passed into the Northwest Territories which I had been denied about a week ago on the Liard Hwy by the check-engine-light.

The second pass at km490 had a little side road up to a radio tower. I decided to walk it. Near the top I found an interior Gray-crowned Rosy-finch and *arctica* Horned Lark. Otherwise it was slow, so I turned back. Looks like I got 13 species on the NWT list now, including a Surf Scoter. Savannah and *gambelli* White-crowned Sparrows are abundant in the Richardson Mountains, which do not have trees.

Cornwall Creek at km448 yielded a surprised-looking drake Harlequin Duck.

On the way back I turned up a second pair of Long-tailed Jaegers at km420. The pair at km415 was still there, one bird even took flight briefly. No sign of any longspurs that time. I believe that these birds have already stopped singing and are tending to their nests.

After a home-cooked lunch at Eagle Lodge (with several hungry Gray Jays trying to get some) and a celebratory Snickers, I again crossed the Eagle Plains. At km180, two Solitary Sandpipers were perched up on the tips of White Spruces. Very cool! Shorebirds on tree tops are one of my favorites!

The 3 Gyrfalcon chicks at km158 were still there. This time an adult briefly came in. I didn't even see it fly in, but the youngsters were making a lot of noise.

Overnight near km140, ready to give the Blackstone Uplands another try tomorrow morning.

### **6/26: Dempster Hwy (Ogilvie Mountains and Blackstone Uplands again, Dawson City)**



Yet another shot at the Blackstone Uplands ... Just shy of getting there at km137, I got my first Common Merganser for the Yukon. And a Common Goldeneye.

In the Chapman Lakes area, I found a total of 3 Red-throated Loons, 6 Long-tailed Ducks (which had eluded me before), a drake Black Scoter (rare for the area), a pair of Blue-winged Teal (also rare and there was a report of a Blue-winged Teal x Northern Shoveler from this area; I should have looked more carefully at the male), 25 drake Surf Scoters (!) and 2 Greater Scaup.

At km106, one Merlin handed over a small rodent (!) to another Merlin. Both were yelling loudly. Very cool!

At km98 the tundra looked decent, so I spent time looking for arctic species. And failed again, while an Alder Flycatcher was calling in the back (my only one for the Dempster). Two young foxes were by a den near the road.

At km82 there were 2 swans. This time I spent some more time on the id and found that they were 1 Tundra and 1 Trumpeter. A Gray-cheeked Thrush was calling out back. One of many in the general area.

Near the North Fork Pass, a small road leads uphill to the trailhead of the Goldensides Trail. I was hoping to get out into the alpine to look for maybe Northern Wheatear and Rock Ptarmigan. The 1.7km-long hike (one way) was pleasant and bug free. American Tree Sparrows were singing at the parking lot. The hike yielded 2 Golden-crowned Sparrows and many White-crowns, up to 5 Hoary Marmots, a Merlin harassing a Golden Eagle but no arctic species.

Here is my take on the Blackstone Uplands: I think the tundra is shrubbifying rather severely there, so that the arctic breeders had to move up our out. Probably due to global warming. There probably are some birds, but higher up and not accessible from the road. The road follows the creek and the willows are very high. Sometimes too high to look over, and there are some bluffs anyway that you can't look over. The write-ups in Finley and the little brochures copy from Bob Frisch's 1986 book about finding birds along the Dempster. Well, sadly, things have changed and you may have to go further north (like the Richardson Mountains) to get your arctic targets. One other point: The Tombstone birding festival is in the first week of June and I assume that that time coincides with maximum activity. So, I was at least 3 weeks late. Smith's Longspur definitely wasn't singing any longer.

One amazing thing is that several common breeders in Oregon make it this far north (Richardson Mountains), some as a different subspecies. Wilson's Warbler, White-crowned and Savannah Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, and even Yellow-rumped Warbler. This gives one a special appreciation as these birds are really long-distance migrants.

After a quick check at the visitor center at km72, I decided to call it quits and drive back as the weather was declining. The Grizzly Lake Trail at km52 gets you out into the alpine, but I skipped it. I had survived the Dempster!

I took a quick nap at Klondike River CG and a hen Ruffed Grouse was trying to herd her chicks when I drove out.

After spending some hours at the store and at the visitor center, I set out once more for the 3-marsh spot along lower Bonanza Creek Rd. I really like the spot, it was very active again at around 6:30pm. Highlights were Lesser Yellowlegs, 2 Solitary Sandpipers (defending a nest site and coming really close)

and a Spotty, 4 warblers including a Common Yellowthroat and 2 Northern Waterthrush, a Pewee in the distance, several Common Redpolls and a Bank Swallow. 23 species in 45 minutes is good that far north. My Yukon Black-capped Chickadee was nearby as well.

Overnight at the Ridge Road Heritage Trail parking lot.

### **6/27: Dawson City to Stewart Crossing & Silver Hwy**

I slept in a little bit and the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher from a few days ago was still singing. I then birded the lower part of Hunker Creek Rd. Nothing of note. The goal for the day was to hit the Silver Hwy from Stewart Crossing to Keno.

First stop heading south along the Klondike Hwy was Moose Creek CG. White-winged Crossbills were singing and an inquisitive family of Boreal Chickadees payed a visit. They are usually quite shy, but this time came in very close. One Townsend's Warbler was also singing.

My first stop along the Silver Hwy was Devil's Elbow Wetlands. I started hiking the trail, but then realized that it was leading away from the marsh and to an overlook on the other side of the highway. Weird. While cooking lunch, an Arctic Ground Squirrel was watching me.

Five Mile Lake CG yielded "only another" singing White-winged Crossbill, Hermit Thrush and a Herring Gull. Just past the CG and the associated rec area is a smaller lake on the other side of the highway (which turns gravel right there) which was superb: A pair of Pacific Loons, Horned and Red-necked Grebes and whole slew of other waterfowl. A female Moose was feeding in the marsh in the back! My first Moose of the trip.

At Halfway Lakes at the Silver Trail Inn (km 76), I initially stopped for 2 Pine Grosbeaks feeding on the gravel by the road side. It ended up being a good stop, as I was able to add 3 Bohemian Waxwings (man, are these guys quiet right now), a pair of Rusty Blackbirds and a yelling Lesser Yellowlegs perched high up in a tree (nice!). Did I mention that I love shorebirds perched up high in trees???

In Keno, I satisfied my craving for French Fries ... Not very normal for me; looks like my nutrition is off from all the camping food. I've also experiencing cramps in my calves. A Say's Phoebe was flycatching around the big museum and Violet-green Swallows were zipping around. Keno is a cute little hamlet with 1 bar, 1 hotel and 2 museums. There are 12 all-year residents. It's a very mellow place, with not many tourists. Visit if you can.

The highlight of Silver Trail was going to be Keno Hill. And it was! It is actually a tall mountain at 1800m and gets you up into the arctic. Keno Hill is also noteworthy for its butterflies. So I embarked on the Butterfly Trail. Unfortunately the winds were too strong and while the flowers were neat, the butterflies stayed down. BUT, just a few yards into the hike, I got really close to an American Golden-Plover sitting on its nest. I later found its mate as well. Wow! I quickly added American Pipit and Horned Lark and then finally got a visual on my first Collared Pika. Having almost wrapped up the hike I noted the outline of a chicken on a rock near the top. It ended up being a White-tailed Ptarmigan with 7 young! Very cool! I really wanted it to be a Rock Ptarmigan, but White-tailed are actually much rarer up here.

On the drive back I had a Northern Harrier at km80, a hen Spruce Grouse with 3 chicks by the roadside at km74 and a male Pine Grosbeak at km70.

I like the Silver Hwy ... Birding was excellent! Probably mostly due to the light traffic.

Overnight at Gordon Park in Mayo (free!).

### **6/28: Mayo to Whitehorse**

Another late start, a few minutes of birding around Mayo (nothing special except for Fox Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Northern Waterthrush) and I was on my way. I again stopped at Meadow Lake (still no coots, but there were 30 some drake Ruddy Ducks present) and at Rock Island Lake (this time a pair of Trumpeter Swans on top of the masses of waterfowl), and then had a relaxing lunch at the side of the Yukon River in Carmacks.

Back in Whitehorse I spent a good amount of time at the visitor center and went stocking up on food.

In the evening I checked out the Boreal World's Trail at the Yukon College where it was slow except for a close White-winged Crossbill. Unfortunately, the lighting was out-of-this-world bad.

Quartz Creek Wetlands did not yield anything of note other than many Mew Gulls (some on nests), it likely is more of migration hotspot.

On the way out of town, several Arctic Terns were fishing on the river near the gravel bars just south of downtown.

Looking for an access to McIntyre Mountain and a place to sleep, I found myself at McIntyre Marsh again. Driving a little ways in on the Canada Trail (which I hadn't done last week), I came to an open marsh right next to the road. The first bird I saw was a male Rusty Blackbird. I followed the bird for a while and even got the scope on it. A nice evening surprise!

Overnight low on Haeckel Hill.

### **6/29: Around Whitehorse**

I'm noticing that I'm losing steam ...

Early morning I stopped by at Fish Lake. Nice Place! 2 Arctic Terns were perched up close, Surf Scoters, a pair of Red-necked Grebes, many scaup (both Lesser and Greater) and a female Red-breasted Merganser were on the lake. A Blackpoll Warbler was singing from behind (the area of Fish Creek that is interspersed with White Spruce). A Lesser Yellowlegs was yelling from a tree top. On the drive back from Fish Lake I must have seen 30 Snowshoe Hares. Where was the lynx???

After that, I drove up Gray Mountain, based on a report of Rock Ptarmigan of 2 TX birders. A Tennessee Warbler was singing loudly along the way up (and was still singing when I drove down). A Spruce Grouse with 3 young was along the roadside. A Sharp-shinned Hawk, my Yukon province lifer, was along the road about 0.8km short of the radio tower. The radio tower was the end of the road and also the trailhead. The hike to the summit was 4.6km roundtrip. I ended up finding 2 broods of Dusky Grouse but no Rock Ptarmigan. The Rock Ptarmigan may have been misid'ed. A hen Spruce Grouse with at least 2 chicks was near the trailhead, in the willows. Seemed odd, just too high up. A Porcupine was scuttling away from the trail. Also present were 2 Dusky Flycatchers, 4 Golden-crowned Sparrows, several Townsend's Solitaires and American Pipit.

I could not resist Vietnamese food in town, so after I had refueled and researched better how to get up McIntyre Mountain, it was mid afternoon and I went on my way of finding the way up Mount Mac. I found it, but it turned out rough that I had to turn back. No ptarmigans for me.

It was time for some more shopping and an oil change. The Subaru needed a treat.

Late I checked Schwatka Lake and only found a few Surf Scoters, a very dusty road and lots of traffic on it. I read somewhere that Schwatka Lake is the water supply for Whitehorse. Where there would be numerous float planes around the lake baffles me ...

Overnight on Gray Mountain Rd, just where the road turns bad. Just about to tuck myself in, I dropped my key in the car. It took me a long time to find it, I was almost ready to walk out and call Subaru. A Fox checked out the car as I was finally tucked in.

### **6/30: Idle day around Whitehorse**

As it was raining most of the day, I only went to Wolf Creek CG in the morning. Highlight was a singing White-winged Crossbill! Then I checked out the Beringia Interpretive Center, went to a tire shop and the visitor center.

Towards the end of the day, I briefly stopped at McIntyre Marsh (the second spot about 800m down the Canada Trail). Again I saw a Rusty Blackbird, this time a female. A pair of Red-winged Blackbirds was also present. Curiously, both Cedar (uncommon to start with) and Bohemian Waxwing were on the same perches side by side.

Fish Lake also did not disappoint: 3 Arctic Terns were motoring around, two of which seem to be a pair. They were quite territorial chasing everybody else out. On the mini mudflats at the far side of the dam, I photographed 2 adult Semipalmated Sandpipers, likely already back from breeding further north. A Lesser Yellowlegs, a Spotted Sandpiper and a Semipalmated Plover were also there. On the lake proper I found Common Goldeneye, both scaup and Red-necked Grebe again.

Overnight in quarry near Fish Lake.

### **7/1: Canada day around Whitehorse**

Woke up to 37F, colder than I thought. The goal for the day was to hike up Mt. Mac (Mt. McIntyre). I dawdled for a while due to the cold and checked Fish Lake. One Semipalmated Sandpiper was joined by 3 Leasts, everyone else was still there. The Blackpoll Warbler came out for a few seconds. A Wilson's Warbler joined in, a first for that location for me. The Arctic Tern pair were again very territorial towards the interloper.

The hike ended up being a total of 18km. The usual stuff (Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, lots of Orange-crowned Warblers and a Dusky Flycatcher were joined by an American Tree Sparrow, Horned Lark and a pair of Northern Harriers at the top (radio masts and summit). I worked the area good, but could not find any ptarmigan. Arctic Ground Squirrels were abundant and I also found 2 calling Collared Pikas.

After a final stop at the visitor center and some shopping, I took off in direction Watson Lake.

At Swan Lake, BC, I got out for a few minutes and promptly 2 Arctic Terns were wheeling by. Province bird for me.

Overnight just east of Rancheria.

## **7/2: The Stewart-Cassiar Hwy**

Early morning, while still in the Yukon, a Wood Bison was walking down the shoulder of the highway.

I gassed up at Junction 37 and re-entered British Columbia. The birds that seemed to be lacking in Yukon were back!

Just a few clicks south of the border in a burn I stopped at a small unmarked lake. There were Common Loon, Lincoln's and White-crowned Sparrow, Bohemian Waxwing and Tennessee Warbler. Just a little further down the road, a White-throated Sparrow was singing. Western Wood-Pewee, Pine Siskin, Chipping Sparrow and a drumming woodpecker.

I had high hopes for Boya Lake Provincial Park, but it was overall slow. Tennessee Warbler, Boreal Chickadee, singing White-winged Crossbill, Gray Jay, Western Wood-Pewee and Bald Eagle were probably the best birds. The lake was entirely lacking waterfowl, yet it was a real mellow morning. They say that it is one of the few northern lakes in BC that is actually swimmable, i.e. it is warm enough to swim in. I didn't try.

Mudd Lake had both goldeneyes, Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup and the obligatory Tennessee Warbler.

At 2 large gravel pullouts, a total of 8 Pine Grosbeaks and 2 Pine Siskin were ingesting the grit.

An unmarked lake at km564-5 held a summering Tundra Swan. I checked carefully and it was not a Trumpeter which it should have been. Maybe a weak bird that couldn't complete its migration. It was a decent spot, as the southern end was a big marsh. Northern Waterthrush, Warbling Vireo, Alder Flycatcher, Lesser and Greater Scaup, Yellow Warbler, American Wigeon were all new for Stikine municipality. ☑ As were Varied Thrush and Orange-crowned Warbler a little further down the road.

At Dease Lake I took the road down to the boat launch. At a little marsh about halfway down the road I found Northern Waterthrush, Fox Sparrow, Wilson's and Blackpoll Warbler, Swainson's and Varied Thrush and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. It was a nice little spot! At the lake itself, a Common Loon had a baby on its back. Always cool to see! Also, there were 5 Surf Scoters, a Savannah Sparrow and a singing American Redstart.

In Dease Lake proper, there were Tree and Cliff Swallows and 5 Bonaparte's Gulls were wheeling overhead. At the RV Park in town was the first time that somebody in BC was unfriendly to me as it was clear that they simply wanted me to leave.

Right outside of town, another American Redstart flew across the road.

As the road climbing up towards Gnat Pass (at 1200m the highest point along the Stewart-Cassiar), I picked up a pair of Solitary Sandpipers with a chick. A little further up in the spruces, there were Boreal Chickadee, a Pine Grosbeak, Gray Jay, Tennessee and Yellow-rumped Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and White-crowned Sparrows. At the pass proper were a few Lincoln's Sparrows.

Just down the pass were several Gray-cheeked Thrushes (who would have known!!), Wilson's Warblers, a Blackpoll and 2 Tennessee Warblers. Amazing! I hadn't been able to dig one of those up near Dawson City of Whitehorse.

At Lower Gnat Lake, the highlight were 2 American Tree Sparrows. 2 Arctic Terns were on the mudflats, Northern Shoveler, both scaups and Mallard on the lake, a pair of Wilson's Snipe in the ditch and a slew of dicky birds in the willows, including my first Yellow Warblers for the area.

At Upper Gnat Lake, I picked up a Bald Eagle and an Olive-sided Flycatcher was calling his Three Beers in the distance. Another Blackpoll Warbler and a Hermit Thrush a little further along.

The Gnat Pass/Gnat Lakes area is not sufficiently covered in Cannings. Seems to me they did not research this site well. It is a great and very unusual site: Gray-cheeked Thrush and American Tree-Sparrow are not a gimme in northern BC and there were easy.

I pulled into Morchuea Lake Recreation Site at around 17:30. I quickly checked the lake and watched more Bonies, Red-necked Grebe, both scaup and a Common Loon, but the highlight was a young bull moose which I was able to share with a couple from FL and a lady from Germany. Overnight at Morchuea Lake. This was another one of those amazing free campgrounds.

It was a fun day, indeed!

### **7/3: The Stewart-Cassiar Hwy to Stewart**

It started raining when I cooked dinner the night before, rained all night and only let up mid day. So, I drove. A young Moose was in a wetland early morning. A pair of Great Horned Owls were perched on a sign close to Iskut.

Bob Quinn Lake still had Tennessee Warbler. It had become a sport to find the southernmost Tennessee.

Snowbank Wetlands just south of Ningunsaw Pass was pretty active and I saw for the first time a good mix of west side birds: MacGillivray's Warbler, Red-breasted Sapsucker and Pacific Wren were all firsts for the trip. Swainson's and Varied Thrush, Song and Lincoln's Sparrow, Tennessee (!) and Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Pine Siskin, Red-tailed Hawk, Warbling Vireo and Golden-crowned Kinglet were the supporting cast.

An Osprey was on the lake just south of Bell 2. Regarding Bell 2 ... They wanted \$10/30min for WiFi and \$10 for a shower. Avoid if you can.

At Meziadin Junction, I turned west on the Glacier Hwy towards Stewart, BC. I got WiFi for \$5 for the whole day. Along the first two kilometers of the Glacier Hwy I briefly stopped for some perched-up Red-breasted Sapsuckers, but then realized that I had to get out because a lot of birds were singing: Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Hairy Woodpecker, American Redstart, Yellow Warbler and Warbling Vireo.

I pulled out for the glaciers, in particular Bear Glacier, but the wind was too cold to really enjoy the view.

In Stewart, I walked the boardwalk downtown, then briefly went across the border to Hyder, AK, went for a run, took a shower at the RV Park (nice folks, \$1 for 4min) and cooked supper. In town, Red Crossbill were prominent. Also, a couple of American Crow, several Bald Eagles and several Bonies were on the BC side, 2 Arctic Terns on the AK side. Great Blue Heron on either. Interestingly, a Western Wood-Pewee was at the 90-degree turn coming into Stewart from Meziadin Jct.

After dinner, I went back into AK to the Fish Creek Wildlife Observation Area. Chum salmon had just started running and everyone was waiting for the first bear (95% of them are Grizzlies). It wasn't meant to be, but a beaver was busy building a dam and easily observed for a long time. Some chum were also present. Many birds were still singing. New for AK were Townsend's, Yellow and Yellow-rumped Warbler, Red Crossbill, Varied, Swainson's and Hermit Thrush, both kinglets, Vaux's Swift, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Hammond's and Pac-slope Flycatcher. A hen Common Merganser with several young was also around. It was also nice to chat with Eric, the F&W naturalist on site.

Overnight along Salmon Glacier Rd on the AK side.

#### **7/4: Stewart, Hyder (AK) and the drive to New Hazelton**

Early morning I drove up to the vista point for the Salmon Glacier, but due to the thick fog, there were no clues that it was even there. I continued a little ways along the road beyond the vista point, but was then chased out by a (friendly) security guard. So, I parked at the vista point and then walked further up into the alpine, in the thick fog, maybe about 20min. The fog lifted briefly up there for me and, sure enough, 2 Willow Ptarmigan found me (i.e. they flew towards me when they saw me). They were aggressively defending the chicks. The male was doing a threat display, dancing around me. Once he receded to guard the chicks, the female did the same. When I moved, she came closer. Very cool! Also up there were many Golden-crowned Sparrows, an American Pipit, 2 possible Gray-crowned Rosy-finches and Robins. Near the vista point, Sooty Fox Sparrow, Pacific Wren, Varied & Hermit Thrush, Pine Siskin and Olive-sided Flycatcher chimed in. A Golden Eagle circled further down.

Eventually, the fog sort of lifted and all were treated to an amazing Salmon Glacier (the 4<sup>th</sup> longest in North America). Albeit only for moments, because it would close up as quickly as it opened.

Near my campsite from the night before, I found a singing Tennessee Warbler at km14.2 (if you follow the yellow signs). Looks like he is a little out of range and the eBird reviewer was excited about getting a picture.

Also on the AK side were Western Wood-Pewee (so, yesterday's sighting was not a fluke), Common Yellowthroat and Song Sparrow.

It was July 4<sup>th</sup> and there was a small celebration in Hyder, AK. I missed the parades and the ax throwing contest, but sat with a few nice folks from Germany, Switzerland and some locals (including Eric) enjoying some hot dogs and cinnamon buns. It was very mellow. I felt rushed when decided to leave town.

I briefly pulled into Meziadin Provincial Park, but other than the Ruffed Grouse hen with babies on the way in, the place was just too crowded.

I made only few stops on the way south, but the totem poles in Gitanyow (Kitwancool) were worth seeing. On the access road into town I heard a Least Flycatcher (also a little out of range) in the aspen. Cedar Waxwing, Pewee, Yellow Warbler, American Crow, Swainson's Thrush and 3 species of swallows were also along that stretch.

Then it started raining and I essentially stopped birding. While cooking dinner at the sheltered picnic area at the visitor center (free potable water) in New Hazelton (already along the Yellowhead Hwy), I saw American Crows, Kingfisher and Song Sparrow.

Overnight at the trailhead for some waterfall trail in New Hazelton.

### **7/5: Around Smithers**

I briefly pulled into Ross Lake Provincial Park in the morning. The boat launch and picnic areas were quite active with the usual suspects, including Northern Waterthrush, American Redstart, Red-eyed Vireo and Brown Creeper. The lake hosted 54 gaudy adult male Surf Scoters.

I hit the jackpot at around 7:30am at the Smithers airport where 21 Black Swifts were wheeling about. They were stationary for several minutes as it was overcast with a low cloud ceiling. Wow!

At the visitor center, the young lady recommended to go to Twin Falls. En route I slowly drove around Kathlyn Lake Rd and it was quite birdy. The first White-throated Sparrow was singing after not having them for quite a while. Least Flycatcher also was present again. American Redstart and Northern Waterthrush continued at pretty much every stop. Near the falls were (at the falls you can't bird because of the noise) Pacific Wren, Varied & Hermit Thrush, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, MacGillivray's Warbler and White-throated Sparrow. Less than 0.3mi uphill from Davidson Rd I heard an odd song that I could not place. When I pushed, a Magnolia Warbler popped up, not what had sung [note from a day later: Bird was still singing; likely it was an odd Maggie song]. Will try tomorrow morning again ...

Early afternoon I hiked up Malkow lookout. This is a 4mi hike taking you through a variety of different habitat. An odd song of a Northern Waterthrush temporarily had me stumped. I played Connecticut - the habitat was perfect - and the male went ballistic, almost flew into me. I watched a Dusky Flycatcher for a while. Mountain Bluebirds were in the pastures near the trailhead, it was also fun to hear Clay-colored Sparrows again. Downy Woodpeckers were also new for Bulkley ... ;-) A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker looked pure down below, higher up was a sharp-looking Red-breasted. I imagine that we are in the YB x RB Sapsucker hybrid zone here. Other birds of note include more MacGillivray's Warblers and Western Wood-Pewee.

The Pacific Wetland Trail in Smithers added Western Tanager, Alder Flycatcher and Red-winged Blackbird, but the main attraction was a fledgling Northern Waterthrush which was already bobbing its non-existent tail.

After only getting Common Loon on Toboggan Lake and Northern Rough-winged Swallow being the only interesting bird at Riverfront Park, I bagged it for the day and set up camp at the Twin Falls Recreation Site (which has 4 free sites). I enjoyed a nicely hoppy Fat Tug IPA right before heading to bed.

### **7/6: Around Smithers and Yellowhead Hwy**

Another and final run for Rock Ptarmigan at Hudson Bay Mountain near Smithers. 2 Foxes were on the road up to the ski resort. From there I started hiking up towards Crater Lake. It was a soup out there, so I couldn't venture off-trail much. No ptarmigan, but there were many American Pipits, 1 Horned Lark, a clucking Dusky Grouse hen (hiding her chicks well) and Golden-crowned Sparrows. The usual was in the subalpine and lower down.

Near midday, after seeing a Eurasian Collared-Dove on the wire in Telkwa, I counted 20 some species at Tyhee Lake Provincial Park. 3 Bonaparte's Gulls, Red-necked Grebe and the usual cast of songbirds: Waterthrush, Redstart, Pewee, White-throated Sparrow, ...



At the Topley rest area I heard my last Clay-colored Sparrow of the trip. Rose Lake had 7 Red-necked Grebes with 2 being babies (too big to be on the back of the adults).

While looking for a place in Prince George to sleep, the tire pressure light came on, so I didn't experiment. This must have happened on the access road to the Shelley Sludge Lagoons (the gate was closed, so I turned back). Within 0.5mi I found a cozy place to sleep in the parking lot of the outdoor oval. A very dark fox was working the area when I pulled in. A White-throated Sparrow was still singing when I finally closed the door.

### **7/7: Cariboo Hwy**

I got a late start today and hit Canadian Tire first thing in the morning at 7:30am. Unfortunately, the tire couldn't be fixed so I had to get 4 new ones. Bummer! But, I had been thinking about doing that in Whitehorse anyway ...

The first birding stop of the day was West Fraser Timber Park in Quesnel at around 11:30am. Birding was still good. I was surprised to find many Tennessee Warblers singing. Also, there was no shortage of Veery there (this being one of the northernmost spots they breed in BC). Northern Waterthrush, American Redstart, Barrow's Goldeneye and Red-eyed Vireo were also present.

At the Quesnel indoor pool where I took my shower I heard a White-throated Sparrow sing in the parking lot (my last one for the trip) and the first House Finches in month.

The next and final spot was Scout Island in Williams Lake. It was again very active mid afternoon, definitely one of the birdiest spots in a while. There were many ducks, with hens dragging their babies around. 2 Wood Duck families were uncommon. Other birds that were good or that I hadn't seen in a while were Willow Flycatcher (2 for sure, the 3<sup>rd</sup> was not calling; Alder could be there), Bullock's Oriole, Coot, Brewer's Blackbird, Veery, Pied-billed Grebe, California Gull and a Northern Waterthrush. No more Tennessees now ...

Near Lac La Hache an Eastern Kingbird flew across the road. Westerns entered the scene just north of Cache Creek.

I was amazed that it was very dark at around 9:15pm. Overnight near Merritt.

### **7/8: Okanagan**

From Merritt it was smooth sailing to the Okanagan in the morning. I started at the Vaseux Lake boardwalk. While bird song was already slow at 9am, I still picked up Black-headed Grosbeak (the first one in a month), Veery, Red-eyed Vireo, White-throated Swift (a first for the trip and BC), Bank Swallow and Eastern Kingbird. The cliffs nearby had Canyon Wren, Lewis's Woodpecker and Pygmy Nuthatch.

A drive up Shuttleworth Rd saw the weather deteriorate quickly as I climbed in elevation, so I turned around soon. I was nevertheless able to add Cassin's Finch, Red Crossbill, Mountain Bluebird, Lewis's Woodpecker and, lower down, a Veery was singing along the creek.

At Inkaneeep Provincial Park I saw my first American Goldfinch of the trip. There also were singing Bewick's Wren and Yellow-breasted Chat.

Haynes Point Provincial Park has a little wetland look that is worth doing. The highlight there were 4 Common Nighthawks that I shared with a baffled family.

At Spotted Lake, a weird geological oddity about 9km uphill from Osoyoos, I saw more Asian tourists than birds.

To celebrate my trip and the last day in BC, I treated myself to a dinner at Dolci in Osoyoos. I had Spaetzle with mushroom sauce and a salad. ☺

Late at Haynes Ecological Preserve, I found Rock, House and Canyon Wren, a nest of Western Bluebirds, Lark and Chipping Sparrow. 2 Peregrine Falcons zipped by. Mid afternoon I had also had 10+ California Bighorn Sheep low down. They had been very tame and I was probably within 30yds. Overnight at Haynes Ecological Preserve.

### **7/9: Okanagan cleanup and the drive home**

It rained overnight and was still raining off and on throughout the morning. At the road to the Chopaka border crossing to Nighthawk, I found 2 singing Sage Thrashers, many Vesper Sparrows and a Western Kingbird family, but no Brewer's Sparrow.

Kilpoola Lake Rd takes you through a variety of habitats including marshes, lakes, woods, sagebrush and grasslands, so it's not surprising that I found 39 species in 2 hours of birding when it wasn't even all that active. Red-naped Sapsucker, Hooded Merganser and Brewer's Sparrow were new for the trip, but there also were Willow and Dusky Flycatcher, Western Tanager, Redhead and Barrow's Goldeneye, Mountain Bluebird, Townsend's Solitaire and Gray Catbird.

After my final tea at Tim Horton's, I crossed the border into Okanagan Co.

I briefly drove up Soap Lake Rd hoping for shorebirds, but the lakes were too high. A Loggerhead Shrike was good for Okanagan County.

In Leavenworth I was hoping for White-headed Woodpecker, but found it neither at the Fish Hatchery nor the Sleeping Lady Resort, but my attempts were pretty half-hearted. A slice of German Cheesecake from the German Bakery was a nice picker-upper.

I reached home at 9:30pm, after being on the road for 33 days. It was a great trip!

### **Bird list (231 species): O – Okanagan, P – Peace River area**

Red-throated Loon (3 at Blackstone Uplands)  
Pacific Loon (2 along Silver Trail)  
Common Loon  
Horned Grebe (Dempster Hwy)  
Eared Grebe (P and Caribou)  
Red-necked Grebe  
American Bittern (1 at McQueen Slough in Dawson Ck)  
Great Blue Heron (1 at Swan Lake PP - P, Stewart)  
Turkey Vulture  
Canada Goose  
Trumpeter Swan

Tundra Swan (1 at Blackstone Uplands, 1 near Dease Lake- BC)  
Wood Duck (O)  
Gadwall  
American Wigeon  
Mallard  
Blue-winged Teal (O, P, 2 at Blackstone Uplands)  
Cinnamon Teal (O)  
Northern Shoveler  
Northern Pintail  
Green-winged Teal  
Canvasback (P, Stone Mountain PP)  
Redhead  
Ring-necked Duck  
Lesser Scaup  
Greater Scaup (northwestern BC and Dempster)  
Harlequin Duck (1 at Dempster)  
Black Scoter (1 drake at Blackstone Uplands - rare)  
White-winged Scoter  
Surf Scoter  
Long-tailed Duck (1 in Ft. Nelson, 6 in Blackstone Uplands)  
Bufflehead  
Common Goldeneye  
Barrow's Goldeneye  
Hooded Merganser (1 near Osoyoos)  
Red-breasted Merganser (1 at Fish Lake in Whitehorse)  
Common Merganser  
Ruddy Duck  
Osprey  
Bald Eagle  
Northern Harrier  
Sharp-shinned Hawk (1 on Gray Mountain in Whitehorse)  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Golden Eagle  
American Kestrel  
Merlin (1 Richardson's south of Ft. Nelson, several columbarius along the Dempster)  
Peregrine Falcon (2 near Osoyoos)  
Ring-necked Pheasant  
Ruffed Grouse  
Dusky Grouse (Gray Mountain in Whitehorse, Hudson Bay Mountain in Smithers)  
Spruce Grouse  
Willow Ptarmigan (Richardson Mtn; above Salmon Glacier near Stewart, BC)  
Rock Ptarmigan (Richardson Mtns)  
White-tailed Ptarmigan (Keno Hill)  
Sharp-tailed Grouse (Near Rose Prairie - P)  
California Quail  
Virginia Rail (O)  
Sora (O, P)  
American Coot

Sandhill Crane (near Ft. Nelson only)  
American Golden-Plover (1 pair on Keno Hill – YT)  
Semipalmated Plover  
Killdeer  
Greater Yellowlegs  
Lesser Yellowlegs  
Solitary Sandpiper  
Spotted Sandpiper  
Semipalmated Sandpiper (2 at Fish Lake, Whitehorse)  
Least Sandpiper  
Wilson's Snipe  
Wilson's Phalarope (P)  
Red-necked Phalarope (several at Blackstone Uplands)  
Long-tailed Jaeger (2 pairs in Richardson Mtns)  
Franklin's Gull (many at Swan Lake PP – P)  
Bonaparte's Gull  
Mew Gull  
Ring-billed Gull  
California Gull (O)  
Herring Gull  
Black Tern (3 at McQueen Slough in Dawson Creek)  
Arctic Tern (Northwest BC and YT)  
Mourning Dove (O)  
Eurasian Collared-Dove (found a bird in Watson Lake, YT)  
Great Horned Owl  
Northern Hawk Owl (1 near Prophet River, BC, in a burn)  
Short-eared Owl (2 in Richardson Mtns)  
Common Nighthawk (P, O)  
Black Swift (21 near Smithers, BC)  
Vaux's Swift  
White-throated Swift (O)  
Rufous Hummingbird  
Calliope Hummingbird (P)  
Belted Kingfisher  
Lewis's Woodpecker (O)  
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
Red-naped Sapsucker (O)  
Red-breasted Sapsucker (south of Iskut, BC, also near Smithers, BC)  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker  
American Three-toed Woodpecker (Brassey Rd and Fish Creek CF)  
Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted on east side of Rockies and in the far north)  
Pileated Woodpecker (O)  
Olive-sided Flycatcher  
Western Wood-Pewee  
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (Ft. Nelson area, Stone Mountain PP, Dawson Creek)  
Alder Flycatcher  
Willow Flycatcher (O and as far north as Williams Lake, BC)

Least Flycatcher (one as far north as Dawson Ck)  
Hammond's Flycatcher  
Dusky Flycatcher  
Gray Flycatcher (Camp McKinney Rd – O)  
Pacific-slope Flycatcher (2 at Fish Creek CF – Ft. St John; also again near Smithers)  
Eastern Phoebe (P)  
Say's Phoebe (O, Whitehorse and Upper Ogilvie Mtns)  
Western Kingbird  
Eastern Kingbird (O, P, Williams Lake)  
Northern Shrike (1 at Blackstone Uplands)  
Loggerhead Shrike (Soap Lake Rd, Okanogan, US)  
Blue-headed Vireo (P, as far north as Liard Hot Springs)  
Cassin's Vireo (O)  
Warbling Vireo  
Philadelphia Vireo (Del Rio, SYD)  
Red-eyed Vireo  
Gray Jay  
Steller's Jay (2 at Bijoux Falls, BC)  
Blue Jay  
Black-billed Magpie  
American Crow  
Common Raven  
Horned Lark  
Tree Swallow  
Violet-green Swallow  
Northern Rough-winged Swallow  
Bank Swallow  
Barn Swallow  
Cliff Swallow  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Mountain Chickadee (near Swan Heaven, YT; Williams Lake, BC)  
Chestnut-backed Chickadee (southern Stewart-Cassiar Hwy, around Stewart)  
Boreal Chickadee  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
Pygmy Nuthatch (O)  
Brown Creeper  
Rock Wren (O)  
Canyon Wren (O)  
Bewick's Wren (1 at Inkaneep PP)  
House Wren (O, also P)  
Pacific Wren  
Winter Wren (several spots in P and Ft. Nelson)  
Marsh Wren (northernmost spot was Parker Lake in Ft. Nelson)  
Golden-crowned Kinglet  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Western Bluebird (O)  
Mountain Bluebird  
Townsend's Solitaire

Veery (as far north as Quesnel, Cariboo; O)  
Gray-cheeked Thrush (Gnat Pass area, Dempster Hwy)  
Swainson's Thrush  
Hermit Thrush  
Varied Thrush  
Gray Catbird (O)  
Sage Thrasher (Near Chopaka border crossing, O)  
European Starling  
American Pipit  
Bohemian Waxwing (Dawson City, Silver Trail, Stewart-Cassiar Hwy)  
Cedar Waxwing (also around Whitehorse)  
Tennessee Warbler (furthest west was near Hyder, AK; furthest south was Quesnel, BC)  
Orange-crowned Warbler  
Nashville Warbler (O)  
Yellow Warbler  
Magnolia Warbler (Twin Falls in Smithers, Forests of the World in Prince George, Ft. Nelson)  
Cape May Warbler (Beatton, Fish Creek CF, Ft Nelson Demo Forest, Kledo Ck, SYD)  
Yellow-rumped Warbler  
Townsend's Warbler  
Black-throated Green Warbler (Radar Lake, Fish Creek CF)  
Bay-breasted Warbler (Beatton, Fish Creek CF, Ft Nelson Demo Forest, Kledo Ck)  
Blackpoll Warbler  
Black-and-white Warbler  
American Redstart  
Ovenbird (the most western one was near Liard Hot Springs, BC)  
Northern Waterthrush  
Connecticut Warbler (4 near Big Lake RS, Chetwynd)  
Mourning Warbler (Cormack 201G, SYD, Del Rio, Ft. Nelson)  
MacGillivray's Warbler (the northernmost one just south of Ningunsaw Pass)  
Common Yellowthroat  
Wilson's Warbler  
Canada Warbler (Big Bam Rd, Fish Creek CF, Ft. Nelson Demonstration Forest, Beatton PP)  
Yellow-breasted Chat (O)  
Western Tanager  
Spotted Towhee (O)  
American Tree Sparrow (Gnat Pass area, Dempster)  
Chipping Sparrow  
Clay-colored Sparrow  
Brewer's Sparrow (O only)  
Vesper Sparrow (Near Cecil Lake – P, Watson Lake – YT)  
Lark Sparrow (O)  
Savannah Sparrow  
LeConte's Sparrow (wet meadows in P: Braden Rd, Cormack 201G, Watson Slough)  
Fox Sparrow (Sooty near Stewart, zaboria Red to the north; altivagans to the east)  
Song Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow  
Swamp Sparrow (P and Ft. Nelson)  
White-throated Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow  
Golden-crowned Sparrow (southernmost at Hudson Bay Mountain near Smithers)  
Dark-eyed Junco (Cassiar at Stone Mountain and Watson Lake, rest all Slate-colored)  
Smith's Longspur (2 males in the Southern Richardson Mtns)  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak (SYD, Del Rio, Cormack 201G – all P)  
Black-headed Grosbeak (O)  
Lazuli Bunting (O)  
Bobolink (Road 22, Osoyoos)  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Yellow-headed Blackbird (as far north as Williams Lake)  
Rusty Blackbird (Silver Hwy, McIntyre Marsh in Whitehorse)  
Brewer's Blackbird  
Western Meadowlark (O, near Rose Prairie – P)  
Common Grackle (McQueen Slough in Dawson Creek and SYD in Ft. Nelson)  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Baltimore Oriole (1 at McQueen Slough in Dawson Creek)  
Bullock's Oriole  
Gray-crowned Rosy-finch (1 in Richardson Mtn)  
Pine Grosbeak (Dawson City, Silver Hwy, Stewart-Cassiar Hwy)  
Purple Finch  
House Finch (O and Caribou)  
Cassin's Finch (O)  
Red Crossbill (Stewart, BC; O)  
White-winged Crossbill (common north of Dease Lake and Ft. Nelson)  
Common Redpoll (Dawson City and Dempster)  
Pine Siskin  
American Goldfinch (O)  
House Sparrow

### **Mammals (in no particular order)**

Black Bear (many ...)  
Grizzly Bear (2 near Tetsa River)  
Dall's Sheep (Northern Ogilvie Mountains, Dempster)  
Stone Sheep (Stone Mountain PP, BC)  
California Bighorn Sheep (Haynes Ecological Preserve - O)  
Snowshoe Hare (especially common around Whitehorse)  
Hoary Marmot  
Yellow-bellied Marmot (O)  
Arctic Ground Squirrel  
Least Chipmunk  
Collared Pika  
Red Squirrel  
Porcupine (several)  
Wood Bison (Liard Hot Springs, Watson Lake)  
Moose (Stewart-Cassiar Hwy; Silver Trail)  
Elk

Mule Deer

Beaver (Fish Observation Site near Hyder, AK; Swan Lake PP)

Muskrat

Red Fox

Steller's Sea Lion (Stewart, BC)