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

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

FREQUENCY and BREEDING CODES

C Common: expected in appropriate habitat.
U Uncommon: expected but not always seen.
R Rare: expected annually, but easily missed.
ca Casual: at least two records but not seen every year.
ac Accidental: recorded only once.

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

DOCUMENTING BIRD SIGHTINGS

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

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

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✓ SPECIES	A	B	C	D
Red-throated Loon * C				
Pacific Loon U				
Common Loon R				
Yellow-billed Loon U				
Horned Grebe ac				
Tundra Swan * C				
Greater White-fronted Goose U				
Snow Goose U				
Brant * U				
Canada Goose R				
American Wigeon R				
Mallard * U				
Northern Shoveler * U				
Northern Pintail * C				
Green-winged Teal * R				
Greater Scaup ca				
Lesser Scaup ca				
King Eider * R				
Common Eider * C				
Harlequin Duck U				
Surf Scoter C				
White-winged Scoter U				
Black Scoter ca				
Long-tailed Duck * C				
Common Goldeneye ca				
Red-breasted Merganser U				
Common Merganser ca				
Northern Harrier U				
Rough-legged Hawk * C				
Golden Eagle ca				
Merlin ca				
Peregrine Falcon * U				
Gyrfalcon ca				
Willow Ptarmigan * R				
Rock Ptarmigan * C				
Sandhill Crane * C				
Black-bellied Plover ca				
American Golden-Plover * C				
Semipalmated Plover * C				
Lesser Yellowlegs ca				
Wood Sandpiper ac				
Spotted Sandpiper ac				
Whimbrel * R				
Ruddy Turnstone * C				
Sanderling R				
Semipalmated Sandpiper * C				
Western Sandpiper ca				
Least Sandpiper * ca				
White-rumped Sandpiper ca				
Baird's Sandpiper * C				
Pectoral Sandpiper * C				

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

Additional Species:

Notes:

A Sensitive Environment

Arctic environments are sensitive with fragile habitats

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

References and further reading:

Eckert, C.D. 1996. Wood Sandpiper a Yukon first at Herschel Island. Yukon Warbler 4(3):10-14.

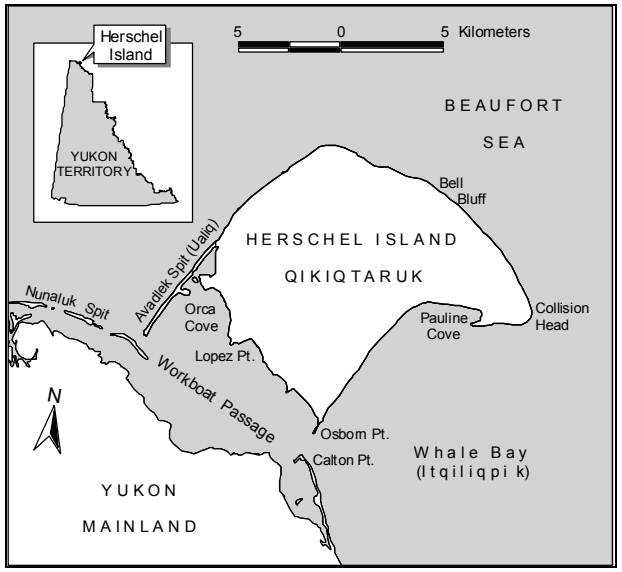
Grünberg, H. 1994. Great birding moments: A Yukon first on Herschel Island. Yukon Warbler 2(3): 10-11.

Talarico, D., and D. Mossop. 1986. Herschel Island avifauna and interpretive report 1986. Yukon Dept. of Ren. Res.

Yukon Bird Club web site: www.yukonweb.com/community/ybc/

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

A Unique Arctic Island



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

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

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

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

Yukon Bird Club

Checklist of the

Birds of Herschel Island

OBSERVERS: _____

_____

DATES:

A _____

B _____

C _____

D _____

Awareness ~ Appreciation ~ Conservation