
BIRDS

BIRDS OF KASBA LAKE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES AND NUNAVUT

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From 28 June to 2 July, 2013, I visited Kasba Lake Lodge, located at approximately 60° 17' 02" north latitude and 102° 30' 37" west longitude on the west shore of Kasba Lake. A portion of the lake's eastern and southeastern area is in Nunavut, and the rest is in the Northwest Territories, just north of the borders of Manitoba and Saskatchewan (Fig. 1). It is about 70 km long north to south and averages about 15 to 20 km wide east to west, although at the lodge's location it is about 40 km wide.

My purpose was to document as many birds as possible while being taken to various locations around the lake by boat; I was frequently dropped off on shore and was able to walk for up to about three hours before being picked up. While five days is admittedly a short time for documenting the avifauna of such a large area, it is probable that little, if any, birding has been done in the region, and it seems worthwhile to report the results.

Most of the species recorded were those to be expected according to the breeding range maps in *The Birds of Canada*¹ and *Birds of North America*.² However, a few species were observed which seemed to be somewhat out of the breeding range indicated in these publications.

The following is a list of all species recorded, with some comments (based solely on my five days of observation) on abundance, breeding status, habitat and range. Breeding status is based on the evidence criteria used by the *Manitoba Breeding Bird Atlas*.³ See that resource for the corresponding letter codes. NWT refers to the Northwest Territories; NUV refers to Nunavut. Data for confirmed breeding records are shown in Table 1.

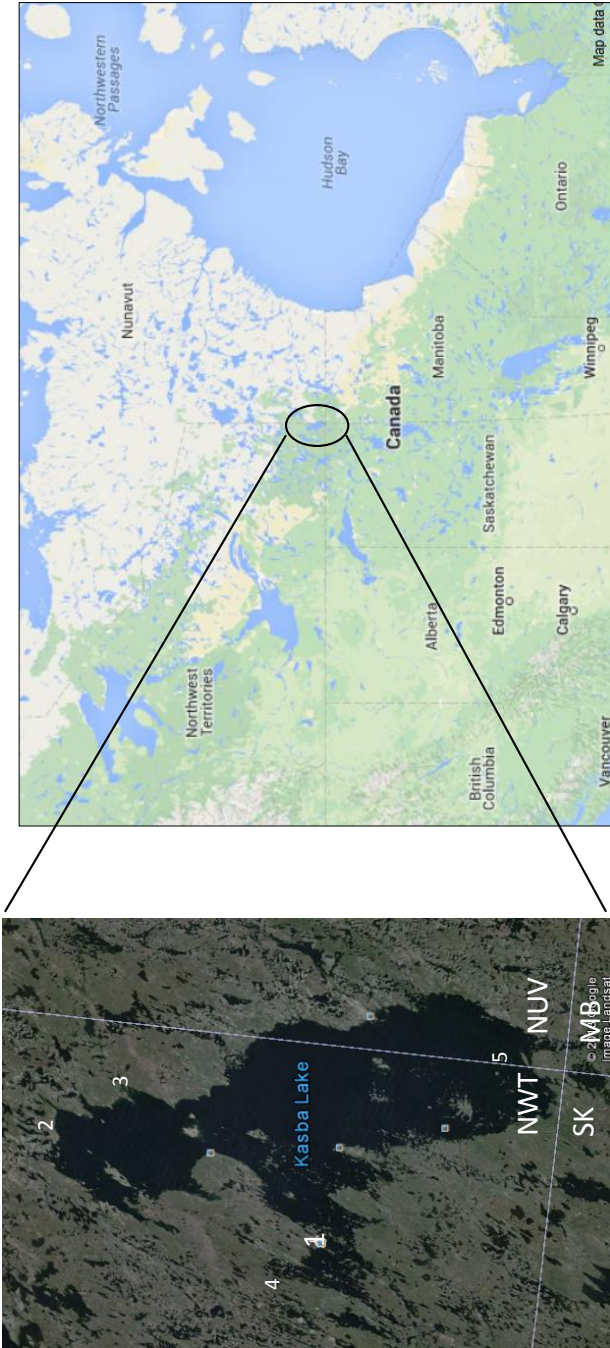


Figure 1. Kasba Lake; maps courtesy of Google Earth and Google Maps

- 1 – Kasba Lake Lodge (60.283283°N, 102.508480°W) - NWT
- 2 – northern tundra area (60.642225°N, 102.298023°W) - NWT
- 3 – Kazan River outflow (60.549180°N, 102.177173°W) - NWT
- 4 – Snowbird River mouth (60.336976°N, 102.610447°W) - NWT
- 5 – gull and tern nesting islands in the south (60.081457°N, 101.991436°W) – NUV

Table 1. Confirmed breeding species, Kasba Lake, NWT and NUV

Species	Date, 2013	Map location (see Figure 1) or latitude, longitude	Breeding evidence	Nunavut (NUV) or Northwest Territories (NWT)
Bald Eagle	June 29	1	NY	NWT
Semipalmated Plover	July 1	1	NE	NWT
Least Sandpiper	June 29	2	DD	NWT
Parasitic Jaeger	June 28	60.3332°N, 102.2679°W	NE	NWT
Long-tailed Jaeger	June 29	2	NE	NWT
Ring-billed Gull	June 30	5	NE	NUV
American Herring Gull	June 28	60.3174°N, 102.3464°W	NY	NWT
American Herring Gull	June 30	5	NE	NUV
Common Tern	June 30	5	NE	NUV
Arctic Tern	June 30	5	NE	NUV
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	June 28	60.2334°N, 102.3458°W	CF	NWT
American Robin	June 28	1	CF	NWT
Gray Jay	June 29	60.4938°N, 102.1878°W	FY	NWT
White-winged Crossbill	July 1	1	FY	NWT
Yellow-rumped Warbler	June 28	60.2334°N, 102.3458°W	CF	NWT
Chipping Sparrow	June 28	1	CF	NWT
Fox Sparrow	June 28	60.2334°N, 102.3458°W	CF	NWT
Fox Sparrow	June 30	60.2151°N, 101.8314°W	FY	NUV
White-crowned Sparrow	June 28	60.2334°N, 102.3458°W	CF	NWT
Harris's Sparrow	June 28	60.3206°N, 102.4659°W	NE	NWT
Rusty Blackbird	July 1	4	CF	NWT

Common Loon (*Gavia immer*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). Seen as single birds widely spaced on the lake; it seems possible that several pairs could nest on this large lake.

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (H, NWT; H, NUV). Several individuals were seen near suitable nesting habitat, but no other evidence of breeding was found.

American Wigeon (*Anas americana*): Rare; breeding status: probable (P, NWT). Seen on only two occasions; one of these sightings was of a male and a female together.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (H, NWT; H, NUV). Three separate females were seen, all towards the S end of the lake.

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*): Uncommon; breeding status: probable (P, NWT). Seen only on 29 June - about 10 pairs were well out in the lake near the last remaining ice.

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*): Rare; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). Seen on only one occasion: two males were on a pond near the NE part of the lake, about 8 km S of the Kazan River outflow.

Long-tailed duck (*Clangula hyemalis*): Rare; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). One female was seen on a pond in the northern tundra area.

Black Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). Three males and 2 females were seen well out on the central part of the lake on 29 June, a lone female was seen

later that day on a small tundra pond, and another lone female was in a bay in the lake the next day.

Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*): Uncommon (or perhaps locally or temporarily common); breeding status: possible (H, NWT). Two flocks, of about 15 and 30 birds, mostly (or possibly all) males were seen well out on the central part of the lake on 29 July.

White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). One flock of about 10 birds was seen well out on the central part of the lake on 29 July. Most (possibly all) were males.

Bufflehead (*Bucephala albeola*): Rare; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). A lone female was seen on a pond near the NE part of the lake, about 8 km S of the Kazan River outflow.

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*): Common; breeding status: probable (P, NWT). Seen often, usually near the lake's shore, usually as single birds or small flocks, but occasionally as pairs.

Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). A few lone males were seen near the shore in the southern part of the lake and near the Snowbird River.

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*): Uncommon; breeding status: confirmed (NY, NWT). A nest to the east of the lodge's airstrip had at least one small young. Another nest on the Snowbird River, but no other information, was reported to me.

Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*): Rare; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). One female was seen flying N past the W side of the lodge's airstrip.

American Golden-Plover (*Pluvialis dominica*): Rare; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). One adult was seen at a pond at the northern tundra area. This area is apparently somewhat S of the known breeding range.

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*): Rare; breeding status: confirmed (NE, NWT). A nest with 4 eggs was on the W edge of the lodge's airstrip; rarely seen elsewhere.

Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*): Rare; breeding status: possible (S, NWT). One was

heard on two occasions displaying not far from the lodge; presumably the same bird on both occasions.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*): Uncommon; breeding status: probable (A, NWT). Seen only near the Kazan River outflow from the lake and on the northern tundra area not far away.

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*): Locally common; breeding status: probable (A, NWT). Common along rivers, where they often acted agitated and called persistently.

Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*): Uncommon; breeding status: probable (A, NWT). Seen infrequently in treed areas near the lake; almost certainly breeds in the area.

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*): Common; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). Seen quite often along the shores of the lake and rivers, and almost certainly nests here.

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*): Uncommon; breeding status: confirmed (DD, NWT). Small numbers were seen occasionally along the shore of the lake. In addition, an adult was found performing a vigorous distraction display on the northern tundra area.

Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*): Uncommon; breeding status: confirmed (NE, NWT). Three adults were seen where a pair had a nest (one egg) on an island a few kilometers NE of camp, and three others were seen on the northern tundra area where there was almost certainly another nest. This appears to be a slight southwestward extension of the known breeding range.

Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*): Rare; breeding status: confirmed (NE, NWT). Three adults were seen on the northern tundra area, where a nest containing two eggs was found. This area is somewhat southwest of the known breeding range.

Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*): Locally common; breeding status: confirmed (NE, NUV; X, NWT). About 75 birds were seen apparently just loafing on a well vegetated island NE of the lodge, but there was no sign of nesting. Many were found nesting on two islands (#5 on the map, Fig.1; the more westerly island is small and rocky, while the other is much larger and well-vegetated) towards the S end of the lake; about 150 gulls were present. At this longitude, this appears to be at least a slight breeding range extension.

American Herring Gull (*Larus smithsonianus*): Common; breeding status: confirmed (NY, NWT; NE, NUV). This species nested in single pairs on many islands (generally small and rocky) in the lake, including the small rocky island where Ring-billed Gulls were also nesting.

Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). Seen mainly near the Kazan and Snowbird Rivers. No nesting behaviour was encountered.

Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*): Locally common; breeding status: confirmed (NE, NUV; H, NWT). Seen only towards the S part of Kasba Lake. Several nests were found on a well-vegetated island towards the S of the lake.

Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*): Locally common; breeding status: confirmed (NE, NUV; H, NWT). Arctic Terns were seen on several islands towards the northern part of the lake, but there was no sign of nesting. However, there were several nests on a well-vegetated island to the S where Ring-billed Gulls and Common Terns were also nesting.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (*Empidonax flaviventris*): Possible; breeding status: possible (S, NWT). A bird was heard early in the morning of 29 June which was small in size, had wingbars, and an eye ring making it an *Empidonax*. The only *Empidonax* species whose known breeding range gets anywhere near Kasba Lake are Least, Alder, and Yellow-bellied. I am familiar with Least and Alder Flycatchers - this song had neither the clean sharpness of a Least's "che-beck!", nor the burry and enthusiastic sound of an Alder. After comparing songs with on-line sources, I believe that this was a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. It (presumably the same bird) was heard twice subsequently - once in mid-afternoon on 1 July on the ridge running N from the lodge (two songs, not seen), and once early the next morning further N on the same ridge (one song, not seen, not far from where it was heard the first morning).

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*): Rare; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). One individual was seen at the lodge's float plane dock our first morning, but no more were seen.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*): Common; breeding status: confirmed (CF, NWT; H, NUV). This species was frequently

seen and heard singing in forested areas.

Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulous*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). Individuals were seen flycatching near the Kazan and Snowbird Rivers, and very occasionally elsewhere.

Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (S, NWT; S, NUV). Seldom seen, but heard singing fairly often, this species was widespread in forested areas.

Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (S, NWT; S, NUV). Widespread in forested areas; heard singing fairly often, but never seen.

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*): Common; breeding status: confirmed (CF, NWT; H, NUV). This species was common and ubiquitous wherever there were trees.

Boreal Chickadee (*Poecile hudsonica*): Rare; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). Seen only twice, but the species does tend to be inconspicuous and may be more common than this suggests.

Gray Jay (*Perisoreus canadensis*): Uncommon; breeding status: confirmed (?) (FY, NWT – the

juveniles seen were NOT “incapable of sustained flight”). Gray Jays were seen several times around the lodge and a few times elsewhere. This year’s young were seen.

Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*): Uncommon; breeding status: probable (P, NWT). Tended to be seen feeding quietly, including a pair just west of the lodge’s airstrip.

White-winged Crossbill (*Loxia leucoptera*): Common; breeding status: confirmed (FY, NWT). Most often noted flying overhead; a pair was seen with two fledged young near the lodge’s airstrip.

Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora peregrina*): Common; breeding status: possible (S, NWT; S, NUV). Heard singing persistently in many places. It seemed almost certain that the species nests here.

Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroica coronata*): Common; breeding status: confirmed (CF, NWT; H, NUV). This species was common everywhere there were trees.

Blackpoll Warbler (*Dendroica striata*): Rare (perhaps uncommon); breeding status: probable (P, NWT). A pair was seen on one occasion, and a female on another. The song is hard for me to hear, and this species may be more common than my observations suggest.

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*): Common; breeding status: possible (S, NWT; S, NUV). Commonly heard singing near the shore of the lake and on some of the islands; almost certainly breeds here.

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*): Rare; breeding status: possible (S, NWT). One was heard singing a few kilometers southeast of the lodge. The Kasba Lake area is well north of the known breeding range.

American Tree Sparrow (*Spizella arborea*): Uncommon; breeding status: possible (S, NWT). A few were seen and heard singing near the northern tundra area and on well-vegetated islands in the central and northern portions of the lake.

Chipping Sparrow (*Spizella passerina*): Rare; breeding status: confirmed (CF, NWT). An adult was seen singing and carrying food at the S end of the lodge’s airstrip. No others were seen.

Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*): Rare; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). One adult was seen near the lake’s shore at the northern tundra area.

Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*): Common; breeding status: confirmed (FY, NUV; CF, NWT). Common wherever there were trees.

Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*): Rare; breeding status: probable (A, NWT). One agitated pair was observed a few kilometers southeast of the lodge; no others were seen.

White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*): Common; breeding status: confirmed (CF, NWT). Common everywhere on the mainland where there were trees or shrubs.

Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*): Common; breeding status: confirmed (NE, NWT). Common everywhere on the mainland where there were trees or shrubs.

Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*): Uncommon; breeding status: probable (A, NWT; H, NUV). While less common than the previous two species, juncos were fairly frequent in treed areas.

Smith's Longspur (*Calcarius pictus*): Rare; breeding status: possible (H, NWT). Two males, or one seen twice, were on the northern tundra area. This area is somewhat south of the known breeding range.

Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*): Common; breeding status: confirmed (CF, NWT). Often seen feeding along the lakeshore, particularly in wet grassy areas.

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1. Godfrey WE (1986) The Birds of Canada, revised edition. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa, ON.
2. National Geographic Society (1987) Field guide to the Birds of North America, third edition. National Geographic Society, Washington, DC.
3. Manitoba Breeding Bird Atlas website: <http://www.birdatlas.mb.ca/mbdata/codes.jsp?lang=en&pg=breeding>



Arctic tern



Common tern



Harris's Sparrow



Harris's Sparrow

(see back outside cover for colour image)



Harris's Sparrow



Lincoln's sparrow



Long-tailed jaeger eggs amongst Ledum (circled)



Long-tailed jaeger eggs amongst Ledum (see front inside cover for colour photo)



Parasitic jaeger



Ring-billed gulls at nest island near south end of Kasba Lake



Habitat for all three scoters 29 June 2013



Typical shoreline habitat - grasses along the shore, alder shrubs behind, and spruce trees with open areas of reindeer moss



Treeline habitat on shore of Kasba Lake



Open spruce treeline habitat



Solitary sandpiper



Yellow-rumped warbler



Bald eagle at nest with one young



There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar:
I love not man the less, but Nature more.

*~George Gordon, Lord Byron,
Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*