

# BIRD OBSERVATIONS AT RANKIN INLET, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

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During a study of the feeding ecology of Peregrine Falcons, the author spent from May through August 1988 in the community of Rankin Inlet, (62° 48' N 105' W) 450 km n of Churchill, Manitoba on the western shore of Hudson Bay. The landforms present in the study area included inland outcrops, rivers, coastal flats and beaches, and numerous islands (Fig. 1). Fresh water was abundant in the larger rivers, Liadine and Diana, lakes and many low ponds. Lowland areas flood in spring and early summer but were largely dry by mid-summer. These areas were dominated by sedges (*Carex* spp.) and cottongrasses (*Eriophorum* spp.). Common herbs of upland areas in-

cluded White Mountain-avens (*Dryas integrifolia*), Broad-leaved Willow-herb (*Epilobium latifolium*) and Three-toothed Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tricuspidata*). Dominant woody species were Labrador Tea (*Ledum decumbens*), Lapland Rosebay (*Rhododendron lapponicum*), and various willows (*Salix* spp.).

Bird observations began 6 May and were recorded daily until 21 August. Areas where the greatest numbers of birds were seen were the town dump and just south of it, Pond 1, and beaches along the sw shore of Thomson Island (Fig. 1). Pond 1 was visited nearly every day in June, usually in the evening. Bird

Rankin Inlet  
Townsite  
Dump  
Thomson Island  
Adlik Peninsula  
Lake Nipissak  
Pond 1.  
Liadine River  
Diana Trail  
Staff Island



Figure 1. Study area

sightings from other locations were made casually during field work and during systematic biweekly bird surveys carried out to determine prey availability for Peregrine Falcons.

### Species List

The following is a list of 47 species observed by the author. Bird names and order follow those of Godfrey.<sup>1</sup> The date of first observations, breeding evidence, and migration notes are reported. In the species accounts the following terms are used:

*transient* - seen for less than a two-week period or in migration only

*resident* - seen at various times throughout the season or year

*common* - seen on at least 10 occasions

*uncommon* - seen between five and nine occasions

*scarce* - seen on fewer than five occasions

*vagrant* - species far beyond normal range

\* - breeding evidence found by author



Pair of Snow Geese, one white and one blue form G.W. Beyersbergen

*Red-throated Loon* — Scarce resident. First recorded 26 July when two adults were seen on a fresh pond on the e end of the Peninsula. Two adults were seen on pond on Marble Island 31 July. One adult was observed 21 August on Hudson Bay on the s side of the Tudlik Peninsula.

*Pacific Loon* — Common resident. First recorded 15 June when two were seen 3 km nw of town. Most observations were mainly on ponds and lakes in June and July. They were more frequently noted on Hudson Bay in August. A pair was seen on Marble Island 31 July.

*Common Loon* — Scarce transient. Two adults were seen on a lake along Diana Trail 8 km nw of town 22 July.

(\*?)*Tundra Swan* — Common resident. A pair was first seen 5 June flying over the Barrier Islands. From 6 to 9 July, 10 to 13 pairs were seen regularly on Pond 1 with a peak of 33 birds 16 June. In late July and August fewer were seen on various inland ponds and lakes. Courtship displays were noted 18 June on Pond 1.

*Greater White-fronted Goose* — transient. One bird was seen in a mixed flock of Canada and Snow Geese flying n 5 June.

*Snow Goose* — Common transient. First sighting of two birds flying n 24 June. All birds in June were flying n. They were usually in mixed flocks of white and blue morphs. Peak numbers were on 1 and 23 June with approximately 625 and 224 birds respectively, were seen. Occasional sightings of flying mixed flocks were also noted in July and August.



nt — Scarce transient. One individual was feeding on the w shore of Pond 1 with a flock of Canada geese 19 and 20 June.

Canada Goose — Common resident. A flock of eight was seen 25 May and almost daily to mid-July. June birds were mostly in flocks flying n with over 1500 birds seen 21 June. Nests were found 17 June (three eggs) on Nuttress Island and 20 June (five eggs) on Falstaff Island. Five downy young were at a nest 5 km nw of Rankin Inlet in early August.

thern Pintail — Common resident. First seen 5 June and regularly on inland ponds throughout June and July but becoming more irregular in August. Flightless young were observed on Marble Island 31 July.

ter Scaup — Uncommon resident. Two drakes were seen on an open patch of water on the mostly frozen Lake Nipissak 3 June. Drakes were

on Pond 1 in mid-June. The only pair seen was on an inland pond 30 June.

\**Common Eider* — Common resident. A pair was on open water on Hudson Bay 13 June 2 km nw of town. Birds were regular in low numbers throughout the summer on both fresh and sea water. Noted on Marble Island 31 July. A hen with young was seen on Hudson Bay near Falstaff Island 4 August.

*King Eider* — Uncommon resident. A pair was seen 8 June on Pond 1. Highest numbers occurred 19 June when five pairs and a lone drake were observed on Pond 1 as well as eight adults flying over the Meliadiñe River.

\**Oldsquaw* — Common resident. Three were seen on a patch of unfrozen water on Lake Nipissak 3 June. This species was recorded daily in July and less regularly in August on both salt and fresh water. A nest (eight



r. Eider

G.W. Geyersbergen



eggs) was found on the s bank of the Meliadine River 19 June. A hen with seven young was seen near town 18 July. This species was also recorded on Marble Island 31 July.

*Red-breasted Merganser* — Common resident. Three pairs were first seen on an unfrozen patch of Lake Nipisak 3 June. Present in low numbers on both salt and fresh water throughout June and July but no sightings were made in August. One was on Marble Island 31 July.

\**Rough-legged Hawk* — Common resident. First recorded 7 May near Panorama Island. After mid-May they were seen regularly, most often near islands and larger inland outcrops. On 21 June a nest (five eggs) was found on Thomson Island. On 3 July a nest (four eggs) was found 9 km w of town. Flightless young were seen in mid-August on Panorama Island.

\**Peregrine Falcon* — Common resident. Arrival was 21 May and, excepting days when bad weather prevented travel, the species was seen daily after this. An average of just over three eggs per nest was recorded in 17 active nests. Forty young were banded, the majority of which fledged. A nest on Panorama Island was the closest to town and likely the site most disturbed by human activity. A full clutch of four eggs was laid and all four young fledged there.

*Rock Ptarmigan* — Uncommon resident. First sighted 11 May when 14 individuals were seen s of the town dump. On 13 May 31 birds were seen there, but this area had fewer birds until 21 May when they were last recorded. The only other sighting was 7 June when a male that had

just begun to moult was seen 3 w of town.

*Sandhill Crane* — Common resident. First observed 17 May when a group of nine was seen flying n 8 km of town. Seen or heard regularly throughout the entire summer on mainland and the larger islands.

\**Lesser Golden-Plover* — Scarce resident. One adult was recorded on Diana Trail 13 km w of town 4 July. Two adults and three young were seen 21 July on the Meliadine River 8 km nw of town. An adult was hatched in a wet sedge area 2 August 3 km w of town.

\**Semipalmated Plover* — Common resident. First seen 1 June 1 km w of Rankin Inlet. Seen regularly throughout summer on mainland and islands. A nest (four eggs) was found 4 July along the Diana Trail 13 km nw of town. Immatures were seen on Marble Island 31 July.

*Ruddy Turnstone* — Scarce transient. Two adults were on a beach on the sw side of Thomson Island 12 and 13 June.



*Ruddy Turnstone on nest*

Wayne Reu



*derling* — Scarce transient. Three shorebirds tentatively identified as this species were seen 5 June on an upland gravel ridge 4 km nw of town.

*impalmated Sandpiper* — Common resident. Seen regularly beginning 8 June on mainland and islands, most often near water. Recorded on Marble Island 31 July. A nest (four eggs) was found 25 June on the bank of the Meliadine River. Young were seen 16 July in the same location.

*te-rumped Sandpiper* — Scarce transient. Seen s of town dump and on sw Thomson Island between 7 and 15 June. Seven adults were recorded 11 June on Thomson Island.

*y's Sandpiper* — Scarce transient. Recorded 1 June when two adults

were seen 4 km w of town. Eleven were seen on sw Thomson Island 11 June. Last record was one adult on Thomson Island 12 June.

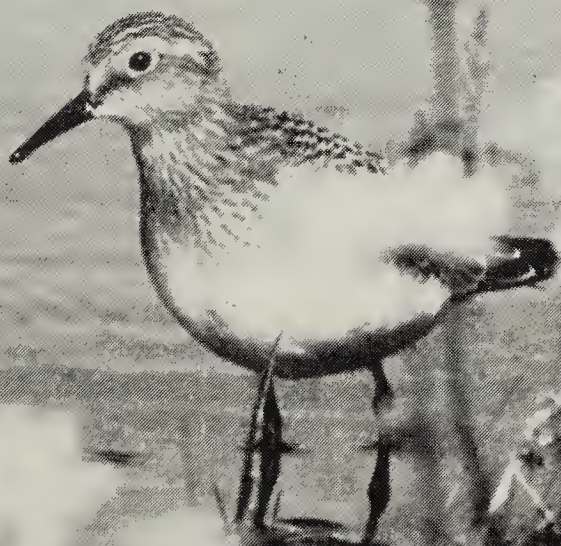
*Pectoral Sandpiper* — Scarce transient. Only record is of one adult on the shore of Lake Nipissak 19 July.

*Purple Sandpiper* — Scarce transient. Two adults were seen on Marble Island 31 July.

*Dunlin* — Scarce transient. Only record is 11 June when two adults were seen on sw Thomson Island.

*Red-necked Phalarope* — Uncommon transient. One adult was seen s of the town dump 12, 13, 15 and 17 June. Five adults were seen there 19 June.

*Red Phalarope* — Scarce transient. Ten adults were seen on sw Thomson Island 11 June and six adults 12 June.



*impalmated Sandpiper*

Wayne Renaud



Four adults were also seen s of the town dump 12 June and one adult 13 June.

\**Parasitic Jaeger* — Scarce resident. Pair first seen 7 June, then throughout the summer, never far from the same area. Repeated dives at me by an adult during a search 2 August would suggest a nest although none was found. A group of five birds, believed to be this species, was seen flying over the Char River 16 July.

\**Herring Gull* — Common resident. First recorded for the year 19 May when 38 were seen at the town dump. Recorded in large numbers daily throughout summer both on the mainland and islands. Birds were seen on Marble Island 31 July. A nest (three eggs) was found 5 km nw of town 5 July.

*Thayer's Gull* — Scarce transient. Only records are of one bird in town 9 June, one bird s of the town dump 12 June, and one bird just n of town 13 June.

*Glaucous Gull* — Common resident (?). A group of nine birds was first seen 23 May at the town dump. Seen regularly in low numbers in the dump area from then until 22 June but absent until 26 July when one bird was seen.

\**Black Guillemot* — Common resident. First sighting was 20 July when seven birds were seen swimming on Hudson Bay. Seen daily afterwards, always near salt water. Recorded on Marble Island 31 July. A nesting colony was found on Buttress Island 9 August. Most nests had two eggs.

*Snowy Owl* — Uncommon resident. Singles observed 7 and 17 May, 4 July, and 5 and 6 August.

*Short-eared Owl* — Scarce transient. One seen 16 June 4 km w of town. On 2 June a pair of Peregrine Falcons was seen feeding on this species on Panorama Island.

*Eastern Kingbird* — Vagrant. One of these unusual visitors was seen 1 July south of the town dump. Identification of this species was based on the following characters: a medium-sized, blackish, thin-billed bird of common size and with a definite bar of white on the tip of the tail feathers. The author is very familiar with this species from birding in Saskatchewan.

\**Horned Lark* — Common resident. First seen 26 May and almost daily thereafter in and out of town. Young were seen in early July and a few feeding young were noted 8 July.

*Common Raven* — Scarce transient. Single birds were seen flying over town 7 and 13 May.

\**Water Pipit* — Common summer resident. First seen 7 June near Nipissak and almost daily afterwards, inland and on the larger lands including Marble Island 31 July. An adult carrying food was recorded 17 July 2 km w of town. Immatures were seen 20 July s of town dump.

(\*?)*Savannah Sparrow* — Common summer resident. First recorded as a single bird on Thomson Island 12 June. Subsequently seen in low numbers on the larger islands and on the mainland often s of the town dump. In mid-July an adult repeatedly chirped near me as if I was near a nest.

\**White-crowned Sparrow* — Uncommon resident. First seen in town 12 June. An adult sang in town 13 June.

several days in late June. Immatures were seen at the town dump 7 August.

*iris Sparrow* — Scarce transient. One adult was seen feeding on Falstaff Island 21 June.

*Lapland Longspur* — Common summer resident. First seen 4 June and daily thereafter, both inland and on larger islands. In mid-June males were seen in territorial battles, heard singing, and females were seen carrying nesting materials. On 17 July immature birds were seen 4 km w of town.

*ow Bunting* — Common resident. This early spring arrival was seen 6 May and in flocks of 50 to 100 through the month. During the rest of summer they were seen in smaller numbers throughout the area and on many islands. In June females were seen carrying nesting materials, males were heard singing, and a nest was found in town 28 June. Immatures were seen 31 July on Marble Island.

*mon Redpoll* — Scarce resident(?). A group of four birds was seen on Noronama Island 24 May. A single bird was w of town 6 June and two were on Thomson Island 11 August.

### Discussion

This study recorded 47 species of birds with evidence of breeding for 17 species. There was weak evidence of breeding found for Tundra Swans and Savannah Sparrows. Past studies in the Rankin Inlet area by Maher (1968) and Maher and Lein (1968), showed that, in addition to the 47 species seen in the summer of 1988, there are records for the following: Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Green-winged Teal, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Gyrfalcon, Willet, Ptarmigan, Black-bellied Plover,



*Lapland Longspur, Herschel Island*

M.A. Gollop

Red Knot, Pomarine Jaeger, Long-tailed Jaeger, Northern Wheatear, and Hoary Redpoll.<sup>2 3</sup> The total list is 59 bird species for the area. This list should grow as more studies are done in the area.

### Acknowledgements

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<sup>1</sup> GODFREY, W.E. 1986. The birds of Canada. National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa.

<sup>2</sup> MAHER, W.J. 1968. A preliminary survey of the birds of Rankin Inlet, District of Keewatin, Northwest Territories, June 1967. *Musk Ox* 3:43-50.

<sup>3</sup> MAHER, W.J. and M.R. LEIN 1968. The birds of Rankin Inlet, Northwestern Hudson Bay, Northwest Territories, Canada. Unpublished paper.