

FIRST RECORD OF THE BLACK GUILLEMOT NEAR YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

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The late Robert J. Lynn observed and photographed a Black Guillemot near Yellowknife ($62^{\circ}27'N$, $114^{\circ}22'W$), on 26 November 1988. The bird was on the Cameron River, 60 km east of Yellowknife, where the current prevented ice from covering the entire width of the river. The guillemot dove repeatedly under the ice which extended from the shoreline, and it apparently ignored Lynn's presence. Reported as a strange diving gull with red feet, the photographs showed the white underparts and the white wing patches very clearly. The photographs were sent to the Canadian Museum of Nature where the identification of the bird, an adult in winter plumage, was confirmed (H. Ouellet, pers. comm.). This is the first record of a Black Guillemot in the Great Slave Lake region (R.G. Bromley, pers. comm.).

Motivated by this observation, I flew over the remaining areas of open water in Great Slave Lake, on 15 December. Most of the lake's surface was frozen but leads up to 10 km long and 30 m wide were present off Hardisty Island ($61^{\circ}45'N$, $114^{\circ}35'W$), 60-80 km south of Yellowknife. We flew as low as 15 m above the water at ca. 100 km/h. Visibility was excellent. One guillemot in apparent adult plumage was observed. It was not possible to ascertain whether it was a Black Guillemot or a Pigeon Guillemot. Two additional birds which also appeared to be guillemots (because of their size, shape, colours

and diving behaviour) were swimming among the pieces of floating ice.

The Cameron River sighting is not the first inland record of a guillemot in the Northwest Territories. One individual was captured at Fort Good Hope ($66^{\circ}15'N$, $128^{\circ}37'W$), in February 1974.⁴ Another was recorded on Baker Lake (ca. $64^{\circ}N$, $96^{\circ}W$) in August 1977.¹⁶ The latter observation is less surprising given that Chesterfield Inlet connects Hudson Bay to Baker Lake and that a few hundred pairs of Black Guillemots nest at the mouth of Chesterfield Inlet.⁹

Inland sightings of alcids, including Black Guillemots, have been frequently reported in Canada.^{1,8} In some cases these incursions have been considered genuine irruptions.⁷ In November 1988, there appears to have been a small irruption of Black Guillemots in western Canada. One Black Guillemot was recorded near Fairview, Alberta, on 21 November; it was a first record for that province.¹³ On 26 November, another Black Guillemot was sighted at Regina, Saskatchewan. It was an adult in winter plumage and a first record for Saskatchewan (R. Kreba, pers. comm.).

It is virtually impossible to determine the causes of such unusual, coincidental, inland movements. They could include freezing-over of traditional wintering areas, failure of food supplies, or altered wind patterns. However, one

can speculate on the provenance of these birds. The closest breeding colonies to Great Slave Lake are either in Hudson Bay or the Beaufort Sea, both 1000 km away. But if Great Slave Lake, Fairview and Regina are considered collectively, Hudson Bay is closer than the Beaufort Sea and is approximately equidistant from these three locales: 1000, 1400 and 1100 km respectively. Furthermore, hundreds (probably thousands) of pairs of Black Guillemots nest in Hudson Bay as opposed to only 250 pairs in the Beaufort Sea.^{3,6,9,10,11,12,14,18} Accordingly, the guillemots sighted in western Canada in November and December, 1988, were more likely from Hudson Bay, which is probably a traditional wintering area for this species because open water usually occurs year-round.² It is not unusual for guillemots to winter in Arctic marine waters. Thousands have been estimated to winter in polynyas even much further north.¹⁷

One Red-necked Grebe was also recorded in the ice-free leads off Hardisty Island, on 15 December 1988. It was impossible to confirm whether it was a juvenile or an adult in winter plumage. It was loafing on the water, along the ice edge. This species had apparently never been recorded near Yellowknife in December (R.G. Bromley, pers. comm.), when most water bodies are frozen. However, this species stays in Yellowknife Bay until freeze-up in October, and is usually one of the last species to leave in the fall.

Although many bird species which breed in Great Slave Lake, including loons, grebes, gulls, terns and ducks, winter in coastal or marine habitats, only two other exclusively marine species—Common Eider and King Eider—have been previously reported at or near Yellowknife.^{5,15} Given the size (28,930 km²) and location of Great

Slave Lake, which is approximately equidistant from the Pacific, Arctic and Hudson Bay coasts, seabirds have likely occurred more often than they have been reported.

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ANNUAL SPRING MEET

June 7-9, 1991, are the dates for the Society's annual spring meet. Members from across Saskatchewan will meet near the Great Sand Hills for a weekend of tours, members slides, and good camaraderie. Further details will be available in the May issue of the *Blue Jay News*. In the meantime, mark this date on your calendar and start gathering your slides.



Sand hills near Webb

Frank A. Switzer