

## McIntyre Creek Wetlands

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Wetlands are a key source of biodiversity and McIntyre Creek Wetlands are the largest in Whitehorse. These wetlands provide critical habitat to diverse communities of birds and other wildlife. This area is well known to local birders for species which are very difficult to find elsewhere.



Violet-green Swallow at McIntyre Creek Wetlands.

**Directions:** Take the Alaska Highway north from Two Mile Hill for 3 km and turn left onto Fish Lake Road. Follow Fish Lake Road, stopping at Pumphouse Pond at km 2.9, and then on to the wetlands at km 3.5 at the junction of Fish Lake Road and Copper Haul Road. Turn left onto Copper Haul Road to the overlook just off Fish Lake Road. Park here and explore the area by foot.

**Birding Features:** Pumphouse Pond is a popular fishing hole featuring Arctic Grayling and introduced Rainbow Trout. In May, the pond hosts hundreds of swallows, migrant Mew and Bonaparte's Gulls, and Barrow's Goldeneye. McIntyre Creek Wetlands offer superb birding. Old-growth White Spruce and Balsam Poplar forest, scattered dead trees, and lush shrubs create exceptional habitat for a rich songbird community. Watch for Boreal Chickadee, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hammond's Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Varied Thrush, Bohemian Waxwing, Blackpoll and Townsend's Warblers, Northern Waterthrush, Lincoln's Sparrow, Rusty and Red-winged Blackbirds. Migrants include American Pipit, Golden-crowned Sparrow and Lapland Longspur. In May, watch for the rare Northern Rough-winged Swallow among the frenzy of Tree, Violet-green, Bank, Cliff and Barn Swallows. Displaying shorebirds include Common Snipe, Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers. Winter birds include Mallard, Bald Eagle, Ruffed Grouse and American Dipper. River Otters, Muskrat and Beaver are common.

## Fish Lake & Mount McIntyre

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The simple reward for making the relatively short trip to Fish Lake is an opportunity to experience the area's unique bird life in a truly inspiring setting.

**Directions:** To reach Fish Lake, continue from McIntyre Creek Wetlands to the end of the Fish Lake Road (about 15 km). Hikers can reach the alpine habitats of Mount McIntyre from the Fish Lake Road. Watch for a small dirt trail located on the left side of the road about 1.5 km before Fish Lake. It is about a 4 km moderate hike up this trail to treeline.

**Birding Features:** Scan Fish Lake for loons, grebes, ducks and Arctic Terns. Keep an eye skyward for soaring Golden Eagles. In winter, coveys of Willow Ptarmigan inhabit the willows, and American Dippers forage along Fish Creek. On Mount McIntyre, check the subalpine shrubs for Willow Ptarmigan, Hermit Thrush, Townsend's Solitaire, Dusky Flycatcher, Wilson's Warbler, "Timberline" Brewer's Sparrow, American Tree and Golden-crowned Sparrows. The alpine tundra supports Rock Ptarmigan, American Pipit, Horned Lark and Savannah Sparrow.

## Haeckel Hill

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Lying 915 metres above Whitehorse, Haeckel Hill provides a magnificent view of Whitehorse and the Yukon River Valley with Lake Laberge to the north and Marsh Lake to the south. A pair of wind turbines marks the summit.

**Directions:** Take Fish Lake Road from the Alaska Highway for 3.5 km and turn right at the junction of the Fish Lake Road and the Copper Haul Road. This rough gravel road continues about 6.5 km to the top. It is not passable in winter.

**Birding Features:** This area is not well explored by birders. Both Rock and Willow Ptarmigan occur in the area. Golden and Bald Eagles often cruise by, and with luck you may spot a Gyrfalcon. In spring, flocks of Trumpeter and Tundra Swans are seen moving up the valley. In the subalpine forest you may find Townsend's Solitaire and perhaps Dusky Flycatcher.



A Gyrfalcon soars along the bluffs at lower McIntyre Creek.

## Lower McIntyre Creek

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The confluence of McIntyre Creek and the Yukon River was once the site of the Whitehorse dump. It's hard to imagine how this unique and scenic natural area could have been selected for a dump.

**Directions:** To reach this area from the Alaska Highway, take Two Mile Hill into Whitehorse and take the first left onto Range Road. Go 1.8 km to Mountain View Drive (from downtown Whitehorse take Mountain View Drive north to this intersection). Continue on Range Road for 1.5 km and then go straight onto a dirt road as Range Road swings left. This dirt road ends (~ 200 metres) with a spectacular view of lower McIntyre Creek and the Yukon River. From the dirt road, you can walk about 400 metres further on Range Road to a trail on the right. This trail follows McIntyre Creek to the Yukon River.

**Birding Features:** During spring migration this area hosts an impressive diversity of waterfowl with Tundra and Trumpeter Swans, geese and an occasional Eurasian Wigeon. Regular raptors include Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Gyrfalcon and Northern Shrike. Watch for Townsend's Solitaire and Mountain Bluebird. The mudflats attract shorebirds and gulls. Search among the Herring and Mew Gulls for the odd Glaucous or Glaucous-winged Gull.

## Quartz Road Wetland

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This wetland on the Yukon River offers a rich mosaic of marsh grasses, mudflats, shrubs, White Spruce and Balsam Poplar. Natural spaces such as this are an essential part of Whitehorse's unique character.

**Directions:** This wetland is located right in downtown Whitehorse. From the southeast corner of Industrial Road and Quartz Road, walk south along Quartz Road for about 200 metres. Continue just past the large industrial yard, and walk down to the old train tracks for a good view of the wetland.

**Birding Features:** In May, migrant waterfowl, gulls, shorebirds, and songbirds are abundant. The mudflats feature species more typically found along Marsh Lake with rarer shorebirds such as Dunlin and Hudsonian Godwit. The shrubs come alive with songbirds such Yellow and Wilson's Warblers, Western Wood-Pewee and Olive-sided Flycatcher. Watch for Northern Harrier and an occasional Short-eared Owl. Hundreds of gulls and a few Arctic Terns roost on the gravel bars and in summer the wetland supports a large breeding colony of Mew Gulls.

## Wolf Creek

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This wonderful boreal forest creek is a great place to view species which favour White Spruce forest. The creek is the focus of a long-term study by the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Network. As well, it is part of a salmon enhancement project. The campground offers day use and camping.

**Directions:** Take the Alaska Highway south from Robert Service Way for 11 km and got left into the campground. Park and explore the area by foot. Trails lead from the south end of the campground along Wolf Creek and to the Yukon River.

**Birding Features:** Songbirds found in the White Spruce forest include Boreal Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Red and White-winged Crossbills, Bohemian Waxwing, Pine Grosbeak and Pine Siskin. Mountain Chickadee is rare in the area. Hammond's Flycatcher and Golden-crowned Kinglet occur along Wolf Creek. Listen for the soft tapping of a Three-toed Woodpecker. Follow the trail to the Yukon River to view Trumpeter and Tundra Swans during migration. Spruce and Ruffed Grouse occur in the area. In winter, American Dippers frolic along fast flowing stretches of Wolf Creek.

## Mary Lake

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This small boreal lake offers a rich wetland and a treasured wild space for local residents. It features a complex mix of Trembling Aspen and White Spruce forests, and lakeside marshes.

**Directions:** Take the Alaska Highway south from Robert Service Way for 18.5 km and turn right onto Fireweed Drive. Continue for 500 metres to a T-junction and go right along Fireweed Drive for 1.4 km and take a right at the fork onto Booth Drive. Continue for 100 metres and go left onto a small dirt road for another 400 metres and then left again where it forks. From here the road continues 500 metres through open mixed Trembling Aspen and White Spruce forest to Mary Lake. Park here and explore on foot.

**Birding Features:** Scan the lake for nesting waterbirds such as Red-necked Grebe and Barrow's Goldeneye. Listen for Red-breasted Nuthatch, Boreal Chickadee and Golden-crowned Kinglet in the old-growth White Spruce. The wetland areas support Lincoln's Sparrow, Northern Waterthrush and a variety of other songbirds during migration and the breeding season.

## Lewes Marsh

The rich habitats of Marsh Lake offer some of the Whitehorse area's most exceptional birding. Vast wetlands and diverse forests put this area near the top of every local birder's list of favorite places.

**Directions:** Take the Alaska Highway south from Whitehorse (Robert Service Way) about 26 km to the Yukon River bridge. To view the open water, continue over the bridge and take the first left to a rest area and boat launch. To explore Lewes Marsh, turn right immediately before crossing the bridge. This road, known locally as "Gunnar's Road", runs along Lewes Marsh for about 7 km to a sawmill. Stop at the many openings in the shrubs and mixed forest along the road to scan Lewes Marsh.

**Birding Features:** In spring, migrant waterfowl and shorebirds occur in high numbers. Trumpeter and Tundra Swans are common. Watch for Eurasian Wigeon and Harlequin Duck. Masses of shorebirds sweep through in May, and just about every Yukon species can be expected. Even the Wandering Tattler has occurred here! Regular raptors include Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, Osprey and Bald Eagle. Golden Eagles are occasionally seen soaring overhead. Migrant songbirds such as American Pipit, Say's Phoebe and Lapland Longspur occur in good numbers. In May, clouds of swallows feed over the wetland. Listen for Three-toed Woodpecker and Golden-crowned Kinglet in the old-growth White Spruce forest. Mountain Chickadees frequent the bird feeders at the homes near the start of Gunnar's Road. Yellow-billed Loon occurs in fall.

## M'Clintock Bay

The nutrient-rich outflow of the M'Clintock River into Marsh Lake creates exceptional feeding habitat for migrant waterfowl and shorebirds. It is ranked as one of Canada's significant wetlands.

**Directions:** To reach M'Clintock Bay, continue on the Alaska Highway south for 11 km past Lewes Marsh (37 km south of Robert Service Way) and turn right onto the North M'Clintock Road. The road follows the M'Clintock River for about 2 km (take any opportunity to scan the river) and leads to a waterfowl viewing facility known as "Swan Haven". In spring, a nature interpreter is on hand with spotting scopes.

**Birding Features:** In late April, M'Clintock Bay hosts spectacular concentration of migrating Trumpeter and Tundra Swans. Through May, migrant loons and waterfowl are abundant. Eurasian Wigeon is regular

and Brant occur in late May. The mudflats attract thousands of shorebirds, as well as Horned Lark, American Pipit, Lapland Longspur and the odd Sandhill Crane. The forested habitats around M'Clintock Bay support Bohemian Waxwing, Red and White-winged Crossbills, Boreal Chickadee, Three-toed Woodpecker and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Swan Haven's year-round bird feeder attracts Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Grosbeak, Common and Hoary Redpolls and the occasional Mountain Chickadee.

## The Yukon River Trail

The Yukon River Trail offers a scenic and easy-paced nature walk right in downtown Whitehorse. It is a favorite of local residents who enjoy this little piece of wilderness in their own backyard. The trail winds through mixed Lodgepole Pine, White Spruce and Trembling Aspen. The various forks in the trail all follow a similar flow making it difficult to get lost.

**Directions:** Start at the historic riverboat S.S. Klondike in downtown Whitehorse and follow either of two directions: i) Cross the bridge to Riverdale and take the trail immediately to the right where the bridge ends. The trail follows the Yukon River upstream to the Whitehorse Fish Ladder and Schwatka Lake, or ii) Take the pedestrian path along Robert Service Way upstream to Robert Service Campground.

**Birding Features:** Take any opportunity to scan the river and check the gravel bars and mud flats. Watch for Harlequin Duck, Bald Eagle, Belted Kingfisher and various swallows. Pacific, Common and Yellow-billed Loons are seen during migration. Songbirds include Bohemian Waxwing, Boreal and Black-capped Chickadees, Warbling Vireo and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. In summer, the islands host breeding Mew Gulls and Arctic Terns. A small Herring Gull colony is found at the power dam. Common winter birds include Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, American Dipper and an occasional American Robin. Watch for Beavers and Coyotes.



Short-eared Owl is an uncommon migrant.

## Schwatka Lake

More of a widening in the Yukon River than a lake, Schwatka Lake serves the contradictory functions of being Whitehorse's water supply and float plane base. It is the best downtown location for waterbirds which usually occur on larger lakes.

**Directions:** There are two ways to access Schwatka Lake: i) Continue on the Yukon River Trail past the Whitehorse Fish Ladder to the dam at the south end of the trail, or ii) From the S.S. Klondike, take Robert Service Way out of downtown for 2.4 km. Go past Robert Service Campground and take the first left past Yukon Electric. Go 100 metres to a T-junction and then right. This road follows the lake for 2 km to a fork. Here the paved road swings right up to the Alaska Highway via Miles Canyon, and a dirt road continues along the lake for 500 metres to the end.

**Birding Features:** During migration Schwatka Lake hosts numerous loons, grebes and diving ducks. While Common and Pacific Loons are most common, Red-throated and Yellow-billed Loons (especially fall) also occur here. Mew, Herring and Bonaparte's Gulls sometimes rest in high numbers on the lake. Check the adjacent woods for Townsend's Solitaire, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Golden and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Boreal Chickadee, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill and Three-toed Woodpecker.

## Travel Lightly

- ✓ Northern ecosystems and habitats are sensitive;
- ✓ Observe birds and wildlife from a responsible distance, and avoid nesting areas;
- ✓ Leave plants, animals and cultural artifacts untouched.

## Documenting Bird Sightings

Contribute to our knowledge of the Yukon's bird life by sending written or photo documentation of rare species and details of breeding observations to:

**The Yukon Bird Club**  
Box 31054, Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada, Y1A 5P7  
[www.yukonweb.com/community/ybc/](http://www.yukonweb.com/community/ybc/)  
Email: [ybc@yknet.yk.ca](mailto:ybc@yknet.yk.ca)

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# Ten great places to go Birding in Whitehorse



Whitehorse is surrounded by seemingly endless wilderness and offers an extraordinary natural setting. Diverse habitats include wetlands, expansive boreal forest, and alpine tundra. This natural mosaic, with its mix of "southern" and "northern" species is an attractive destination for birdwatchers and naturalists. About 230 species of birds have been documented in the area with about 110 breeding species. First time visitors are usually surprised to see "southern" species like Killdeer, American Robin, and Red-winged Blackbird. However, their first encounters with Pacific Loon, Northern Goshawk, Willow Ptarmigan, Arctic Tern, Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, and the ever-present Common Raven reminds them that they have definitely arrived in the North.

The area is rich in wildlife with Coyote, Red Fox, Beaver, Muskrat, River Otter, Snowshoe Hare, Arctic Ground Squirrel, Wolf, Moose, Lynx, Black and Grizzly Bears, Dall's Sheep, Woodland Caribou, Pika and Wood Frog to name a few. Flying Squirrel and Little Brown Bat are common but rarely seen.

The Yukon is a land of rich environments and pristine wilderness. The birds, wildlife and ecosystems are sensitive and must be observed and explored with respect. In this way, the Yukon will continue to reward us with unparalleled natural experiences.