



High Arctic & NWT Trip Report 2025

[Link: High Arctic & NWT Trip Report 2025](#)

Day 1: Arrival

Day 2: June 29th - Elk Island National Park

After a nice breakfast at the hotel, we set off to Elk Island National Park. The weather was beautifully warm and sunny, and it didn't take long before we spotted a few bison on the way in! Our first stop on the Bison Loop Road was a bit quiet, but we did manage to spot a White-faced Ibis, American Kestrel, and a few Franklin's Gulls flying by.



Rose-breasted Grosbeak © Blair Dudeck

We then went on a nice long walk on the Amisk Wuche Trail, which proved to be quite birdy. The group got good looks at many species, including Red-eyed Vireo, Ovenbird, Clay-colored Sparrow, Yellow Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Least Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and a quick look at the more elusive LeConte's Sparrow! We also saw a beautiful pair of Red-necked Grebes with chicks, as well as Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals, Lesser Scaup, and Ring-necked Ducks.



Clay-coloured Sparrow © Blair Dudeck



Ovenbird © Blair Dudeck

The lovely morning finished with a quick picnic lunch on the shores of Astotin Lake before heading out of the park, bound for Beaverhill Bird Observatory. On our way, we were fortunate enough to get amazingly close views of a large male bison showing off and taking a dust bath! As we continued, a few quick stops at roadside wetlands provided sightings of more White-faced Ibis, Barn and Tree Swallows, and a handsome Horned Grebe on the nest.



Bison © Blair Dudeck



LeConte's Sparrow © Sumeet Mukherjee]

Once at Beaverhill Bird Observatory, we enjoyed a very nice short walk through fields and forest to reach a lookout over a vast wetland, and the birding was excellent! We added species like Marsh Wren, Black and Forster's Terns, Yellow-headed Blackbird, California Gull, Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Shoveler, and Ruddy Duck to the trip list. We stayed at the viewpoint for a while, enjoying the numerous Black Terns feeding over the wetlands, occasionally plunging into the water for small fish or insects.



Black Tern © Blair Dudeck



Forster's Tern © Blair Dudeck

On our way back to the hotel, we made one last stop at a roadside wetland that was perhaps the birdiest spot of the day. Territorial American Avocets and Black-necked Stilts were numerous, as well as Lesser Yellowlegs and many of the duck species seen throughout the day. Killdeer, Savannah Sparrows, and Western Meadowlarks sang away, and a few Willets, Marbled Godwits, and Wilson's Phalaropes were spotted! It was a quintessential flooded Alberta field full of life during peak breeding season and was a perfect way to end a full day of birding before filling our stomachs with dinner and getting some shut-eye.





American Avocet © Blair Dudeck

Day 3: June 30th - Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

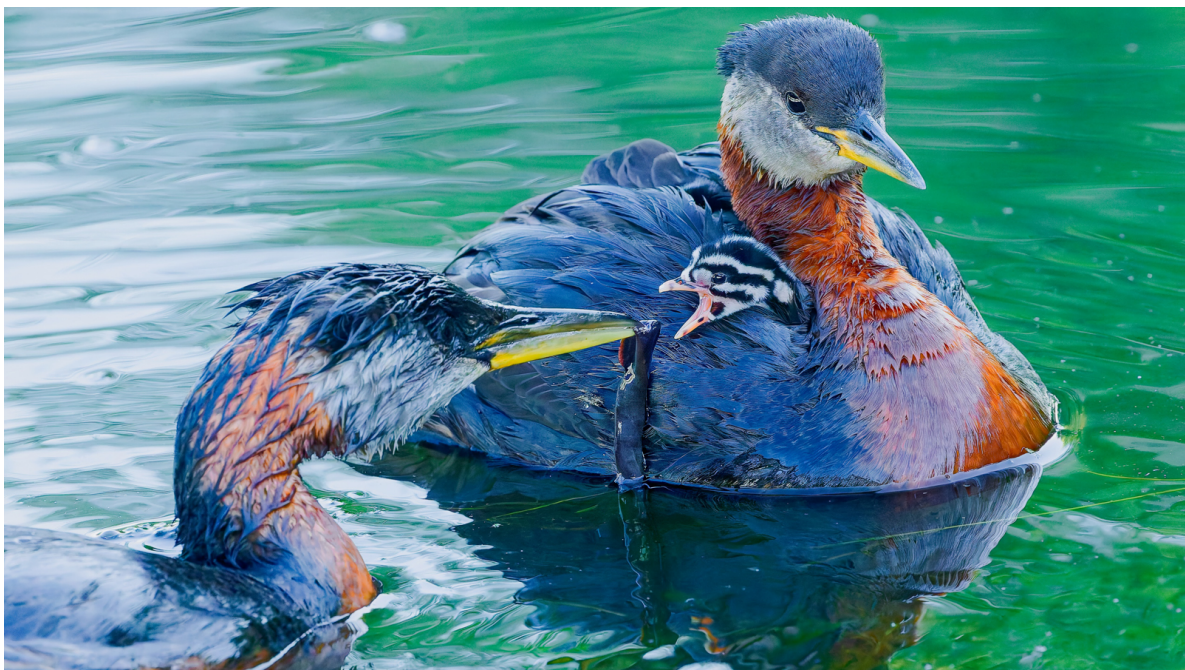
An 8 a.m. flight to Yellowknife made for an early start, but thankfully everything went smoothly, and we were welcomed by beautiful weather upon landing! On our way in, we got an idea of just how expansive the vast, flat boreal forest is. We didn't waste any time once settled at our hotel, the Chateau Nova, and went for a loop around the nearby lake before lunch. Here, we had some amazing looks at breeding Horned Grebes, Bonaparte's Gulls, and Sora. Northern Waterthrush and White-throated Sparrows provided the background music for most of this walk, though they were not so easy to spot. Lunch was at the hotel's restaurant, The Quarry, and it was delicious. Later that afternoon, we spent a couple of hours making fairly quick stops at local lakes to see what birds were around and to get introduced to the boreal forest species. More waterfowl like Horned and Red-necked Grebes, Lesser Scaup, American Wigeon, and Ring-necked Ducks were common. Near the Yellowknife River Territorial Park bridge, we took a stroll through the forest and saw Boreal Chickadees, Tennessee Warblers, and Canada Jays. At another small roadside lake, we also saw a few beavers and muskrats.

Day 4: July 1st - Canada Day in Yellowknife

After a delicious and filling breakfast at the hotel, we started with another mosquito-filled loop of Niven Lake in the continuing sunny weather. Highlights: Red Fox, baby Sora, Red-necked Grebe feeding babies, Short-billed Gull nest, both species of gulls dive-bombing incoming predatory Herring Gulls, as well as Eastern Phoebe, Yellow-rumped Warbler and Lincoln's Sparrows.



Horned Grebe © Blair Dudeck



Red-necked Grebe © Sumeet Mukherjee

The latter half of the morning involved a short walk at Willow Flats along the shore of Great Slave Lake on the east side of town. The location produced some nice birding! Yellow Warblers and Savannah Sparrows were plentiful, but the highlights were Surf and White-winged Scoters, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, a Bald Eagle being chased by gulls, and a Common Loon on the nest.



Eastern Phoebe © Blair Dudeck

After lunch, we explored Long Lake at Fred Henne Territorial Park and a nearby sewage plant. Our best birds were a pair of Arctic Terns and a pair of Common Terns nestled among Bonaparte's Gulls along a railing, a flyby Merlin, and a Lesser Yellowlegs perched on a tree! Those marked our final birding stops in Yellowknife!

Day 5: July 2nd - Arrival in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut

The morning flight into Nunavut went very smoothly, and we didn't waste much time after settling into the Green Row Suites before heading out to explore the nearby pond by the dump. After that little tease, we had lunch at the Kuugaq Cafe. The Arctic Tundra is a dreamy, barren place full of life—vast beyond what the eye can imagine. It was clear within an hour of arriving in Cambridge Bay that we were in a different world. All we had to do was look at the pond by the dump in town to find Snow Buntings, Horned Larks, and Lapland Longspurs, pairs of Long-tailed Ducks, striking King Eiders, Tundra Swans, and Red-necked Phalaropes, along with mighty Sandhill Cranes casually walking nearby!



King Eider © Blair Dudeck



Baird's Sandpiper © Blair Dudeck



Stilt Sandpiper © Blair Dudeck

In the afternoon, we headed right back out and birded Kulvak Rd going north. The weather was cool, with a bit of wind, and the bugs were not bad at all. We walked through the tundra at different points to get closer to roadside lakes, which led to great views of a pair of King Eiders and Red-throated Loons. While walking, we came across Baird's Sandpipers with chicks, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Stilt Sandpipers, and Semipalmated Plovers warning us of nearby nests. We also saw numerous Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, and Horned Larks. The ground was full of wildflowers, lichen-covered rocks, grasses, and mosses. We were visited by passing Sandhill Cranes and a group of four speedy Long-tailed Jaegers flying overhead, reminding us to keep our eyes on the skies from time to time. The highlight was probably the excellent view we had of a Yellow-billed Loon that came close to shore while feeding around the large reservoir at the end of the road. Overall, it was a fantastic first day that truly gave us a small but quality taste of what was to come! We made it to the Kuugaq Cafe for dinner before calling it a day and getting some much-needed rest. After all, we would be spending the next five days covering a lot of ground and breathing in the Arctic air in what many would call the middle of nowhere.

Day 6: July 3rd - Dew Line Road, Cambridge Bay

First full day exploring the High Arctic! We began with a very filling breakfast at the Arctic Island Lodge and then followed the sunny, warm weather 15 km down Dew Line Rd for the entire day, slowly birding the landscape. Our first few stops were to get good looks at pairs of Long-tailed Ducks. It didn't take long before we spotted a pair of Pacific Loons as well— the first of several we would see throughout the day, with great views too! As we drove on, we would spot Tundra Swans, Cackling Geese, Glaucous Gulls, and Greater White-fronted Geese. Most stops involved seeing Semipalmated Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plovers, Red-necked Phalaropes, or Baird's Sandpipers just beside the road. One of the highlights of the day came halfway through the morning when we spotted a few Long-tailed Jaegers flying high in the distance. Shortly after, a Peregrine Falcon took off from the far shore of a roadside lake!



Red-necked Phalarope © Blair Dudeck

We took a nice stroll through the tundra just before and after our picnic lunch. Not many birds were found, but the quietness of the tundra was palpable, making it a truly unique experience. We spotted some Ptarmigan droppings, but sadly the birds themselves remained elusive! On our way back to town, we kept our eyes peeled across the land and ended up getting closer views of some of the same species we saw in the morning. The highlight, however, was a beautiful, healthy-looking Arctic fox traveling along a lakeshore!

Day 7: July 4th - West Road, Cambridge Bay

Time for another day of birding! After the usual breakfast at the Arctic Islands Lodge, we headed out to drive the West Road. This morning was a little windy, with greyer skies, and since we were mainly along the coast. The coastline was filled with thin, patchy sea ice. As we drove past, we could see Eiders sprinkled on the ice, with Jaegers and Glaucous Gulls flying over the houses along the beach every now and then. One Parasitic Jaeger came in and perched on the tundra near the road. We also had a great look at an Arctic Hare that crossed the road in front of us!



American Golden-Plover © Blair Dudeck

Our first new bird of the day was a pair of gorgeous American Golden Plovers calling. We walked out into the tundra to get a better look at them, and luckily, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper flew in and landed nearby! We got great views of what was our rarest bird of the trip so far for a few minutes before it flew out of sight.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper © Blair Dudeck

Shortly after, we took the time to walk down to the ocean and skip some rocks while admiring the ice from up close, all the while keeping an eye out for passing Common Eiders. The ocean, covered

in ice, was a wonderful sight. Towards the end of the road we had a picnic lunch and then took a short hike up to a ridgeline with a stunning view. We walked among wildflowers, trying to identify various plants, bones, and scat until we reached the top, where we admired the land full of lakes and the Arctic Ocean in the distance. Far off, the sound of Sandhill Cranes filled the air, traveling surprisingly far. After the hike, we slowly made our way back to town, stopping to get some excellent views of Common Eiders.

Day 8: July 5th - Road to Mt. Owayuk

With clouds and wind gusts of up to 35 km/h, today was the coldest of the trip. We began the day with some pre-breakfast birding at the dump. There, we found a handful of striking Sabine's Gulls on nests, an Arctic Tern on a nest, and a very cute, close Semipalmated Plover on a nest that provided amazing photos. We even witnessed the male and female trade incubation shifts!



Pectoral Sandpiper © Blair Dudeck



Long-tailed Duck © Blair Dudeck

We then took the Ovayuk road out of town stopping regularly along the way to explore the tundra. Here we had many amazing views of Pectoral, Stilt, Board's and Semipalmated Sandpipers. We also got our first looks at Redpolls. We finished our exploration of the road side tundra by watching a pair of Parasitic Jaegers nap on the shore of one of the many small arctic ponds.



Arctic Tern © Blair Dudeck



Glaucous Gull © Blair Dudeck

We then headed back toward the airport to see if we could find a nearby Peregrine Falcon nest along a cliff on the other side of the bay. Scanning from the road, it only took a few minutes before one of the parents flew in, and eventually the other briefly showed up. Although we never found the nest, we watched one Peregrine impressively fly in the wind, dive-bomb a few passing Glaucous Gulls, and even cross the bay to check us out. It's always an incredible experience to watch nesting Peregrine Falcons guarding their territory!



Peregrine Falcon © Blair Dudeck

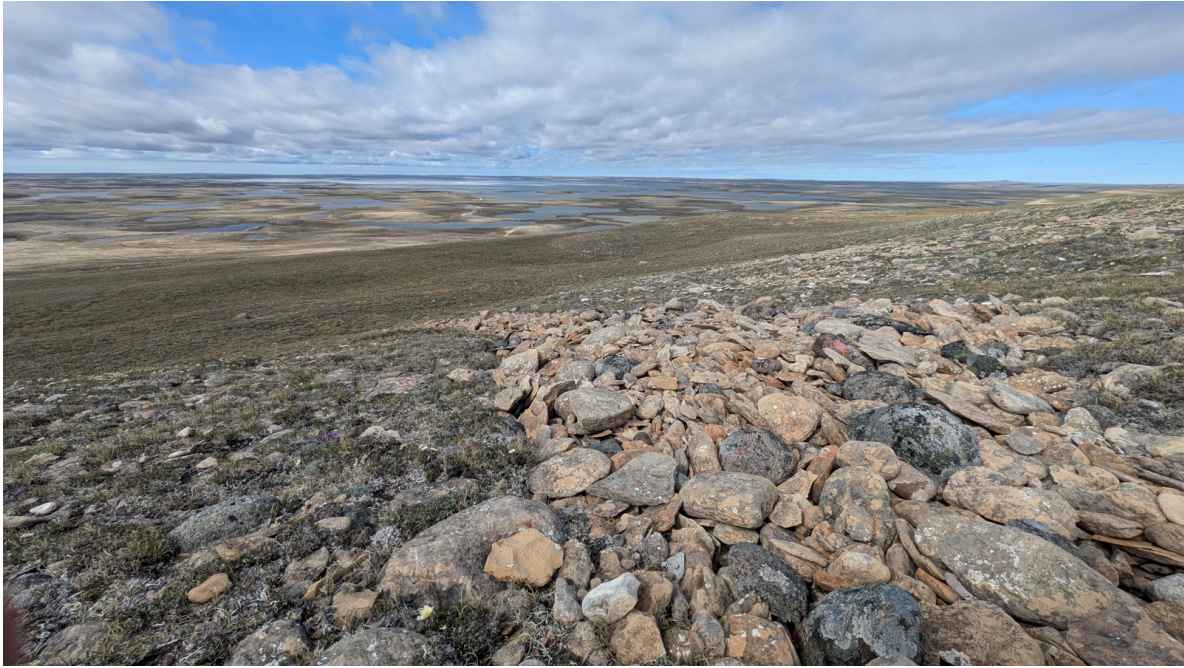
Day 9: July 6th - Hike up Mt. Ovayuk

Following an early picnic breakfast, we headed straight out to Mt. Ovayuk (Mt. Pelly). We then spent the rest of the morning climbing and exploring Mt. Ovayuk, taking in the breathtaking views of the tundra spread out in every direction. We also got great views of a pair of Peregrine Falcons. On the walk down the mountain, we were lucky enough to find some very small Arctic Hare leverets trying to hide among the arctic flowers.



Arctic Hare © Blair Dudeck

After a picnic lunch at the base of Mt. Ovayuk, we began our return to town, birding along the way, where we had excellent looks at families of Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers with newly hatched chicks!



View from Ovayuk © Blair Dudeck

We finished the day with a stop at the sewage ponds, where we found large flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes, several families of Greater White-fronted Geese, King Eiders, and Long-tailed Ducks.

Day 10: July 7th - Around Cambridge Bay Town and Visit to CHARS

We started our last day in Cambridge Bay by walking the tundra just west of town, exploring some of the flatter and drier habitat in that area. First, we found a nesting pair of Long-tailed Jaegers, who put on a great show of letting us know we were not welcome—a truly classic High Arctic experience! We also had a brief view of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper, always a great find up here! The rest of the morning was spent watching several pairs of American Golden Plovers flying around, displaying and chasing each other.



Long-tailed Jaeger © Blair Dudeck

After spending the morning on the tundra, we took a tour of the Canadian High Arctic Research Station (CHARS) in Cambridge Bay, where we learned about the research happening around town and the history of the station. We then had our last lunch in Cambridge Bay and finished our time in the High Arctic just as we started it—by visiting the highly productive dump pond. Just like on the first day, we were treated to great views of two male King Eiders, several Long-tailed Ducks, and a plethora of Red-necked Phalaropes. A pair of Sabine's Gulls also put on a show as they floated along the shoreline. We also experienced a bit of a surprise when we heard and then saw a White-throated Sparrow—quite a rarity this far north! This bird was actually first discovered a few days earlier by a friend of ours who was also in town. It was a fabulous way to wrap up our time in the Arctic and to conclude this very successful and wonderful tour. Thanks, everyone, for the positive energy and great times!



Our group

[High Arctic & NWT 2025 eBird list](#)