

**WILLIAMS LAKE WILDLANDS**  
**BIRDING PROJECT – JULY 19-31, 2012**  
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Bird surveys were conducted during the last two weeks of July because of project timing and availability. This is a period when most bird species are still feeding fledged young but with bird song at a bare minimum and some bird species having already moved some distance from their nesting territories. For this reason it was decided to forego density estimates. Despite these disadvantages an initial list of 52 breeding species were recorded within the proposed development area. Most were recorded visually.

A total of five trips were undertaken to different parts of the site with a total of 14 hours spent in the field collecting bird data. Of the 52 breeding species noted 41 were confirmed breeding, two were probably breeding and another eight were possible breeders.

***Breeders***

American Black Duck	-	H	Swainson's Thrush	-	H
Osprey	-	FY	Hermit Thrush	-	FY
Northern Harrier	-	ON	American Robin	-	FY
Sharp-shinned Hawk	-	FY	European Starling	-	FY
Spotted Sandpiper	-	FY	Cedar Waxwing	-	FY
Herring Gull	-	H	Ovenbird	-	FY
Mourning Dove	-	FY	Black-and-White Warbler-		FY
Great Horned Owl	-	T	Common Yellowthroat	-	FY
Barred Owl	-	ON	American Red Start	-	S
Common Nighthawk	-	FY	Magnolia Warbler	-	S
Ruby-throated Hummingbird-		FY	Chestnut-sided Warbler -		FY
Downy Woodpecker	-	FY	Palm Warbler	-	FY
Hairy Woodpecker	-	FY	Yellow Rumped Warbler-		FY
Eastern Wood-Pewee	-	H	Black-throated Green Warbler-		S
Alder Flycatcher	-	FY	Song Sparrow	-	FY
Blue-headed Vireo	-	FY	Swamp Sparrow	-	FY
Red-eyed Vireo	-	FY	White-throated Sparrow-		FY
Blue Jay	-	FY	Dark-eyed Junco	-	FY
American Crow	-	FY	Common Grackle	-	FY
Common Raven	-	FY	Purple Finch	-	FY
Black-capped Chickadee-		FY	Red Crossbill	-	FY
Boreal Chickadee	-	FY	Pine Siskin	-	FY
Red-breasted Nuthatch	-	FY	American Gold Finch	-	FY
Brown Creeper	-	FY			

***Birds of Particular Interest from the Breeding Study***

Red-Cross Bill (type two) – confirmed family groups  
 Common Nighthawk – confirmed family groups  
 Osprey – confirmed family  
 Spotted Sandpiper – juvenile on territory  
 Barred Owl – pair in next cavity  
 Great-horned Owl – territorial presence recorded in same area at least one week apart  
 Black-backed Woodpecker – juvenile on territory  
 Boreal Chickadee – juvenile on territory  
 Northern Harrier – adult at nest site  
 Sharp-shinned Hawk – juvenile on territory  
 Alder Flycatcher – juvenile on territory  
 Red-breasted Nuthatch - juvenile on territory  
 Brown Creeper – confirmed family group  
 Golden-crowned Kiglet – confirmed family group  
 Purple Finch – confirmed family groups  
 Pine Siskin – confirmed family groups

***Historical Breeders***

Northern Saw-whet Owl  
 Broad-winged Hawk – MBBA<sup>1</sup>  
 Northern Goshawk – MBBA  
 Red-tailed Hawk – MBBA  
 Great Blue Heron  
 Whip-poor-will – MBBA  
 Chuckwill's Widow – MBBA  
 Eastern Bluebird – MBBA  
 Pine Grosbeak – MBBA  
 Rusty Blackbird – MBBA  
 Wilson's Warbler  
 Blackpowl Warbler  
 Bay-breasted Warbler  
 Canada Warbler – MBBA  
 Wood Duck – MBBA  
 Hooded Merganser – MBBA  
 Ring-necked Duck  
 Scarlet Tanager – MBBA

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<sup>1</sup> Maritime Breeding Bird Atlas, 2006-2010

The study area is found to the southwest and southeast of Williams Lake and up to and including Colpitts Lake. It includes a large mature forest and is a remnant of the Jollimore Forest. If this forest is allowed to continue to exist the south east Williams Lake portion should transition to old growth forest. The loss of this forest will be profound to the bird population. Once the majority of the tree cover is gone the buffer currently provided to the severe landscape will disappear. The birds and other wild life come to the area to seek shelter, this sheltered area specifically consists of large white and red pines, Jack pines, small Hemlocks, and deciduous trees. The vegetation found in between and on the large granite barren also provide food and shelter for the birds. Loss of the forest will signify the departure of the mature forest species. Additionally, the migratory birds which use the area as a major drop in centre will also diminish.

The observations of early returns suggest a busy migrating corridor and further study into the fall will no doubt confirm this hypothesis. It is of particular note that if this feeding site is lost, there will be less food for migrants which means a harder journey and fewer birds will survive.

Another important aspect of the area is the existence of numerous vernal pools. These pools, which are sometimes as small as a foot or less in diameter, provide food and protection. They will exist alongside lakes and wetlands but often their value is underrated. A bird such as the Rusty Blackbird likes to spend time in a small pool which offers protection and food in the form of a variety of insects. Often, the rocky shore of a lake is not appropriate for the smaller birds. Any alteration to the land which would include the construction of roads and the erection of houses and multi-unit buildings will lead to the eradication of this particular bird habitat. It should also be noted that the vernal pools encourage the proliferation of frogs, which are a source of food for several owl species, including the Barred Owl.

The existence of a family of loons so close to a large metro population area is very uncommon. The loons continue to return to the area because a food source still exists and currently there is the required level of seclusion.

What is of real significance is the historical breeding data. The Whip-poor-will, Chuckwill's Widow and the Nighthawk are commonly known as "goatsuckers". There is plenty of historical data to conclude that at least two of the species once populated the area. Family groups of the Nighthawk were confirmed during the study period. The Chuckwill's Widow was recorded nesting in the area as late as 2009. If the area is left undeveloped Chuckwill's Widow may again inhabit the Williams Lake Forest.

The Whip-poor-will was last seen in the area in 2009, although long-time residents recall the song of the Whip-poor-will on a regular basis.

The Nighthawk continues to exist on the barren at this point but their presence is obviously threatened by any change.

Development of the land brings the hardening of surfaces and results in much less shade. Birds that rely on large trees for shade, and birds that rely on vernal pools and wetlands will be seriously compromised. Additionally, to remove the shade currently created by the tree cover will create a major fire hazard as the large rock surfaces will heat up to a higher temperature.

It is most noteworthy that the historical existence of the Whip-poor-will, Chuckwill's Widow and Nighthawk signifies a unique occurrence. These goatsuckers or *Caprimulgidae* signify a very special area as there is no other in Eastern Canada. The next closest area in Canada which can boast the existence of these three species is extreme Southern Ontario.

**Key:    *List of Breeders***

- P        - Pair (species seen in appropriate habitat)
- H        - Habitat (species seen in appropriate habitat)
- FY       - Fledged Young
- ON       - On Nest
- T        - Territorial
- S        - Singing

