

Notes on the Birds of Southampton Island, Northwest Territories

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ABSTRACT. During the summers of 1970 and 1971, 46 species were seen on Southampton Island, most in the interior of the island where previous records were scarce. A comparison with observations in 1932 suggests little change in the status of the avifauna of the island over the past 40 years.

RÉSUMÉ: *Notes sur les oiseaux de l'île de Southampton, Territoires du Nord-Ouest.* Au cours des étés de 1970 et 1971, les auteurs ont aperçu sur l'île de Southampton 46 espèces, la plupart dans l'intérieur, où les mentions antérieures sont rares. La comparaison avec des observations de 1932 montre peu de changement dans l'état de l'avifaune de l'île au cours des 40 dernières années.

РЕЗЮМЕ. *К вопросу о птицах острова Саутгемптон Северо-Западные Территории.* В течение летних периодов 1970 и 1971гг на острове Саутгемптон было замечено 46 видов птиц, главным образом, во внутренней части острова, где ранее регистрация их проводилась редко. Сравнение с наблюдениями 1932г показывает, что птичья фауна острова мало изменилась за последние 40 лет.

INTRODUCTION

A barren-ground caribou range evaluation of Southampton Island, conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service, provided the opportunity to observe the birds on the island during the periods 2 June to 14 August 1970 and 1 July to 31 August 1971.

The main camp in 1970 was on the Southampton Limestone Plains of the Hudson Bay Lowlands (Bird 1953) at Salmon Pond (64° 14' N., 85° 00' W.), although several trips were made in July, 15 miles northeast to the Precambrian highlands. The area of observation from 1 July to 15 August 1971 was 12 miles south of Duke of York Bay (65° 02' N., 84° 35' W.) (Fig. 1). In August 1971 much of the island was surveyed by aircraft at low elevation (500 feet), including the entire coastal region. References to the physiographic regions of the island follow Bird (1953).

Only occasional references to the birds of the island could be found in the literature before 1929 (Low 1906; Mathiassen 1931). Sutton (1932) provided the first extensive list of birds for the island including numerous notes on their life history. Bray (1943) provided records of birds observed near the Boas River delta in 1936, but perhaps more important are the notes added by T. H. Manning on his observations from 1936 to 1940.

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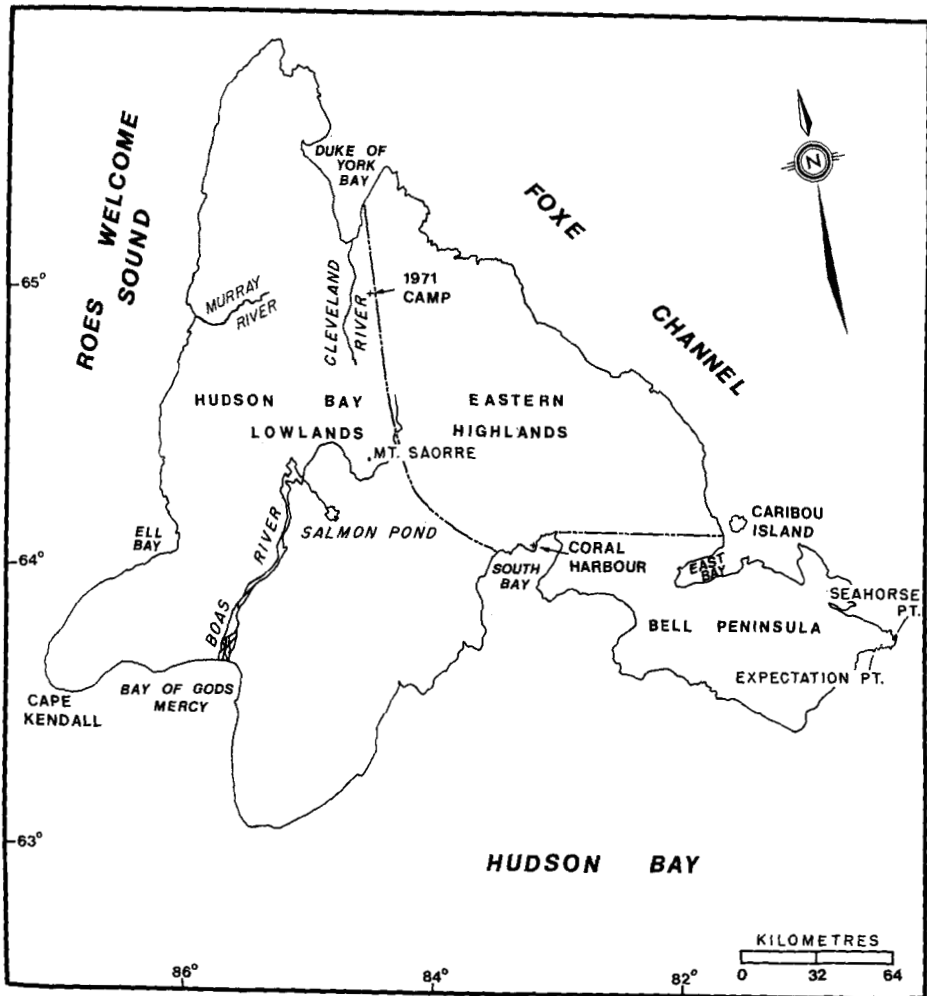


FIG 1: Map of Southampton Island, Northwest Territories, showing areas referred to in the text and the location of field camps in 1970 (Salmon Pond), and 1971.

Sutton (1932) listed 65 species and subspecies of birds for the island and vicinity, but when accidentals and subspecies now non-recognized are excluded, the total is reduced to 54. His observations of seabirds account for the difference between that total and our list of 46 species. The restriction of Bray (1943) to the Bay of God's Mercy area is the reason for his species list being reduced to approximately 40.

There have been no attempts to duplicate the efforts of Sutton and Bray in the last 35 years. This paper provides information on the present avifauna of the island and where relevant compares the status of individual species to that provided by Sutton. Technical nomenclature follows that of Godfrey (1966).

ANNOTATED LIST OF SPECIES

Common loon (*Gavia immer*).

Two birds flew directly overhead at a height of approximately 100 feet at Kirchoffer Falls on 5 August 1971. Both birds made 2 passes and were examined through 10 x 40 field glasses. The distinct white collar identified the species and similarity of size and plumage suggested both were adult birds. This is the first record of the common loon on Southampton Island. Breeding records on Baffin Island (Soper 1928) suggest that occasional breeding on Southampton Island probably occurs.

Arctic loon (*Gavia arctica*).

Most common of the 2 species of loons found breeding on the island; first observed at Salmon Pond on 14 June 1970, and common on the lowlands thereafter. A single nest with 1 egg was found on a small tundra pond on 28 June 1970. Three pairs were at Salmon Pond in late July with brood sizes of 1, 2 and 3. In August 1971 it was common at Duke of York Bay and along the entire coast, particularly noticeable during flights over the southwestern shore from Cape Kendall to the Murray River.

Red-throated loon (*Gavia stellata*).

A common breeder on the Hudson Bay Lowlands though not as abundant as *G. arctica*. First observed on 16 June 1970 and 1 nest containing 2 eggs was found on a small tundra pond near Salmon Pond on 21 July 1970. The first young at that nest hatched on 26 July. Both Sutton (1932) and Bray (1943) report hatching dates of 24 July.

Whistling swan (*Olor columbianus*).

Very common on the Hudson Bay Lowlands. A pair first seen at Salmon Pond on 7 June 1970 began laying on a small island on 13 June. The birds left the nest on 17 July with 3 cygnets. One other nest on the upper Boas River contained 3 eggs on 4 June 1970. In August 1971 swans were abundant on the small ponds along the western coast between Cape Kendall and the Murray River and also along the coast of Bell Peninsula.

Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*).

Common but scattered over most of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. First observed at Salmon Pond on 5 June 1970. One nest at Salmon Pond contained 5 eggs on 27 June. On 3 August 1970, a post-nesting group of 4 families at Salmon Pond had an average of 5 young per pair. On 14 July 1971 an adult pair and 5 newly hatched goslings were at their nest near Duke of York Bay. The nest site was on a narrow ledge approximately 100 feet from the base of a nearly vertical slope, and 10 feet below an occupied Rough-legged hawk (*Buteo lagopus*) nest. In August 1971 flocks of Canada geese were common on the eastern coast of South Bay and on the eastern coast bordering Roes Welcome Sound.

Snow goose (*Chen caerulescens*).

First seen at Salmon Pond on 6 June 1970, small flocks continued to pass over the area until 5 July; not observed again until 7 August when flightless groups of up to 65 appeared at Salmon Pond, believed to have come from the lower Boas River. The 2 major breeding colonies were at the Boas River delta and East Bay. By August 1971 large flocks were distributed over much of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Birds from the East Bay colony concentrate along the eastern coast of South Bay during August while geese from the Boas River colony scatter over the western lowlands and along the coast from the Sutton River on South Bay west to Cape Kendall and north to the Murray River. In June 1970 when records were kept of the colour phase ratio, the average was approximately 2 blues to 3 whites.

Pintail (*Anas acuta*).

A pair was first observed at Salmon Pond on 12 June 1970. Several more pairs were seen until 15 June; the occasional adult male seen after this date suggests local breeding occurred although no nests were found. Five adult males were at Coral Harbour on 1 July 1971, and occasional single adult males in the same area during the latter part of August 1971.

Oldsquaw (*Clangula hyemalis*).

Abundant throughout the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Although no nests were found, females with broods of up to 7 young were common in the Salmon Pond area after 20 July 1970.

Common eider (*Somateria mollissima*).

Not observed in 1970. On 11 July 1971 a group of 23 non-breeders were on a small pond near the mouth of the Cleveland River at Duke of York Bay, and a female and 5 young were on a small tundra pond at Expectation Point on 2 August 1971.

King eider (*Somateria spectabilis*).

Frequently seen on small tundra ponds of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Pairs first seen at Salmon Pond on 10 June 1970 and pairs or solitary males regularly seen until early July. No nests were found and broods were seen only twice. On 1 August 1970 a loose aggregation of 9 females and 45 young were on a small lake near Salmon Pond, whereas on 7 August the next year 2 females and 6 young were on a small pond near Duke of York Bay.

Red-breasted merganser (*Mergus serrator*).

Not common, but adults were occasionally seen in both 1970 and 1971. A pair frequented Salmon Pond during the latter part of June 1970 and a single adult, apparently in eclipse plumage, was seen at the same place on 20 and 26 July 1970. One adult pair was at our camp near Duke of York Bay on 5 July 1971 and a single adult regularly visited a small stream nearby from 7 to 26 July 1971. This species was not recorded by Sutton (1932) or Bray (1943) but our observations and the breeding records from southern Baffin Island (Soper 1928) suggest it is an occasional breeder on Southampton Island.

Rough-legged hawk (*Buteo lagopus*).

As observed by Sutton in 1930, this species was nowhere common on the island and was restricted to the highlands. One pair was seen at Mount Saorre on 10 July 1970 and another at our camp near Duke of York Bay in 1971. The latter pair was first seen at a nest site on a cliff on 5 July at which time the female (dark phase) was incubating. The male (light phase) was regularly observed near our camp throughout July and August. The nest contained 3 young on 28 July.

Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*).

Not seen in 1970 and only twice in 1971. On 15 July, 2 adults were hunting along the escarpment at our camp and at the same location a single adult was observed in an unsuccessful chase of a water pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*).

Willow ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*).

Common at Salmon Pond in 1970. First observed on 4 June it was seen daily throughout the remainder of the month, displaying males being most common. As the breeding season progressed birds became much more difficult to see. Although our camp in 1971 was again on the Hudson Bay Lowlands only one adult male was seen on 6 July. On 17 July 1970 a pair with 10 newly hatched young were found near Salmon Pond while on 7 August, at the same site, a pair with 11 large young were recorded. This bird does not appear to be abundant anywhere on the island, and is restricted to the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

Rock ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*).

No nests or young were found but occasional adults were seen whenever we visited the highlands, both in 1970 and 1971.

Sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis*).

Status believed unchanged since Sutton (1932 p. 102) reported it as "A rather rare, but widely distributed summer resident . . .". One pair with 2 young were near the upper Boas River on 8 July 1970 and 2 adults were seen at Ell Bay on 28 August 1971.

Semipalmated plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*).

A common local breeder of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. In 1970 only 1 adult was seen, that being on 10 July during a 10-day stay near the escarpment on the upper Boas River. None were seen at Salmon Pond. In 1971 these birds were seen daily at our Duke of York Bay camp from 1 July to 15 August. Adults were also seen at Coral Harbour in early July 1971. Two nests were found in 1971 on the shattered limestone ridges near camp containing 4 eggs each; the hatching date for each was 13 July. This is in agreement with the hatching date of 13 July provided by Bray (1943 p. 518) and 14 July provided by Sutton (1932 p. 107).

Golden plover (*Pluvialis dominica*).

One of the most common breeding birds on the Hudson Bay Lowlands, adults being observed continually in 1970 and 1971. The 3 nests found each contained 4 eggs. On 17 July 1970 a young chick was found near Salmon Pond and in 1971 the hatching date near Duke of York Bay was between 5 and 13 July. These records suggest hatching dates for this species on the island may vary considerably. Both Sutton (1932) and Manning (Bray 1943) report this bird as relatively rare on the island while our observations show just the opposite. The abundance of this species in the Coral Harbour region in 1970 and 1971, the area where Sutton recorded most of his observations, suggests a considerable increase in nesting Golden Plovers on Southampton Island within the past 35 years.

Black-bellied plover (*Squatarola squatarola*).

Not recorded in 1971 and only rarely in 1970. Sutton (1932) found it a common resident along the South Bay coast region. This may explain the paucity of observations in 1970 and 1971, most of which were restricted to the interior.

Ruddy turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*).

No nests found in 1970 and only occasional individuals seen from 13 June to early August. No birds of this species were recorded in 1971.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*).

Two seen at Salmon Pond on 26 July 1970; none recorded in 1971. Both Sutton (1932) and Bray (1943) reported the whimbrel as uncommon and found no nests.

Knot (*Calidris canutus*).

First seen at Salmon Pond on 8 June 1970 and groups up to 3 were observed at least weekly thereafter. Neither nests nor young were found but territorial display and calling suggested that breeding occurred. Not seen in 1971. If breeding does occur, as suggested by Manning (Bray 1943) it is certainly not common.

White-rumped sandpiper (*Erolia fuscicollis*).

Found to be one of the most common breeders on the Hudson Bay Lowlands; first seen on 4 June 1970. Display flights and singing were recorded from 15 June onwards. One nest with 3 eggs was found in late June 1970 and many family groups were seen from mid-July to mid-August. Manning (Bray 1943) found this bird the most common nesting sandpiper in the Seahorse Point region.

Purple sandpiper (*Erolia maritima*).

Not recorded in 1970 and only one was seen in 1971, at Caribou Island on 2 August. Its affinity for the coastal region probably accounts for our failure to note this species on Southampton Island. Neither Sutton (1932) nor Manning (Bray 1943) found positive evidence of this species breeding on the island.

Baird's sandpiper (*Erolia bairdii*).

Although predicted by Sutton (1932) to breed on the island, the first nest was found on a limestone ridge near the upper Boas River on 10 July 1970. The nest contained 4 newly hatched young and several other adult pairs were seen in the same vicinity. None was identified in 1971.

Dunlin (*Erolia alpina*).

First seen at Salmon Pond on 4 June 1970 and daily from then on. One nest (3 eggs) was found on 21 June and young were first seen on 17 July. Although not as common in 1971, breeding birds were observed at the Cleveland River south of Duke of York Bay in mid-July. One nest with 3 young was found on 11 July 1971.

Semipalmated sandpiper (*Ereunetes pusillus*).

Very common in both 1970 and 1971. First seen on 11 June 1970 and although no nests were found, young were frequently seen after mid-July and were flying on 27 July 1970.

Buff-breasted sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*).

Two were seen on a dry limestone ridge near Salmon Pond on 7 August 1970. This is the only record for this species on the island, and they are believed to have been autumn migrants rather than summer residents.

Sanderling (*Crocethia alba*).

First observed flying north over Salmon Pond on 13 June 1970. From 16 July to 8 August 1970, flocks of up to 25 birds appeared at our campsite. A few were seen on the lower Cleveland River in mid-July 1971.

Red phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*).

A very common breeder on the Hudson Bay Lowlands. First seen on 12 June 1970 and regularly thereafter. In mid-July 1971 single females were identified at the lower Cleveland River. One nest with 2 eggs and 2 young was found near Salmon Pond on 14 July 1970. By 29 July 1970, flocks of up to 40 birds were forming suggesting possible preparation for migration.

Northern phalarope (*Lobipes lobatus*).

Only seen flying north over Salmon Pond between 4 and 12 June 1970, when a total of 6 was counted. Sutton (1932) and Bray (1943) reported this species as rare and found no nests.

Pomarine jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*).

A rare and local breeder of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Similar to the observations by Sutton (1932) it was the least common of the 3 found on the island. Two birds were first seen at Salmon Pond on 9 June 1970. Three pairs were found during July 1970, 2 near the upper Boas River and 1 at Salmon Pond. In all 3 cases the birds circled and called, suggesting the presence of nests. A downy young was found at one of these sites on 14 July 1970. None was seen in 1971.

Parasitic jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*).

First seen at Salmon Pond on 10 June 1970 and observed 3 or 4 times weekly thereafter. One nest with 2 eggs was found on the upper Boas River on 3 July 1970. On 8 August 1971, near the lower Cleveland River, a pair was observed during a successful chase of a Lapland longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*).

Long-tailed jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*).

The most common of the 3 jaegers, at least in the interior lowlands, in 1970. It was continually evident from 7 June to mid-August 1970. First young were seen on 18 July. In 1971 it was occasionally seen at Duke of York Bay from 3 July to 18 August. Manning (Bray 1943) considered *S. parasiticus* to be generally more common than *S. longicaudus* on Southampton Island. A crash in the lemming populations during the winter of 1970-71 was probably responsible for the apparent absence of nesting jaegers in the summer of 1971.

Glaucous gull (*Larus hyperboreus*).

A rare visitor inland but probably, as Sutton (1932) reports, is much more common along the coastal regions. Single birds were seen at Salmon Pond on 23 and 28 June 1970, both identified as second-year immatures. On 26 July 1971 a second-year immature was identified at our camp near Duke of York Bay. Manning (Bray 1943) reported 20 nests at the mouth of the Canyon River in 1937.

Herring gull (*Larus argentatus*).

A very common breeder on the larger inland lakes and tundra ponds and along the coastal region. Immatures were rare inland, only 1 third-year and 2 second-year birds having been seen in 1970 and 1 second-year bird in 1971. Immatures were often seen in larger groups near Coral Harbour and it is probable many adults move inland to breed while most immatures restrict their summer distribution to the coast.

Thayer's gull (*Larus thayeri*).

A rare summer visitor, 1 solitary adult being observed twice at Salmon Pond on 15 and 23 June 1970. Reported to breed along the northeast coast by Smith (1966).

Sabine's gull (*Xema sabini*).

Our observations verify Sutton's (1932) speculation that this bird was rare inland. In 1970, 2 groups of 3 and 6 individuals flew north past our Salmon Pond camp on 11 and 12 June respectively. A single bird was seen in the water at Salmon Pond on 23 June 1970. No birds of this species were seen in 1971.

Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisaea*).

Although very common at Salmon Pond from 13 June to 14 August 1970 no nests were found or any activity observed suggestive of breeding. In 1971 it was very common along the lower Cleveland River in mid-July. Nesting appears to be restricted to the coast.

Snowy owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*).

A very common breeder in the Salmon Pond area in 1970. Eleven nests were found having an average clutch size of 8.1 eggs (range: 5 to 10). First young were seen on 30 June and first fledgling on 4 August. In 1971 no owls were seen on the island. Their disappearance was caused, no doubt, by the crash of the lemming population during the intervening months.

Horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris*).

In both 1970 and 1971 this bird was common on the eastern highland but rare throughout the Hudson Bay Lowlands. It was one of the earliest migrants to arrive in the spring and, although no nests were found in either year, it is believed to be a common breeder throughout the eastern highlands.

Raven (*Corvus corax*).

A rare summer visitor to the island, the only observation being a group of 4 adults near Duke of York Bay on 7 August 1971. Sutton (1932) reported it common near Seahorse Point and along the rugged coastline of Foxe Channel.

Water pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*).

Observed near the upper Boas River in early July 1970. In 1971 it was very common on the eastern highlands near Duke of York Bay although no nests were found. Its present status appears similar to that described by Sutton (1932), it being common locally and mainly restricted to the eastern highlands.

Redpoll (*Acanthis sp.*).

On 10 July 1970 one was seen on the upper Boas River, and on 17 July 1971 one was observed near Duke of York Bay.

Lapland longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*).

One of the most common summer residents on the island. A nest with 5 eggs was found on 28 June 1970 on the upper Boas River and one nest with 6 eggs at Coral Harbour on 1 July 1971. Young were first seen on 10 July 1970 and fledglings on 17 July 1970. Young were observed flying on 23 July 1970.

Snow bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*).

Scarce to absent over most of the Hudson Bay Lowlands but common to abundant on the eastern highlands. One of the first spring migrants, nests were found on 10 July 1970 (4 young), 10 July 1971 (4 young; 1 egg), and 10 July 1971 (5 young). All nests and bird observations were restricted to the eastern highlands. Flying young were seen from the end of July in both years.

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