

12th Annual Newsletter

The Snow Bunting Report

Welcome back to the 12th annual Canadian Snow Bunting Network Newsletter! We are excited to share our most recent work on Snow Buntings from students, banders and community members!

Highlights

- Exciting New Research Projects and Updates
- Iqaluit Nest Box Project
- Banding Updates
- SNBU Resights

Looking for Updates?

Follow us on Facebook
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Questions about Snow Bunting research?

Contact Dr. Oliver Love
(olove@uwindSOR.ca)



Research Projects and Updates

The First Steps of My Master's: Connecting Research from the High and Low Arctic

Justine Grimard-Spalding, MSc student at UQAR

In October 2025, I took part in a conference on animal behavior in Montreal, QC, organized by the Société Québécoise de l'Étude Biologique du Comportement. There, I presented my first scientific poster as part of my master's research, titled « Arctic Warming and Reproductive Performance of a Cold Specialist: A Comparative Study Across Their Breeding Range ». I had the opportunity to meet many other scientists who, like me, are passionate about biological questions. They asked insightful questions about my project, which focuses on the reproduction of the snow bunting in both the Low and High Arctic. In this study, I will connect datasets collected across both regions over several years.



Justine presenting her work at the animal behaviour conference in Montreal, QC.



Justine Grimard Spalding

A photo taken during the 2025 field season in Iqaluit, NU. The snow bunting's breeding range is extensive, and I was able to observe last summer the strikingly different conditions that this species encounters across its range. For instance, the vegetation in Iqaluit could almost be described as lush compared to the polar desert of Alert—both located in Nunavut. Moreover, while Iqaluit experiences long summer days with only a few hours of twilight, the sun never sets at Alert during the snow buntings' breeding season! We then assume that thermal constraints might differ greatly between the High and Low Arctic. Additionally, because Arctic warming occurs unevenly across regions, variable warm events may cause differential thermal stress throughout the species' breeding range. Current research in the High Arctic shows that this cold-adapted bird already appears to reduce chick provisioning at temperatures as low as 14 °C. We therefore



Photo of Angelina, Kenzi, Patricia, Rachel, Elena and Justine during the 2025 field season in Iqaluit, NU.

wonder whether periods of heat affect populations similarly across the distribution of the species.

In my project, I will compare snow bunting reproduction in the High and Low Arctic by first examining general reproductive parameters—such as clutch size, hatching and fledging success, chick growth, and breeding timing. I will then test whether warm events, which are becoming more frequent in the Arctic, affect the two regions differently. Finally, I will investigate whether these thermal stresses influence reproductive success and whether such effects vary across the breeding range.

This research is important because few studies have examined the direct impacts of Arctic warming across the full breeding range of cold T-specialist species. Differential warming effects could lead to a redistribution of Arctic species, and understanding these effects will help guide future conservation strategies.

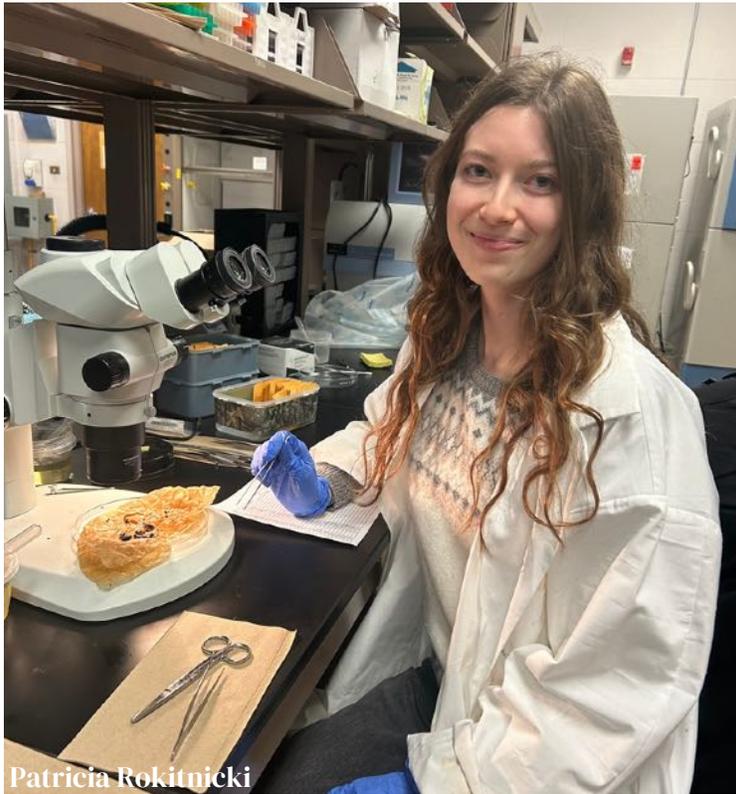


Justine recording data from a Snow Bunting feeder equipment in Alert, NU.

Arctic Invertebrates in the City: Iqaluit's Invertebrate Updates

Sarah Dunn, Undergraduate student at the University of Windsor

Urbanization is increasing worldwide and it's affecting the environment and biodiversity. However, little is known about the impacts of urbanization on Arctic wildlife, especially in relation to invertebrates. In November 2024, I joined the Integrative Avian Ecology Lab as an Invertebrate Quantification assistant with the goal of sorting invertebrate samples collected during the Snow Bunting field season.



Patricia Rokitnicki

Sarah sorting invertebrates in the Avian Ecology Lab.

The Integrative Avian Ecology Lab primarily focuses on arctic birds like the Snow Bunting and how they are adapting to urbanization. However, understanding the diversity and abundance of invertebrates is an important part of their work, as Snow Buntings rely on invertebrates to feed their nestlings. The Iqaluit Snow Bunting team deploys nine sets of insect traps across Iqaluit in early June. They collect the invertebrate samples every three days and store them in tubes to bring back to the University of Windsor for later quantification.

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Patricia Rokitnicki

Female Snow Bunting with invertebrates in beak.



Patricia Rokitnicki

Invertebrate trap deployed in Iqaluit in 2025.

I've spent the past year organizing approximately 500 invertebrate samples with the help of Larisa Renaud, Julia Dubeau, and Patricia Rokitnicki, while also working on an undergraduate honors thesis examining invertebrate abundance across an urban gradient in Iqaluit.

Over the past year, I've learned a lot about invertebrates and the characteristics that distinguish different orders, often comparing them to previous data collected in East Bay Island, a remote study site at a similar latitude to Iqaluit. While we find similar orders of invertebrates such as flies (Diptera), beetles (Coleoptera), moths and butterflies (Lepidoptera), wasps and bees (Hymenoptera), and spiders (Arachnids)

Since starting my invertebrate quantification journey, we've found some new orders including slugs (Stylommatophora), lice (Psocodea), and thrip (Thysanoptera). With about 100 samples left

for the 2025 field season, I am excited to see if we discover any other new orders and to see if the abundance of invertebrates may differ across Iqaluit!



Sarah Dunn

Microscope view of a beetle (Coleoptera) from the Iqaluit samples.



Sarah Dunn

Microscope view of an aphid (Hemiptera) from the Iqaluit samples.



Larisa Renaud

Microscope view of a thrip (Thysanoptera) from the Iqaluit samples.



Sarah Dunn

Microscope view of a fly (Diptera) from the Iqaluit samples.

Between Fieldwork and Publication: Advancing Snow Bunting Research

Marianne Turcotte, MSc student at UQAR

Hello wonderful community! Since February 2025, I have officially been among the graduates of Dr. Vézina's and Dr. Love's laboratories. After spending several years studying our beloved Snow Buntings in eastern Canada during the winter, I had the opportunity, in the summer of 2025, to observe them during their breeding season in Alert, Nunavut. It was an incredible experience, full of meaningful challenges and memorable moments. Following this adventure, my admiration for these cold-adapted songbirds has only grown.



Patricia Rokitnicki

Male Snow Bunting in Iqaluit.

In addition, this past August, my collaborators and I published a scientific article in the journal *Ornithology* examining the physiological costs associated with wintering sites in the Snow Bunting. It was my first experience publishing in a scientific journal, and it proved to be a valuable learning milestone. The article, titled “Wintering closer to breeding grounds comes at a cost in an Arctic-specialized songbird, *Plectrophenax*

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Patricia Rokitnicki

Snow Bunting fledgling in Iqaluit.

nivalis (Snow Bunting)”, is available open access if you would like to take a look. This research would not have been possible without the invaluable help of many CSBN members, whose names appear in the article's acknowledgments. Patrice Bourgault, Nancy Furber, David Lambie, Rick Ludkin, and Rodger D. Titman: thank you so much again for your thoughtful advice and your hands-on support in the field!



Patricia Rokitnicki

Female Snow Bunting in Iqaluit.

As for what comes next, I fully intend to keep watching Snow Buntings flutter like tiny snowflakes across the Canadian fields.

H-O-T-T-O-G-O, you can take me hot to go: Are Arctic urban centers offering shady refuge for snow buntings?

Elena Tranze-Drabinia, MSc student at the
University of Windsor

I am investigating the combined effect of climate change and urbanization on snow buntings in Iqaluit, an Arctic urban center which reaches higher summer temperatures almost every year. Captive studies suggest buntings begin to overheat at low ambient temperatures 9-12°C, however, free-living birds may use behavioural flexibility to mitigate the effects of thermal stress on body temperature. Snow buntings breed in high densities in Iqaluit compared to the rest of their circumpolar range, putting them at the forefront of warming effects, with the city either acting as a thermal refuge from the tundra, or an ecological trap.

Elena Tranze-Drabinia



Snow Bunting fledgling panting in Iqaluit, NU.

The goal of my research is to quantify how Iqaluit snow buntings are affected by climate- and urban- induced heat stress, and I am examining the flexibility in provisioning rates across a thermal gradient to see whether some individuals manage rising temperatures better than others. I will also be using offspring quality and quantity as a proxy to determine whether high temperatures and other anthropogenic factors

may be positively or negatively affecting snow bunting reproductive success.

Patricia Rokitnicki



Female Snow Bunting feeding a fledgling in Iqaluit, NU. Through our 3D printed and painted temperature models, we were able to collect a more detailed measure of what temperatures the snow buntings are experiencing compared to a weather station. Shockingly, this past summer, some of our 3D models have reached 40°C, and what's even more surprising, is that many of these hotter models are in areas farther from the city core, which is not what we had predicted. This may suggest that cities are offering a variation in landscape compared to tundra, with colder pockets that melt out quicker. This novel research investigates how wildlife responds to the ecological effects of rapid environmental change in the Canadian Arctic and can hopefully act as a framework of how to coexist with urban wildlife in developing Arctic communities.



Plastic Snow Bunting Model with temperature logger in Iqaluit, NU.

Late Spring, Record Captures

Audrey Le Pogam, Researcher at UQAR

Each field season in Alert comes with its share of surprises and challenges. This year, we experienced an exceptionally late and snowy spring... and, against all odds, it turned out to be to our advantage!



Marianne Turcotte capturing Snow Buntings with a walking trap in Alert.

With my two teammates, we arrived on site on May 20. As usual, the ground was covered with a thin layer of snow. But instead of melting gradually over the days, winter lingered, and by mid-July, we were still using the snowmobiles, although we normally stop using them by early June (some years, we don't need them at all).

The abundant snow had one positive effect: feeding sites remained few and difficult for the birds to access for several weeks. Therefore, each pile of seeds we put out attracted lots of birds!

Thanks to these exceptional conditions, we were able to capture, almost at the doorstep of our laboratory, more than 95 snow buntings and make over 110 recaptures between May 24 and June 17, a record since we began working in Alert in 2015.



A Snow Bunting perched in front of a Potter trap.

This unusually high number of captures couldn't have come at a better time, as we had brought our magnetic resonance machine to the field for the first time. In just three minutes, this remarkable device measures the amount of fat, lean mass, and water in the birds. These minimally invasive measurements are essential for tracking changes in snow buntings' body composition, from their arrival after a long spring migration up to the start of breeding.

Combined with body mass and pectoral muscle thickness (used for both flight and heat production through shivering), these measurements, repeated on many individuals and compared with "normal" years, will help us document post-migration phenotypic



Marianne Turcotte taking ultrasound measurements while Corinne Pradet records magnetic resonance data.

adjustments and breeding preparation during late springs.

Although the snow was in our favor at the beginning of the season, it actually made monitoring the breeding more complicated... but that's another story.

in search of snow buntings. In a typical June, we'd be in the thick of nest searching, watching for pairs and trying to locate their well-hidden nesting sites. So, we venture out across the snow-covered tundra, scanning for any sign of activity.

A Snow-Bound Season in the High Arctic

Emmanuelle Gouin, MSc student at UQAR

June 2025 — We step off the plane in Alert, at the northernmost tip of Nunavut. We look around, and everything is white. Snow stretches as far as the eye can see. It's a strange sight for early summer. By now, we'd normally expect at least a few patches of tundra to be snow-free. We reassure ourselves: once the melt begins, it'll go quickly.

Days go by, and the snow remains. The landscape is still blanketed in white, and we keep telling ourselves the same thing — once it starts, it'll melt fast. Of course, we can't just sit around and wait. So, we fire up the snowmobiles and head out

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Emmanuelle looking for Snow Buntings in Alert, NU.

Our first trips yield nothing. Not a single nest. We assume the buntings are delayed by the lingering snow cover, and we keep at it. By mid-June, we finally find our first nest — a much-needed sign that the season is finally kicking off. We feel a wave of cautious optimism, hoping this is just the beginning. At this point, most of the tundra around the station is still buried under snow. The only exposed spots are the steep canyon walls — not exactly easy terrain, but that’s where we focus our efforts. Bit by bit, we manage to locate a few more nests in these scattered, snow-free pockets. We stay hopeful, thinking perhaps a second wave of nesting will start once the rest of the snow finally melts.



UQAR team searching for Snow Bunting nests in Alert, NU. That second wave never came. In the end, after our most determined efforts, we found a grand total of ten nests. Ten very precious nests. Despite the unusual — and frankly, challenging — field conditions, those ten nests provided solid data, enough to complete the third year of data collection for my master’s project. I’ve now finished analyzing the full dataset, and some very exciting results have emerged. We’re now eager to start writing and prepare a manuscript to present them.



Female Snow Bunting perching on a rock.

Fieldwork in Alert never fails to surprise, and this year was no exception. Despite the persistent snow and the lower-than-expected nest numbers, the season was a success in its own way — and I’m grateful to everyone who helped make it happen.

Patricia Rokitnicki



Male Snow Bunting with a spider in his mouth.

From Tundra to Traffic: How Snow Buntings Navigate Urban Life

Rachel Dow, MSc Student at the University of Windsor

Wildlife around the world are facing vast amounts of change, often from multiple sources such as climate change, habitat loss and habitat degradation simultaneously. As communities expand, natural habitats are often cleared and replaced with artificial infrastructure and many species must adjust quickly in order to survive. Several species are able to adaptively respond to these changes through behavioural adjustments. Studies at temperate latitudes have found that birds living in cities display different behavioural responses compared to those in more natural areas, especially in terms of boldness and exploration. However, very little is known about whether Arctic-breeding birds show similar flexibility in response to the growing urbanization happening in northern communities.

My study focuses on the behavioural responses of Snow buntings (*Plectrophenax nivalis*), an Arctic-breeding songbird, to urbanization within Iqaluit, Nunavut. Throughout the city, there is a gradient of urbanization, ranging from highly disturbed core areas (e.g., construction zones, heavy traffic, and frequent human activity) to moderate disturbed residential neighbourhoods, and minimally disturbed natural areas.



Location of a Snow Bunting nests in Iqaluit, NU.

Snow buntings' nest across this entire gradient and the overarching goal of this research is to determine if buntings may be choosing nesting sites throughout Iqaluit depending on their individual behavioural responses to human disturbance.



Gianco Angelozzi-Blanco
Female Snow Bunting leaving nest after provisioning during behavioural experiment.

During the 2024-25 field season, we measured two key behaviours in buntings nesting across different parts of the city. First, to quantify boldness, we recorded how close a field-researcher could approach a bird before fleeing (flight initiation distance). Second, in order to quantify exploratory behaviours, we observed how buntings reacted when an unfamiliar object was placed near their nest and whether this changed the number of times they visited. This study may provide insight into the behavioural mechanisms that could allow buntings and possibly other Arctic songbirds to adapt to a rapidly changing environment to help answer whether cities may be acting as refuges which could presumably slow population declines. Ultimately, our findings can support conservation strategies and help city planners design urban spaces that maintain healthy, resilient bird populations in a changing Arctic.

Small Birds, Big Love: Learning from Snow Buntings in the City

Angelina Kemp, MSc student at the University of Windsor

In urban environments, noise from traffic, construction, and other human activities can create challenges for wildlife. Songbirds like Snow Buntings rely on vocal alarm calls to warn one another of danger, but these signals can be masked by loud urban noise, potentially putting birds at risk. As Iqaluit, Nunavut's capital, continues to grow, so do the risks that noise pollution may pose to Snow Buntings living in and around the city.

A key trait that supports birds in urban areas is their behavioural adaptive capacity, the ability to quickly adjust, learn, and tolerate changing conditions. Birds may respond to noise pollution by learning to recognize vocalizations despite background noise, habituating to noise that is non-threatening, or compensating visually by increasing vigilance. My research examines how urban noise affects Snow Buntings' ability to perceive alarm calls and how it shapes their vigilance behaviour.



Angelina Kemp

Female Snow Bunting at an experimental feeder.

With support from community members, we established feeding stations across Iqaluit and conducted playback experiments using different combinations of noise and alarm calls.

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By observing behaviours such as latency to flee, scanning frequency, and time spent at feeders, I aim to understand how these birds respond to shifting environmental conditions.

Snow Buntings are not just a great study species for understanding Arctic urbanization, they are also the perfect link between science and community. Using these birds as our focus, we set out to get Iqalumiut youth engaged with our research. We created a place-based environmental education program for students from kindergarten to grade 11, shaped by feedback from Iqaluit teachers and interests communicated to us by community members. Birds are everywhere, easy to spot, and already familiar to students, so they became the perfect gateway into learning about Snow Buntings and our research.



UWindsor and UQAR research team sharing information about Snow Buntings with local students in Iqaluit.



Angelina Kemp

Photo of environmental education program material for students from kindergarten to grade II.

Our lessons tied into the territorial curriculum and local research, letting students explore the importance of birds, try out real field tools, build ecological skills, and discover new science career pathways. In spring 2025, we piloted the program in three schools and reached over 200 students! Afterward, we collected feedback from teachers, students, and community members to learn what worked well and what needs improvements. In the big picture this project will provide insights into the adaptability of snow buntings to urban environments, informing conservation and city planning, while fostering collaboration between researchers and the Iqalumiut community, promoting knowledge sharing and relationship-building. A big thanks to the community members who helped out with this project, it would not have been possible without you!



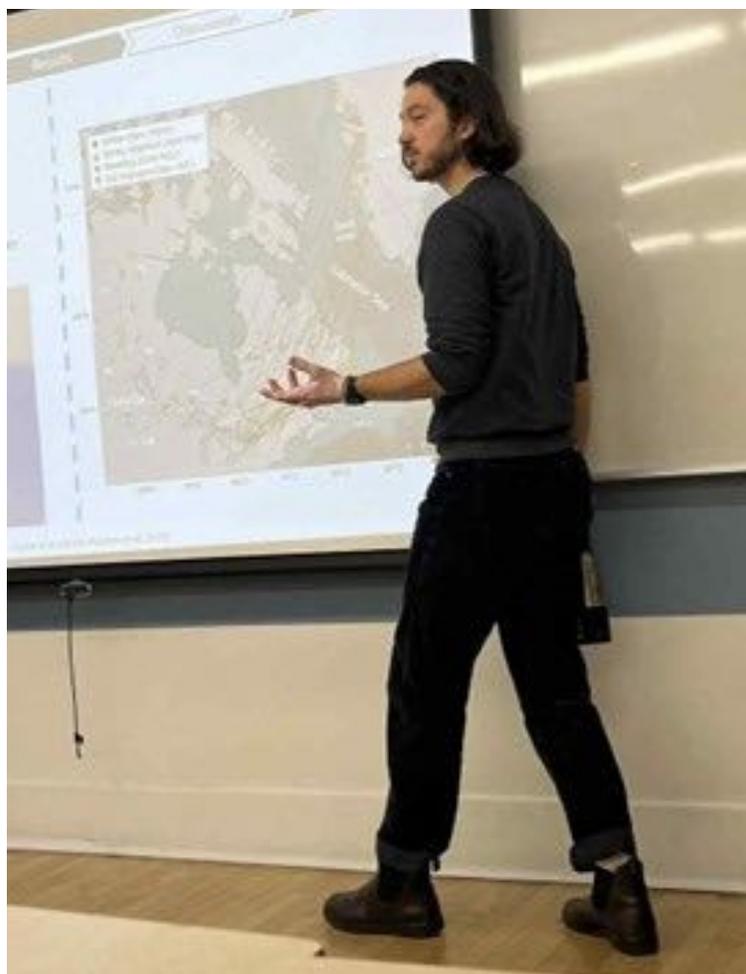
Patricia Rokitnicki

Male Snow Bunting and fledgling perching on a fence.

Where do our Snow Buntings go?

Baptiste Courtin, PhD Student at UQAR

Understanding migratory routes is essential for assessing population connectivity, migration costs, and our responsibilities in terms of conservation. This is especially true for migratory songbirds like the Snow Bunting, whose populations are declining across North America. We know that those breeding in western Greenland winter in Northeast America... But how do they cross the Labrador Sea? Determining these routes remains a challenge: these birds are too small to carry GPS devices, and the low recapture rates from wintering areas prevent us from using GLS. But I have other leads, such as analyzing at-sea observations.



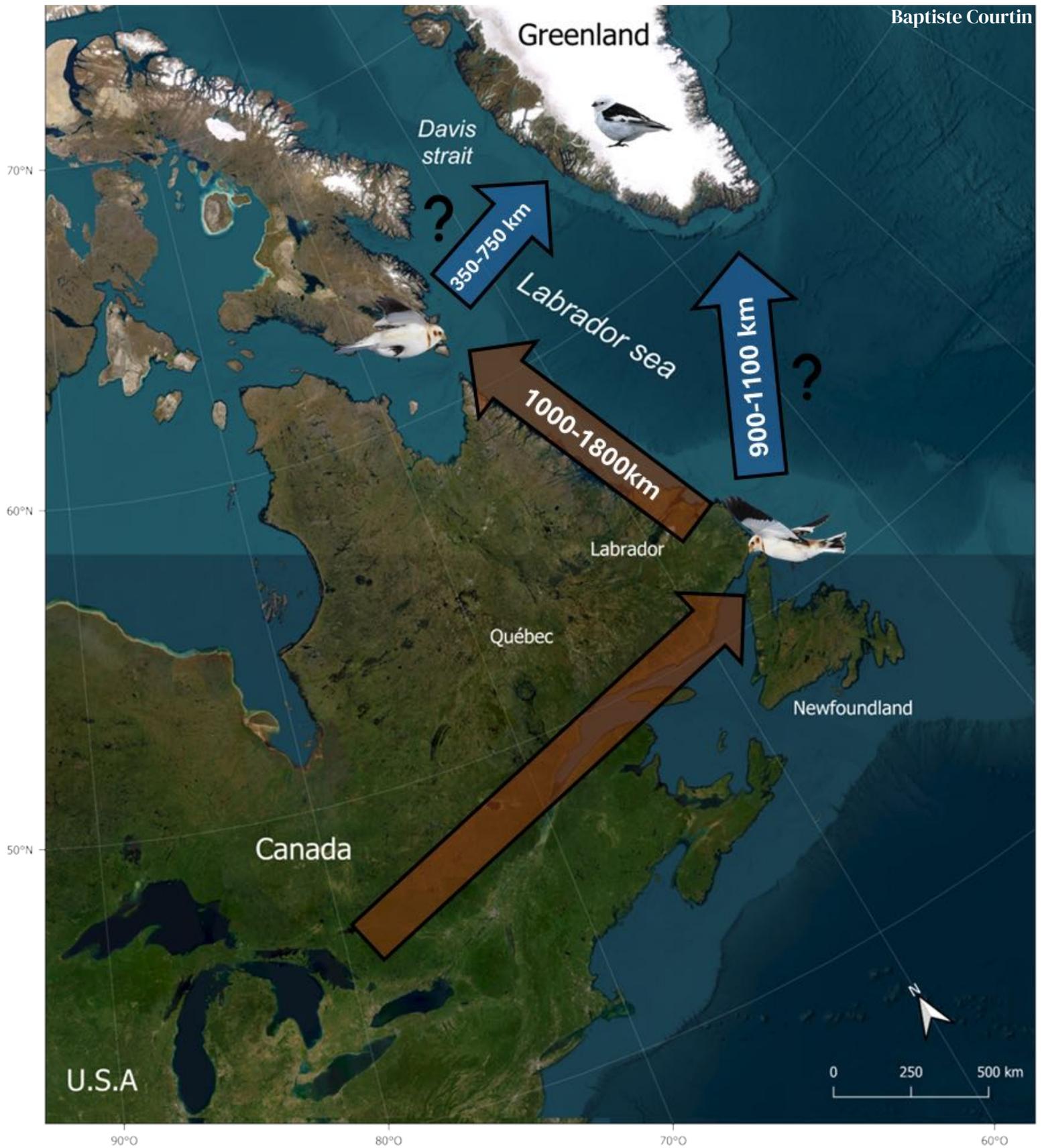
Baptiste presenting his work on Snow Buntings in the SQEBC congress meeting.

Presented last November at the Société Québécoise pour l'Étude du Comportement (SQEBC) congress, this study, which is based on 56 years of seabird observation data from the Programme Intégré de Recherches sur les Oiseaux Pélagiques (PIROP) and the Eastern Canada

Seabirds at Sea (ECSAS) programs, will soon be published as a short communication. The results? A surprise: our buntings don't all follow the same path! In spring, two routes seem to emerge: The classic route through the Davis Strait, already described by Salomonsen (1950) and Orr (1980). A shorter route via Newfoundland and southern Labrador, which could reduce the distance to southern Greenland by at least 1,000 km! A nice shortcut, you might say, but at what cost? This suggests the existence of several strategies in spring. In autumn, however, there is no preferred corridor: buntings cross from virtually any point along the Greenland coast.

Next step: heading to Newfoundland and Labrador!

To understand why different strategies exist, I hope to visit two sites next spring, one in Labrador and the other in Newfoundland, which are yet to be determined. The goal: to calculate their potential flight range based on body mass, wing length, sex, age, and fat score, similar to the mileage range displayed by your car. Then, using Emlen funnels, circular cages that reveal birds' migratory direction, I will estimate whether they head offshore (toward Greenland) or northward, potentially following the Labrador coast and the Davis Strait corridor. These data will help confirm whether these banding sites are key stopover locations, an important piece of information for conservation. By studying females, males, adults, and juveniles, I also hope to determine whether these strategies are linked to sex and age. Remember: adult males arrive earlier on breeding grounds to secure the best



Map depicting potential migration routes for Snow Buntings nesting along the coast of Greenland.

territories. Could these be the same individuals taking the shortcut via Newfoundland and southeastern Labrador?

I'm excited to try to answer these questions, explore regions that have long fascinated me, and meet other CSBN members along the way!

Snow Bunting Nest Boxes

The Iqaluit Snow Bunting Nest Box Project

Patricia Rokitnicki, PhD Candidate at the University of Windsor

We started studying Snow Buntings in Iqaluit in 2022. Our goals for the Iqaluit Snow Bunting Research are to understand how urbanization impacts where they nest in the city and their survival. There are many breeding Snow Buntings in Iqaluit, likely because it is warmer in the city in comparison to the tundra, and because they use human-made structures as nests. Over the past four years, we have found buntings nesting in buildings, sheds, pipes, and retention walls. Discovering these different nest locations led us to consider whether Snow buntings nesting in Iqaluit would use nest boxes, like those used in Barrow, Alaska, and Svalbard, Norway.

In 2024, an Iqaluit community member found a Snow Bunting nesting in the nest box on their property, and this helped inspire our Iqaluit community nest box project. As natural nesting

sites disappear due to urban growth, nest boxes might provide safer places for buntings. However, the use of Snow Bunting nest boxes has not been examined in a Canadian Arctic city, and thus our goal was to determine whether buntings would use nest boxes in Iqaluit.



Patricia Rokitnicki

A nest box installed on a community member's shed in Iqaluit, NU.

In March 2024, we invited residents to host a nest box and monitor its activity during the breeding season. If they noticed increased activity, our team would visit to collect information about the nest, including the number of eggs, nestling hatch dates, chick development, and fledging (i.e. when they leave the nest).



Patricia Rokitnicki

Trying to catch a Female Snow Bunting nesting in a nest box in Iqaluit, NU.

A Community Member's story on Snow Bunting and Research in Iqaluit

Living with Snow Buntings in Iqaluit

Mike Courtney, Iqaluit, NU

It's funny how we become pretty complacent in our lives and just accept the things around us.

I say this because of my experience over the last 4 or 5 years with the Snow Bunting Project here in Iqaluit. For a bit of a background - my father was in the military and served Canada for 21 years, causing our family to travel and not live in one spot until I became a teenager. This spot was Churchill Manitoba, the Polar Bear Capital of the world. When I was 19 I was hired by a small tour company and did a summer of tours, birds, beluga whales and of course Polar Bears. I loved it and learned so much about nature and the animals around us. But as life moved on and I moved to the arctic I got complacent in thinking I knew a lot about the animals around me. Case in point the snow buntings.

I have lived in my current house for 25 years and we have fed the birds all year around. I assume that the snow buntings were here all year long as we always had birds around. Annual sightings of snow buntings, redpolls, whitens, and the odd slated junco. Even had a couple of birds get into our house in the middle of winter here, which caused lots of excitement trying to catch them and put them back outside safely. The best thing I found out was to turn out all the lights in the house, open the outside door and turn on the outside light. If you can get the bird to fly it will head to the light and hence be able to leave the house on its own.



Mike Courtney

Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs visiting Mike's feeder on May 14th 2025 in Iqaluit, NU.

About 5 years ago I met Rick Ludkin in our backyard. He was here studying the snow buntings, and I told him we had them all year. He asked me a couple of times to confirm and me being a little cocky I said "Yes sir...". Well I learned later that the birds who were staying over the winter were actually redpolls. So I have been a lot more observant over the last few years and keeping a closer eye on the buntings. Our new, quick observations reveal that the Snow Buntings do not stay in our area between late October to April/May.

After that summer I spent many days in my back yard waiting to see a banded bird. Unfortunately they were far and few between. I was asking questions like do they fall off? Do they die once they are banded and have been handled? Etc. But it just took a bit more patience and looking to find them. One of the biggest thrills was when I saw a post about a bunch of buntings that were banded in Labrador with yellow bands. Well lo and behold did we not have a couple at our feeders later that spring. I think they were what I called the passers, as they didn't hang around all summer, but rather got a fill of food while passing by and moved further up the island.

It was great to learn that the team started the local Facebook page and have it opened for community members to post their observations and questions and to read the feedback from the study team. I am amazed at how many people are involved. The other thing I really liked this summer was that all fledglings were banded with the same color band. This year was green. Easy to see. So we were able to see which were newborns in our area this year.



Patricia Rokitnicki

In 2024, Snow Buntings fledglings in Iqaluit were banded with a pink colour band. In 2025, fledglings were all banded with a green colour band.

For myself and my wife, we love to have the action around the house. We have multiple feeders outside and it is amazing watching the buntings, especially when the young start to fly and come to the feeders. They all have their own little personalities, some are very timid, some can be pretty aggressive and some are bossy. I think some of my favorite times are watching the parents feed the young out back. The squawking and tweeting is lovely. Nothing like enjoying a cup of tea on the back deck with the birds while watching for a coloured band.

Patricia Rokitnicki



Snow Buntings fledglings in Iqaluit snacking on millet on a balcony in Iqaluit, NU.

They will also get used to you. My wife can not go out on the back deck without a few of them swooping in fast to see if she is putting out seed for them. We have learned to limit the feeding to first thing in the morning and early evening. They will learn your patterns pretty quickly.

I want to thank the Team for working with the community. I think it is so important to work together for the better of our world. Information needs to be fed both ways so we are all learning. One thing I have learned over the last few years is there are no stupid questions, only ones that allow you to learn. Please keep up the great work.

Up and Coming Motus Projects

Spring forward with Motus in Labrador

Erica Geldart, Birds Canada

In the last few years, Birds Canada has had the pleasure to work with NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) to strengthen bird monitoring across central and southern Labrador. Together, we're expanding the Motus Wildlife Tracking System to facilitate community-led science and understand bird migration of culturally and scientifically important birds.



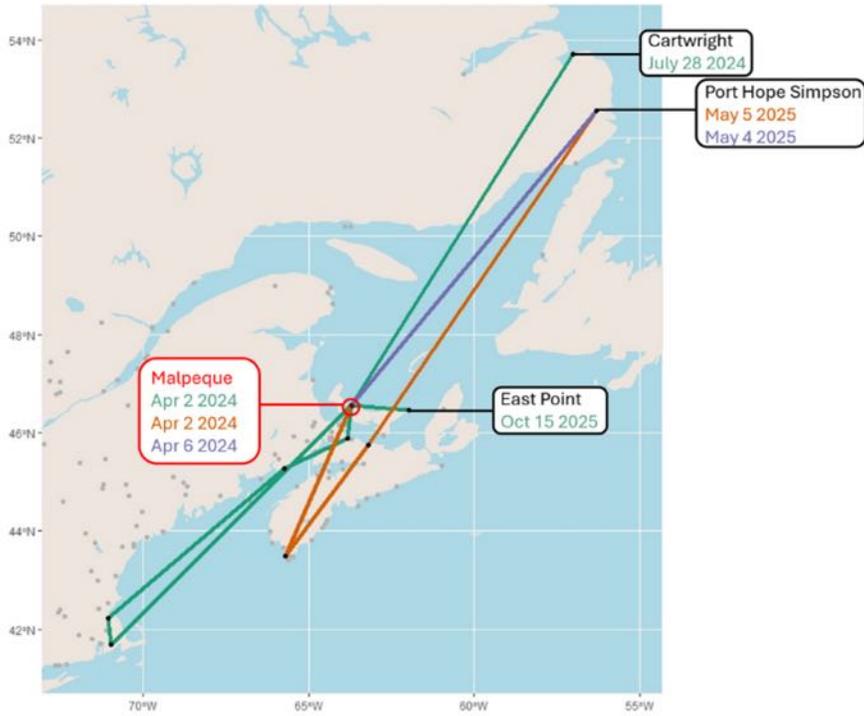
Sara Pearce Meijerink, Kayla Brown, and Kailee Poole assembling a Motus station in St. Lewis Labrador.



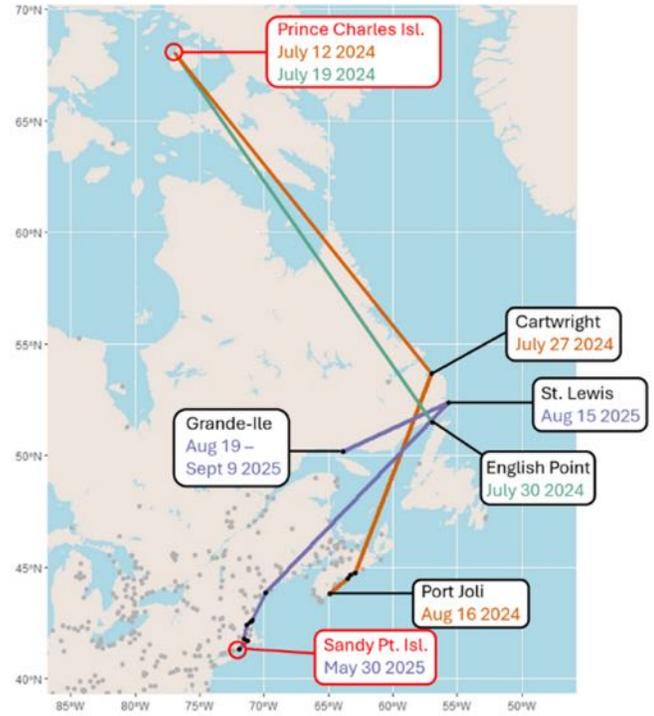
Motus tower attached to the side of a house.

In the spring of 2024 and 2025, we partnered with NCC to install five new Motus stations across southern Labrador - in Forteau, St. Lewis, Charlottetown, Port Hope Simpson, and Cartwright. Along the way, we gathered local bird-enthusiasts to enjoy delicious food and lively conversations about birds, Motus, and the questions they are eager to explore. This growing network strengthens our ability to track birds across Labrador, increases the possibilities of following culturally important species locally and to-or-from their breeding grounds, and supports research that helps protect birds across the North.

Canada Goose



Ruddy Turnstone



- Tagging site
- Active station
- Detected station

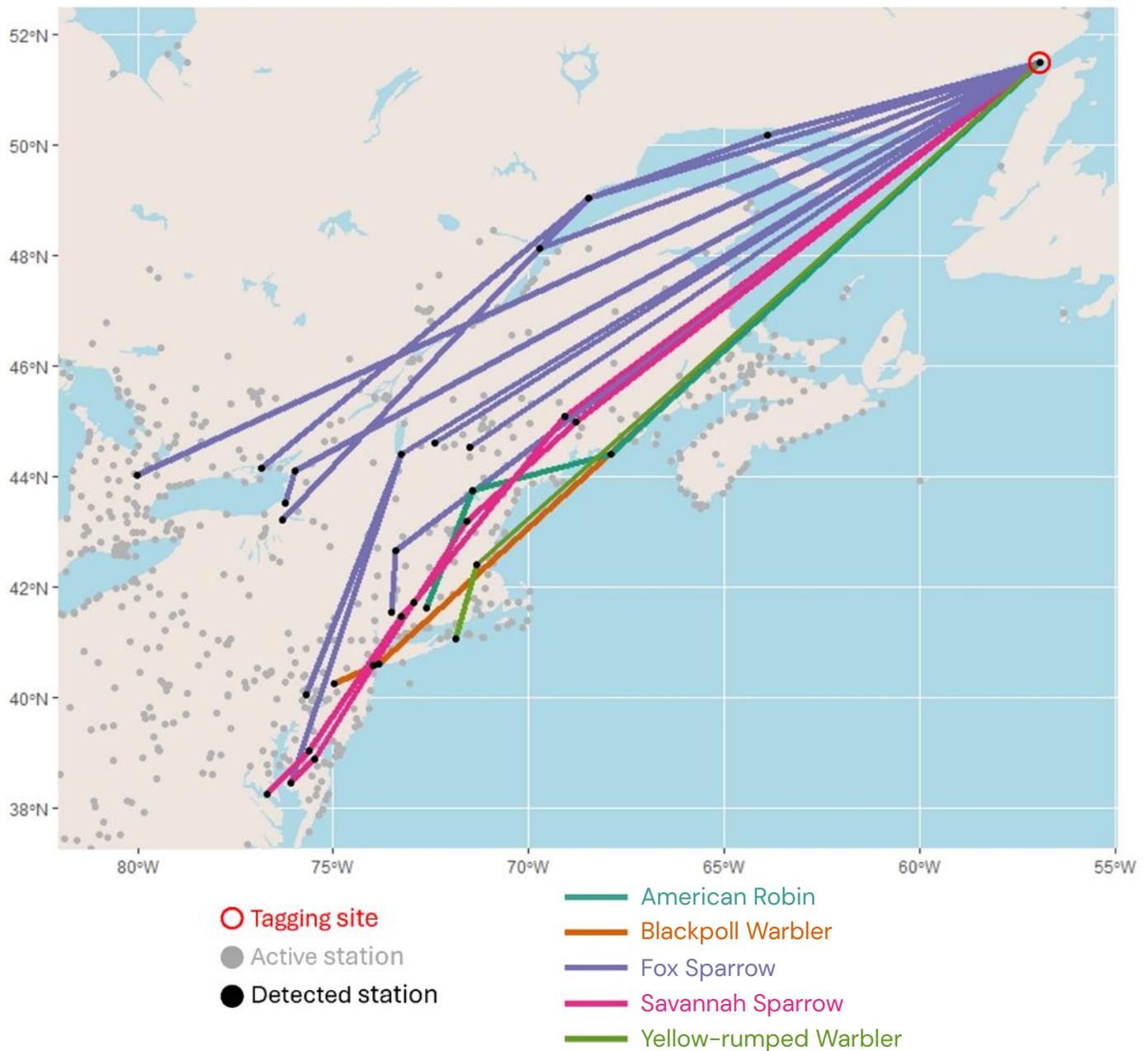
Detections of birds on NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) Motus stations. Each path colour represents a different bird. Data last updated December 1, 2025.

Over the past two Falls, we hosted Motus training workshops in Sackville, New Brunswick (2024) and Forteau, Labrador (2025), where we worked hands-on with NCC wildlife biologist Sara Pearce Meijerink, wildlife technician Kayla Brown, and local Canadian Snow Bunting Network (CSBN) bander Vernon Buckle. These sessions built local expertise in effectively and safely attaching Motus tags to songbirds, while advancing research on how different species and age groups migrate through Atlantic Canada. We tagged 33 birds during our latest workshop in Labrador, some of which we have been able to follow along their migration south. We tagged plenty of Fox Sparrows - which served as a great practice before tagging snowbirds (Snow Buntings) thanks to their similar size and adorable round bodies.



Kayla Brown Motus-tagging a bird with Lucas Berrigan and Vernon Buckle at Motus workshop in Forteau, Labrador.

Cléa Frapin

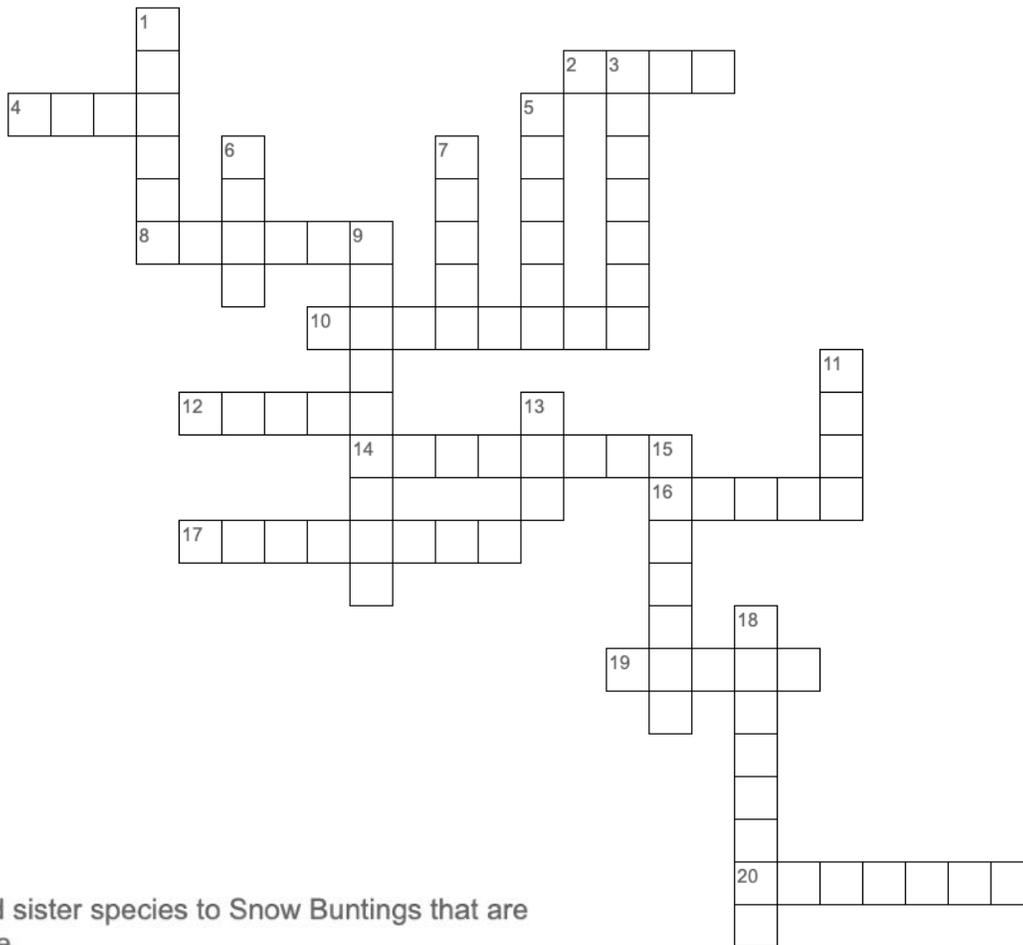


Detections of Motus-tagged passerines from Forteau, Labrador. Data last updated December 1, 2025.

Next spring (2026), NCC is excited to start Motus-tagging snowbirds. To start, their hope is to learn how snowbirds move around Labrador during their spring migration and the length of time the birds spend in the region. Discovering route choice on their way to their breeding grounds is a future goal, and although the Motus station network in the Canadian Arctic is sparse, there has been more and more interest and resources to expand the Motus

network North, which will increase the possibilities of tracking snowbirds during their northward migrations after they depart southern Labrador. Birds Canada also plans to deploy Motus tags on snowbirds overwintering in the Maritimes and southern Québec. These data may further support NCC's questions outlined above, as well as provide insights into arrival timing and the migratory origins of birds passing through central and southern Labrador.

Snow Bunting Crossword Puzzle



Down

- 1 Closely related sister species to Snow Buntings that are almost all white
- 3 Means 'snow white' in latin and is the species name after the genus 'Plectrophenax'
- 5 Small carnivorous predator of Snow Bunting nests and adults
- 6 Important winter agricultural food source for Snow Buntings in Ontario and Québec
- 7 Most northern known breeding location for Snow Buntings in Canada
- 9 Country where some Ontario and Labrador Snow Buntings breed outside of Canada
- 11 What buntings do with their feathers after breeding, but before migrating south in the fall
- 13 Acronym bird banders use for a Snow Bunting aged two years or more
- 15 This bird replaces Snow Buntings at people's feeders in winter in the north
- 18 Country where non-migratory Snow Buntings live year-round

Across

- 2 Common name for Snow Buntings '____birds'
- 4 Large avian predator of adult Snow Bunting during the winter
- 8 Snow Buntings announce the arrival of this season in the north
- 10 Material Snow Buntings use to line their nests
- 12 Large avian nest predator in the north
- 14 Companion birds of Snow Buntings all year round
- 16 Largest clutch size (number of eggs) recorded for Snow Buntings in Iqaluit
- 17 The South Baffin Inuktitut word for Snow Bunting
- 19 Feather colour of male Snow Bunting's back and part of the wings during breeding
- 20 Human-made wooden structure birds build nests in

Snow Bunting Resight in Saskatchewan

Hans visits Saskatchewan!

Jared Clarke, Regina, Saskatchewan

I am honoured to be able to share some exciting results from the Prairies with the Snow Bunting Network!

When the network was established over a decade ago, I was very gung-ho to get involved. But Snow buntings in Saskatchewan, in my experience around Regina, don't linger that long in any one spot. I tried to find places to bait but couldn't find Snow buntings hanging around the same area! So, I have been watching from a far as the network has grown and developed out east, with envy. Fast forward to the winter of 2022/23 when I noticed a flock of Snow buntings a couple times just a mile away from my farm (near Edenwold, Saskatchewan) and I thought I should try to put out some bait. Shockingly (to me), they actually found the bait pile and started showing up regularly to it!

Through January and February, I was able to catch 37 buntings with cracked corn. To say I was hooked, was an understatement...

In the winter of 2023/24, we only had a few weeks of snow in January and February, and I had about 8 snow buntings find the bait pile during that time. I decided to not trap the birds as I hoped they would attract more, but then the snow melted and they disappeared. No buntings banded that winter!

Last winter, 2024/25, brought a good amount of snow and buntings. I was able to attract buntings to the same bait site near my farm, but I also set up a second bait site 7 km straight south where I was seeing birds. After two weeks, buntings found this second site too. I spent January and February trapping as often as I could and was able to capture 265 buntings between the two locations!! Interestingly, I did not recapture birds that had moved between the two bait sites.



Snow buntings foraging on bait pile in Regina, SK.

Possibly more exciting than catching 265 buntings though... was resighting a colour-banded male bunting on February 1, 2025 at the bait pile closest to my home!

It turns out he was banded as an after-second-year (ASY – at least 2 years old) bird on June 7, 2023 by Alysha (Ally) Riquier and Rebecca (Becky) Jardine who led the bunting field work in Dr. Love’s team on Qikiqtakuluk island in the Qaqsauqtuuq (formally East Bay) Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Nunavut in 2022 and 2023! His name is Hans - named by Ally and Becky as part of their breeding pair tracking work at Qikiqtakuluk. On Feb 9, Hans entered one of my traps and I was able to take his measurements and confirm his metal band number.



Jared Clarke

Hans (male Snow bunting) getting updated measurement after re-captured by Jared Clarke.

He was spotted another 5 times until February 19th, when the snow started to melt and the buntings stopped coming to the bait anymore. Although previous tracking work by Christie Macdonald and the U-Windsor team using Geolocators confirmed that Qikiqtakuluk breeding birds do winter in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, Hans represents the first re-sight and band recapture of a Snow bunting in the prairies and coming from the Arctic no less! In my first winter I used straight cracked corn for bait. On reflection, I had a lot of birds around the traps, but I didn’t catch many birds. I would catch 1 bird in 2 or 3 hours, even though a flock of birds surrounded the trap. For the 2024/25 winter I switched baits over to mostly white millet and a bit of a generic mix bird seed that had a bit of corn and wheat and such. This bait seemed to work way better. One morning I captured 50 buntings!

As I write this, we only have a skiff of snow around Regina. I have set out bait at the two sites this week, but I haven’t seen any buntings there yet. I wait with great anticipation to see if Hans returns this winter. Good luck this winter all and may your traps be full of buntings!



Rachel Dow

Female Snow Bunting perching on a rock.

Snow Bunting Resight in East Greenland!

Dutchy meets Labrador-banded Snow Bunting in East Greenland!

Meike Sjoer, Polar Expedition Guide

My passion and love for nature has come together beautifully in my job as an expedition guide in the Arctic and Antarctic. As a naturalist and ornithologist onboard travelling vessels, I get to take guests to some of the most remote places on the planet.

This summer, on July 15th, we sailed from Longyearbyen, Norway towards East Greenland as one of the first ships of the season. There was so much sea ice that we couldn't reach the fjords we had originally planned to visit. And as a true expedition, we simply had to go with what was possible. So we headed further south into more unknown waters around Sermersooq, with a community visit in Tasiilaq.



Coastal view of Tasiilaq, Eastern Greenland.

On the 22 of July we came to one of those remote places – Tasiilaq – on Eastern Greenland. Once we had disembarked our guests and explored the town a little, I had an hour to myself, perfect for

some birding. I could hear Snow Buntings singing everywhere. Their calls led me to a small inlet in the middle of the village. The tide had just gone out, but there was still some water in it. I sat down on a rock and watched the birds foraging for insects between, yes, quite a bit of village rubbish.



Low tide at an inlet in Tasiilaq.

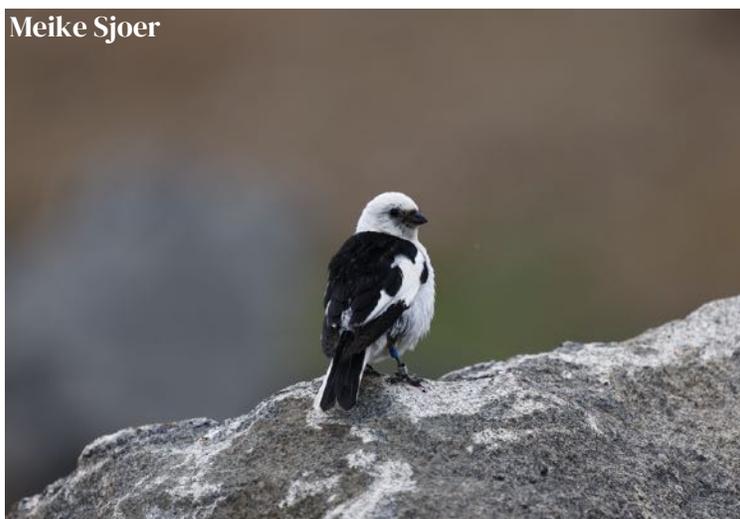
Snow Buntings are one of my favourite land birds to check out, especially in summer. They're so busy feeding their chicks, flying back and forth, and their cheerful song always makes me smile. They're also great to photograph because their chicks are just adorable. So there I sat, on my little rock, watching Snow Buntings, Ringed Plovers, Wheatears, a few Redpolls and Dunlins. Ravens were cruising back and forth above me. And as always when birdwatching: you never know what might show up. Sitting still, observing, taking photos—that's really my happy place. You're in the moment and sometimes, with a bit of luck, something special flies right in front of your lens.

For the past eight years I've been working in the Arctic, and our expedition vessel often visits the research town of Ny-Ålesund in Greenland. I always stop by the same nesting spots. The Snow Buntings there have a nest in the roof of a small shed—easy to find. I just sit and watch the parents fly in and out. Since we visit from May to August, I sometimes get to see the same chicks grow up through the season.

But back to Tasiilaq. As you know, Snow Buntings are fast little movers. I watched and clicked away, taking heaps of photos. I didn't look at them right away—no time—until a few days later when we were sailing towards Iceland and I suddenly had some days at sea and a bit more time on my hands.

And then: surprise! A ringed (banded) male Snow Bunting. I looked again : yes! A ring (in fact two!) That's when the little journey began.

Meike Sjoer



Banded male Snow bunting perched on a rock.

I reported my sighting on bto.org on August 1st, about a week after the observation. I didn't hear anything for a while, until the Copenhagen Bird Ringing Centre contacted me on August 11th asking for the photo. Then Amanda Johannisson, from the Copenhagen Bird Ringing centre got in touch for more details. She went the extra mile and reached out to the Canadian Snow Bunting Network (CSBN). By August 22nd I was connected with Oliver (Love) from the CSBN. And at the

beginning of September, he shared the news: “my” bird had been banded on either April 7th or 8th 2025 by banders Sara Pearce-Meijerink and Kayla Brown in the community of Cartwright, Labrador, Canada as the beginning of a new community-based banding effort along the Labrador coast. He also shared more details about the bird's age: a male “after second year,” based on the deep black in his plumage. That means he was at least two years old, so hatched in 2023 at the earliest (and possibly older).

I can't tell you how exciting it was to learn that my little observation actually contributed to wider research and helped confirm that the migration route between East Greenland and Eastern Canada is a real connection. It adds even more joy to my birdwatching and to supporting your wonderful work in the Snow Bunting community (I follow you on FB 😊). I can't wait till it's time again to go exploring the Arctic and watch the Snow Buntings and hopefully find some more ringed ones.

Keep an eye out for our snowbirds!!

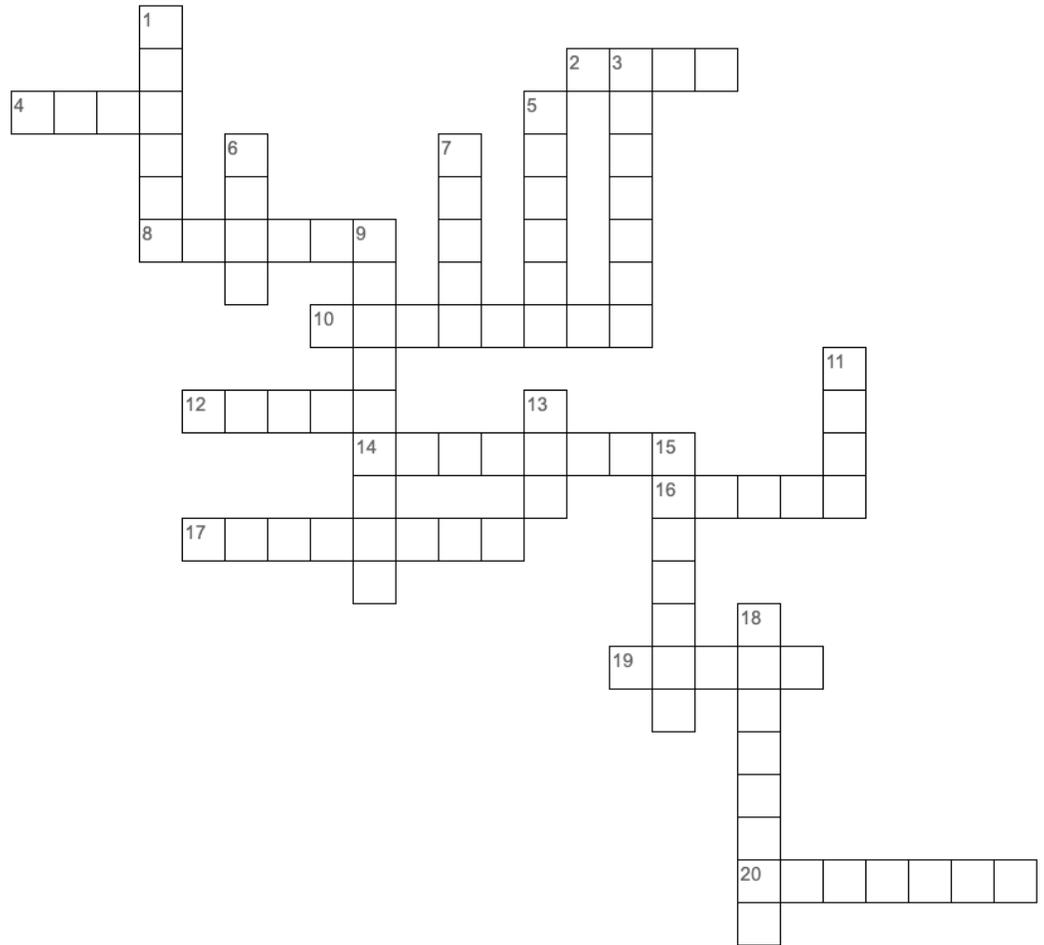
● Straits
● PHS/Charlottetown
● Cartwright
● Goose Bay

NunatuKavut

Kayla Brown (NCC) who originally banded the male Snow bunting in Cartwright with Sara Pearce-Meijerink and Vernon Buckle from Forteau who provides training to community banders.

Snow Bunting Crossword Puzzle Answers

1. McKays
2. Snow
3. Nivalis
4. Hawk
5. Ermine
6. Corn
7. Alert
8. Spring
9. Greenland
10. Feathers
11. Molt
12. Raven
13. ASY
14. Longspur
15. Redpoll
16. Eight
17. Qupanuaq
18. Scotland
19. Black
20. Nestbox



City of Iqaluit, NU.

Rachel Dow

12th Annual Newsletter

The Snow Bunting Report

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