

Notable bird observations in North-east Greenland, 1992-1998

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(Med et dansk resumé: Bemærkelsesværdige fugleobservationer i Nordøstgrønland, 1992-1998)

Introduction

The knowledge about the regional distribution of birds in North-east Greenland is still rather scanty. During geological field work in 1992, 1994, 1997 and 1998, bird observations were noted, and the most unusual of these are put on record here. The records supplement earlier publications.

Most of the fieldwork was conducted from small camps that were usually moved once a week by helicopter or zodiac boat. The observations come from the region around and south of Nioghalvfjærdsfjorden and from the Jameson Land region (Fig. 1). NE Greenland belongs to the high-arctic bioclimatic zone, but the vegetation is far richer in Jameson Land than around Nioghalvfjærdsfjorden. In Jameson Land, copses of arctic willow *Salix arctica* are found at some sheltered localities, and dwarf-shrub heaths are widespread. In contrast, fell-field vegetation dominates around Nioghalvfjærdsfjorden, and meadows occur rarely. This difference reflects the lower summer temperatures in the north, the shorter growth season (Cappelen et al. 2001), and also differences in bedrock. Bird nomenclature follows Boertmann (1994).

Annotated list of species

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

One pair with two young was noted on a lake a few kilometres west of Blåssø on 14 August 1997. The species is widespread in Greenland (Boertmann 1994), and a previous breeding record from Kronprins Christian Land was published by Schwarzenbach (1954).

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

A flock of seven Whooper Swans were encountered in southern Jameson Land on 20 July 1992, and on 29 August the same year a flock of six birds were seen in eastern Jameson Land. The birds were slightly grey in colour, and thus not fully adult. The species is a rare visitor to North-east Greenland, presumably from Iceland (Boertmann 1994).



Golden Plover. Photo: Leif Bisschop-Larsen.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

A small flock of four non-breeding, moulting birds was observed at Blåssø on 29 July 1997, and in 1998 a flock of four birds and another flock of 26 birds were noted on 17 August in the same area. It appears that moulting birds go farther north at present compared with the situation some decades ago (Boertmann & Glahder 1999).

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*

One pair with five young was observed on 29 and 31 July 1997 on southern Hovgaard Ø. The breeding range of Snow Goose in Greenland has increased during the past decades, and the species is now rather common in the region between Svarthuk Halvø and Inglefield Land in W and NW Greenland (Bennike 1990, Boertmann & Mosbech 1999, Bennike & Feilberg 2004). In addition, it breeds in low numbers in northern Greenland (Bennike & Kelly 1986, Bay 1991). There are two former breeding records of Snow Goose from northernmost East Greenland (Hjort et al. 1987, Bay 1991).

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

Seven pairs with 22 young were seen on a small lake in Søndre Mellemland on 19 July 1998, close

to a site where a colony with 5-10 pairs was observed in 1989. The colony is one of the northernmost Barnacle Goose colonies in North-east Greenland (Boertmann et al. 1990), but in spite of the northern location, breeding success appeared to be high.

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*

Three adult female King Eiders with 10 chicks were observed on a small lake a few km west of Blåsø on 29 July 1997. There is a previous breeding record from central Kronprins Christian Land (Schwarzenbach 1954), and the species is widespread in the region (Boertmann 1994).

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

One pair of Golden Plover was seen north of Nordostbugt on 21 July 1994. The birds were calling incessantly and were obviously most dissatisfied with my presence. What was assumed to be another pair was seen at a distance at a different site on 23 July. On 12 August a single bird was observed in western Jameson Land. Breeding birds has previously been recorded from south-western Jameson Land, Kjøveland and Liverpool Land (Korte 1975, Boertmann et al. 1985, Boertmann 1994).

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Three pairs of Dunlin were noted in a meadow area in Søndre Mellemland on 20 July 1998, and six more birds were seen in the same area between 19 and 25 July. In addition, in 1997 one bird was seen on southern Hovgaard Ø on 29 July and seven birds in north-eastern Lambert Land on 9 August, and in 1998 one bird was observed on Île de France on 29 July and one at Blåsø on 14 August. These observations are near the northern range limit of the species (Boertmann et al. 1990, Berg & Kapel 1998).

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Four Whimbrels were observed in song flight on the south-western part of Karstryggen on 23 July 1994, in an area of rich dwarf-shrub heaths. A small breeding population of the species has been reported from western Jameson Land, and Whimbrels have also been seen on Kjøveland (Boertmann et al. 1985, Mortensen 2000). Our observation indicates a slight extension of the breeding range to the north.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

One pair of Arctic Skua was observed on Hovgaard Ø on 2 August 1997. The birds were very

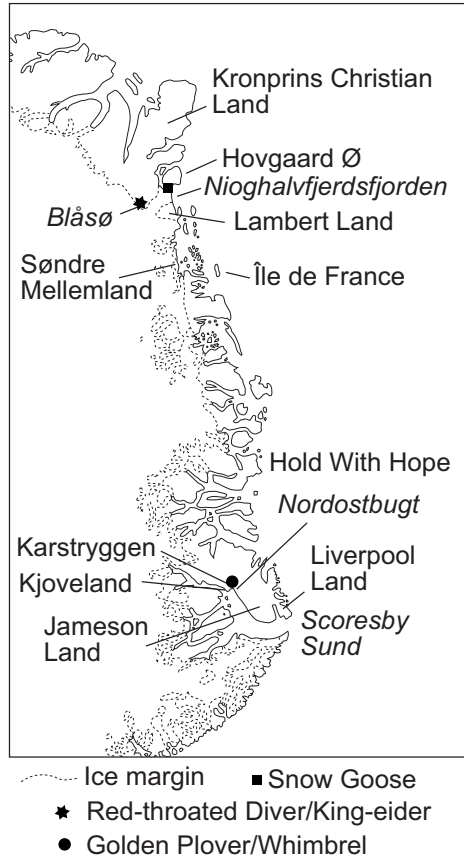


Fig. 1. Map of North-east Greenland showing the location of place names mentioned in the text, and sites of breeding records of selected species.

aggressive and may have been breeding. Only a few birds have been recorded this far north, the northern limit for regular breeding in East Greenland being around Hold With Hope (Hjort et al. 1988, Boertmann 1994). In NW Greenland the species breeds as far north as 80°N (Bennike & Feilberg 2004).

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*

A single bird was observed at the mouth of Lange-landselv in western Jameson Land on 4 August 1992. The species is a regular summer visitor to NE Greenland (Boertmann 1994).

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

One bird was observed near Lollandselv in western Jameson Land on 13 August 1994. The species is a regular summer visitor in the Scoresby Sund area (Boertmann 1994).

Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

One Wheatear was observed near Blåsø on 25 July 1997. It occurred on a southward facing slope with a relatively lush vegetation of *Dryas integrifolia*, *Salix arctica* and various herbs. The species is rare this far north (Håkansson et al. 1981, Bennike & Higgins 1989, Bay 1991, Hjort et al. 1988)

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Resumé**Bemærkelsesværdige fugleobservationer i Nordøstgrønland, 1992-2003**

Under kvartærgeologisk feltarbejde i somrene 1992, 1994, 1997 og 1998 blev der indsamlet spredte observationer omkring fuglelivet i Jameson Land området og i regionen omkring og syd for Nioghalvfjersfjorden. Feltarbejdet blev udført fra små teltlejre. Mens vegetationen i lavlandsområder af Jameson Land domineres af dværgbusheder, er vegetationen omkring de indre dele af Nioghalvfjersfjorden ørkenagtig. Ved Nioghalvfjersfjorden blev Rødstrubet Lom, Snegås og Kongeederfugl konstateret som ynglende, Almindelig Ryle, Almindelig Kjøve og Stenpikker som muligt ynglende, og Kortnæbbet Gås som fældende. Ved Karstryggen nordvest for Jameson Land fandtes små forekomster af Hjejle og Lille Regnspove, som formentlig ynglede her. Sangsvane, Storkjøve og Hvid Vipstjert blev også observeret i Jameson Land.

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