A Celebration of Swans
2013

Prepared by
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June 2014

Yukon Department of Environment
Fish and Wildlife Branch
PR-14-04

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Suggested citation:

Yukon Fish and Wildlife Branch Report PR-14-04
Summary / Highlights

A key feature of the Wildlife Viewing Program is the annual *A Celebration of Swans* birding festival and related activities at Swan Haven. *A Celebration of Swans* is held during the third week of April each year, to coincide with the return of migratory waterfowl to Yukon. The festival provides many opportunities for Yukoners to enjoy and learn about native swan species as spring progresses. *A Celebration of Swans* is part of the larger Yukon Biodiversity Awareness Month (YBAM), which is recognized each April.

Swan Haven is located on the shores of M’Clintock Bay at the north end of Marsh Lake, approximately 35 km southeast of Whitehorse. This is a critical staging area for migrating birds as they travel from southern wintering areas to northern breeding grounds each spring. As such, the area has been identified as a Habitat Protection Area by the Government of Yukon, and is awaiting a management planning process.

The focal point for visitors to Swan Haven is the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre. This facility is located on Swan Haven Drive, Marsh Lake. Visitors can enjoy interpretive displays both inside and outside the building, waterfowl viewing, interactions with staff, interpretive activities and a picnic area.

The centre’s building is open daily in April; the grounds are open year-round. The Swan Haven Interpretive Centre is managed by the Wildlife Viewing Program. Girl Guides of Canada own the property and Government of Yukon owns all assets.

Both the festival and the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre were well attended this year. The program continues to be popular with Yukoners and visitors alike.

Scope

This report describes Swan Haven / *A Celebration of Swans* program activities from January to December, 2013.

![Figure 1](image_url). Hundreds of Yukoners enjoyed Swan Haven during Family Weekend, 2013.
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A Celebration of Swans

This year’s festival was April 13-21, with additional events occurring before and after these dates. Participation was strong for most individual events and for the festival overall (Table 1, Figures 2 and 3).

Table 1. Participation summary for *A Celebration of Swans*, 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Festival Component</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>Average 2003-2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive Centre</td>
<td>2,428</td>
<td>2,059</td>
<td>2,965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>1,191</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Program</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participation:</td>
<td>4,048</td>
<td>3,307</td>
<td>4,234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Festival participation has fluctuated over the years (Figure 2). While this is typical for environmental education centres, the exact causes of the variation are not known. Swan Haven visitors may feel that they have seen the exhibits already and the centre offers nothing new for their interests. The new exhibits and interpretive updates planned for 2014 are intended to engage visitors again and attract return visitation. We continue to try new activities and techniques to ensure continued relevancy of *A Celebration of Swans*.

*Figure 2.* Participation trends by festival component, 2003 to 2013.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 7 10:30 am – 12 pm</td>
<td>Winter Swans</td>
<td>Johnsons Crossing</td>
<td>A talk and short walk about the overwintering swans in the area.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 12 5 – 7:30 pm</td>
<td>Jeu-questionnaire</td>
<td>Whitehorse</td>
<td>A presentation and craft at the Association franco-Yukonnaise’s Cafés-rencontres.</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 13 12 – 2 pm</td>
<td>Tagish Stories and Campfire</td>
<td>Tagish</td>
<td>First Nation stories about spring around a campfire with tea and bannock.</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 13 8 - 10 pm</td>
<td>Coffee House Music Night</td>
<td>Swan Haven</td>
<td>Musical jam session with light refreshments.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 14 11 am – 12 pm</td>
<td>From Image to Identity</td>
<td>Swan Haven</td>
<td>Bird identification workshop.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 14 1 – 3:30 pm</td>
<td>Forest Birds of Swan Haven</td>
<td>Swan Haven</td>
<td>Bird banding display by Society of Yukon Bird Observatories.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 14 3:30 - 4 pm</td>
<td>A Bird’s Eye View</td>
<td>Swan Haven</td>
<td>Presentation on bird banding by Society of Yukon Bird Observatories.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 14 8 – 9 pm</td>
<td>Spiritual Celebration of Swans</td>
<td>Swan Haven</td>
<td>Multi-faith service, songs and quiet reflection.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 17 11 am – 3 pm</td>
<td>Seniors’ Tea</td>
<td>Swan Haven</td>
<td>Drop-in event hosted by the Marsh Lake Community Association with tea, coffee and baked goods.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 18 6:30 – 8:30 pm</td>
<td>Following the Swans</td>
<td>Carcross</td>
<td>Outdoor swan viewing and indoor presentation and craft.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 20 &amp; 21 12 – 4 pm</td>
<td>Family Weekend</td>
<td>Swan Haven</td>
<td>Swan viewing, face painting, crafts, games, activities, food concession by Girl guides of Canada.</td>
<td>~900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 27 10:30 am – 12 pm</td>
<td>Bird Photography Workshop</td>
<td>Swan Haven</td>
<td>Introduction to wildlife photography on the shoreline.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 28 2 – 5 pm</td>
<td>Watercolour Landscape Workshop</td>
<td>Swan Haven</td>
<td>Drop-in water colour painting workshop.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 12 12 – 4 pm</td>
<td>Swans of Kluane</td>
<td>Burwash Landing</td>
<td>Walk and talk along the shores of Kluane Lake with waterfowl viewing. Tea, bannock and stew.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attendance sum:** 1191
Supporters / Partnering Organizations

Over 20 different organizations either hosted or aided in the delivery of A Celebration of Swans events (Table 3). Many individuals also contributed (see Appendix B).

Table 3. Supporters and partnering organizations for A Celebration of Swans 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Association franco-Yukonaise</td>
<td>‘Jeu-questionnaire et bricolage sure les cynges’ event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada Games Centre / City of Whitehorse</td>
<td>Display space for art exhibit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Wildlife Service</td>
<td>Promotion and waterfowl monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBC/Radio-Canada</td>
<td>TV, radio and web promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carcross/Tagish First Nation</td>
<td>Promotion and support for ‘Tagish Stories and Campfire’ event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CKRW The Rush</td>
<td>Radio promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ducks Unlimited</td>
<td>Promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Guides of Canada</td>
<td>Food concession (‘Snack Shack’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kluane First Nation</td>
<td>Promotion and support for ‘Swans of Kluane’ event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mac’s Fireweed Books</td>
<td>Storefront Challenge display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsh Lake Community Association</td>
<td>Hosting ‘Senior’s Tea’ event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Massie</td>
<td>Contributed photograph for poster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society of Yukon Bird Observatories</td>
<td>Promotion, ‘Forest Birds of Swan Haven’ event, and ‘A Bird’s Eye View’ event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehorse Public Library</td>
<td>Storefront Challenge display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehorse Star</td>
<td>Newspaper and web promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehorse United Church, Trinity Lutheran Church</td>
<td>‘Spiritual Celebration of Swans’ event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon Brewing</td>
<td>Storefront Challenge display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon Conservation Society</td>
<td>Promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon Energy</td>
<td>Sponsored festival poster and swan cam, promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon News</td>
<td>Newspaper and web promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon Literacy Coalition</td>
<td>‘Family Days’ event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YG Education</td>
<td>Hosted ‘Following the Swans’ event at Ghuch Tlâ Community School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YG Environment, Animal Health Unit</td>
<td>‘Family Days’ event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YG Tourism and Culture</td>
<td>Twitter and Facebook promotion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Swan Haven Interpretive Centre

The centre was open daily in April, from 5-9 pm on weekdays and 12-7 pm on weekends and holidays. A contractor (Jukka Jantunen) was responsible for day-to-day operations of the centre, visitor reception, and daily counts of waterfowl. Environment Yukon staff also worked at the centre during peak visitation times. Mr. Jantunen is an accomplished birder and photographer and has been involved in many Yukon bird monitoring programs in recent years.

Visitors could enjoy the exhibits, view waterfowl from the centre’s two decks, and interact with knowledgeable staff and the contractor. Total visitation at the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre was 2,428 people during April 2013. This should be considered a minimum count as the contractor may have missed some visitors during busy periods.

Figure 3. Visitors enjoy a craft in the interpretive centre.
**Poster Contest**

As in the previous 13 years, a poster was produced to commemorate *A Celebration of Swans*. A contest was held to obtain a swan-related image for use in poster design (Figure 3). A total of 54 images by 17 artists were submitted for consideration. The winning entry was submitted by Whitehorse photographer Rick Massie. The poster was designed by Paul Gowdie of Tarius Design, and Yukon Energy again sponsored the design and printing.

![Poster Design](image)

*Figure 4.* Final 2013 poster design.
Interest has been building in recent years, as reflected by the number of contest entries.

![Figure 5](image)

**Figure 5.** Recent entry totals to the poster contest (no contest in 2012).

**Student Art Display and Contest**

Yukon students in grades 2-6 were invited to submit original artwork for display at the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre throughout April. Visitors to Swan Haven were invited to vote for their favourite pieces in a “people’s choice” style contest.

We received 77 entries from students across the territory and the top ten vote-getters received a certificate and prize. The winning submissions were also displayed at the Canada Games Centre during May. Students from Hidden Valley Elementary School (Whitehorse), Selkirk Elementary (Whitehorse), and Del Van Gorder School (Faro) created the winning entries.

![Figure 6](image)

**Figure 6.** Winning submissions from Del Van Gorder School (Faro).
**Storefront Challenge**

Along with the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, we encouraged local businesses to recognize *A Celebration of Swans* by decorating their storefronts or offices. The challenge was described in a chamber newsletter and we provided a poster and suggestions to local business owners.

While many companies displayed the poster, few went beyond this level of participation. Mac’s Fireweed Books, Yukon Brewing, and the Whitehorse Public Library all created swan-related artwork/displays. Participation in the Storefront Challenge has varied since its introduction in the 2005 festival and companies do not always notify us that they have created a display. This festival component will be reviewed in 2014.

![Figure 7. Yukon Brewing display.](image1)

![Figure 8. Mac's Fireweed Books display.](image2)
**Open House for Local Residents**

On March 28, 5:30 – 8:30 pm, we hosted an open house for Marsh Lake residents at the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre. This was an opportunity for local residents to enjoy Swan Haven before the April crowds and to meet Environment Yukon staff. This year special focus was placed on the shoreline stabilization project, completed just weeks earlier.

**School Program at Swan Haven**

We again offered free outdoor education activities at Swan Haven for regional schools (grades 2-6). Three staff members were hired for the month of April to deliver this program. Morning and afternoon time slots were available on weekdays (excluding Wednesdays) from April 8-26. Programs were curriculum matched to each grade level and allowed students to enjoy and learn about swans and other migrating birds.

Initial booking numbers were quite low and renewed promotion occurred in early April. The final school program participation was 429 people, down 17% from 2012. The reduced participation will be examined and addressed in preparation for *A Celebration of Swans*, 2014.

*Figure 9. A school group enjoys the views at Swan Haven.*
Infrastructure and Property

Shoreline Erosion Protection Project

Construction

Major infrastructure work occurred at the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre in February and March 2013. To address significant, on-going concerns over shoreline erosion and stability, we planned and completed a construction project under the terms of water license number MS10-081, issued by the Yukon Water Board.

The effects of erosion on the shoreline had been a concern since at least 2007. Significant planning and regulatory work occurred from 2009 to 2011, notably obtaining construction drawings and the legal authorizations to proceed with an erosion protection project. Unfortunately, the project was stalled in May 2011 due to construction bids that vastly exceeded the budget.

In 2012 a new, cost-effective approach was explored and the project was re-scoped. New drawings were produced and construction of an erosion protection system occurred from February 25 to March 13, 2013.

Gabion mats were selected as the erosion protection solution. Gabion mats are large, mesh baskets filled with rock, and placed along the shoreline. The gabions absorb the energy of wind-driven waves, and protect the underlying soil materials from erosion. The general steps of the construction project were:

1. **Pre-construction**: establishing contracts; spill response equipment and procedures; communications with Yukon Water Board, partners, and local residents; health and safety planning.

2. **Site preparation**: snow clearing, site signage, removing viewing platform and staircase, erecting silt fencing, removing parking barricades.

3. **Bank preparation**: contouring the shoreline with an excavator to design specifications.

4. **Install gabions**: placing geotextile cloth on prepared slope, assembling, placing and filling gabions.

5. **Gabion edge protection**: Placing rip-rap (rock) on each edge of gabion structure to blend gabions back into the existing shoreline.

6. **Restoration**: Returning the viewing platform, staircase and parking barricades to their original positions. Minor maintenance fixes on staircase and viewing platform. General clean-up of the site.
Re-vegetation

After construction was completed, attention turned to re-vegetation of the shoreline to improve the visual aesthetics of the site, and to further guard against soil erosion. Research was conducted to determine a suitable approach to re-vegetation. This included a literature review, conversations with government and private sector vegetation specialists, and several site visits.

In September 2013 a native seed mixture was spread along the top portion of the shoreline bank, above the gabion mats, as per directions from Randy Lewis of Arctic Alpine Seeds. Re-vegetation efforts will continue in 2014 to ensure long-term slope stability.

Construction of a fence along the top of the bank began as well, with fence posts installed in the ground in October. Further work on the fence is planned for March 2014. The fence will increase visitor safety on the site and reduce foot traffic in revegetating areas.

Other Exterior Work

Other work on the exterior infrastructure included:

1. Removed the large sandblasted cedar sign and returned it to the Parks shop to be refurbished. Posts were also removed and new ones are being made for re-installation at a location closer to the access road;
2. Relocated and painted a garbage/recycle bin;
3. Painted the sign board, viewing platform and staircase;
4. Installed a hand sanitizer dispenser in the pit toilet;
5. Improved wheelchair access to the boardwalk;
6. Repaired picnic tables;
7. Painted the doors of the building to match the red trim;
8. Sanded and stained the wooden benches on the upper deck;
9. Removed two panels from the viewing platform and moved them to the sides/back of the platform to clear up sightlines;
10. Removed old chimney pipe and repair roof;
11. Re-painted the parking posts and access road barriers yellow;
12. Cleared out debris and scraps from under the deck;
13. Unlocked and cleaned lenses in permanent viewing scope. New lenses to be installed in spring 2014;
14. Outhouse directional signage produced and ready to be installed in spring 2014;
15. Cleaned and repaired the rain gutters.

![Figure 11. Y2C2 staff painting at Swan Haven, summer 2013.](image)
**Building Interior**

A major refresh of the building interior began in 2013. We developed an interpretive concept, including messages, colour-schemes, displays and a revised building layout. Work included:

1. Interpretive planning;
2. Establishing design contracts;
3. Acquiring display materials;
4. Removing old chimney and patching roof;
5. Painting interior walls and floor.

This work will continue into early 2014 with carpentry, and display fabrication and installation.

Note: In November 2012 the original propane heater was deemed unserviceable and was replaced by a new, efficient propane heater. The new unit vents through the wall, which allowed the removal of the chimney.
Next Steps

**Infrastructure and Property**

We will undertake the following actions in 2014:

- monitor built structures for safety issues and effectiveness, particularly new erosion protection features;
- continue to comply with terms and conditions of our water licence (annual report, January);
- monitor the seeded areas of the property and assess the need for further re-vegetation action (April-June);
- finish construction of the fence along the top of the shoreline bank (March);
- fabricate and install new exhibits in the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre (February to March).

**A Celebration of Swans**

Next year, 2014, marks the 20th anniversary of the Swan Haven Interpretive Centre. This will be recognized throughout *A Celebration of Swans* 2014. Comments, suggestions and evaluations from the 2013 festival will be used in the planning process.

In particular, the Swan Haven School Program will be examined to encourage more participation in 2014. A new promotional strategy is being developed, with input from Science Adventures, Yukon College. The strategy will leverage the new centre exhibits to encourage teachers to return: a sense of ‘newness’ will be highlighted. A new evaluation format will be used, to get feedback from teachers on their experience in our program.

Festival events in 2013 were generally well-attended, with the exception of events in Carcross and Johnson’s Crossing. These sites are important as part of the overall swan migration story, and also give opportunities for local community members to get involved in the festival, without traveling far. Increased promotion will be used in 2014, to boost attendance.

*Figure 12. Enjoying spring stories and tea around the campfire in Tagish, 2013.*
New events and elements will be added to *A Celebration of Swans* 2014 to recognize the 20th anniversary of the centre. A 20-year retrospective event is being planned for Whitehorse, with guest speakers looking back over Swan Haven’s history. A new “daily update” web product will be tested, to create and maintain interest in the program throughout April.

*A Celebration of Swans* has great community support. We will continue to strengthen this program by focussing on high quality experiences for participants.
Yukon Celebrates Spring 2013

Yukoners can celebrate spring in so many ways!

Celebration of Swans
April 13-21

Yukon's premier bird festival brings residents and visitors alike out to greet swan viewing spots to welcome spring to the north, arising on the wings of the Thompson River. Imagine shallow waters of McBeth Geyser Bay, Takhini Lake, Protection Bay, and Lake Laberge. Swans and tundra swans are网格seabirds on the swans' stopover migration to northern nesting grounds. These birds provide access to food, good visibility, and little disturbance. In return for a safe place to stay, we are given the chance to observe a spring spectacle of birds not to be missed.

Faro's Annual Crane & Sheep Viewing Festival - May 3-5

In spring tens of thousands of sandhill cranes drift in the skies above Faro as they migrate to their breeding grounds in northern Yukon. Come and enjoy a weekend of wildlife appreciation at Faro's Annual Crane and Sheep Viewing Festival with the incredible number of cranes commonly at Faro and enjoy various workshops focused on the sandhill crane and the area in the tundra surrounding the town. Festival events include the event popular every morning bird walks, crane and sheep viewing tours, an exhibit, and more.

Environment Fair: Born to be Wild
May 10 from 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Canada Games Centre

Environment Yukon is once again hosting this fun and interactive fair that will focus on how we interact with the natural world around us. Along with other Yukon agencies and organizations, we will provide activities, information, and entertainment focused on helping us learn more about how we can get in sync with nature.

Yukon Biodiversity Awareness Month
April is Yukon Biodiversity Awareness Month (YBAM)

Many Yukoners recognize the importance of maintaining biodiversity both here and around the world. They are working hard to ensure habitats remain healthy for the widest variety of species.

With the participation of:

- Association Thonacou or K'waan
- Canada Games Centre
- Cranberry Lake
- Ecofence
- Environment Yukon
- Friends of the Takhini River
- Friends of the Yukon
- Geoscience Association
- Government of Yukon
- Nature Conservancy Canada Yukon
- Union of British C"

www.wildlifeviewing.gov.yk.ca

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www.wildlifeviewing.gov.yk.ca
Biodiversity Month Events 2013

Sunday, April 14 - From image to identity
Swan Haven, 11:00 am - 3:00 pm. Join Julia Jayson as he uses some of his spectacular bird photographs to teach us how to identify the feathered friends that make their home in Yulcan. Head down on the ice and work together identifying some of the more challenging birds at Swan.

Sunday, April 14 - Forest birds of Swan Haven: bird banding display
Swan Haven, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm. The Society of Yukon Bird Observers will have a minisit set up at Swan Haven to demonstrate bird banding and talk about what we hope to learn from our feathered friends. This is your chance to get a closer look at some beautiful bird images. Don't forget your camera.

Friday, April 19 - Coffee House Music Night
Swan Haven, 6:00 pm - 10:00 pm. Bring your acoustic instruments to Swan Haven for a musical evening, unplugged style. RSVP to wildlife.viewing@gov.yk.ca if you would like to read some songs, and he prepared to sing along. Light refreshments will be served.

Ongoing Events

Swan Haven Interpretation Centre opens
See Ingaming Events for details.

Swan Haven Interpretation Centre Open House
May 6 - 7, 2013

Yukon Student Art Display
April 12 - Swan Haven. Get inspired by this youth art extravaganza and write for your favourite piece. The People’s Choice Award will be given to students and announced in the Yukon News. The top pieces of student artwork as chosen by you will be on display in the Canada Center!

Swan Haven Interpretation Centre
1100 River Drive, Whitehorse
www.yukonwildlife.gov.yk.ca

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1100 River Drive, Whitehorse
www.yukonwildlife.gov.yk.ca
Appendix B – A Celebration of Swans Thank You Ad

To everyone who made Swan Haven and A Celebration of Swans 2013 a success,

Thank You!

Poster:
Yukon Energy | Rick Massie
Yukon Energy Swan Cam:
Yukon Energy | Peter Heebink
Swan Haven Support:
Environment Yukon, Monitoring & Inspections staff | Peter Heebink
The Snack Shack:
Girl Guides of Canada, 1st Whitehorse Pathfinders & friends
Promoters:
CBC/Radio-Canada (TV, radio, web) | CKRW The Rush | Whitehorse Star | Yukon Conservation Society | YG Tourism and Culture | Yukon News | all the businesses and individuals who take it upon themselves to share the swanspiration!
Community Displays & Art Exhibits:
City of Whitehorse (Canada Games Centre) | Mac’s Fireweed Books | Whitehorse Public Library | Yukon Brewing
Events & Activities:
The Swan Haven People’s Choice Art Awards go to:
Gessica Ryan, Kenneth Pickett, Marc Ryan, Rhys Delvin, Trinity Michell-Grenon (Grade 4&5, Del Van Gorder School, Ms. Evans)
Taia Zakus (Grade 3, Hidden Valley School, Mrs. Macleod)
Andrew Stogneff, Kengxu Liang, Ralph Hermosa, Tyson Smith (Grade 5, Selkirk Elementary, Ms. Innes-Taylor)
School Programs:
Karine Grenier, Lance Leenders, Maria Leung, Science Adventures NR1 (Heather Dundas) and 430 teachers and students!
Waterfowl Monitoring:
Adam Skrutkowski | Environment Canada | Jim Hawkins | Jukka Jantunen
Coordinators:
Environment Yukon, Wildlife Viewing Program

Thank you to the children, youth and adults who submitted inspiring creations for the poster and the lively walls of Swan Haven.