

Expedition to the Taimyr Peninsula, Russia

Les G. Underhill

Avian Demography Unit, UCT, Rondebosch, 7701
email: lgu@maths.uct.ac.za

Along with Ron Summers and Robert Prys-Jones, I participated in the 1991 International Arctic Expedition, organized by the Institute of Animal Ecology and Evolutionary Morphology of the then Soviet Academy of Sciences. Camps were established at several sites in the Siberian tundra; we were based at Lake Pronchishcheva (75°16'N 112°28'E), in the northeastern Taimyr Peninsula. Our contribution to the expedition was to examine the relationship between lemmings, lemming predators such as the Arctic Fox *Alopex lagopus* and ground-nesting birds, such as waders and geese. Within a study area of 14 km², a total of 73 wader nests were found. Lemmings were superabundant.

The fieldwork in 1991 confirmed the hypothesis that breeding productivity was high in years of high lemming abundance; in such years, the lemming predators breed successfully, and predate only a small fraction of the nests of birds. Further fieldwork at the same site in 1992, when the lemming abundance was low, confirmed that breeding success was low: foxes quartered the tundra in search of food, and found most nests within a week of clutch completion. Several papers have been written describing these results; these are listed below.

Earlé, R.A. & Underhill, L.G. 1993.

Absence of haematozoa in some Charadriiformes breeding in the Taimyr Peninsula. *Ardea* 81: 21–24.

Underhill, L.G., Prys-Jones, R.P., Syroechkovski, E.E. jr, Groen, N.M., Kar-

pov, V., Lappo, H.G., van Roomen, M. W.J., Rybkin, A., Schekkerman, H., Spiekman, H. & Summers, R.W. 1993. Breeding of waders (Charadrii) and Brent Geese *Branta bernicla bernicla* at Pronchishcheva Lake, northeastern Taimyr, Russia, in a peak and a decreasing lemming year. *Ibis* 135: 277–292.

Summers, R.W., Underhill, L.G., Syroechkovski, E.E. jr, Lappo, E.G., Prys-Jones, R.P. & Karpov, V. 1994. The breeding biology of Dark-bellied Brent Geese *Branta b. bernicla* and King Eiders *Somateria spectabilis* on the northeastern Taimyr Peninsula, especially in proximity to Snowy Owl *Nyctea scandiaca* nests. *Wildfowl* 45: 110–118.

Summers, R.W. & Underhill, L.G. 1996. The dispersion of arctic breeding birds according to snow-free patch dimensions during the spring thaw in the north-eastern Taimyr Peninsula. *Polar Biol.* 16: 331–333.

Schekkerman, H., van Roomen, M.W.J. & Underhill, L.G. 1998. Growth, behaviour of broods, and breeding productivity of Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*. *Ardea* 86: 153–168.

Summers, R.W., Underhill, L.G. & Syroechkovski, E.E. jr. 1998. The breeding productivity of Dark-bellied Brent Geese and Curlew Sandpipers in relation to changes in the numbers of Arctic Foxes and lemmings on the Taimyr Peninsula, Siberia. *Ecography* 21: 573–580.