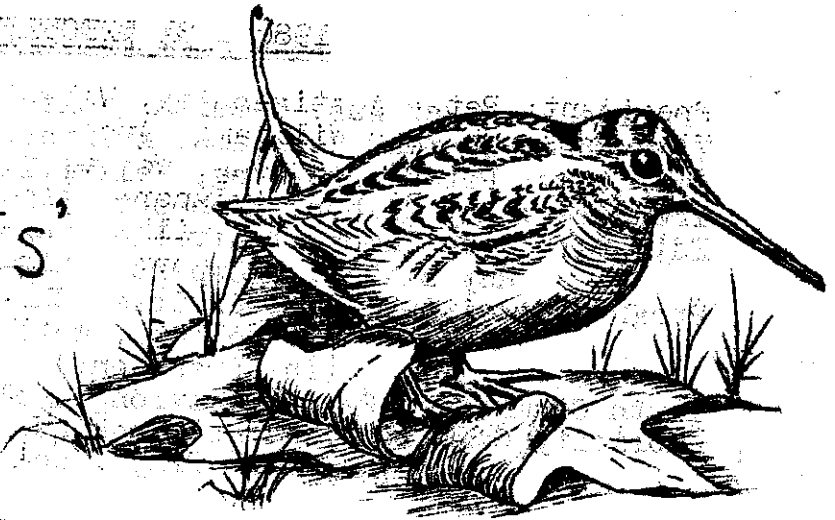


# Blomidon Naturalists' Society Newsletter



Vol.7, No. 2

June 1980

The BNS Newsletter is published on the equinoxes and solstices.

Editors: Jean Timpa and Roy Bishop

Art/Production: Roy Bishop

Typist: Barbara Gerritse

The primary objective of the Society shall be to encourage and develop in its members an understanding and appreciation of nature. For the purposes of the Society, the word "nature" will be interpreted broadly and shall include the rocks, plants, animals, waters, air and stars.

from the BNS Constitution

## SUMMER FIELD TRIPS

(mark your calendar now!)

July 19 or 20 - "Carboniferous Creatures" (Roy Bishop and Sherman Williams)  
Over 300 million years ago some of the first creatures to leave the oceans and populate the dry land left their foot prints near Wolfville, along the rocky beach that the Micmacs called Maktomkus. Meet at Roy Bishop's home (the house with the observatory) on the Bluff Rd., Avonport, at 2 p.m. and wear footwear suitable for a 2 hour stroll along a damp and occasionally muddy beach. (In the case of rain on the 19th, come on the 20th) Also: For those requiring transportation (and those in Wolfville with cars) meet at the Acadia gym parking lot at 1:40 p.m.

August 23 - "Shorebirds" (Jim Wolford)  
One of the most spectacular wildlife events in eastern Canada is the massing of shorebirds on their return southward. The tidal flats of the upper Bay of Fundy provide rich feeding areas for these birds and offer the naturalist unrivaled opportunities for observation. Meet at the Acadia gym parking lot at 10 a.m. for a guided tour to the Evangeline Beach area (and bring your binoculars!)

## NEXT REGULAR MEETING

Member's Night: September 15 (Monday), 8 p.m. in Room 52, the basement of Huggins Science Hall, Acadia (2nd building on the right as you go up University Ave.

A few years ago we had a very interesting and well-attended Member's night in this same room. Tables are available for displaying objects of natural history interest, and a slide projector will be available. You are invited to bring up to 20 of your best slides plus any other objects you think

others may be interested in seeing. Mark September 15 on your calendar now for an evening of variety, entertainment and socializing. And—be sure to bring a contribution, however small (or large).

### 1980 - 81 EXECUTIVE

President: Peter Austin-Smith, Wolfville 542-2109  
Vice-Pres: Sherman Williams, Avonport 542-5104  
Secretary: Peter Armstrong, Wolfville, 542-5852  
Treasurer: Roy Bishop, Avonport 542-3992  
Editors: Jean Timpa, Wolfville 542-5678  
Roy Bishop, Avonport 542-3992  
Program Committee: Alf Gerritse (Chm.) Canning 582-3206  
Jim Wolford, Wolfville 542-5278  
(The President)  
Youth Committee: Peter Armstrong, Wolfville 542-5852  
Publicity Committee: Rachel Erskine, Wolfville 542-2388  
Jean Timpa, Wolfville 542-5678

### DUES

This Newsletter has been sent to those members in good standing. New members, or those wishing to re-join, should send their name and address and \$4.00 to Roy Bishop, Avonport, N. S. BOP 1B0. (Dues for members under 16 years of age are \$1.00)



### Small Fishes

(Cont. from last Newsletter)

John S. Erskine  
From the Journal of  
Education, Nov. 1957

### UP COMBERLAND WAY

We soon learned that rocky pools presented a problem which the seine could not meet, and I recalled having seen a Sunday fisherman on the Tiber above Rome, eagerly lifting and dropping a square net in the faint hope that some imbecile fish would pause above it. This might be our solution. So I created a net of quarter-inch wire-mesh with collapsible walls of cotton mosquito-netting. It was not a great success, for the flimsy netting billowed in the current and caught in everything, and the minnows that we could see in the river avoided it sedulously. So we evolved the bomb-technique. When a school of minnows was skirting the net, I dropped a large stone ke-glump on the far side of them. The greater fear drove out the lesser, and they dashed away from the noise and over the net which Francis jerked up.

Under the bridge at Parrsboro a number of large suckers were feeding, their flanks flashing through the dark water as they gimbled with their noses in the mud. We set traps for them without avail. We tried to seine them, but the net always became entangled in old wires or fragments of decayed car, rubbish for the disposal of which Nova Scotian rivers have been especially designed. Then the bomb-and-grab technique netted us some reputable suckers, fine brown-backed, pale-sided fish with reddish pectoral fins and tiny toothless mouths set low in their faces. A farmer who used to net suckers and cook them for his foxes told me that he had tasted them and preferred them to trout. But among most people their reputation is bad. "Suckers - dirty feeders!" they exclaim; "bring me some pork."

The distribution of suckers and catfish is so wide in Nova Scotia as to suggest that they must have skirted parts of the coast by sea; the distribution of shiners and dace is so nearly confined to the North Shore that it seems certain that they cannot take such short cuts at any season. But along the Fundy Shore even the commoner species have not spread, perhaps because the brooks there are small and their spring floods are mixed to unimportance by the tremendous tides.

We had been fishing westward towards Advocate along the Minas Channel, sampling every brook in order to determine the limit of the spread of minnows, and now we ran beyond the edge of all things. At Fox River I stopped to botanize, and presently I saw large brown fish slipping downstream past me. I called Francis who came reluctantly, disillusioned with fish, and we struggled upstream through wastes of cans and tires and defunct machinery. Above the bridge we drew the net to a beach and found it quivering with a miraculous draught of fishes, dozens of them from five to ten inches long, brown above, brassy flanked, crimson dotted - trout, all trout. So we put them back and watched them scurry away again toward the sea.

#### ABUNDANT COLLECTING

The North Shore was the fish collector's paradise, for that isthmus was the only line of entrance open to freshwater fish, and there the shale and sandstone rocks broke down readily into soft-bottomed weedy ponds. There my memories are chiefly of wide shoaly rivers with red banks starred with the whitish bell-flowers of bedstraw campanula; of beaver ponds where huge bull frogs crouched in the shade of alders, and minnows swarmed about the brushy dam; of tidal waters where the seine brought up tiny eels and slim silversides and yellow mummichogs and long grey-green shrimps that flapped and fluttered on the mud; and of sandy lakes where silver shiners flashed among broad-leaved pondweed and mink frogs clucked their harsh triple call among the lily-pads.

These were our most elusive frogs. They looked so like young green frogs that one could distinguish them readily only by their call and by a smell of musk said to resemble mink. Now persistent colds have long since deprived me of a sense of smell, so I had no alternative but to catch each of these agile creatures and hold it to Francis' nose for confirmation. Mink frogs are lovers of water, never found away from it, and they haunt chiefly lakes and still brooks where lily leaves flap and where in emergency they can dive and rocket downward with long smooth strokes of their thin legs, past the trailing stems to the sludgy bottom where the basal leaves of the lilies wave pink and translucent like strange jellies of the sea.

We sampled ponds where smooth sandy bottoms gave suddenly under our feet and dropped us into warm depths of rotten sawdust beneath. There were lakes and even rivers void of life, where the decomposition of the sawdust had turned the water back from the oxygen-rich present to prehistoric saturation with carbon dioxide and methane, from which half a century of algal slime may eventually rescue the water and make it fit again for animal life. There were lakes dammed for power where the beaches had been drowned, and the old shore plants had been replaced by masses of trailing water-speedwell and the pale yard-long scapes of pipewort. There were lakes where we stood breast-deep at the edge of shelving depths and cast the seine outward and watched it sink down into the dark. There were ponds where the water knotgrass formed wide sheets of blossom, blotting-paper pink, and there was one lake where the algae drifted in pale clouds, clotting the seine and entangling silver finger-long gaspereaux in a tenuous green mesh.

In Earltown Lake the wrack was full of long-leaved pondweed found there first long ago by Dr. MacKay, and in the sandy shallow a water buttercup lifted single white flowers. In one sludgy corner of the lake masses of Canada pondweed were growing, sending up tiny floating flowers on long threadlike stalks. The female flowers rise only to the surface and there float, but the male plants allow their flowers a longer tether so that they may drift with the wind into contact with the females of other plants and fertilize them. Then the stem of the female flower contracts into a tight spiral, drawing the fertilized flower down to mature its seed in the safety of the water. A single plant, a female, of this species was carried by chance to Ireland and was noticed there in 1836. Its descendants, all female, spread rapidly throughout western Europe, choking canals and rivers and becoming one of the most expensive plant pests of that continent, although more recently its own pests have begun to catch up to it and to control its spread. But here in Nova Scotia the plant is rare and is certainly no more than holding its own.

One night we turned aside from the waters and made our camp high on the Cobequids. The sky was clear, and the squirrels were chattering in the wood. Then they seemed suddenly quiet. "What is a brown animal low to the ground?" asked Francis. I was busy with my plants. "A weasel," I replied. We strolled over to the place where he had seen it and, of course, it had gone, but there on the path lay two freshly killed squirrels. We returned to our supper. "Welcome, friend," said Francis, and I looked up. A brown rabbit bounded unhurriedly toward us, passed between us and went on into the wood. The sun had gone. In a farm below some children shouted and a dog barked echoingly, and at the edge of the wood a white-throated sparrow was still singing his thin sweet lonesome "Hard times, Canada, Canada, Canada."

Finis

#### A SPECIAL THANKS

- To Rachel Erskine for providing the very enjoyable coffee, cookies and squares at the end of all of our monthly meetings this Spring. Rachel's thoughtfulness is appreciated by the several members who have stayed to talk after the formal portion of our monthly meetings.

#### BNS Field Trips for Spring Amphibians

Jim Wolford, Wolfville  
April 23, 1980

Two days after my slide-show we had our first of two excursions with flashlights. About a dozen people were present, and we went to two spring-fed breeding areas of spotted salamanders just west of Gaspereau. Our first stop was a roadside ditch in which numerous active adult salamanders were seen and caught by hand; the vents of males vs. females were compared, the white spermatophores from the males were seen attached to leaves and sticks, and many batches of eggs with their milky envelopes were seen. (The adult salamanders had been seen here as early as April 2 this year; ironically, and luckily for us, our field-trip night was the last good night of the year for these salamanders, and very few were seen there after April 26).

This night was a little too clear and chilly for good activity of frogs, but one wood frog was caught (another was later heard chuckling) and several spring peepers were calling fairly strongly. The peepers were unco-operative when approached and even when taped calls were played to them; but at least everyone managed to see several of them in calling positions (or in the hands of Sean Timpa, who was indefatigable at catching peepers and salamanders).

Then we went to a second pond where we again saw numerous spotted salamanders, some of them occasionally undulating to the surface for gulps of air (a reminder that these are terrestrial critters for most of the year). Around the edges of the pond were large numbers of two-inch, brown overwintered larvae of the spotted salamander -- most of these will lose their external gills and leave the water transformed into terrestrial animals in mid-summer, and then an adolescent period of at least two summers must pass before these youngsters become sexually mature and appear at the breeding sites.

April 30, 1980

One week after the first trip, we had nearly perfect weather for amphibian activity -- warm air (10°C.) and rain (a fairly steady drizzle all day long). Again about a dozen people were on hand (mostly people who were not along on the first trip).

American toads had just begun calling on the previous night, and our first stop was a small dugout known to harbour many toads, just east of Gaspereau. Along the edges, and largely oblivious to our noises and lights, were numerous trilling males -- in fact, many even seemed to be attracted to our beams. Frequently added to the pleasant but monotonous trills were peculiar chirping noises, which I identified as "warning chirps" -- when one male is clasped by another, he chirps and vibrates his abdomen to tell the avid clasper of his mistake (if the claspee is a female, she makes none of these protestations.).

Everyone was able to watch the trilling males with their distended throats; we also saw fresh strings of eggs known to have been laid 24 hours earlier, and only one probable female was seen (held in an embrace, called amplexus, by a male). Later I returned by myself and censused the toads; 31 males and 1 female. This unbalanced sex ratio early in the breeding season is also typical for the spotted salamander and for most frogs.

Then we moved to the salamander breeding sites to the west. No adult salamanders were present (eggs and overwintered larvae were shown), but spring peepers were everywhere and calling enthusiastically. After a bit of patient sitting and waiting nearly everyone was treated to a close-up view of these "mighty-mites" heaving their sides and swelling their throats seemingly to the bursting point. Sean Timpa found us a pair in amplexus, and Tom Herman caught an immature green frog -- this latter species breeds elsewhere and much later in the season. Also one late wood frog was chuckling occasionally.

Finally, back at the "toad dugout", while listening to the faint winnowing of a snipe, several of us saw an early bat flying around.

### LOGO CONTEST

The deadline for submissions has been extended to September 1. One good submission has been received to date, but to have a contest we need more. Several of our members must have ideas for a symbol for the B.N.S. Don't be shy; send your idea to Jean Timpa (Box 1382, Wolfville, BOP 1X0.)

### BNS NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

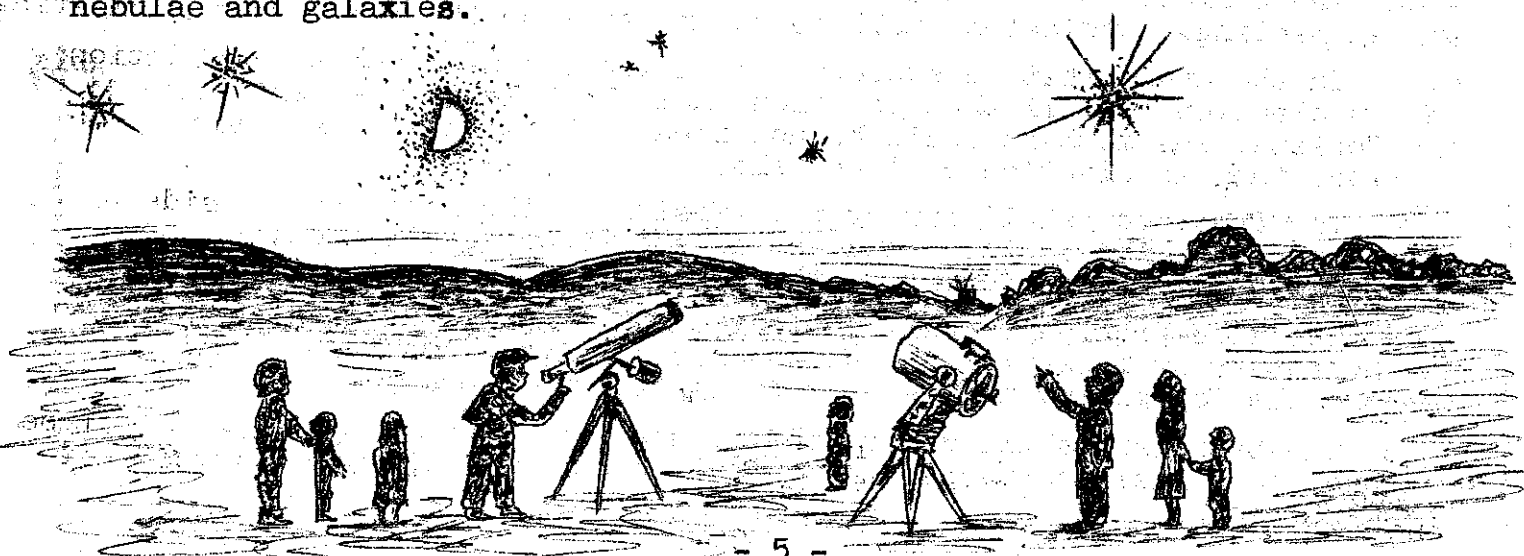
SEPTEMBER 21

There's plenty of activity out there now, gang! Please jot down some of your summer sightings to make our next Newsletter more interesting! Send to Jean Timpa, Box 1382, Wolfville, N. S. BOP 1X0 or call 542-5678.

### STARNIGHT - MAY 20, 1980

Roy Bishop

The day closed clear and promising. About 9 p.m. the tour leaders (Roy Bishop and Sherman Williams) with three telescopes arrived at the Grand Pre parking lot only to find smoke (from what must have been the last grass fire in Kings Co. for 1980) drifting directly over the observing site (Murphy's Law strikes again!) Fortunately, the light wind shifted a short while later to permit breathing and seeing. Approximately 15 observers turned up to view the Solar System and the Universe beyond (we were competing with the Quebec referendum on T.V.) It was a rare night for seeing the Solar System as five planets and nine moons were in view: Venus sparkled in the West while Jupiter, Mars and Saturn were temporarily the shining claws of Leo the Lion. The fifth planet, Earth, provided a firm support for the observers and telescopes. Jupiter and Saturn displayed four moons each, while Earth's lone first-quarter moon provided an impressive jumble of mountain ranges and craters. The long twilight meant that only those who stayed later (and had dressed warmly!) were able to glimpse views of the Universe beyond: star clusters, nebulae and galaxies.





## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Special thanks to George Stevens (Satellite Imagery, May 12) and Marjorie Knowles (Food from the Wild, June 16) for very interesting presentations at the last two meetings. Also, thanks to Jim Wolford for leading two field trips (Amphibians, April 23 and 30), to Roy Bishop and Sherman Williams for their field trip on May 20 (Astronomy evening) and to both Sherman and Jim for leading the hike to Cape Split on May 24.

### BNS CONSTITUTION

It has been a few years since our constitution was distributed to the membership. Since we are now proceeding to register our Society, this seems like an appropriate time to make copies available once again.

#### ARTICLE 1. NAME.

1.01 The name of this organization shall be the Blomidon Naturalists Society. The name "Blomidon" is chosen since it is anticipated that many of the activities of the Society will occur within sight of this unique landmark. The flora and fauna of Blomidon itself show great variety, while the minerals in its cliffs make it perhaps the most interesting locality in Canada for the geological naturalist. In addition, the pulse of a larger nature is visible and audible here as the highest tides on Earth endlessly surge around its base.

#### ARTICLE 2. OBJECTIVES.

2.01 Whereas the happiness, well-being, and very existence of man are inseparably linked to the natural world, and whereas a knowledge of nature is a prerequisite to any and all means of preserving these aspects of life, the primary objective of the Society shall be to encourage and develop in its members an understanding and appreciation of nature. For the purposes of the Society, the word "nature" will be interpreted broadly and shall include the rocks, plants, animals, waters, air and stars.

2.02 The Society shall function without the purpose of material gain for its members, any earnings of or other accretions to the Society being used in promoting its objectives.

#### ARTICLE 3. MEMBERSHIP AND DUES.

3.01 Membership in the Society shall be available to any interested person upon payment of the prescribed annual dues.

3.02 The annual dues shall be determined and shall be payable at the first meeting of the Society after September 1.

3.03 The annual dues for members under the age of 16 shall not exceed one dollar.

3.04 Members who join the Society after February 1, shall pay one-half of the annual dues for that year.

#### ARTICLE 4. EXECUTIVE.

4.01 The officers of the Society shall be a president, a vice-president, a secretary, and a treasurer. They shall hold office for one year, but shall be eligible for election to more than one term.

4.02 The officers of the Society shall be elected by the members at the annual meeting. Candidates shall be nominated from the floor at this meeting.

4.03 In the event that an executive position becomes vacant, nominations and an election to fill that position shall be held at the next meeting of the Society. The members shall be notified at least one week prior to this meeting, that an election will be held.

4.04 The President shall direct the affairs of the Society, preside at all meetings of the Society, and act as spokesman for the Society. The President shall give a report to the members at the annual meeting.

4.05 The Vice-President shall perform the duties of the President and/or the Secretary or Treasurer in the absence of either one, and shall be responsible for giving notice of meetings to the members.

4.06 The Secretary shall record the minutes of all meetings, and shall be responsible for all correspondence. The Secretary shall keep a record of the membership.

Constitution, cont.

4.07 The Treasurer shall be responsible for all assets and finances of the Society. The Treasurer shall present an annual statement of receipts and expenditures at the annual meeting.

ARTICLE 5. COMMITTEES.

5.01 The Program Committee shall consist of the President and two members of the Society elected at the annual meeting. This Committee shall be responsible for the program of the Society for the coming year.

5.02 Special or Standing Committees may be created and appointed by the Officers of the Society for the promotion and proper conduct of the objectives of the Society. All members of the Society shall be eligible to membership upon all committees so created.

ARTICLE 6. MEETINGS.

6.01 The meetings of the Society shall be open to the public.

6.02 Meetings of the Society shall normally be held monthly, excepting July and August. Several of these meetings shall be field trips.

6.03 The annual meeting of the Society shall be the first meeting after March 1.

6.04 Special meetings, including field trips, may be called by the Program Committee at their discretion.

6.05 Seven members including one member of the executive shall form a quorum for a meeting of the Society; however, adequate notice must have been given to all members of the Society before any meeting shall be recognized as a meeting of the Society.

6.06 Meetings may be held at any place within Nova Scotia; however, the place of meeting shall be chosen with a view to encouraging as many members of as wide a background as possible to attend.

ARTICLE 7. AMENDMENTS:

7.01 Amendments to this Constitution may be proposed by any member and must be presented for consideration by the Society at least two weeks before a vote is taken. Amendments to the Constitution shall require the support of two-thirds of the members who are present when the vote is taken.

ARTICLE 8 DISSOLUTION:

8.01 In the event that the Society shall disband, all of its assets shall be transferred to some other non-profit organization having objectives similar to those of the Society.

March 26, 1974

Amended April 21, 1980

Note: Regarding article 3.04, the B.N.S. did not get underway for 1979-80 until January. It is hoped that the full dues collected to date (and in the Fall from any new members) will suffice to carry the Society through to September 1981.

Roy Bishop, Treasurer  
June 18, 1980



### CAPE SPLIT HIKE

Sherman Williams  
May 24, 1980

Approximately 20 hikers completed the 15 km round-trip to Cape Split. The clear sky and lots of sunshine provided excellent visibility. The fresh green foliage of the hardwoods and shrubs had not yet fully expanded, allowing generous amounts of sunlight to reach the ground. Taking advantage of this temporary situation, plants on this level were luxuriant. The "fiddle heads" had already unrolled into fronds 40 or 50 cm high, and blooms of purple trillium, dutchman's britches and spring beauty produced gasps of excitement. Pleasant sounds and flashes of colour were provided by a variety of birds. Of particular note were the warblers, purple finches, ovenbirds and a winter wren.

Abruptly the cover of woods finally gave way to the expansive view of blue Fundy water, bald headlands and precipitous basalt cliffs and pinnacles that characterize Cape Split. The group scattered into small clusters to break open the lunch boxes, sit in the sunshine, and enjoy the surroundings. Entertainment was provided by the activities of gulls and cormorants. The nests and young of these birds were occupying the tops of the outer headlands and sides of the cliffs.

The return trip began by taking the lower looping trail. This offered a more rugged, windswept trail atmosphere and an opportunity for some to descend to the beach at Little Split Cove. Since the tide was low a few backtracked along the beach to view Cape Split from this level.

At this point the main group ceased to exist. As smaller groups, hikers adopted their own pace and points of interest for the return trip to the parking lot at Scotts Bay. The combination of beautiful weather and the spring activity of birds and wild flowers made this a most successful Cape Split venture.

### PERSEID METEOR SHOWER

(August 10, 11, 12)

Roy Bishop

Meteoroids are small solid particles moving in orbits about the Sun. If they happen to collide with Earth, they are heated to incandescence as they fall at high speed through our atmosphere. Millions of these small rocks collide with our planet every day. Most burn up into gases and dust high in the atmosphere, but on rare occasions a meteor may be large enough to survive its passage through the atmosphere and reach the surface as a meteorite.

Meteors are visible on any clear night, but at certain times of the year Earth, as it moves in its orbit, encounters large numbers of meteoroids all moving together in their own orbit. Such meteoroids are the remnants of an extinct comet, still orbiting the Sun in the same path. The intersection of our path with that of the old comet results in an unusually large number of meteors — a meteor shower.

The Perseid Shower is the richest and best-known of the annual meteor showers. It extends through the first half of August, but peaks this year on August 11, when anywhere from 25 to 100 meteors will be visible per hour. This year is a good one since the Moon will not be in view to brighten the sky. If one or more of the above nights (10th, 11th or 12th) is clear, dress warmly and choose a site away from the light pollution of towns and farm-yard lights. Your unaided eyes are the best



instruments for observing a meteor shower; a telescope would be useless. A reclining lawn chair and blanket are recommended. Position yourself so you have a clear view of the north-eastern half of the sky and begin your vigil after 11 p.m. The number of meteors will increase as the night progresses, reaching a maximum in the pre-dawn hours. (An early evening nap is recommended!).

R. W. Tufts  
Wolfville, N.S.  
February 24, 1980

STARLINGS ARE CLEVER BIRDS - Some more so than others

An incident occurred in my garden a few days ago which in my experience is unique. It concerns the sagacity of an individual Starling.

For many years I have been banding birds. To catch them I use a small box-trap about 8 x 10 x 8 inches in size. It is made of wire based on a block of wood. When 'set', a sliding door at the front entrance is raised about four inches and held there by a delicate wire clasp. The bait is placed in the rear of the floor space. In order to reach the food, the bird must step on a pedal. Even the pressure exerted by a chickadee releases the catch, and the door drops, thus closing the trap both suddenly and securely. Of the hundreds of birds I have caught in this device - a fair number of which have been starlings - not one has escaped, until it was released manually.

On February 2 the trap was set and baited with a slice of fresh apple. My object was a Robin whose weak manner of flight told me the bird was suffering from malnutrition. It was later caught and found to be little more than skin and bones. Presently it seems well content in my "hospital". It will be banded and released late in March when others of its kind will by then be singing overhead.

But I digress. On the day in question it so happened that a Starling was caught. I noticed it from an upstairs window fluttering in the trap, and when I came down moments later I said to my wife, "I see I've caught a Starling", to which she promptly replied - "You did, but you haven't now." She and her sister had been watching from the kitchen window. Glancing at the trap I saw it was empty. Here is her account of what happened: After the bird flapped violently for a while, they noted that it stopped and stood quietly for a long moment. Then, to their amazement they saw the bird's head slowly protruding from the base of the cage. The bird had inserted its long sharp bill under the light-weight sliding door and was in the process of gradually lifting it. More and more of its body began to appear and a moment later it flew off. Had evidence of its manner of escape been less convincing, I think I would have doubted its validity.

A NATURALIST'S GUIDE TO KINGS COUNTY

Roy Bishop

In the last Newsletter (p. 7) Alf Gerritse described the application the B.N.S. had made for a Summer Youth Employment Program grant. Our application was successful and we have been awarded \$9,834.00 to prepare a naturalist's guide to Kings County. The bulk of this money is being used to employ four students from May 26 to September 5. Peter Austin-Smith and Roy Bishop signed the contract on May 16, interviewed 7 candidates for the 4 positions on May 23, hired 4, and started this group to work on May 26. The students are:

Lynn Dixon, Wolfville (Supervisor)  
Dale Frail, Centreville  
Ann Odell, Wolfville  
Debra Williams, Wolfville

Input from the members of the B.N.S. will be very valuable and, indeed, essential to the success of this project. The last page of this Newsletter is a questionnaire prepared by our 4 students so that you can help them. Please take a few moments to fill it out and mail it to the address indicated. If you are really interested in Kings County, now is your chance to make a contribution to a very worthwhile project.