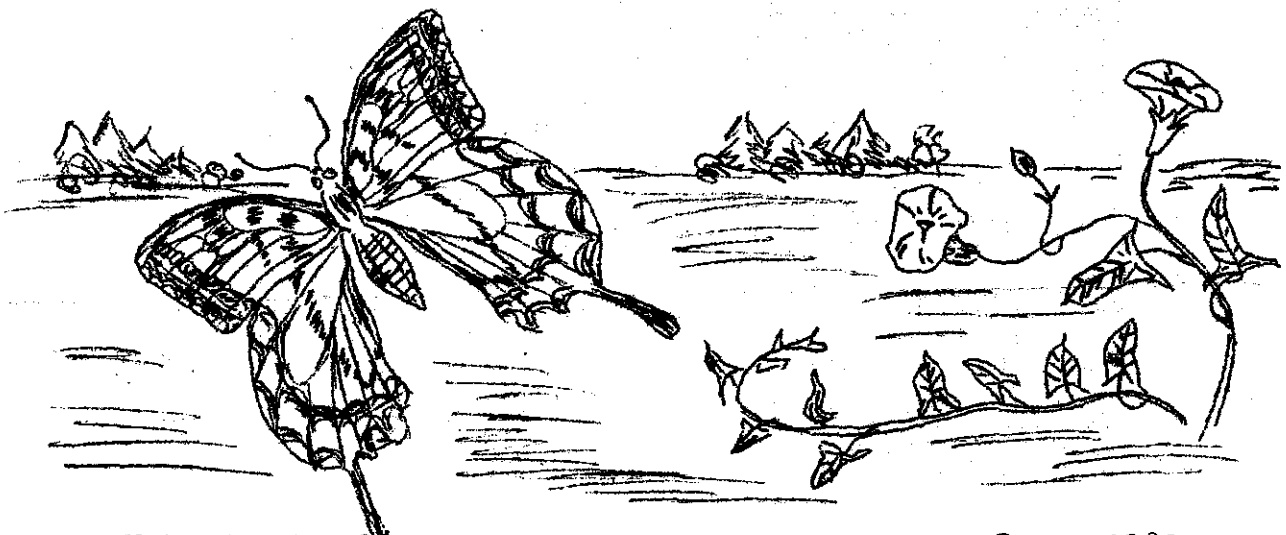


BLOMIDON
NATURALISTS
SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER



Vol. 9, No. 2

June, 1982

The BNS Newsletter is published on the equinoxes and solstices.

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Art Production: Lynn Coldwell

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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

- - FALL PROGRAM - -

All meetings will be held in Room 244 of the Beveridge Arts Centre, Acadia University, beginning at 8 p.m.

1. Monday, September 20: TBA We have left this space hoping that Larry Bogan would be able to share with us some of his New Zealand experiences.
2. Monday, October 18: ANNUAL MEETING. There will be a special audio-visual presentation courtesy of the Environmental Protection Service.
3. Monday, November 15: MEMBER'S NIGHT This most successful event will provide that opportunity to show your newest or best slides, photos, or collections!! Bring some friends along as well.
4. Monday, December 13: TBA Further discussion as to this meeting will be encouraged during other events.

- FIELD TRIPS -

1. Saturday, July 24: Mud Lake - For a look at bog flora and fauna, join Jim Wolford and Sam VanderKloet. Meet at the Acadia Gym Parking Lot at 1:00 p.m.
2. Sunday, August 1: Shorebirds - Meet Jim at the Gym Parking Lot at 10 a.m. The outing will likely be to the Grand Pre area, where we hope to find the greatest number of birds.
3. Wednesday, August 11: Perseid Meteor Shower - Roy Bishop will guide astronomy buffs during this event. Meet at the Gym Parking Lot at 9:30 p.m., or a bit later at the Grand Pre Parking Lot. Dress warmly and bring telescopes if you wish. This event will be cancelled if the sky is cloudy.
4. Sunday, September 12: Shorebirds - Jim Wolford will meet you at the Gym Parking Lot at 1:30 p.m. At this later date participants will be able to view different species, and probably much less numbers, in the Grand Pre area. For the best benefit, attendance at both shorebird trips is suggested.
5. Sunday, September 26: Mushrooms - Ken Harrison will lead the group on a very interesting walk. Details are forthcoming.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank our guest speakers Karen Leigh Casselman, Ken Harrison, and Jim Wolford. Thanks also to trip leaders Bernie Forsythe, Jim Wolford, Karen Leigh Casselman, and Sherman Williams; the sharing of your expertise is much appreciated.

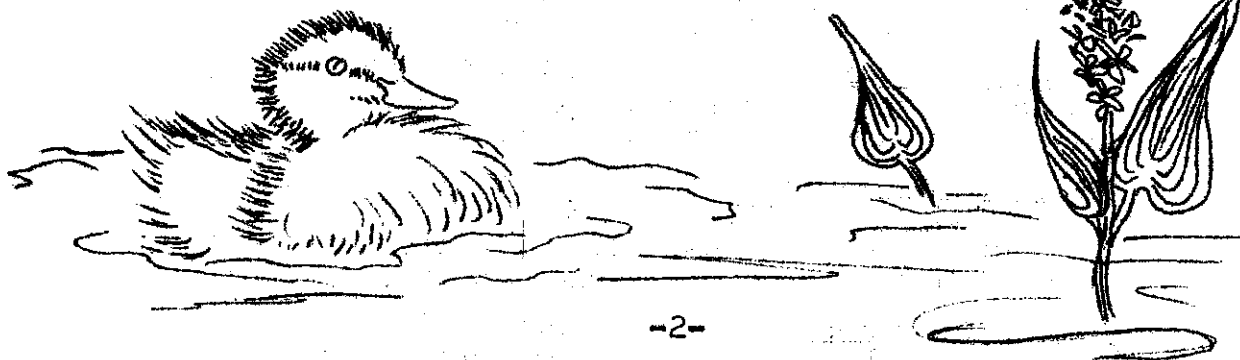
To those who contributed to the June Newsletter, thank you as well!!!

THE BNS NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

Your contributions by way of observations or conversations in areas of natural history are very welcome. Suggestions for speakers, trips, or Newsletter topics are also accepted. Deadline for contributions is September 21.

DUES - These will be set at the Annual Meeting, October 18.

NEW MAILING ADDRESS: Blomidon Naturalists Society,
Box 127,
Wolfville, N.S. BOP 1X0



OWL FIELD TRIP
April 26, 1982

Bernard Forsythe
Wolfville, N.S.

Owl numbers and nesting habits are controlled by the abundance of their food supply. This year the cycle is at a low and most species of Owls are hard to find. Even our most common owl, the Barred Owl, is late in beginning to lay eggs. However on the evening of April 26, approximately 25 people in 6 or 7 cars headed for the South Mountain area in an attempt to hear owls calling.

We arrived at our first stop, Greenfield, a half hour before dark and spent some time listening to frogs and a few birds such as Robins, White-throated Sparrows, and a Myrtle Warbler heard by some of the group. At dusk a Woodcock was seen in its courtship flight and the "peent" sound it makes on the ground was also heard. As this performance was taking place there was an interesting discussion on the habits of this fascinating bird.

At another site an attempt was made to call a Saw-whet Owl. When there was no response we continued on to a known Horned Owl nest site at Lumsden Pond. This nest contained a newly hatched young and an egg that was pipped on April 13. We had hoped to hear the adults calling but all was quiet.

The last stop of the evening was at a Barred Owl nest site at Newtonville. The tape of a Barred Owl call was played and several minutes later we heard several hoots from a Barred Owl perched nearby. It was good to end the outing listening to the call of at least one of our night hunters.

FIELD TRIPS FOR AMPHIBIANS

Jim Wolford
Wolfville, N.S.

April 22, 1982 - This was unfortunately a chilly night that kept nearly everyone indoors. (This was the luck of the draw, for the previous night was rainy and excellent for activity of amphibians.) One spectator and myself went first to a dugout just east of Gaspereau, there we saw several newts and oodles of large overwintered tadpoles of green frogs. Also a large predaceous diving beetle was seen. Then in a roadside ditch west of Gaspereau there were 8-10 adult spotted salamanders, including a couple that were laying eggs. A few spring peepers were calling, but to find them we needed more pairs of eyes than we had!

May 3, 1982 - This night was at least warm, and about 8 people came out. We started in my lab at Acadia University, where I had a couple of wild-caught newts in amplexus. (Contrary to popular expression, this position is not "mating"; in newts this is strong-arm courtship in which the male literally has a captive audience, the female!) (Of course, amplexus in frogs or toads is again a forceful tactic by the male, in order to place him in prime position to fertilize the eggs when they leave the female.)

Then we caravanned to the Gaspereau ditch, where lots of peepers were seen, both calling and in amplexus. Two wood frogs were seen, along with lots of eggs of spotted salamanders and wood frogs. Then, at the Gaspereau dugout, we saw a few newts, oodles of big tadpoles again, plus 6 male toads, a male leopard frog, a stickleback, and assorted other aquatic life (leeches, snails, backswimmers, etc.).

Amphibians cont'd

A snipe was softly winnowing overhead.

May 24, 1982 - On this windy evening with a threat of rain (unfortunately only a threat, rather than the real thing), 4 people accompanied me to the Gaspereau dugout. There we could find no toads, and only a few peepers were calling.

P.S. This spring has been unusually cold and dry; what little rain we had was either on very cold nights or during daylight hours, the gist of this was that the toad population that I am following as a hobby didn't seem to breed at all at the dugout this year. (Hopefully they did all right in other breeding ponds and ditches.)



EXPLORATION FOR LADY'S SLIPPERS

Jim Wolford
Wolfville, N.S.

For the past couple of years, Rachel Erskine has been urging us to reinvestigate the Windsor area for the rare Ram's-head Ladyslipper Orchid. John Erskine had found some in the early 1950's; Rachel unerringly led Ruth Newell and myself to the precise spot, pointed us south and wished us good fortune, and then patiently waited while we searched up-and-down topography underlain by gypsum.

It didn't take us long to find some plants of the larger and widespread yellow ladyslipper (we hope to have a BNS field trip for these very soon) and several other things of interest. After perhaps an hour of exploring, Ruth looked down at her feet and exclaimed something like "Hey, how about these?", and there was a clump of our target species. Nearby were perhaps a dozen more clumps of plants (most of them showing last year's fruiting capsules, which may be a sign of good health), but only one specimen had the blossom open. None of the yellow ones were open yet, either.

This was on May 28; John Erskine had found them flowering on May 24. So Ruth and I returned on June 8, when to our delight the orchids were all beautifully in bloom, and we also found several more clumps of them. The ram's-head orchid is not as showy as the red moccasin-flower or the yellow ladyslipper; it is small in stature, but on close inspection the flower is very pretty. The petal which forms the peculiarly shaped lip is white, strongly marked with deep red, and bearded with hairs. In order to get pictures, Ruth and I had to squat in poison ivy, but neither of us have suffered any ill effects.

Ladyslippers cont'd

This is a perfect time to advertise a publication that should be of interest to all Nova Scotia naturalists. In Forest and Field is a collection of writings by John Erskine, available at the N.S. Museum in Halifax for two or three dollars. It contains well written descriptions of our forest floor plants, bog plants, the dykelands and saltmarshes, and gypsum areas (including the ram's-head orchids); also included are guides to identification of our most common mosses and lichens.

P.S. Coincidentally, as I write this (June 18), Ruth and I have just returned from an exploration of another gypsum area, where we found impressive numbers of flowering yellow ladyslippers.

SKUNK STORIES - THE LAST GASP

Tom Herman
Wolfville, N.S.

The skunk stories are all(?) in and time for judging has arrived. I found them both informative and entertaining! Appreciation is extended to everyone for their recollections. After much consternation, I decided that two prize categories were required. In one, a tie for most intimate encounter goes to E.L. Eaton and Alice Fuller. In the other, Edgar McKay and Milton Morgan share the prize for most careful observation and impressive memory of detail from events that occurred more than 65 years ago!!

THE TWEET TWEET BIRD

Robie Tufts
Wolfville, N.S.

Down the years I have been asked hundreds of times by observers to identify birds they had seen. From the descriptions they provided it was possible, at times, to name the bird with a fair degree of accuracy. While as often it was little more than mere guess work. All of which, of course, depended upon how accurate or detailed the description they furnished.

For instance I was told not long ago by an observer that a bird, about a robin-size, was seen on his front lawn. It had a very short tail, a whitish breast, and a dark and light striped back, with a bill at least two inches long. I told him he had seen a Common (Wilson's) Snipe. With a characteristic bill like that it just couldn't have been anything else.

But all descriptive details are not as definite or helpful as the one just cited.

For example, a woman recently phoned to tell me of an incident she had experienced with a bird whose identity she wished to establish. "I was looking for mayflowers in the Black River area and heard the notes of a bird close at hand, but the foliage was so thick I didn't actually see it - But it plainly said, in very sweet tones 'tweet-tweet -- tweet-tweet'. Can you tell me what bird it was?"

With an apologetic tone, I had to inform her that I was afraid that I could not help her.

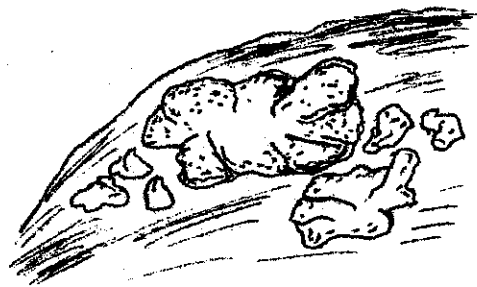
LICHEN FIELD TRIP

Karen Casselman
Cheverie, N.S.

Twenty participants arrived at Cheverie, Hants County, on Saturday, May 8 by car, truck and motorcycle, from Halifax, Chester, Wolfville and Greenwood for the lichen fieldtrip. In the morning, we took a two-mile hike through woods (mixed stand of spruce, hemlock, yellow birch, maple and beech) where we saw twenty-two species of lichen including the unusual occurrence of Lobaria pulmonaria growing on a softwood. We stopped at what we call our "Peltigera hill" where an incredibly abundant growth of Peltigera apthosa covers an entire slope near a stand of hemlock.

After lunch, there was a demonstration showing how Umbilicates are used to make red dyes and how Xanthoria parietina is used to make the elusive blue-green which depends upon strong sunlight for its success (it worked!). On the afternoon walk, we took a footpath through a neighbour's woodlot characterized by numerous sinkholes. The Daphne was in full bloom, and we found an additional six species of lichen including two which are rare in this region: Evernia prunastri and Peltigera horizontalis. We saw the remains of a female black duck and viewed the possible location of a Harrier nest. (The Harriers were not sighted during the day. However, as Jim, Phoebe and Robert drove off at 5:30 p.m. and reached the bottom of our hill, the male hawk appeared and spent a leisurely twenty minutes hunting. This, after the bird had been appearing daily that week at almost exactly the same time, 4:30 p.m.)

As many of the species in the Erskine Key to Lichens have been reclassified, a list of the new names has been prepared and is available from the secretary.



From Dec. 1978 issue of Conservation, a publication of the Nova Scotia Dept. of Lands and Forests.

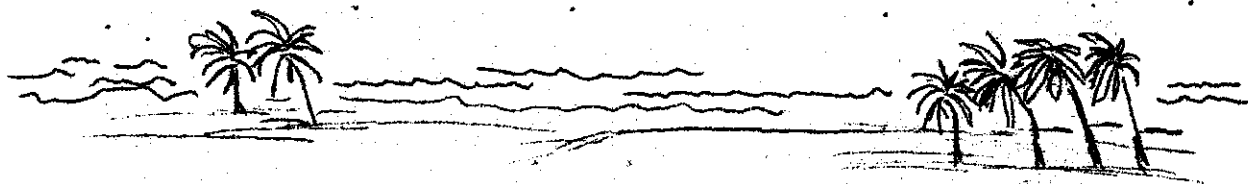
"If I find a dead hawk or owl in good shape, may I keep it and have it mounted by a taxidermist?"

Hawks and owls are protected by provincial law in Nova Scotia. All "salvaged" specimens of hawks and owls must be submitted first to the Department of Lands & Forests. If the bird has not been shot or otherwise illegally taken, and is not required by the Department for special study, etc., you may then apply for permission to have the specimen mounted for display purposes. Such permission in writing must accompany the specimen when you take it to the taxidermist for preparation; otherwise it is against regulations for him to mount the bird.

The autumn of 1982 marks two anniversaries in man's venture into space: it is 25 years since Sputnik 1 astounded the world, and 10 years since the end of the Apollo voyages to the Moon. Without the first, the second would not have occurred, and without the second the technological momentum that spawned the Mariners, Pioneers, Vikings, Voyageurs, and Space Shuttle would have been much slower to develop. The Apollo program was born of international rivalry and presented to the world as a symbol of American vitality and technology. The program came to maturity during the social turmoil of the late 1960's, a turmoil that was accompanied by changing priorities which, in turn, brought the Apollo venture to an early end. Yet despite those circumstances, Apollo captured the spirit of man as no other venture had done before, nor ever can again.

As an undergraduate engineer I recall vividly a clear October evening when Sputnik 1 was announced. Fifteen years later I stood with my son beneath palm trees and saw night transformed into day by the departure of Apollo 17.

Apollo 17 was unique in several respects. Nothing to equal the mass of that rocket has been launched before or since. Together with Skylab, it represented the end of "no deposit'no return" rocketry hardware in the American manned space program. It is unlikely that ever again will such a formidable machine be hurled from Earth's surface for but one flight. As the last manned flight to another world, and most likely the last such flight in this century, it marked the end of an era. When manned flights to the Moon and beyond are resumed, probably never again will they rise from Earth's surface as spaceships complete in themselves. And as the only nighttime launch of the Saturn V rocket, Apollo 17 was awesome.



Aside from the launch itself, other aspects of that warm Florida night a decade ago remain with me. Our viewing site was on the banks of the Indian River, directly west of the launch complex. Despite an estimated half million observers in the area, there was nothing but a wide expanse of water in front of us. During the hours of waiting, pelicans, ducks, and egrets occasionally flew by, and once the dorsal fins of a school of dolphins broke the water's surface between us and the moonship.

Apollo 17 cont'd

As day departed, the white Saturn rocket dominated the scene with blue-white beams of searchlights fanning out past it up into the moist night sky. During the evening, a large, distant electrical storm slowly moved out of the north-east to take up a position over the Atlantic behind the glowing rocket. Pinkish-orange flashes played through the complex clouds and occasionally a bolt of lightning connected to the water below. With distance reddening its colors and silencing its thunder, the storm resembled a scene from an old painting, and was reminiscent of the conditions that must have been responsible for the earliest beginnings of life on Earth. It made a fitting backdrop for the evolutionary step occurring that night.

All that long, warm afternoon there had been a few aircraft in sight, but as the mid-evening launch time approached, the lights of planes and helicopters became more numerous. In the final minutes several dozen were all over the sky, some with brilliant searchlights, no doubt to be available in the event the flight had to be aborted in its early phases. Even from our remote site, the amount of hardware amassed to support the launch was impressive. Then came a hold at the 30 second point. As the minutes passed the activity in the sky subsided together with the emotions of the multitudes in the dark below.

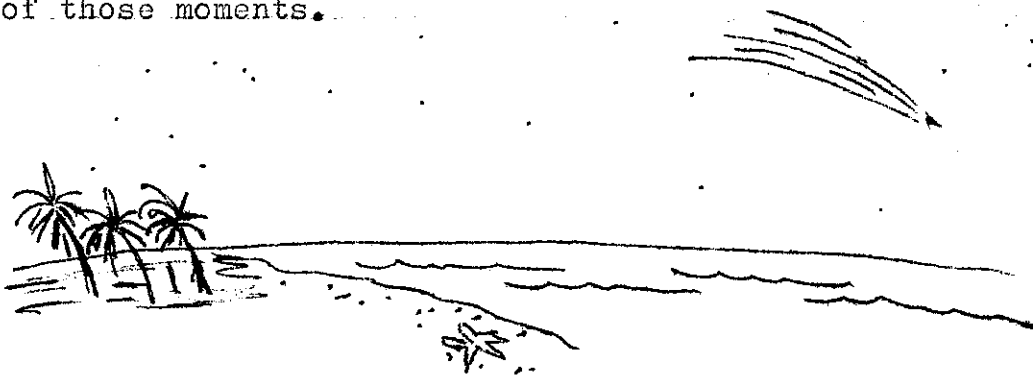
Toward midnight the sky was clearer. High in the east between the horns of Taurus, the planet Saturn shone down on its namesake, the floodlit Saturn V. As the new launch time of 33 minutes into December 7 approached, the activity in the sky increased once again.

The first evidence that the rocket was alive was a sudden orange glow around its base. A few seconds later, and to my great relief, a brilliant, searing, yellow-orange light appeared directly under the rocket. Apollo 17 was rising on a pillar of flame and the gamble I had taken in travelling so far had paid off. The flame from the first stage engines seemed to have the brilliance of the surface of the Sun. But it was not a white Sun, it was the yellow of burning kerosene, the fuel of the first stage and color of lamps of a century ago. The glare and rays of the floodlights which had dominated the night up to that point were utterly lost in the radiance of that flame, and for miles around night turned into dawn as a strange apparition rose in the east. Even the gigantic white rocket was lost in the dark above its own exhaust.

A Saturn V does not leap into the sky like a smaller rocket or the Space Shuttle. Several seconds passed before it rose its own length and cleared the launch tower. However, gulping 13 tonnes of kerosene and liquid oxygen every second, the rocket's mass fell away and the fire beneath drove it with an increasing acceleration up into the stars above.

Apollo 17 cont'd

Suddenly a low rumble began and quickly grew to a powerful, chest-shaking thunder. In the wonder of following that ascending flame, now high in the sky, I had totally overlooked the silence of the first minute of the launch. Approximately one percent of the 180 million horsepower of a Saturn V is converted into sound, and now that thundering herd had traversed the 19 kilometres of marsh and water separating us from the launch pad. Soon the pounding roar was joined by the sound of sharp explosions, likely due to the supersonic whipping of the lower end of the flame once it had cleared the launch pad. With the entire coastal region reverberating to this staccato thunder, the loudest sustained sound ever produced by man, it was difficult to think coherently. The fact that three men were riding that flaming machine to another world only compounded the emotional impact of those moments.



As the second minute of the flight passed, the level of both the light and sound dropped rapidly. Soon the yellow flame was but a brilliant point. Then, suddenly it vanished, leaving only the twinkling stars and Saturn itself in the dark above. A few seconds later a bright, blue-white star appeared, like Venus only brighter, as the hydrogen-burning second stage ignited. Over the next few minutes this star dimmed, and dropped toward the horizon as the moonship headed eastward out across the Atlantic toward Africa. Seven minutes after launch it disappeared behind a low cloud bank just to the right of the steaming launch tower. I then turned back to earthly matters and spent the rest of the night coping with a massive traffic jam.

Apollo carried with it the emotions of many people, emotions related to the romance and challenge of the unknown, of space, of a rocket of unprecedented power, of the age-old classic adventure of a lunar voyage, and of the first vision of Earth as a small, turquoise sphere, alone in the black silence. It may well be that the most valuable gift of Apollo was the latter, and the perspective it provided of man and his home. Today as financial support for science and space steadily falls, as funds for weapons to vaporize one another continually increase, we are in danger of losing far more than the spirit symbolized by Apollo.

If man survives himself, long after today's headlines have vanished into the mists of time, our era will be remembered as the one in which man first ventured beyond Earth. To those who would still question Apollo, the best answer I have yet heard was given by Gordon Donaldson, a CBC news commentator during those years. He put it this way: "It's the sort of situation that if you need to ask, you'll never understand the answer".