

Extra



BOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 10 No. 1

March, 1983

The BNS Newsletter is published on the equinoxes and solstices.

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ART AND
PRODUCTION: Larry Bogan

The primary objective of the Society shall be to encourage and develop in its members an understanding and appreciation of nature. For the purpose 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

Come one, come all, and please bring friends along!!!

1. Sunday, July 17 - SUMMER BIRDING -
Richard Stern will lead us around the Kentville area to see what we can see in the way of birds and any other interesting bits of nature. Meet at the Acadia University Gym Parking Lot at 8:30 a.m. or the Cornwallis Inn Parking Lot, Kentville at 8:45 a.m.
2. Saturday, July 30 - SALT MARSH ECOLOGY - Sherman Bleakney will lead a trip to the Kingsport salt marshes to introduce us to the flora and fauna of such an ecosystem. Dr. Bleakney plans to bring microscopes in order to examine the more minute life. It is muddy and wet so plan to wear old sneakers or boots, and sometimes fly dope is a very real necessity, especially if the wind isn't blowing! Meet at the Acadia Gym Parking Lot at 9:00 a.m.
3. Saturday, August 6 - SHORE BIRDS
Led by Richard Stern or Jim Wolford. This trip will focus on the large numbers of Semi-palmated Sandpipers which rest and feed on the mud flats of Minas Basin before leaving for Suriname for our fall and winter months. A

few other shore birds may be seen at this time but not in large numbers. Meet at the Acadia Gym Parking Lot at 10 a.m. or the Grand Pre' Parking Lot at 10:30 a.m. This trip will probably extend into the afternoon so a lunch should be brought along.

4. August 10 (Wednesday) [or August 11 (Thursday) if Wed. is not clear] - STAR GAZING AND ASTRONOMY

Larry Bogan will point out the constellations, and other celestial objects. Jupiter, and Saturn will be observed in telescopes. If you have binoculars, bring them. Dress warmly. Meet at the Wolfville Ridge Park at the top of Highland Avenue at 9:30 P.M. ADT. Observing session will occur only if there are clear skies. L. Bogan 678-0446

5. September 18, Sunday. SHORE BIRDS- Led by Jim Wolford in conjunction with the Nova Scotia Bird Society. This trip will return us to the Evangeline Beach area to view a greater diversity of migratory shore birds. Meet at the Acadia Gym Parking Lot at 10 a.m. or the Grand Pre' Parking Lot at 10:30 a.m. This trip will probably extend into the afternoon so a lunch should be brought along.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all those generous people who have been willing to give so freely of their time and knowledge spring bouquets of thanks from all of us who have so greatly enjoyed your evening presentations (Ian Manning, Barry Moody and Barry Sabeau); delightful field trips (Bernie Forsythe, Jim Wolford, the Chignecto Naturalists and especially Gay Hansen, and Ruth and Reg Newell who led a sizeable and enthusiastic group out to Cape Split; scrumptious refreshments after evening 'dos' provided by Rachel Erskine; and all those who contribute to this Newsletter in one way or another.

BNS NEWSLETTER DEADLINE * July 21 *

Sorry to be behind our usual deadline, but we nevertheless need your help - articles - observations - don't forget the unusual events you may have observed in nature sometime in the past. We aren't, unfortunately, having an overwhelming response to this contest. Poetry? And in the worst way we need another co-editor to cajole, prod, remind, organize or even give a great big PUSH to get me back on my deadlines!

REPORTS ON FIELD TRIPS

March 5, 1983 - WINTER WALK

On this day a snowshoeing/skiing expedition was scheduled for the Cambridge area, but for various reasons it turned out to be a rather pleasant walk in the snow. Seven of us were on hand, and Bernard Forsythe and Merritt Gibson decided to show us a spot near Greenfield.

We stopped first at Cyril Coldwell's farm at Gaspereau, where we saw 5 eagles and various small birds, including a vesper sparrow which had wandered into Cyril's back-yard trap, so that we all had a close look at its features. (It was banded by Cyril and released).

Then near Greenfield we walked on a wooded path for perhaps a mile. We encountered one party of skiers, but otherwise it was mostly very quiet on this bright winter day. Along the way we saw lots of tracks of snowshoe hares (very aptly named) plus those of squirrels and a grouse. Birds were not abundant, but highlights were at least 3 white-winged crossbills (one was singing) and 6 red-breasted nuthatches. The red spruces held heavy crops of cones at their tops, and this undoubtedly had attracted the crossbills. Also seen or heard were red-tailed hawk, raven, boreal chickadee, black-capped chickadee, and probably a brown creeper.

Later at Lumsden Reservoir we saw 3 common mergansers and 3 common goldeneyes.

Jim Wolford, Wolfville

April 19, 1983 - OWL LISTENING TRIP

Mid-afternoon was quite windy; however by suppertime it had died down. That was when the rain started. As rain doesn't affect sound as much as wind, the 15 or more of us who met at 6:30 p.m. decided to try our listening trip even though it would be necessary to stand around in raincoats.

This season I had not located any Horned, Saw-whet, or Short-eared Owls. Barred Owls were a different story. After taking last nesting season off, by mid-April this year 6 of my Barred Owl nest boxes held eggs, so I felt confident that we would be able to at least get some response from this species. To add a little variety we would also try for Woodcock and Snipe.

Just before dark found us beside an alder tangle on the road to Black River Lake. After a short wait some of us could hear the "peent" made by a Woodcock on the ground. Soon one was in the air giving its flight song over our heads. Its twitter changed to more of warble sound as it dropped to the ground next to us to begin the "peent" again. In a wetter area down the road a Snipe could be heard giving its ground song, a sharp series of chips. Then it too was in the air performing its winnowing sound often heard over swamps and wet pastures at this time of year.

Next we stopped at Peck Meadow in the hope that Jim Wolford would be able to point out different frog voices to us, but spring peepers were the only ones performing. It was now time to try for Barred Owls, so we drove back to one of my nest sites at Newtonville. After a hike down a dark soggy woodroad, we were close to the nest box, and I tried my Barred Owl imitation. The male answered and was soon joined by the female, and they gave us a nice series of hoots, cackles, and laughs with me joining in also. Then it was quiet, and we saw a dark form coming our way, landing on the bare branches of a hardwood tree beside us. With the aid of a flashlight we all got a good look at a Barred Owl very anxious about our intrusion into its territory. It was time to end what started out as a doubtful trip and ended up as perhaps one of our best night bird trips.

Bernard Forsythe,
Wolfville

April 24, 1983 - N.S. BIRD SOCIETY OUTING WITH BNS

Luck was with us weather-wise on this beautiful spring day; it was so nice that anything we happened to see was just a bonus! About 30 people from the Bird Society as well as the Blomidon Naturalists' Society formed a caravan of 10 cars and a motorcycle. Perhaps a good omen was a sharp-shinned hawk that we all viewed well before we even started.

Most of the morning was spent in going from pond to river to pond, looking mainly for waterfowl -- seen were 4 pairs of shovelers, 2 pairs of blue-winged teal, plus Canada geese, mallards, black ducks, green-winged teal, and ring-necked ducks. Others of note were 2 greater yellowlegs, 2 tree swallows, a flicker, and 4 kestrels (2 were seen mating by the front cars of the caravan).

We had a lunch-break in Canning, where the hospitality and chowder and assorted other goodies from Merritt and Wilma Gibson were warmly enjoyed by all. One of our highlights came later in the Gibsons' enormous back yard, when we all wanted to see a promised mockingbird. Fulton Lavender knew just where it was, so, while we all lined up along a fence to wait, he dashed around the brambles and nicely flushed the bird into view for the whole gang! (just like one of those Indian tiger-hunts).

Then we went to Cyril Coldwell's farm at Gaspereau. After we looked at his menagerie of caged birds (ravens, horned and barred owls, red-tailed and rough-legged hawks, and bald eagles), he and Bernard Forsythe took us to two nest-boxes of barred owls containing one cold egg and 3 eggs, respectively. The latter was attended by a female, and we all saw her well. There was also a nest of a red-tailed hawk. At the hawk nest we witnessed a weird spectacle: try to imagine Bernard at the top of a 35-foot spruce, under the hawk nest, hanging on to the tree with one hand, and with the other trying to position a long-handled convex mirror so that the contents

of the nest could be seen with binoculars from below! The verdict was that there was one egg and probably one very recently hatched youngster. This year at least two pairs of red-tails were unusually early, with eggs at the end of March.

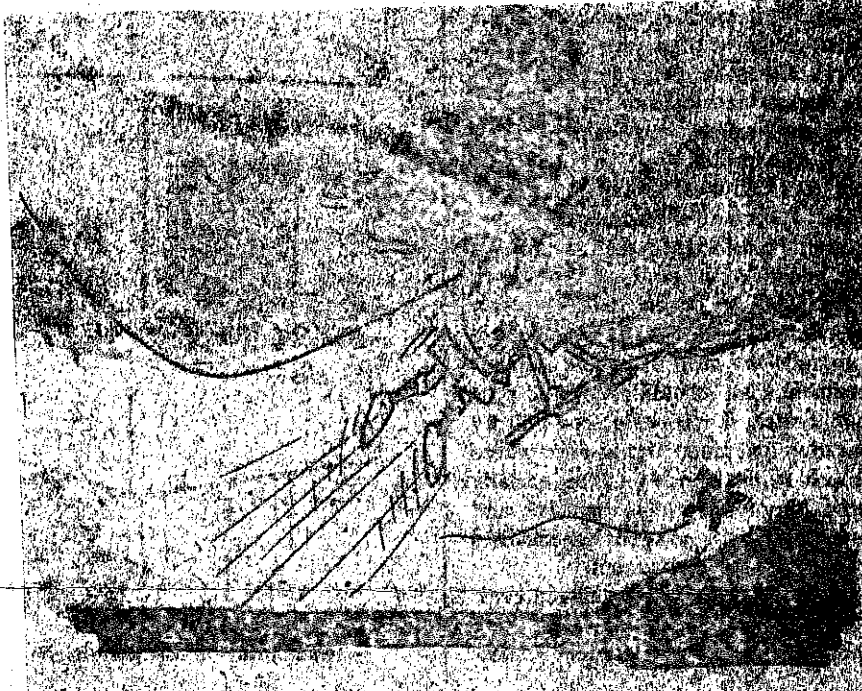
A few of us ended the day by going to Grand Pre and looking across "The Guzzle" to Boot Island, where we could see several double-crested cormorants in their nesting trees, and we also saw 5 great blue herons plus hundreds of territorial gulls on the grassy parts of the island. Cyril predicts that the black-backs are on eggs now but the herring gulls will not have laid theirs yet.

Jim Wolford, Wolfville

April 25, 1983 -- FIRST FIELD TRIP FOR AMPHIBIANS

This was a perfect day for amphibian activity ---overcast, warm and intermittently rainy all day long, with a couple of brief torrential downpours in late afternoon. On the Acadia campus the pavement and lawns were literally crawling with earthworms. Why do they do this whenever there is rain? Unfortunately for us, the rain stopped in early evening, so that we had only a very occasional light drizzle for our excursion to Gaspereau.

About 10 people in 4 cars visited 3 known breeding sites. At the first pond (permanent, spring-fed) we had some difficulty because the hard rain and wind had stirred up the water, so that visibility was poor. But still we saw abundant adult spotted salamanders plus lots of their eggs and several year-old larvae which will transform in mid-summer. Also seen were a batch of eggs of a wood frog (one was heard chuckling, also) and assorted aquatic insects (backswimmers, water boatmen, mayfly and dragonfly and damselfly nymphs, and a very large adult diving beetle).



Our second site was a shallow ditch where we saw several spring peepers, but their chorus wasn't strong enough to make them oblivious to our presence; therefore very few of us saw them in the act of calling. I can't resist repeating my frequent advertisement that it's best to visit your favorite site during a rain. Then the frogs will be singing so hard that they seem to be unaware of everything but themselves (just like people sometimes!). We also saw spotted salamanders and a wood frog and eggs of both, and distantly we could hear toads trilling; these were the first I've heard this year.

At the third pond, first we found a toad on the road (poetry?) and Bernard had picked up another toad on our drive to the first pond. Again we had the problem of zero visibility in the turbid water, but there were two leopard frogs and a few peepers seen. A few sweeps with a dip-net yielded a nine-spined stickleback, leeches, flatworms (planarians), lots of snails (3 kinds), water striders, backswimmers, water boatmen, assorted aquatic beetles, 2 kinds of caddisfly larvae in cases, and a pretty orange water mite. Also overhead we heard a winnowing snipe.

Jim Wolford, Wolfville

April 30, 1983 - AMHERST POINT BIRD SANCTUARY

We were kindly invited by the Chignecto Field Naturalists to visit the Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary, and the surrounding area, on Saturday, April 30. A sizeable Blomidon contingent drove up, some staying locally on Friday night at one of the hotels in the area. We were met by about a dozen Chignecto naturalists at the entrance to the sanctuary on the Saturday morning, with Gaye Hansen leading the trip.

We spent most of the day walking around the sanctuary, initially down from the road to the impoundments, and later, after a picnic lunch, drove round to the other side and walked along the dykes.

On the way, in the morning, about 1,000 Canada Geese were seen feeding on the John Lusby Marsh, and as we walked down into the sanctuary, Song Sparrows, Flickers, and Black Duck, plus several Northern Harriers were in evidence. There were Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers singing - for many, the first evidence of the new summer. Down on the impoundments there were Pied-billed Grebes calling (a little like a loon's cry), and many Blue-winged Teal and Ring-necked Duck. Jim Wolford spotted a Redhead, for some people the birding highlight of the day, and an American Bittern flew past, as did an Osprey.

A picnic lunch was interrupted by the sight of crows diving at "something" on the ground, but despite (or ? because of) the entire party rushing over to investigate, no owls or other suitable wildlife was seen.

After lunch, by walking along the dyke on the seaward side of the sanctuary, we saw thousands of Three Swallows, and 3 Barn Swallows (again, the first of the summer for most people), as well as American Coots, Pintail, Gadwall, American Wigeon, and more Ring-necked Duck. Two Greater Yellowlegs flew by, and there were lots of Red-winged Blackbirds chattering away.

Unfortunately, the day was dull, and by 3 p.m. it looked as if heavy rain had set in for the rest of the day. We were planning to go onto the Lusby Marsh, but the party then broke up. Finally, the Thextons and Merritt Gibson saw a Cattle Egret beside the road near Kennetcook on the way home.

Many thanks to the Chignecto group for having us up there, and to Gaye Hansen for leading the trip. Hopefully this can be a regular occurrence.

Richard Stern, Kentville

April 30, 1983 - AMHERST POINT BIRD SANCTUARY (We can enjoy two points of view about Amherst, because Jim forgot he'd asked Richard to write up this trip!)

Twelve of us from the BNS were hosted by Gay Hansen and several other members of the Chignecto Naturalists. The day was overcast and fairly warm with occasional light drizzle. We made two short walks in the sanctuary, looking mainly for waterfowl on the various ponds and impoundments. Observed were a few Canadian geese plus nine species of ducks; notable among the latter were pintails, wigeons, gadwalls, and a redhead. Also on the water were several coots and good numbers of pied-billed Grebes, whose haunting calls were very "atmospheric" (at least to me). Other highlights included a flock of 150 tree swallows with at least 3 early barn swallows, and several myrtle warblers singing and snapping up the very abundant midges in the air. They didn't even have to fly to catch them!

En route to and from Amherst, various people saw a cattle egret, rusty blackbirds, woodchucks, a porcupine, a pileated woodpecker, loons, etc. And one car (mine) even managed to get lost on the way back!

Jim Wolford, Wolfville

For next year (?) I suggest a slightly later date, just for better birding diversity - competition for other field trips?

The Canadian Nature Federation meeting August 11 - 14 in Sackville, N.B. is also a good excuse to get all of us up to the Amherst area.

BIRDING IN THE LAWRENCETOWN BEACH AREA, Halifax County, Bill Thexton
Wolfville

It has been many years since Brenda and I visited the Lawrencetown beach area. We remembered fishing there for Harbour Pollack with the children some twenty years ago. We also seemed to remember seeing a fair number of shore birds there as well. Why not an early spring visit, combined with a look at Sullivan's Pond in Dartmouth, reported to contain all sorts of rare ducks and other sea fowl?

Saturday morning, March 19, found us accompanied by Jean Timpa, on the road to Dartmouth. We soon located Sullivan's Pond and, unlike most of the other lakes in the area, found it ice-free and teeming with waterfowl. There must have been several hundred Black Duck there on that chilly morning, a number of pairs of Mallard, and three Green-winged Teal, the drakes in their beautiful spring plumage. There were also a sprinkling of Canada and domestic geese, and a Mute Swan. Several hundred gulls of various shapes and sizes, in both adult and immature plumage eyed us hungrily from the perimeter of the pond. One immature Glaucous Gull that was being fed bread by some children looked almost as big as a goose. These birds are apparently fed by the people of Dartmouth all through the winter.

We then proceeded to the Lawrencetown beach area which is a succession of wind swept beaches and sand dunes, both saltwater and freshwater marshes, lakes, and fishing harbours. We soon noted a small flock of Red-breasted Mergansers in an ice-free section of a fairly large lake off to the left. An elderly gentleman who was cutting wood nearby confirmed our identification and told us that a flock of fifteen hundred geese had passed over the lake flying north on the previous day. While watching these ducks, we saw three more flying in to join the flock. Suddenly a large blue-grey hawk came sweeping out from a nearby wooded island to intercept them. The mergansers were too fast, however, and the disappointed Goshawk returned to the woods.

In a nearby inlet we spotted a small, tern-like gull which was being harrassed by a group of Crows as it twisted and turned to get away from them. A quick look at our field guides seemed to indicate either a Bonapartes or Black-headed Gull in winter plumage. The long wedge of white on the fore edge of the wing was particularly noticeable.

While having lunch in the car near a small fishing village, we watched a group of four Bufflehead, one of the prettiest of the diving ducks, fishing nearby in the bay. A Great Black-backed Gull that was drifting overhead suddenly swooped down and, much to our surprise, attacked one of the Bufflehead. The ducks all dived and to our delight and the gull's chagrin, the attack was unsuccessful. These big gulls must however take their toll of the smaller wintering waterfowl when other food is scarce.

After watching a Merlin heading north across the next bay, we headed for home, quite determined to visit this interesting area again later in the spring. This we did on Saturday, April 16.

The lakes this time were ice-free and the weather pleasant but still cool. We noted several pairs of Ring-necked Duck on the small lake on the right of Highway 101 just before reaching the turnoff to Sackville. The Ring-necks apparently breed on this lake as there are usually a number of broods visible from the road during the summer months.

On our arrival in the Lawrencetown beach area we noted our first Osprey tangling with a small group of crows over some nearby wood. A little further along, a pair of Osprey were busy re-establishing their rights to a nesting site. One appeared to be standing defiantly on an old nest, while it's mate was driving off some bothersome crows. Half a mile further on, a fourth Osprey was seen.

This time the sea was full of bird life. We saw flocks of Bufflehead, Common Loon, Red-necked Grebe, and Red-breasted Merganser in some of the bays. Further out off a headland, was a large flock of Scoter, variety unknown. Further out still were other waterfowl, too far away to identify with our binoculars.

On the lakes on the inland side of the road, pairs of Black Duck were common. We also saw small flocks of Common Goldeneye, more Bufflehead, Great Blue Heron, and Green-winged Teal.

MEMBERS' WRITINGS

A FISH STORY, UNUSUAL, BUT TRUE, Doris Rolph, Hantsport, N.S.
April 25, 1973

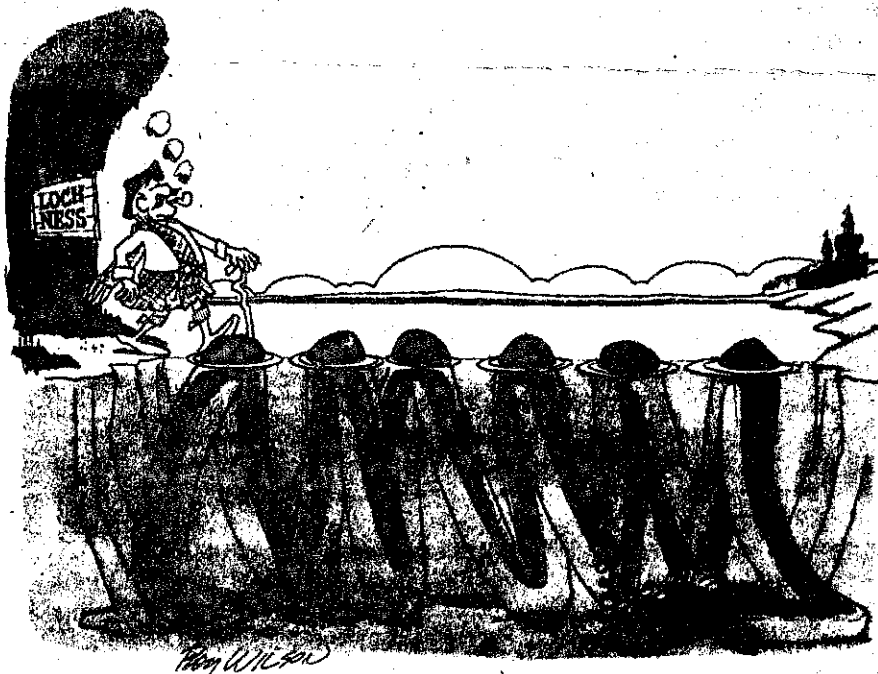
The most exciting thing happened to me this morning. Winnie, my sister, had noticed a very large trout in the intake stream of pond two recently. It is one that was in the pond last year which we used to fee. I went to the place that she had seen the trout and, sure enough, there he was, lying in the middle of the little brook with the tip of his dorsal fin and the tip of his tail above the water. I stood looking at him for some minutes; then leaned over, with my face within three feet above him and tried talking to him softly. "Hello, little fishie, hello little fishie," I said, over and over again, all the time bending down closer. He did not 'turn a fin'; so then I knelt down and put my fingers in the water about ten inches from him and gradually reached my hand closer and closer (all the while talking to him) until, at last, I was stroking his side, lightly. He just seemed to love it.

I then came back to the house, got some dog food from the can in the refrigerator and my steel tape measure, and went back. I found the trout still in the same position. I enticed him until he would eat right out of my fingers, in between times stroking his sides lightly. Then I pulled out a section of my tape measure, and he allowed me to lay it along his side and measure him. He was 15 inches, from the tip of his nose to the end of his tail.

Next I put the end of the tape measure in the water in front of his nose and moved it when he came after it, until I had him chasing it round and round the little pool as a kitten would chase a string pulled in front of its nose.

I forgot to measure the trout's thickness, but will do that the next time I am over there. He is huge. Winnie calls him "LURKER", as he sometimes goes under the overhang of the bank of the stream and peers out.

For a number of days I went over to the pond where the little stream entered, and where the trout lurked, throwing fish food pellets in the water. When the trout was enticed from his hiding place, he would let me stroke his sides and then swim out into the pond, as though leaving, but would come back several times before swimming off into the pond and disappearing. A few times he even allowed me to pick him out of the water for a couple of inches and seemed to enjoy the experience. Then the water that was in the little stream became too low for him to swim in it, and I found other interests and stopped going over to the pond. That is another story.



May 2, 1983 - 2ND FIELD TRIP FOR AMPHIBIANS

This day's weather was nearly identical to last week's, i.e. drizzle and light rain all day and then a humid but otherwise dry evening.

Five veterans of frogging trips plus three "rookies" convened at the gym. Just for something a bit different, first we visited an Acadia campus softball field. There with our flashlights we saw dozens of large "nightcrawlers" (earthworms) out on the soil surface. Keeping their hind ends anchored in their burrows, they forage in this way every night, sometimes extending their entire impressive lengths. When disturbed, they retract themselves very quickly out of sight.

Then we drove to Gaspereau, to a shallow roadside ditch near the White Rock power plant. There we heard and saw several American toads, one leopard frog, and lots of spring peepers. The peepers were not very cooperative, but their abundance and our perseverance resulted in everyone being able to watch them in the act of calling (sides heaving and throat-sacs pulsating). The toads' activity was minimal, but we were able to compare the small males with a big swollen female and to see a couple of males trilling. In the ditch were several strings of fresh toad eggs. Also we saw one spotted salamander and a large batch of nearly hatching frog eggs (leopard frog?).

Finally we visited the permanent spring-fed pond to the west, where we saw numerous spotted salamanders, oodles of batches of their eggs, including some fresh ones, and many year-old larvae. There were also a few year-old tadpoles (pollywogs) of green frogs (some very large, others much smaller), one calling wood frog, and numerous calling spring peepers plus a pair of peepers in amplexus.

Special thanks for sharp eyes go to Sean Timpa, who found the female toad, the wood frog, and the paired peepers for us.

Jim Wolford, Wolfville



"Could I interest you in a dissertation on the numerous benefits the beaver has brought to the environment?"

May 15, 1983 - CAPE SPLIT

We phoned all members about this hike, and our turn-out was pretty good, about 25-30 people. Reg and Ruth Newell were our leaders, and the day was nice and cool for the walk; however, at the Cape's tip the view was obscured by fog, which lifted as we left after lunch for those of us who weren't in a hurry.

We knew that a major attraction would be the spring flowers. I made notes on 15 different kinds seen, but stealing the show were the zillions of spring beauties, aptly named, on close inspection. In fact, we saw several photographers that were admiring them on our way. There were lesser amounts of red trilliums and the dainty Dutchman's breeches. Ostrich-fern fiddleheads were surprisingly about knee-high.

The birding was not especially good, but Bernard Forsythe and I managed a list of about 42 species. We saw occasional waves of migrating birds, solitary vireos and white-throated sparrows being especially abundant. Among the latter we were surprised to see at least 2 late fox sparrows, normally gone from us after mid-April. Other notable sightings were a male pine grosbeak and about a dozen purple sandpipers. And I had at least 9 species of warblers.

Signs of browsing by deer and snowshoe hares were abundant. But the mammalian highlight was the flushing of a flying squirrel out of a cavity in a stump along the path. She (?) had no young yet in her grassy nest, but hopefully she wasn't unduly disturbed by us and by now has some youngsters either there or in some other hiding place.

Jim Wolford, Wolfville

During a leisurely lunch in the car, a noisy flock of American Goldfinch kept us entertained as they worked their way through some bushes on either side of the road.

After lunch we drove on and came to a salt marsh on the right hand side of the road. There seemed to be many ducks in the brackish ponds, most of them just out of binocular range. Suddenly Jean noticed a group of Green-winged Teal in a small pond quite close to the car. They turned out to be three drakes busily courting a female. I think we all noticed at about the same time that one of the drakes was different. It had a very noticeable longitudinal white stripe running along the top of the wings. Petersons and the Golden Guide were hastily consulted. There was no doubt about it: this particular drake was a Eurasian Green-winged Teal!

We drove home happy and contented. What did it matter, as we later found out, that other keen birders had already spotted our Eurasian Teal?

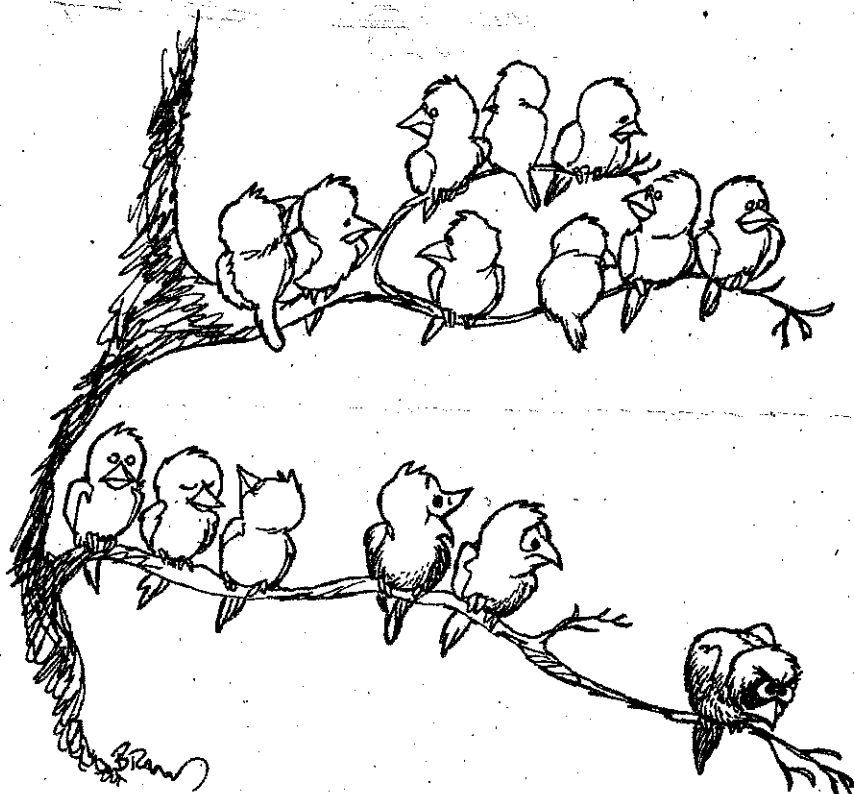
We all heartily recommend an early spring visit to Sullivan's Pond and the Lawrencetown beach area. It is only a little over an hour away by car, and who knows what one will see in the way of bird life along this interesting and attractive shoreline?

B L O M I D O N N A T U R A L I S T S S O C I E T Y M E M B E R S H I P ! ! !

If you are interested in membership in our Society or a copy of this Newsletter, please write to our treasurer:

Dr. Norman McGuinness
% School of Business
Acadia University
Wolfville, Nova Scotia
BOP 1X0

Or call Norman at 542-2201, Ext. 425.



"Our reclassification as a mere subspecies has been a terrible blow to his macho."