

# BLOMIDON NATURALISTS' SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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DECEMBER 1984



The BNS Newsletter is published on equinoxes and solstices.

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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 purpose of the Society, the word 'nature' will be interpreted broadly and shall include the rocks, plants, animals, water, air and stars."

from the BNS Constitution

## NEW FORMAT FOR THE NEWSLETTER

You will notice that the News letter is no longer 8-1/2 by 14 inches but has been folded in half to form a booklet or magazine shape. This, we hope will make it easier to handle and read. The printing, you may notice, is sharper and clearer. The printing was done by the print shop at Acadia University and gives us the possibility of including photographs in the Newsletter.

We would like to have your comments on this new format.

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## WINTER AND SPRING PROGRAMS

### EVENING PROGRAMS (Monday Evenings 7:30p.m.):

1. January 21, Rm.244 Beveridge Arts Centre, Acadia University. Don Purchase and John Cohrs will talk and show slides about their trip to Point Pelee National Park during the Spring of 1984.
2. February 18, Rm.244 Beveridge Arts Centre, Acadia U. John Pickwell will tell us about "Cacti". John has been growing these plants for many years and has pictures of these unique plants in their desert habitats.
3. March 18, Rm. 52 in the basement of Huggins Science Hall, Acadia U. Annual Member's Night. Bring your favourite (10 or so) slides, books, collection, etc. and share them with other members.
4. April 15, Rm.244 Beveridge Arts Centre, Acadia U. Scott Cunningham will tell and show us of his visit to Mingan Islands in the Jacque Cartier Passage north of Anticosti Island. This region is so beautiful and unique that it has been proposed as a National Park.

### FIELD TRIPS (Unless otherwise noted, meet at the Acadia University Gym parking lot at the time indicated)

1. Saturday, January 19, 9:00 a.m. or at the Keji Park headquarters at 11:00 a.m. Skiing and Snowshoeing trip to Kejimikujik National Park. We had a fabulous time last year on this trip, let's hope we have good snow conditions again this year. Bring you own lunch and skis , snowshoes, or boots.
2. Saturday, February 2, <sup>9.00am</sup> ~~8:15 a.m.~~ or 8:30a.m. at the Grand Pre' Park lot. Raptors and other Winter birds. In conjunction with the Bird Society, led by Richard Stern.
3. Saturday, March 2, 12:30 p.m., A winter nature walk to look at shrubs and birds, led by Merritt Gibson and Bernard Forsythe.

4. Saturday, April 13, 8:00 p.m. or 8:05 at the Ridge Park in Wolfville. We will look at the winter stars and constellation before they set. Led by Larry Bogan. Wear very warm clothing, boots and hats. If you have binoculars bring them. Telescopes will be provided.

5. Sunday, April 28, 9:45a.m. or 10:00a.m. at the Grand Pre' Park lot. Field Trip for land birds in conjunction with the N.S. Bird Society. Led by Jim Wolford.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks to the following who have contibuted time and talent to make the meetings and field trips of our Society so successful: Herbert Schuurman, Fred Scott, Richard Brown, and Paul Brodie. And for the preparation and presentation of the refreshments at meetings while the rest of us talk and catch up on the latest natural history, we thank Rachel Erskine and Brenda Thexton.

#### BLOMIDON NATURALISTS' EXECUTIVE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The BNS annual general meeting was held during the October evening meeting. The existing executive was re-elected for another year and two new board members were selected. The executive and board are:

President:	Richard Stern-----	Kentville	678-1975
Vice-president	Merritt Gibson----	Canning	582-7569
Treasurer	Norman McGuinness-	Wolfville	542-7235
Secretary	Bill Thexton-----	Wolfville	542-3722
Past president	Peter Austin-Smith	Wolfville	542-2109
Directors:			
	Jean Timpa-----	Wolfville	542-5678
	Bernard Forsythe--	Wolfville	542-2427
	Tom Herman-----	Pt. Williams	542-7607
	Jim Wolford-----	Wolfville	542-7650
	Larry Bogan-----	Cambridge	678-0446

We welcome contacts with members giving ideas for programmes, field trips, and other suggestions about the BNS. Please don't be afraid to volunteer for a talk or to lead a field trip.

FINANCIAL REPORT OF THE BNS

Norman McGuinness,  
Treasurer

Income and Expenditures:  
Sept. 1 - Aug. 31, 1984

INCOME:

Memberships	\$ 645.00
Bank Interest	<u>7.66</u>
total income	\$ 652.66

EXPENSES:

Bank service charges	\$ 3.12
Coffee, etc.	37.00
Newsletter	435.49
Speaker Expenses	100.00
Rebate dues overpayment	<u>1.00</u>
total expenses	\$ 576.61

Excess of Income over Expenses \$ 76.05

Statement of Financial Position- August 31, 1984

ASSETS:

Cash	\$ 357.24
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LIABILITIES:

None	000.00
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SOCIETIES EQUITY:

Balance- Sept. 1, 1984	\$ 281.19
Add: Excess of Income over Expenses	<u>76.05</u>
Total Assets	\$ 357.24

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE - MARCH 21

Do you have any favorite areas of natural history you would like to write about. Jot it down and send it to us. Our readers are eager to hear what the rest of the Society sees, hears, and does. Your contributions are necessary for our Newsletter. Send it to: Jean Timpa, P.O. Box 1382, Wolfville, N.S., B0P 1X0

BLOMIDON NATURALISTS' SOCIETY ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

Membership dues are still only \$5 per person (only \$1 for persons 16 years old or younger) and are due for 1985. If you do not pay them by the next newsletter you will not receive the March issue.

Send or give your dues to:

Dr. Norman McGuinness  
c/o School of Business  
Acadia University  
Wolfville, N.S. BCP 1G0

See him at the January meeting or give it to some other member of the BNS executive.

REPORT ON "THE NATURAL HISTORY OF KINGS COUNTY"

by Larry Bogan  
Chairman  
Editorial Committee

Some members of the B.N.S. may not realize that the Society is working on a book to describe the natural history of our area. The book has been in progress since the summer of 1980 when the Society obtained its first student employment grant to do the initial research necessary. The next year another grant enabled us to put together a team of student authors and an artist to produce the first draft of the book. The grants were supervised by Roy Bishop and then-president Peter Austin-Smith. They were also part of the B.N.S. editorial committee to oversee production and guide policy.

When the draft was finished, the committee began to rewrite the text to produce a smooth-reading, consistent, and accurate natural history. Many additional resource people (B.N.S. and non-B.N.S.) have contributed.

This year, I was asked to head the committee and continue the effort. We met almost weekly throughout the summer and carefully rewrote several chapters. This years committee consists of Roy Bishop, Sherman Bleakney, Merritt Gibson, Peter Austin-Smith, Jim Wolford and myself. George Steven has rewritten the Geology section for us.

Below is the table of contents of the manuscript with notes of status.

## Natural History of Kings Co.

### I. Introduction

### II. Geography

- A. Physiography (done)
- B. Geology (to be modified)
- C. Climate (done)
- D. Sky (done)
- E. Tides (done)
- F. Waterways (done)

### III. History

- A. Native Peoples (done)
- B. Acadian History (done)
- C. Planters to the Present (done)

### IV. Flora and Fauna

- A. Bay of Fundy Coastal Area (done)
- B. Minas Basin Coastal Area (done)
- C. Agricultural Lands (to be modified)
- D. Ponds, Bogs, and Fresh Water Marsh (needs rewrite)
- E. Rivers and Lakes (needs rewrite)
- F. Forest Lands (needs rewrite)

### V. Field Trips (all done)

- (1. Methal's Dam Canoe Trip -2. Three Ponds, -3. Kentville Ravine, -4. Kentville Bird Sanctuary, -5. Cape Split, -6. Minerals of the Bay of Fundy, -7. Horton Bluff, -8. Rockville Knotch, -9. Cape Blomidon, -10. Pickett's Wharf, -11. Black Rock, -12. A Bicycle Tour of Kings Co.)

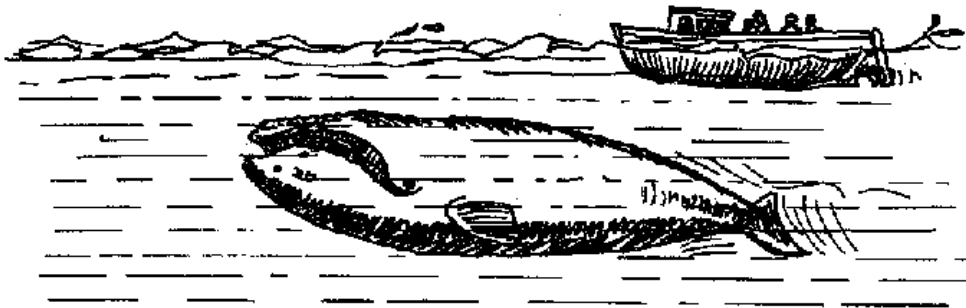
### VI. Index

(with cross references of common and scientific names, still to be compiled)

A series of checklists (trees, birds, mammals, wildflowers, etc.) have been produced in the process of writing and though they will not be included in the book, they are to be copied and made available to anyone who wants them.



## FIELD TRIP REPORTS



### A DAY ON BRIER ISLAND by Richard Stern Kentville, N.S.

On Sunday, September 30th, fifteen members and friends made their way to Brier Island for a boat trip to watch whales and seabirds. Despite the forecast of rain, it was sunny all day, but with fresh N.E. winds. On the way, a Pileated Woodpecker and some soaring Broad-winged Hawks were seen.

At Brier Island, life-jackets and packed lunches were loaded into the good ship "Marlene Dawn" (Squid's Cape Islander) and off we set. As soon as we rounded Northern Point, the combination of N.E. winds, S.W. tides and a large shoal produced what Squid described as "a bit of a swell", which caused pitching and rolling enough to test the hardest stomach (not all passed the test!).

Not too far from land we soon saw Great and Double-crested Cormorants, Surf and Black Scoters and Black (white at this time of the year) Guillemots. About three miles out to sea we came to Batson's Bouy, where Greater Shearwaters sat on the surface, almost close enough to touch and there were Kittiwakes, Bonaparte's Gulls and Gannets. Two Sooty Shearwaters and a Puffin were also seen. Red Phalarope numbers were down, with only a few hundred in the area.

We had two tantalizingly glimpses of a medium-sized whale (or two whales?) and wonderful views at a large school of dolphins, seen swimming close to, under, and around the boat, but despite the competency of the observers, and the presence of field guides, the exact species were not positively identified.



After two and a half hours at sea, we returned to dry land, and were greeted by five Great Blue Herons sitting in the trees near the lighthouse. After offering our many thanks to Squid for the trip, we departed, some of us going down to Pond Cove. There, the combination of sun, wind and sand made it appear more like a poster advertisement for the Caribbean than Nova Scotia in the Fall. Birding had not stopped, and some saw an immature Peregrine Falcon while others saw two Eastern Bluebirds. In addition there were Sharp-shins, Broad-wings, Flickers and Blue Jays all over the place.

All in all it was a very pleasurable day.

#### HAYES CAVE AND BATS

October 21, 1984

by Jim Wolford

Wolfville, N.S.

The day was was bright and clear with gaudy, Fall colours when we met at a small general store in South Maitland, Hants County, to begin this long-awaited outing. Here, some of us noted an interesting hole pattern on the exterior of an adjacent building; apparently it had been riddled by feeding woodpeckers (hairy?).

From here the car caravan drove 5 km. west to the site of the cave in a gypsum cliff on the south side of the Five Mile River. Fred Scott, our leader from the N.S. Museum, provided some detailed maps of the cave and talked a bit about its form, formation and bats.

Fred divided the 32 of us into two equal groups; then each group spent about an hour inside the cave while the other group climbed the gypsum to wander around on top of the cliffs in the rugged karst topography (checking out the large sinkholes, etc.).

The entire cave is about 400 metres long and, the 300 metres or so that we investigated, was very roomy. The muddy and slippery path bordered six ponds that are seasonally connected by a small stream. We began seeing a few isolated bats almost immediately inside the small entrance, but the zone of highest humidity and temperature, which the bats prefer for roosting and hibernating, began perhaps 100 metres from the entrance. In that zone, the hanging bats were everywhere-- they were solitary or in small groups of up to 10.

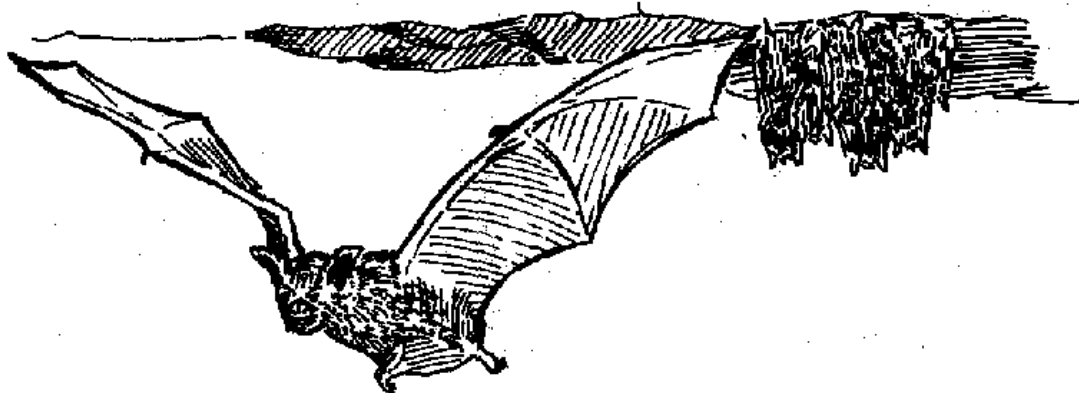
We were told that the bats were not yet hibernating, but the many light and our voices didn't seem to bother them at all. We saw very few individuals flying around, and the only other bat activity observed was mating. Most bats hung from the ceiling of the cave but a few were wedged into crevices in the rocks. Observation of them was, at times, at close range of a few centimeters where the ceiling was only slightly above our heads.

The bats of Hayes Cave a predominately little brown bats (*Myotis lucifugus*), with much smaller numbers of Keen's bat (*M. keeni*). The latter, recognizable by their longer ears, prefer roosting sites closer to the entrances. Another species that has inhabited this cave in the past is the Eastern pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus subfiavus*).

Annual counts by the Nova Scotia Museum staff have shown a wide fluctuation in numbers of hibernating bats in Hayes Cave-- from 4500 to 8200. Fred emphasized that nobody should visit during hibernation (Nov. to May), because any disturbance-caused arousal is so energetically costly that the mortality effects might well be devastating.

We didn't see any other animals in the cave. Fred showed us a fungus that grows on carcasses and droppings of the bats, and he mentioned that the ponds have had, at times, fish in them (red-bellied dace and sticklebacks).

Not too surprisingly, I had the dubious distinction of being the only one to trip and fall in the cave. This resulted in visible but negligible damage to my camera. But, worse still, Fred commented that I am the one he's ever seen to fall! Thanks, Fred, for everything except that remark!



# WILDLIFE REPORTS

## TRIVIAL TIDBITS

of Local Natural History (No.4)

compiled by Jim Wolford

- Early Summer/84-- several specimens of Portuguese man-of-war washed up on beaches of the Eastern Shore (RM, EM).
- mid-July/84-- 3 otters seen closely at East Lawrencetown Marsh (NE of Halifax) (SC).
- late Sept./84-- witch-hazel trees in bloom at Falmouth (BLF) and Wolfville (JW).
- Sept.30-- 2 eastern bluebirds on Brier Island (MT, JW).
- July to October 20-- at seashore cottage near Crescent Beach, daily at dusk, unidentified bats apparently arrive over the water and begin foraging among the pine and spruce trees (SC).
- October-- an oil-soaked gannet found near Yarmouth was treated and fed for 3 days, hopefully successfully (JG).
- Oct.5 to 8-- on Bon Portage Island, 4 house wrens, a blue-winged warbler, a prairie warbler (ME, SF); also 3 peregrine falcons on Tuskey and Bon Portage Islands (MO).
- Oct. 8-- a flock of snow geese at Tobetic Game Sanctuary (adjacent to Kejimikujik Nat. Park) (GB).
- Oct. 13-- a western kingbird and 2 field sparrows on Brier Island (RS).
- Oct. 15-- a robin singing repeatedly in Wolfville (JT) - who wants to compile a list of species that sing in the Fall?
- Oct. 23-- a lone snow goose at Grand Pre' (DT).
- Nov. 2-- a harbour porpoise found beached (dead) at Canard aboideau (NSLF).
- Nov. 4-- off Porter's Point was a very impressive raft of about 2500 black ducks (plus assorted other ducks) (MG)
- Nov. 4,5-- a mockingbird in Kentville (RS); also one was at Starr's Point all summer (BM)
- early Nov.-- lots of white-winged crossbills on Brier Island (RS) (not surprising with our huge cone-crop this year, which is apparently true for all of central and eastern Canada).
- Nov. 10-- THE Digby lesser black-backed gull seen by BBT (this bird(?) has returned every winter since 1970.



- Nov. 12-- a great horned owl very observable in Wolfville (RS et al.).
- Nov. 13-- a bat flying in early morning and at sunset in Wolfville (JSB).
- Nov. 15 to 16-- several black scoters at Kingsport (MG, BLF, JW).
- Nov. 16,17-- a cattle egret at Gaspereau (EG, then seen by others).
- Nov. 17-- a Forster's tern seen closely near Yarmouth (JG et al.).
- Nov. 18 to 20-- at Canard Poultry Pond, a ruddy duck and 4 scaups (BLF, RS); the scaups were probably lesser scaups (JW); also black ducks and green-winged teal were diving, which is apparently normal at Canard Poultry for these usually-surface-feeding species.
- Nov. 18-- at least 6 long-eared owls at their traditional Canard roost; but subsequently only a barred owl was in the same woodlot (BLF).
- Nov. 23-- a shovler at Canard Poultry Pond, and a lone snow goose south of Canning (BBT, JT).
- Nov. 24-- at Canard Poultry, 4 glaucous gulls; at Wolfville sewage ponds, 1 glaucous gull plus 3 Iceland gulls plus a black-headed gull (JW)- latter was still present on Dec.16 (BBT).
- Nov. 25-- a gray-phase gyrfalcon at Grand Pre' (MT, JW); also noted was that this seems to have been a good year for production of berries by Canada holly.
- Nov. 26-- hundreds of winter moths flying actively in Halifax; also a blue-gray gnatcatcher seen there (MG, ES, JW).
- Nov. 28-- a black-throated gray warbler seen in Halifax (RS, seen earlier and later by others).
- Dec. 2 to 5-- a dark-phase gyrfalcon seen at Grand Pre' (MG, ES, JW, RS). coincidentally on Dec.1 BLF had found a site at Grand Pre' where something had been eating 6 or 7 crows.
- Dec. 4-- northern harriers at Grand Pre' (RS); these plus short-eared owls, red-tailed hawks, and rough-legged hawks all show that voles are plentiful in that area- also there are lots of vole signs (BLF, JW).

--Dec. 16-- Wolfville Xmas Bird Count: various observers reported 1 broad-winged hawk (LL), a killdeer, several purple sandpipers, several red-breasted nuthatches, a ruby-crowned kinglet (JSB), two palm warblers (SW), two common yellowthroats (ME, ES), several pine grosbeaks, a few flocks of white-winged crossbills, an Iceland gull (JW), a black-headed gull (BBT), etc. (details to follow in the next newsletter).

--Dec. 18-- Bier Island Xmas Bird Count- two glaucous gulls, 1 black-headed gull, 165 black-legged kittiwakes, a dovekie, 97 unidentified "alcids" (murrelets or razorbills), 48 black guillemots, a northern flicker, about 300 white-winged crossbills (7 observers).

CONTRIBUTORS: Sherman Bleakney (JSB), George Boyd (GB), Shirley Cohrs (SC), Mark Elderkin (ME), Steve Flemming (SF), N.S. Lands and Forests (NSLF), Harold Forsyth (HF), Bernard Forsythe (BLF), Ellis Gertridge (EG), Merritt Gibson (MG), June Graves (JG), Lance Laviolette (LL), Bill Martell (BM), Rod McFarlane (RM), Eric Mills (EM), Mike O'Brien (MO), Edgar Spalding (ES), Richard Stern (RS), Miriam Tams (MT), Brenda and Bill Thexton (BTT), Jean Timpa (JT), Dan Toews (DT), Sherman Williams (SW), Jim Wolford (JW)

#### BIRD NESTING SURVEY 1984

Bernard Forsythe  
Wolfville

Another successful season has come and gone with 152 nest cards sent to the Nest Record Scheme representing 56 species of birds. No two seasons are the same. It doesn't matter how many nests of any one species that one looks at, there will always be something new. For instance, over the years, I have seen dozens of Robin's nests. This year I had one that fledged five young, a first for me. Once I had one with eight eggs that I believe were laid by two females; however, the nest was later robbed.

A nest of the Palm Warbler was found in on the Butler Road at the South end of the Black River Lake. I consider it the nest of the year as I didn't even know that Palm Warblers were nesting in the area. Mourning Warblers also nest there and eventually I hope to find one of their nests

to fill out my list of warbler nests. Two other new nests were recorded this year; Bald Eagle at Methals Lake and Gray Partridge at Kingsport. The Gray Partridge was shown to me by Jim Wolford and was most interesting, as it was 14 inches from the nest of a Willet that had been located earlier by Glenys Gibson.

My merganser nest box at Methals had a clutch of 10 Common Merganser eggs that were abandoned. The same unexpected thing has now happened several seasons in this box. It takes a lot of energy to produce 10 or 12 merganser eggs, and one wonders after all that, why the female would desert the nest. Another similar occurrence happened at the Olive-sided Flycatcher nest. The day the nest was found I watched from the top of a nearby tree. Two weeks later the adults were not in the nest area, and the deserted nest held one egg. Perhaps the female was lost to a predator.

One of our most striking birds, the Cape May Warbler, is actually a common breeder in Kings Co. The trick is to get into the proper habitat. Heavy-limbed, medium-sized spruce trees bordered by mature spruce trees makes a good place to look. However, finding the nest is another matter. On June 27, I followed a male Cape May to a nest among the cones near the top of a red spruce 45 feet from the ground. Both adults scolded at arms length as I took a quick look at the one egg in the nest. Thinking that laying had just begun, I left as fast as possible. On July 2, the nest was revisited, but this time the nearby adults didn't mind me climbing the tree. The nest still held one egg, but a closer look showed that several young had fledged. On my June 27th visit, the young must have just left the nest and were probably still in the nest tree.

The Barred Owl nest box project is going better than expected with 10 boxes producing eggs this year. Six of these boxes fledged young owls providing me with many hours of observing the home life of these most fascinating hunters. Our nest parasite, the Brown-headed Cowbird, also had a busy nesting season. Their eggs were found in 11 songbird nests. Sometimes they try to improve the chances of their egg. This year I found a Veery egg on the ground near a Veery nest that held a cowbird egg. A close look at the eggs in a couple of the other parasitized nests showed that they had a small hole picked in them, just enough to stop them from hatching. This way the young cowbird would receive most of the food from the foster parents and probably be the only one to fledge.

Each nest has its own story but for now I will end with a list of the ones recorded and the outcome. Most of those in question were unknown because time didn't permit revisit.

No.	Species	Outcome	No.	Species	Outcome
1	Common Merganser	F	1	Bald Eagle	S
1	Northern Goshawk	S	4	Red-tailed Hawk	2F, 2F
1	American Kestrel	F	1	Gray Partridge	S
1	Ring-necked Pheasant	S	1	Ruffed Grouse	S
1	Killdeer	?	1	Willet	S
3	Great Horned Owl	3F	10	Barred Owls	6S, 4F
2	Short-eared Owls	2S	1	Ruby-throated Hum.	S
1	Belted Kingfisher	?	2	Northern Flickers	1F, 1F
2	Olive-sided Flycat.	1F, 1F	3	East. Wood Peewee	2S, 1F
1	Yellow-bellied Fly.	S	2	Alder Flycatchers	2F
2	Least Flycatchers	1S, 1F	1	Eastern Kingbird	S
1	Tree Swallow	S	1	Bank Swallow (colony)	
4	Barn Swallow	3S, 1F	3	Blue Jay	3F
3	American Crow	2F, 1F	3	Common Crow	2F, 1F
3	Black-capped Chick.	1S, 1F, 1F	1	Boreal Chickadee	F
1	Brown Creeper	S	3	Veery	1S, 2F
1	Swainson's Thrush	F	3	Hermit Thrush	3S
15	American Robin	7S, 5F, 3F	1	Grey Catbird	S
2	Cedar Waxwing	2S	4	European Starling	2S, 2F
1	Solitary Vireo	?	2	Red-eyed Vireo	2F
1	Northern Parula W.	?	4	Yellow Warbler	1S, 3F
2	Chestnut-sided W.	2F	3	Magnolia Warblers	1S, 2F
1	Cape May Warbler	S	1	Palm Warbler	S
2	American Redstart	1S, 1F	1	North. Waterthrush	?
3	Chipping Sparrow	2S, 1F	1	Savannah Sparrow	S
9	Song Sparrow	2S, 4F, 3F	4	White-throated	1S, 1F, 2F
4	Dark-eyed Junco	2S, 1F, 1F	2	Common Grackle	2S
11	Brown-headed Cowb'd	1S, 9F, 1F	8	American Goldfinch	2S, 6F

BALD  
EAGLE



## LETTERS AND COMMENTS

### MORE ON THE BALLON FROM PENNSYLVANIA

by Bernard Forsythe  
Wolfville, N.S.

In the June, 1984 B.N.S. Newsletter, I reported finding a ballon released by Nicole Pedrick in Macungie, Pa. She is 10 years old and her ballon was one of 800 released from a school near Allentown, Pa. on May 1, 1984. My letter to her was only the 4th one received by late June and was from more than twice as far away as the others from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York. She was hoping to win a prize for having the ballon that travelled the longest distance.

Then, in late summer, a man named Joseph Dwornak asked for me while I was at work at the Post Office. He, his wife, and another couple were touring Nova Scotia and were from a small town near Macungie. He gave me an article from "Neighbors/ the Morning Call", a local newspaper. In it was a report of the ballon launch, and included my letter to Nicole. He had brought it along thinking it would be fun to look me up while he was in Nova Scotia. From it, I learned that the school had closed before I had found Nicole's balloon so the one found in Massachusetts won the distance prize. After they received my letter the school principal suggested a prize should also be awarded to Nicole. Mr. Dwornak and I had a pleasant chat and I was impressed that he went to the trouble of looking me up. To think, this all developed from a B.N.S. field trip looking for yellow lady's slippers.

### TREE SWALLOWS VERSUS HOUSE SPARROWS

by Bernard Forsythe  
Wolfville, N.S.

There is something about the first Tree Swallows to return in late April that always lifts our spirits. The sight of insect eating birds must mean that winter has left us. Then the yearly question comes up: 'Should I put up the swallow nest box and try to outwit those blasted House Sparrows or just forget about it?' There are only 1 or 2



pairs of these house thieves around my home, probably because our house is in a wooded area, so most years my pair of swallows do not have too much of a struggle to claim the box. However, some House Sparrows are more persistent, and the pair in our yard in the spring of 1984 caused real trouble.

The female Tree Swallow took the first few pieces of grass into the box on May 4, while the male watched on a nearby wire. By May 17, the nest cup was ready for the eggs that would soon be laid. That was when I first started to hear the "song" of a male House Sparrow around the box. He would sit on the nest box chirping away, while the swallow tried their best to drive him away. Usually, when I observe nesting birds, I try not to interfere and record what I see, but with my lawn Tree Swallows I just have to make an exception. So out came the 22 rifle loaded with dust shot. It is necessary to very close to get results with this load, and my first shot must have been screened by branches for the sparrow flew off but he was soon back. He had learned a lesson for now I could not get near enough to finish him off.

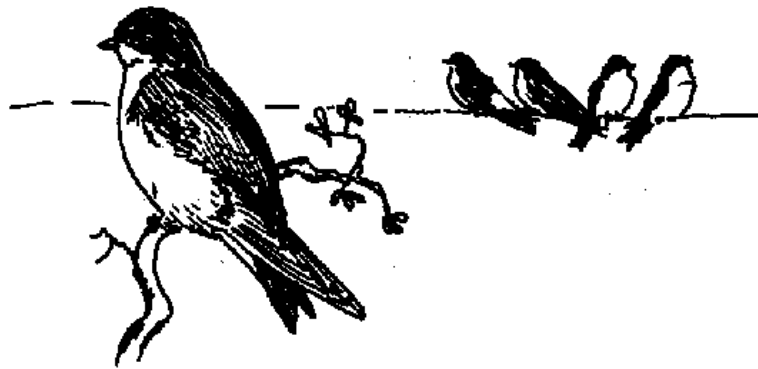
On May 24, the male sparrow was on the box, the female sparrow was looking out of the box, and the male swallow was frantically flying in circles. I looked into the box and found the female swallow dead. The sparrows had cornered her inside and pecked the side of her head in. This time I managed to shoot the female sparrow but again the male escaped. He chirped on top of the box another 2 or 3 days but no more females and he left our yard on his own.

Meanwhile, the male swallow stayed near the box most of the time and, to my delight, on May 28 appeared with a new mate. She immediately began to remove all the nesting material that the first female had put in the box and relined it with coarser grass and white feathers of her choosing. The first of five eggs arrived on June 7 and four young left the box successfully on July 12. There was no more trouble from the House Sparrows.

Most people that have tried swallow nest boxes have had similar experiences. I must report that I do not know any sure way to get rid of the sparrow problem; however, here are a couple of tips that might help. Do not leave the box up over winter, or if you do, cover the opening. Put the box up in the spring after you have seen several swallows around the yard. Boxes placed on a building will attract sparrows, so put the box on a pole in an open

place. The size of the entrance hole is important. Make it 15/16ths of an inch high. The width can be 1-1/2 to 2 inches wide. Sometimes, I narrow down the height with a few layers of masking tape until the sparrow can't enter, and if it is then too low for the swallow I remove a layer or two until she can enter. Another method is to put up 2 or 3 boxes and let the sparrows go to it in the hopes that the swallows will be able to claim at least one box. If you have a winter bird feeder, stop putting out food by late winter as this will hold House Sparrows around your yard.

I hope that I am not turning people off with all of the preceding. Tree Swallows are a delight to have around the yard all summer. Watching their nesting cycle will provide many hours of enjoyment, plus, just think of all those annoying insects they are eating. Believe me, it is well worth the effort it takes to battle those blasted House Sparrows.



#### ON HEARING AURORA AND SEEING WEASELS

by Curtis Chipman  
Lunenburg, N.S.

#### **Aurora:**

Sometime, in the early 1940's I think, I was walking home from a Sunday School Christmas concert held in Bedford Baptist Church. It was a crisp December evening and Northern Lights, were sweeping up the sky from the horizon to the zenith. They contained 'almost-red' and yellow-white light and every shade of colour in-between. In addition they were crackling and swishing with volume- an unforgettable experience both as to colour and sound.

### Weasels:

When we were living at 84 Main Street, Wolfville, (the home west of the Roman Catholic Church) the rear entrance was at ground level, passed through a small porch and went up six or seven steps to the living area. The den entered from the kitchen and contained two Indian Temple birds in a standard bird cage. We were keeping them for a college student during his absence from town.

One afternoon, my wife was doing some ironing in the basement and as she came up to the landing, she saw a small animal go out the door. From its manner of travel she decided it was a weasel.

Although wondering how the weasel got in and what it was doing in the house, she went on with her tasks. Presently, she realized that everything was very quiet- no sound from the Indian Temple birds in the den. Usually these birds are quite noisy, so she went to the cage; one bird was dead on the floor near the cage and the other was dead in the cage. The weasel had evidently gained access to the porch (perhaps to investigate a paper container there) had heard the birds, gone into the house, found the birds, and disposed of them!

This occurrence was recalled a month ago when a workman and I watched a weasel in and around a dry stone wall in our Lunenburg yard. They certainly qualify as "the animal with six heads"! our visitor would look at us from one opening in the wall and almost at the same time would be looking out from another opening. They, like mink, have curiosity and will come out to look at you for some time- it seems to me as long as you remain quiet. They can get through openings where it seem impossible. The frame of the bird cage was wire and so close together the small birds could not get out.

### OF OTTERS IN AND BATS OVER THE WATER

by Shirley Cohrs  
Halifax, N.S.

#### Otters:

In mid-July I was sitting quietly on the railway line which cuts across East Lawrencetown Marsh (Halifax Co.) when a trio of otters approached from the ocean side of the line. They knew I was there but carried on past me under the bridge about twelve feet away. They raised their faces to me and gave me their steady regard as they swam slowly on their sides out to the otherside and on into the marsh.

This is only the second time I have seen otters in the province -- about five years ago I encountered a family of four in Cole Harbour.

**Bats:**

From July onward, I have been greatly entertained by the antics of bats at my cottage in Lunenburg County. The house is situated directly on salt-water and the animals come at dusk, approaching from the sea, over the roof and into the back garden where they dodge about among the pine and spruce trees. What species of bat are they likely to be? I have consulted a couple of books but I have not had any success in determining their species because it is too dark to distinguish colour and the size difference. Perhaps the seaside habitat is diagnostic? They make no sound that I have been able to hear. Should any BNS members be able to help me I would be most grateful. The latest sighting was of two - this time 20 ft. "out to sea" over the water - on Oct. 20. I wonder where they spend their days? I know of no caves in the vicinity.

(We would be pleased to receive and pass on any observation and facts about bats that our readers have. In partial response to Shirley Cohrs' letter we reprint the following article by Sherman Bleakney. : Editors)

**NOTE ON THE MIGRATORY TREE BATS OF NOVA SCOTIA**  
from *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*  
Vol.79, No.2 p154-155, April-June 1965

Records of Migratory tree bats from eastern Canada are exceedingly rare and have been summarized for New Brunswick by Gorham and Johnston (1). The total of published reports for Nova Scotia consists of but three records. Two of these are the Red Bats (*Lasiurus borealis*) both taken on ships far at sea to the south of Nova Scotia (2) and the third of an 1894 specimen of the Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*) collected near Halifax. Smith (3) was the last to list records of all species of bats known for Nova Scotia and he included the 1894 report as the only migratory bat record. He neglected, however, to check the Nova Scotia Museum of Science where two additional records of Hoary Bats are in card files; -1- from the County Jail, Halifax, N.S., November 17, 1909, and -2- found dead at the base of a lamp

post, Dartmouth, N.S. October 22, 1917. The study skin of the latter specimen is still at the provincial museum and the field card mentions that this is the "4th specimen taken in N.S." The wing-span was recorded as 13.75 inches but no other measurements nor the sex were on the card.

The only Nova Scotia record of the Silver-haired Bat (*Lasiorycteris noctivagans*) is an unreported study skin of an adult female in the study collection at the Nova Scotia Museum of Science. It was shot at dusk by Liyod Duncanson, of the museum staff, near Lake Kejimakujik, Queens County, on July 10, 1950. I was present and recall that the bat flew a rather high straight course down a dirt road towards us and was passing directly overhead when shot. The dominant forest cover in that area was maple, beech, oak, pine and hemlock.

Efforts to obtain more specimens of this elusive group of tree bats were made during the summer field seasons of 1959 and 1961, utilizing shot guns and mist nets. It is believed that Hoary Bats were seen on two occasions in Kings County, but the other two species were neither seen in flight nor captured. However, several fishermen on Bier Island, Digby County, had interesting information concerning what appears to represent the migration of bats out of Nova Scotia in autumn. Digby Neck, Long Island and Bier Island form a long narrow peninsula opposite the coast of Maine. It is known that many Nova Scotia birds funnel to the tip of this peninsula in late summer and gather in flocks on Bier Island where they apparently await favourable weather conditions before making the crossing to the United States mainland. This is fifty miles by the shortest route to the northwest or about eighty miles if they fly due west towards Bar Harbour. During September, groups of bats have landed and rested on boats fishing at night that are anywhere from seven to thirty miles to the west of Brier Island. Some bats enter the open cabins, as did a group of five in late September of 1959 where they stayed for an hour. Thus far it has been impossible to obtain specimens of these presumably migratory bats because the fishermen would not touch the creatures with a ten-foot gaff.

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- (1) 1962, Canadian Field-Naturalist 76 (4):288
- (2) Norton, 1930, Journal of Mammalogy 11:225-226;  
Brown, 1953, Canadian Field-Naturalist 67(3):139
- (3) 1940, American Midland Naturalist 24(1):213-241

## FROM OTHER JOURNALS

### WILD TURKEYS

by Neil van Nostrand  
from "Conservation"

Fall 1984

Does Nova Scotia have enough potential turkey habitat to justify trying a serious introduction attempt? They have been successfully introduced to most of their former range in the northeast United States and most recently in southern Maine.

Experience with introductions of other species has shown us that establishing a new population needs careful planning and the "right" stock. We also must be sure the habitat is here for turkeys-- old fields and farms near hardwoods.

Biologist Paul Tufts will be visiting Maine shortly for a first hand look at their turkey habitat. Paul and I would appreciate your comments too on this new bird for Nova Scotia.



**SIGNIFICANT ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIND NEAR BANFF**  
from "Parkscan"  
Sept./Oct. 1984

While preparing for the 100th anniversary of Canada's first national park at Banff, Alberta, Parks Canada has found that someone was there long before 1885.

Carbon dating has verified that Parks Canada archaeologists have unearthed a prehistoric campfire where mountain sheep were cooked over 10 000 years ago.

The site which is about five km west of the Banff townsite, was discovered last summer during a routine survey along the right of way for the Trans-Canada Highway twinning project.

Most tests were unproductive, but in one area a few remains from prehistoric stone tools were discovered. Archaeologists opened a larger test excavation and soon uncovered layer upon layer of evidence indicating human activity. A musket ball was found near the surface, layers of artifacts were found in the middle, and a hearth, with the bones of butchered animals, was found near the two-metre mark.

"The preservation has been very good in the older levels, where earlier slides encapsulated the land surfaces, each of which provides a window to specific time periods," said Parks Canada archaeologist Daryl Fredje. "We are finding things every day."

First excavated last fall, the site has yielded artifacts that include spear points, atlatl points (points from darts hurled with throwing sticks), arrowheads, stone tools used for working hides and butchering animal remains.

The people who lived in the area 10 000 or more years ago were hunters and gatherers whose diet included mountain sheep that Mr. Fredje said were 10 to 15 percent larger than today's mountain sheep.

"We may be able to discover what kind of structures they lived in and get more clues about the vegetation, among other things," Mr. Fredje said. "The site appears to be one of the few sites that has a great deal of potential for showing how these mountain people lived and coped with their environment. A site with artifacts so well preserved and stratified is unique in this part of the country."