



Blomidon Naturalists Society

Summer 2003 – Volume 30 Number 2

Blomidon Naturalists Society

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)

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The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a member of the Sable Island Preservation Trust and the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists and is an affiliate member of the Canadian Nature Federation.

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Visit us on the web
<www.go.ednet.ns.ca/~bns/home.htm>

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Photos by John Belbin (p. 10) and Sherman Williams (p. 27)

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Contributions to the BNS newsletter are always welcome. Members are encouraged to share unusual or pleasurable nature stories through the pages of the BNS newsletter. If you have a particular area of interest, relevant articles and stories are always welcome. Send them to Jean Timpa by mail (25 Gaspereau Ave., #1, Wolfville, NS B4P 2C5) or by e-mail <jtimpa@ns.sympatico.ca>.

Upcoming newsletter deadlines

Fall, September 15, 2003

Winter, December 15, 2003

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A Change of Editors (continued)

I have just finished re-reading four of Mike McCall's editorials, and I am sure we will all miss his touch of sage wisdom and humour. Job very well done, Mike. Thanks for taking it on for a few years.

Dave Shutler would be taking over, but better fortunes have come his way in the form of a yearlong sabbatical from duties at Acadia, and he now plans to spend time in Edinburgh and New Zealand.

Having started this newsletter on my kitchen table with a Royal typewriter and purple-inked Gestetner sheets just about 31 years ago, I had hoped and assumed upon my resignation 14 years later that all would be well for it. But, like most relationships, there are high points and slumps. Currently we are in a large slump: We need someone to sell the all-important ads that bring in about \$200 per issue so we can keep our dues down (Lorna Hart will be willing to train any willing salesperson – call her at 542-4470, please). If you want to see the quarterly birds column continue in this newsletter, we need a new supervisor for that column – beginning immediately. BNS needs a new chairperson for the Program Committee and, in October at our annual meeting, new people to fill a handful of posts on the executive. A number of volunteers are burning out, and some are being recycled over and over again. We need an infusion of fresh people, ideas, and energy in order to keep a healthy BNS. For suggestions and volunteering, please contact me by mail or e-mail (see page 3) or by phone at 542-5678.

Happy reading. It's a great issue thanks to all the faithful and new reporters.

Jean Timpa

Blomidon Naturalists Society

Spring 2003

Meetings

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. in the Beveridge Arts Centre, Room 244, Acadia University. Meetings will not be held in July and August. The arts centre is across Main Street from the Atlantic Theatre Festival parking lot, just west of downtown Wolfville. Everyone is welcome.

Monday, September 15, 2003 – Cutting Trees While Restoring Acadian Old Growth Forests. Lance Bishop will explain forest harvesting alternatives, suitable for all species in Nova Scotia, with the goal of maintaining our forests well into the future. See the link to the North Mountain Old Forest Society from Lance's website: <www.glinx.com/~djbishop/>. Lance will follow up with a field trip on September 20.

Monday, October 20, 2003 – Marine Protected Areas, with Dr John C. Roff of the Environmental Sciences department at Acadia University.

Field Trips

Unless otherwise indicated, all field trips begin at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre (RTNC) on Wolfville's Front Street (look for the weird chimney in the NS Liquor Commission parking lot). Additional field trips may be announced at BNS meetings.

Saturday, July 19, 2003 – Hunt for Minerals on the Fundy Shore and Visit the Scots Bay Formation. Leader: geologist Ron Buckley (902 542-1815). Meet at the RTNC at 1 p.m.. Wear sturdy footwear, preferably waterproof.

Sunday, August 24, 2003 – Shorebirds in Migration, with Judy Tufts

(902 542-7800). Meet at the RTNC at 9 a.m. See some of the many species of shorebird that stop over in the Minas Basin during their long flight south, and check out some of the local ponds for migrating waterfowl.

Saturday, September 20, 2003 – Forest Harvesting Alternatives, with Lance Bishop (902 582-1208). After Lance’s talk on September 15, we will have the opportunity to see what restoration forestry actually looks like in the forest. Meet at the RTNC at 9:30 a.m. or at 10 a.m. at the woodlot of Angelhoeve Farm, 1476 Gospel Woods Road. Go through Sheffield Mills and up the Glenmont Mountain Road. At the top, turn right. The farm is the third driveway on the left.

**Sunday, September 28, 2003
– Life in the Minas Basin.**

Leader: Sherman Bleakney (902 542-3604). Meet at the Kingsport wharf bright and early at 7:45 a.m. (or at the RTNC at 7 a.m.). Sherman will lead us across the mud flats on the lowest tide of the month to see some of the fascinating mud dwellers and sea creatures stranded in the tidal pools. Wear rubber boots and warm clothes. You might want to bring a field guide such as Merritt Gibson’s just-released *Seashores of the Maritimes*.

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Sunday, October 26, 2003 – After Life in the Minas Basin (if you don’t like early mornings, try it after dark). Leader: Sherman Bleakney (902 542-3604). Meet at the Kingsport wharf at 5:30 p.m. (or the RTNC at 4:45 p.m.). Sherman will again introduce us to the fascinating life found in the Minas Basin at low tide, this time after dark. Wear rubber boots and even warmer clothes.

Wood Turtles at the Limit

by John Belbin

In Nova Scotia we have only four turtle species out of the more than 48 found in North America, and all of them are at the limit of their range and thus highly susceptible to any changes in the environment or climate. The rarest is the Blanding's Turtle, restricted to southwest Nova Scotia and rarely seen outside of Kejimikujik Park. The three others are the Common Snapping Turtle, with a somewhat evil reputation, the Wood Turtle, and the Painted Turtle, commonly found in ponds throughout the region. The Wood Turtle, designated a "species at risk," has an unusual distribution in Nova Scotia, being found in the northern mainland and parts of Cape Breton, but not in the south or west. Thus Kings County is the normal limit of its range and it is highly susceptible to disruption here. In Canada as a whole it is found only in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick plus the southern parts of Quebec and Ontario – it is very much at its extreme here. Its global range is from Nova Scotia to northern Virginia and west to Minnesota and Iowa. None of this I knew until relatively recently.

Until about a year ago I had no real appreciation that I lived in a somewhat charmed area for turtles, with three of the four species being found close by. I had thought it was normal to have a variety of turtles – apparently not! I went out for a spring walk and spotted a number of Wood Turtles with their distinctive "carved" shells, basking on the banks of the Annapolis River in the Kingston-Wilmot area. I didn't think too much of it – I had seen them nearby in previous years, usually basking on a log or occasionally wandering over a neighbour's lawn or local trail. Snappers usually got more attention – on spotting them, fishermen usually tried to give them a wide berth, and there were almost as many Snapper stories as fishy ones. The Painted types usually were a source of amusement to the kids when they found them in shallow ponds. However, it was early in the year and I mentioned the "woodies" as a sign of spring on the NatureNS e-mail forum.

The reaction was immediate and unexpected. I was promptly contacted by a university professor and informed that I was the first person to see Wood

Turtles in Kingston in 50 years. Wow! What about all my neighbours whose lawns had been wandered over for at least the 25 years I had been living there? Some even claimed to have had nesting take place on their properties. I had certainly seen the turtles on my own property a few times and on the occasional walk in the area. Long-time residents talked about them as if they were the most ordinary things imaginable. One person on Brookside Drive claims that for a few years they have often nested under an old truck in his back yard. Some years there didn't seem to be any turtles, and other years everyone seemed to see them. People just hadn't reported them because they were not considered very unusual. Yet another one of those "best-kept secrets" we occasionally hear about.

Doing a little research, I discovered that years ago there was a colony in the Kingston region, and another in the Nictaux-Annapolis River area, marking the absolute limits of their known range in the province. No formal reports had been made for many years, and they were assumed to be locally extinct. Wood Turtles are very susceptible to the disruption of breeding sites, which are usually in sandy regions close to the rivers. They look for loose soil and such locations as sand or gravel banks. As both of these geographic areas had been subjected to increasing human development pressures plus the damage caused by unrestricted cattle access to sandy stream banks, their demise was in fact a logical conclusion. However, the turtles have hung on despite the pressures.

The Wood Turtle has had a tough life so far. In much of eastern North America it was for years considered to be an easy and tasty source of food. Then it became a highly desirable pet, and large numbers were scooped from the wild for short and uncertain futures elsewhere. Some of that trade goes on to this day. The populations were decimated and still haven't recovered. The Wood Turtle makes an excellent pet because of its docility and high level of intelligence, which is reputed to be the equal of a rat, that favourite of maze experiments everywhere. It naturally spends a considerable amount of time out of the water, foraging for food, so it is much easier to care for than most other turtles. Now that it is protected, let's hope the pet trade is a rapidly diminishing problem.

The Wood Turtle has a wide choice of diet, eating flowers, leaves, and plants of all kinds, as well as many fruits and berries. In fact it has a distinct liking for strawberries and raspberries, which has me wondering

whether frequent raids on my strawberry patch in the past were the work of turtles rather than the chipmunks and grackles I always blamed. The turtles will also eat baby mice, eggs, and carrion. Of course, being slow moving they are not very good at catching live food. However, there are many stories from the United States of their luring earthworms out of the ground by stamping their feet – if true, that would be a sight well worth watching.

The reason for the survival of our local group is obviously related to habitat requirements. The turtles need riparian areas near clear running streams with sandy or gravelly bottoms. For communal nesting they need loose soil areas nearby that will not be normally disturbed and that are slightly above the normal high water levels. They can be found in both forested and agricultural regions. The attractive wooded section of the Annapolis River that begins at the bridge in Kingston seems tailor-made. The river begins at the edge of Stronach Park (Family Fitness Park) and runs behind the Paragon golf course through a series of meanders and meadows.

Many canoeists have seen our three types of turtles as they begin their journey downriver. The southern shore is undeveloped; all the soils are very sandy. Brookside Drive marks the western boundary of the golf course but does not extend to the river, leaving a wide extent of woodlands. On the far side of Brookside Drive are the Walker Brook meadows, a wide area with a highly meandering stream, ponds, and more sandy soils. It is currently used for pasturing cattle, which have had free access to the area for many years, trampling down many of the sandy banks. It is fairly obvious that the Walker Brook meadows were probably excellent turtle habitat in the past, but continuing disturbance would make that unlikely now. In the meantime, Wood Turtles are quite often seen immediately to both the east and west of the Paragon lands, in the woods and on the sandy slopes. Presumably they may also be found on the south bank of the river, but I have not checked because there is no easy access, probably another factor in their success.

This group is not alone. There are continuing local reports of Wood Turtles nesting on the edge of lawns in a subdivision in Nictaux, close to their old location in the Annapolis River and within sight of Middleton. Qualified observers have even reported individual turtles being found

further down the Annapolis River system, marking a possible expansion of their known historical ranges. Of course such a sighting could be of someone's old pet released into the wild. We will have to wait and see if a new colony is in fact established.

Identifying Wood Turtles is relatively easy, especially in summer when



they are wandering about in the woods and fields or basking in relatively open areas. They are called wood turtles not because of their habitat but because of their appearance. The shell resembles a piece of wood with a grain-like sculptured or carved appearance. It looks like a series of growth rings, occurring in raised ridges. They are usually dark brown, and the shell is from 15 to 24 cm long. There is yellow or orange on the underside of the neck. Identification is much harder in early spring when they are still mostly in the water and all you might see is a nose followed by a vigorous splash. They may also be detected later in the year, in September, if you are lucky enough to come across one of the communal nest sites. The raised location and number of eggshells present is an excellent identifier. There will normally be unhatched eggs present, as the success rate does not appear to be high. Watch out for miniature turtles!

Many Wood Turtle eggs and young are lost to raccoons, otters, and other predators. It is not unusual to find a turtle with an injured foot, a mark of a near brush with death. I have certainly seen that on a few occasions. In

fact, that caused me an anxious moment of my own: I was mowing my lawn one summer when I noticed a large “rock” that had no business being there. I have no rocks on my property – only sand. I drove the tractor over and saw it was a very large turtle with an injured foot. I should have clued in to the size, but didn’t. In a rash moment I picked up the very heavy turtle to put it back into the stream where it would presumably be better off. Only when I had the beast in the air did I realize my mistake; a huge neck whipped around and those wicked jaws tried to take a lump out of me – I had hold of a snapper. I’m proud to say that I got it into the stream without losing any body parts – but never again! Hopefully, I have been much more observant since then.

My most recent meeting with Wood Turtles was this Apple Blossom Saturday when I found two on the east side of Paragon, heading toward the sandy fields near the sewage lagoons. I managed to photograph one with my digital camera, a much easier task than trying to capture bird images. Junior motorcycle enthusiasts now use the area they were traversing, so I hope that a new set of hazards has not begun for this struggling species. The province’s new determination to protect and establish riparian zones close to our rivers and prevent the extensive damage caused by unrestricted cattle should be a real boon for Wood Turtles, if they can avoid all the other hazards of their small worlds. Let’s hope so.



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North American Migration Count May 10, 2003

Annapolis, Kings, and Hants Counties

A great big thank you, especially to everyone in Annapolis, Kings, and Hants counties who participated in the Spring 2003 North American Migration Count (NAMC). Your fine efforts added some wonderful results to the overall provincial migration picture that day, in spite of the fact that spring migration may have been delayed by as much as two weeks due to another cold, wet spring.

On Count day the weather in Nova Scotia was far from favourable, making birding often difficult as birds sought shelter. Although the number of species was down (195 vs. 205+), we tallied more birds (121,043) than ever before for the province and added a new species to the list – Eastern Meadowlark, found on Cape Sable Island (CSI). Temperatures were barely above freezing, with gusty winds (35–60 kph) and plenty of rain for the most part. Some birders in coastal areas through the central section of the province had to contend with hail, sleet, or even snow.

Some General Observations

Egrets and rarer herons are becoming regulars on the NAMC. This year both made appearances at opposite ends of the province: a Great Egret and a Little Blue Heron on CSI, a Snowy Egret and a Little Blue Heron in the Sydney area, and yet another Little Blue Heron seen in Inverness County. The cold spring also affected migration of vireos, flycatchers, and warblers, which were sparse and hard to find. Thrush numbers were down, too. However, waterfowl and seabird numbers were up – they were possibly reluctant to leave too early for breeding grounds.

Of only seven Turkey Vultures counted, the most northern sighting was one in Inverness County; six birds were tallied between Yarmouth and Shelburne counties (oddly, none on Brier Island). A single Gray Partridge was found in the Truro area, so maybe there is hope that it has not been completely extirpated from our province.

A Lesser Black-backed Gull was tallied on Grand Pre, three others in Pictou County. Two Caspian Terns were found in Halifax County, and

two American Oystercatchers were welcome news once again on CSI. Exciting additions: a Marsh Wren heard in Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary (only the second time recorded on our provincial count – the first was in '96), a Brown Thrasher in White Point (Victoria County), and a male Summer Tanager in Dartmouth found by two HRM birders.

Twenty-one warbler species were recorded for the province. We had a very respectable count of 15 species in our region, including one Pine Warbler found on Bon Portage Island by Acadia University ornithological students. House Finch numbers were up, indicating their spread through the province from Inverness County to Yarmouth. There were 13 in East Lake Ainslie (Inverness), Halifax registered nine, and Digby and Yarmouth towns each had four birds.

Some Interesting Valley Reports

How about hearing seven – yes, seven – Saw-whet Owls on your exploration of a new-to-you wood-pulp company road in Hants East? Mike Crowell had this pleasure. And Mike Russell, participating in Annapolis County, was thrilled to find all three falcons – Peregrine, Merlin, and Kestrel – not an easy task on any day. Kim Huskins located a Whip-poor-will in Springfield, Annapolis County, which had been heard calling for almost two weeks. (She heard one again on May 20 near New Ross – perhaps a new location for this species?) The highest tally for Ring-necked Pheasants was notched once again, by Kings County. Two very large mixed swallow flocks arrived that day in dramatic fashion in the Valley, putting on spectacular shows for two participants. In the Belleisle Marsh, Annapolis County, Sharon Hawboldt thrilled to see more than 900 swallows “blanketing ponds and cattails,” while Jim Wolford found a similar sight of 500 taking turns feeding over the New Minas sewage ponds and another 300 over other ponds in eastern Kings.

Considering those weather conditions, we had a pretty good count. Thanks to all of you. Well done!

Judy Tufts

Nova Scotia Provincial Coordinator for NAMC

Note: A complete NAMC provincial (18 counties) totals list will be published in the next issue of NS Birds, the Nova Scotia Bird Society's magazine.

Spring North American Migration Count —

Species	Anna	Kings	Hants	Tot	Species	Anna	Kings	Hants	Tot
Red-throated Loon	5			5	Willet	1	6	2	9
Common Loon	11	17	13	41	Spotted Sandpiper	1	2	3	6
Pied-billed Grebe			1	1	Purple Sandpiper	1			1
Red-necked Grebe	2			2	Wilson's Snipe	5	2	23	30
Northern Gannet	3			3	Am Woodcock	4	2	30	36
Dbl-cr Cormorant	10	152	10	172	Ring-billed Gull	6	117	19	142
American Bittern	4		4	8	Herring Gull	162	773	125	1060
Great Blue Heron	1	11	3	15	Iceland Gull		2		2
Canada Goose	77	103	80	260	Lsr Blk-backed Gull		1		1
Wood Duck	7	8		15	Gt Blk-backed Gull	23	976	59	1058
American Wigeon		2	9	11	gull sp. *		39	314	353
Am Black Duck	29	131	117	277	Black Guillemot		7		7
Mallard	6	109	52	167	Rock Dove	54	214	239	507
Blk/Mallard hybrid *		2	3	5	Mourning Dove	71	288	312	671
Blue-winged Teal	34	7		41	Great Horned Owl		2	2	4
Northern Shoveler	3			3	Barred Owl	3	30	4	37
Green-winged Teal	11	21	2	34	N. Saw-whet Owl		1	7	8
Ring-necked Duck	62	20	48	130	Common Nighthawk	1			1
Common Eider	278	43		321	Whip-poor-will	1			1
Harlequin Duck	6			6	Chimney Swift			1	1
Surf Scoter	111			111	R-thr Hummingbird	5	32	4	41
White-winged Scoter	8			8	Belted Kingfisher	6	18	3	27
Black Scoter	15			15	Y-bellied Sapsucker	6	9	11	26
Long-tailed Duck	1			1	Downy Woodpecker	15	104	61	180
Bufflehead	43			43	Hairy Woodpecker	13	40	19	72
Common Goldeneye	4			4	Northern Flicker	29	101	99	229
Hooded Merganser	7	5		12	Pileated Woodp	3	12	6	21
Common Merganser	8	3	4	15	Olive-sided Flycatcher		2		2
Red-breasted Merg	8			8	E Wood-Pewee		1		1
Osprey	1		16	17	Least Flycatcher	2			2
Bald Eagle adult	5	18	17	40	Eastern Phoebe	2	1		3
Bald Eagle imm. *		10	31	41	Eastern Kingbird		1		1
Northern Harrier	1		5	6	Blue-headed Vireo	18	23	18	59
Sharp-shinned Hawk		3	1	4	Red-eyed Vireo	2	7	1	10
Northern Goshawk	2		1	3	vireo sp.*			2	2
Broad-winged Hawk	1			1	Gray Jay		2	3	10
Red-tailed Hawk	6	20	13	39	Blue Jay	83	284	277	644
buteo sp. *		2	1	3	American Crow	201	799	818	1818
American Kestrel	2	5	4	11	Common Raven	24	121	138	283
Merlin	1	6	2	9	Tree Swallow	545	805	96	1446
Peregrine Falcon	1			1	Bank Swallow	8	5		13
Ring-necked Pheasant	23	161	70	254	Cliff Swallow	300			300
Ruffed Grouse	4	5	20	29	Barn Swallow	100	189	64	353
Spruce Grouse	1	2		3	Blk-cap Chickadee	186	471	373	1030
Sora	2			2	Boreal Chickadee	5	3	1	9
Killdeer	2	4	23	29	Red-br Nuthatch	11	20	27	58
Greater Yellowlegs	2	9	4	15	White-br Nuthatch	4	30	3	37
Solitary Sandpiper	1			1	Brown Creeper	2	5	4	11

* *unidentified or subspecies*

— Results for the Valley (2003)

Species	Anna	Kings	Hants	Tot	Species	Anna	Kings	Hants	Tot
Winter Wren	1	2	4	7	Savannah Sparrow	34	20	44	98
Golden-cr Kinglet	9	12	13	34	Fox Sparrow		2	5	7
Ruby-cr Kinglet	2	14	103	119	Song Sparrow	92	425	224	741
Veery	5	1	1	7	Swamp Sparrow	1	7	43	51
Swainson's Thrush	2			2	White-thr Sparrow	30	62	151	243
Hermit Thrush	7	7	36	50	White-crwn Sparr	1	1	3	5
American Robin	137	537	697	1371	Dark-eyed Junco	57	172	244	473
Gray Catbird		2		2	Northern Cardinal	2			2
Northrn Mockingbird		5		5	Rose-br Grosbeak	3	7		10
European Starling	305	1190	1579	3074	Bobolink		1	1	2
Cedar Waxwing		42	10	52	Red-w Blackbird	286	330	330	946
Nashville Warbler		2	3	5	Rusty Blackbird	1	2		3
Northern Parula	1	3	1	5	Common Grackle	359	505	684	1548
Yellow Warbler	1	6	1	8	Brn-headed Cowbird	5	11	29	45
Magnolia Warbler			23	23	blackbird sp.*		11		11
Y-rumped Warbler	71	125	63	259	Pine Grosbeak			12	12
Blk-thr Green Warb	5	16		21	Purple Finch	35	153	179	367
Blackburnian Warb		4		4	Red Crossbill	2	1		3
Palm Warbler	4	11	25	40	White-w Crossbill		2	5	7
Blk-and-white Warb	17	14	3	34	Pine Siskin	22	23	44	89
American Redstart		1		1	American Goldfinch	285	1042	936	2263
Ovenbird	3	3	1	7	Evening Grosbeak	48	107	165	320
North Waterthrush	1	3	9	13	House Sparrow	12	144	130	286
Mourning Warbler			1	1	raptor sp.*		1		1
Com Yellowthroat		4		4	swallow sp.*			15	15
Canada Warbler		1		1	warbler sp.*		4		4
Am Tree Sparrow	18	13	18	49					
Chipping Sparrow	16	41	27	84					
Vesper Sparrow		1		1					

Total: 141 species for the Valley

Time Start	555	520	450	450
Time Stop	2130	2100	2330	2330

Owling

Time (hr.)	0.5	1.0	5.0	6.5	Car (km)	628	1003	788	2419
Distance (km)			58	58	Boat/kayak (km)			2	2
Parties (#)	1	1	3	5	Bike (km)		10		10
Observers (#)	1	1	6	8	Other - ATV (km)	5			5

Regular

Foot (hr.)	35.8	87.0	66.5	189.3	Parties (#)	13	42	49	104
Car (hr.)	23.4	68.5	60.4	152.3	Observers (#)	18	71	67	156
Boat/kayak (hr.)			1	1	Feeder Watching				
Bike (hr.)		2			Time (hr.)	28	131	81	240
Other - ATV (hr.)	5			5	Feeder watchers (#)	17	77	51	145
Foot (km)	58	103	113	274	Feeder stations (#)	14	61	43	118

Spring 2003 Birds

Barbara and Pat Giffin

Mar 27, Judy Tufts reported that an impressive crowd of Common Grackles and Red-winged Blackbirds were filling the trees around the Grand Pre winery, and Judy's neighbour saw two Killdeer. Jim Wolford checked Bald Eagle nests at White Rock Pond, Starrs Point, and the Muskrat Farm marsh: two had adults on the nest, the other had an adult perched nearby. Jim also saw two adult Iceland Gulls and a pair of Mallards at the Port Williams sewage ponds. On the Habitant River at Canning (still mostly ice), he saw a pair of Common Goldeneye. Along the way he saw 10+ robins, three grackles, and 200 Canada Geese at the Wellington Dyke, Lower Canard.

Throughout March Sheila Hulford saw 20 species in her Tremont yard, including Pileated Woodpecker, Brown-headed Cowbird, Ring-necked Pheasant, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, Song and Fox Sparrows, Evening Grosbeak, and Purple Finch. Sheila also saw a Killdeer in a Tremont field and 60+ Canada Geese flying near Middleton.

Mar 28, Bernard Forsythe reported a Killdeer near Gordon Young's on Lower Sunken Lake Road, near Black River Lake. That same day he checked some of his Barred Owl nestboxes and was delighted to find several females had begun laying eggs.

Mar 30, Bernard saw four Fox Sparrows in the Kentville Ravine; his brother at Black River Lake had had two at his feeders for several days.

Apr 2, Jean Timpa saw in her yard 50+ Cedar Waxwings in the English Hawthorn. She noted, "This has been the first winter in about 25 or so, I think, that I have not seen at least one Bohemian."

Apr 4, Peter Smith saw a male Northern Cardinal in his Wolfville yard.

Apr 5, Judy Tufts reported a Brown Creeper at her residence on Wolfville Ridge, her third sighting of a creeper within a week at the same location. Bernard Forsythe told her he had recently heard Brown Creepers singing. Judy assumed that the snowfall prompted the appearance of eight juncos and some Song Sparrows. Al Mutch noted that Apr 5 was the latest-ever arrival date for American Robins and Common Grackles at his Kentville residence; Al's records show Mar 23 as the earliest arrival date.

Apr 7, Brenda and Bill Thexton sighted a Great Blue Heron on the Gaspereau River. Merritt Gibson reported, "Canning: On the Habitant River, behind Legion parking lot, for the past week or so, since the ice started to break up: m, f Red-breasted Mergansers, m Hooded Mergansers, 6+ C. Mergansers, m Bufflehead, approx. 24 Green-winged Teal." Merritt also saw a Common Loon in winter plumage, while two Merlins hunted up and down the river. He reported seeing many Cedar Waxwings and noted that a Northern Mockingbird had disappeared after spending most of the winter in the field behind his home, possibly taken by the Merlins. He wrote, "There have been mockingbirds in that area for nearly 40 years. Over 2,000 Canada Geese have been in the Canard Valley area recently, but they are beginning to split up into smaller flocks, possibly in preparation for their flight to northern breeding grounds."

Jean Timpa reported, "A pair of Merlins has arrived back in the vicinity of the Wolfville Town Park–King Street area, where pairs have nested for several years now. They are being very vocal (i.e., unpleasantly noisy) and flying back and forth. Karen Cloghesy who lives in the Merlin neighbourhood reported their return to me late this afternoon."

Apr 9, Gordon Tufts found a Hermit Thrush behind his property, and another was reported on Linda Townsend's property. Dave Scarratt saw an Osprey along Hwy 101 near Berwick.

Apr 10, Jane McConnell reported that the partially albino Common Grackle had returned for the third year and that Fox Sparrows had arrived on her property Mar 31.

Apr 11, Jim Wolford reported a Turkey Vulture near his home in Wolfville.

Apr 13, Brenda and Bill Thexton sighted a Snow Goose at the Canning aboiteau.

Apr 15, Jim was convinced that the Red-tailed Hawks had begun to incubate eggs in the nest at University Hall. At the New Minas sewage ponds he saw two adult Iceland Gulls, several Ring-billed Gulls, a Canada Goose, 15 Black Ducks, four Mallards, five Green-winged Teal, one pair of Common Goldeneye, three scaup (2m, 1f, probably Lesser), and three male Ring-necked Ducks. At Chipmans Corner pond (still mostly ice) there were a pair of Wood Ducks and one adult Great Blue Heron.

Apr 17, on his nine acres bordering on Walker Brook in Kingston, John Belbin saw nine Hairy and six Downy Woodpeckers and 100 ducks that were too distant for positive identification. Brenda and Bill Thexton sighted a Northern Harrier on the Grand Pre dikes.

Apr 18, Judy Tufts observed local ponds: at high tide at the Windsor Causeway, approximately 30 Double-crested Cormorants; at Avonport on the Tom Haliburton farm ponds, one Great Blue Heron, one Gadwall, two Green-winged Teal, two male Ring-necked Ducks, two Black Ducks, a Double-crested Cormorant, and one Killdeer; at the Canning aboiteau, a male Bufflehead, eight Green-winged Teal, and 150–175 Canada Geese.

Apr 18, Angus MacLean saw a female American Kestrel on the Dalhousie Road south of Berwick/Aylesford. During the evening he heard a Ruffed Grouse drumming several times. Donald and Elaine Hendricks were at Margaretsville, where they saw two pairs of White-winged Scoters and a Red-necked Grebe. At the DU pond they saw Red-breasted Mergansers, a Common Loon, a pair of Hooded Mergansers, and a Black Duck. At Port George they saw five pairs of Harlequin Ducks, 20+ pairs of Common Eider, one pair of Long-tailed Ducks, two Red-necked Grebes, and Red-breasted Mergansers (5m, 2f). At Hampton they saw 30 Surf Scoters, two Common Loons, and 15 pairs of Common Eider. At Granville Ferry they saw two Double-crested Cormorants. Judy Tufts saw 12 Red-breasted Mergansers on the Cornwallis River at Palmeters Woods.

Apr 19, Jim Wolford saw the immature White-crowned Sparrow that had been at his feeders for some time. At the New Minas Ducks Unlimited

pond (Middle Dyke Rd) he saw a Belted Kingfisher and six or seven Ring-necked Ducks. Bill and Brenda Thexton saw a male Northern Shoveler and Ring-necked Ducks in Canard Pond.

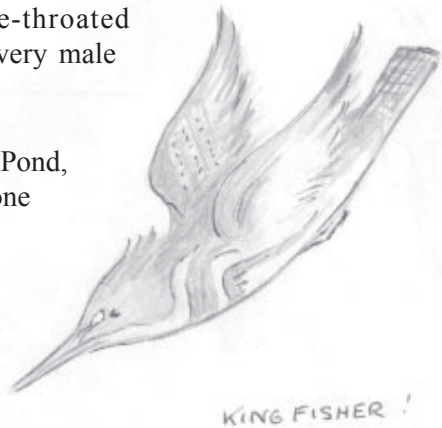
John Belbin wrote, “Went to the artificial lake south of Klahanie Campgrounds in Aylesford. It is a great location, being linked by water to the campgrounds and local cranberry bogs – surprisingly isolated for somewhere so close to a village. There were at least 50 Canada Geese – often you could just see the heads pop up above the marsh vegetation, which must have been hiding a great deal more than we ever saw. We had excellent views of at least three Ring-necked Ducks; there may well have been more, but the large number of vegetation ‘islets’ means there is ample cover. Ducks were flying in and out all the time; most kept their distance but I was able to notice three Blue-winged Teal dropping in. There were a Common Merganser and several Red-winged Blackbirds.”

Apr 19, Judy Tufts reported Joe and Pat Clifford sighting five Piping Plovers on Cherry Hill beach, a Yellow-rumped Warbler at Rissers Beach, and seven Hooded Mergansers in a little pond near Green Bay. Judy noted that the Snow Goose was still on the Habitant River behind Canning, feeding with 125+ Canada Geese.

Apr 19/20, Richard Stern was on Brier Island, where he saw some early migrants, including Tree Swallows, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, many White-throated Sparrows, and some beautiful silvery male Northern Harriers.

Apr 21, Richard reported at Harris Pond, Canning, 11 Ring-necked Ducks, one female Common Merganser, two American Wigeon, one Greater Yellowlegs, a Belted Kingfisher, many Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and Song Sparrows. At Canard Pond were four Ring-necked

Ducks, a pair of Northern Shovellers, and several Mallards and Blacks. A Northern Raven was sitting on its nest in Canning High St.



Apr 21, Jean Timpa saw “a lovely Fox Sparrow ” in Wolfville and a Belted Kingfisher at the Port Williams bridge.

Apr 22, Judy Tufts reported six to eight adult Iceland Gulls at the New Minas sewage ponds.

Apr 24, Jim Wolford saw Ring-necked Ducks (9m, 1f) and 20 Tree Swallows at the DU pond along Middle Dyke Rd north of New Minas. Brenda and Bill Thexton sighted four Iceland Gulls at the Wolfville sewage ponds.

Apr 25, Richard Stern heard a Great-horned Owl near his home in Kentville.

Apr 26, Harold Forsyth saw an Eastern Phoebe in Coldbrook. Judy Tufts saw 150–175 Canada Geese at the Canning aboiteau; pairs of American Wigeon, a Ring-necked Duck, and a female Common Merganser at Harris Pond, Canning; a male Red-breasted Merganser at Starrs Point pond, north of Van Nostrand’s pond; a male Northern Shoveler, Ring-necked Ducks (4m, 2f), and a male Mallard. At the Canard Saxon St marsh-side pond a female Canada Goose was on nest; Judy did not see the male.

Apr 26, Jean Timpa’s son in Maryland advised that the Chimney Swifts were on the way. [This year, Jim Wolford wil keep track of swift sites in Nova Scotia and elsewhere; we look forward to his end-of season report.]

Apr 29, Jean heard a Merlin calling as she proceeded toward the dikeland near the Wolfville Harbour to see “an immature Bald Eagle sitting on a hummock across the river and a Willet or two that were calling somewhere deep down in the ‘canyon’ left by the emptying of the tide.” Near the Wolfville Sewage Ponds were 12+ Red-winged Blackbirds and a pair of ravens; she heard a Ring-necked Pheasant and saw a few American Goldfinches. Later, Jean sighted a Merlin in the Town of Wolfville Park.

The same day, Jim Wolford wrote, “At the east boundary of Wolfville, the raven nest now has at least three black nestlings. And what I thought was a “raven nest” on the extension of Oak Avenue in Wolfville had a

red-tailed hawk apparently incubating – the Thextons & Jean Timpa discovered this yesterday, and on both days the sitting hawk left the nest when she(?) knew she was being watched.”

Apr 30, at Lake Pisiquid Jean Timpa, Judy Tufts, and Bill and Brenda Thexton found two Common Loons, two Double-crested Cormorants, two Tree Swallows, and a pair of Black Ducks. At the Windsor Sewage Ponds were a male scaup and a possible immature Golden Eagle.

During April Sheila Hulford saw 23 species at her feeders in Tremont, including Pine Siskin, Fox and White-throated Sparrows, and Yellow-shafted Flickers. She also saw a Common Snipe south of Greenwood, and a Hooded Merganser and Wood Ducks in Margaretsville.

May 1, Brenda and Bill Thexton, Judy Tufts, and Jean Timpa saw two Greater Yellowlegs, two Bald Eagles, and a Greater Scaup near the Windsor Tourist Bureau. At the Haliburton Farms pond in Avonport were four Green-winged Teal, a Yellow-rumped Warbler, which even did a little singing, and at least 30 Tree Swallows.

May 2, Sherman Williams had a Northern Cardinal at his Avonport feeder.

May 3, at his home Jim Wolford saw an adult White-crowned Sparrow, two White-throated Sparrows, two Song Sparrows, eight American Goldfinches, a cock pheasant, and a male Downy Woodpecker.

May 5, at Port George we saw five male Harlequin Ducks, 100 Common Eider, 50 Surf Scoters, 10 Black Scoters, and six Common Loons. At the DU pond in Margaretsville among the more common birds were a pair of Hooded Mergansers, a Ring-necked Duck, and a Red-tailed Hawk. At Margaretsville, John Belbin saw 160+ Common Eiders, many close to shore, eight Red-breasted Mergansers, 25 Surf Scoters, and 20 White-winged Scoters. In Melvern Square he saw eight Yellow-rumped Warblers, two Northern Flickers, two Eastern Phoebes, four ravens, and four House Sparrows. A Belted Kingfisher was at John's home in Kingston. Jim Wolford saw one swift enter the Wolfville chimney.

May 7, John Belbin observed the first Ruby-throated Hummingbird of

the year at his feeder, and on May 8 he saw an Olive-sided Flycatcher working the brook by his house.

May 9, Brenda and Bill Thexton sighted 20+ Barn Swallows at Avonport flying over the Haliburton pond. Their garden had nine Cedar Waxwings.

May 10, Jim Wolford's NAMC survey observations included an Eastern Kingbird, a Spotted Sandpiper northwest of Port Williams, a male Bobolink at Van Nostrand's Pond, and Tree, Bank, and Barn Swallows.

May 16, Judy Tufts saw Chipping, White-crowned, Song, and White-throated Sparrows and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak on Wolfville Ridge. John Belbin reported 35 swifts entering the Middleton chimney and four choosing the deluxe accommodation of his house chimney in Kingston.

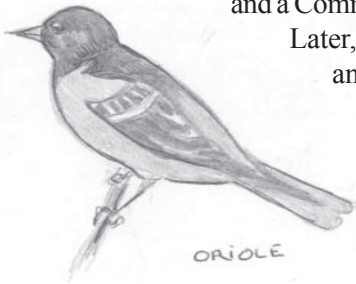
May 18, Judy reported that the Boehners saw a Wilson's Warbler, and a Common Yellowthroat was seen in Palmeters Woods.

Later, Judy, Chris Toplack, and Sheila McCurdy saw an Ovenbird, five Northern Parulas, four each Blackburnian and Black-throated Green Warblers, three Yellow Warblers, three Northern Waterthrush, Black-and-White and Yellow-rumped Warblers, four Least Flycatchers, a Blue-headed and a Red-eyed Vireo, and a Swamp Sparrow. They could

hear Wilson's Snipe winnowing over the marsh and the songs of two Rose-breasted Grosbeak males.

May 20, Angus MacLean heard/saw on Butler Rd about 50 Magnolia Warblers, 30 Black and White Warblers, and 25 Ovenbirds, but only a few Palms, Yellowthroats, Blackpolls, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Winter Wrens, and Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes. Dave Shutler had a Northern Oriole visit his feeder in Coldbrook.

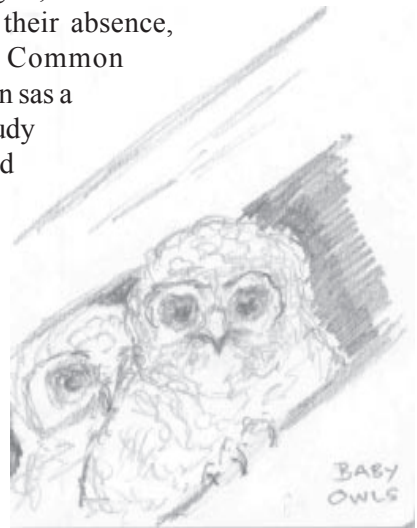
May 26, Doug Linzey had three Pine Siskins at his niger feeder in Hantsport.



During May, Sheila Hulford listed 43 species at her feeders and near her home in Tremont, including Northern Parula, Northern Waterthrush, Eastern Phoebe, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Black-throated Green Warbler, Bobolink, and Wilson's Warbler.

Jun 2, in Coldbrook Angus MacLean saw about 50 Cedar Waxwings, a Canada Warbler, a Northern Mockingbird, several Veerys singing/calling, an Ovenbird, and a Red-eyed vireo.

Jun 7, Liz and Richard Stern saw a Great-crested Flycatcher near their home in Kentville. During a canoe trip on the Gaspereau Canal and into Little River Lake, they sighted Black-throated Blue Warblers, Northern Parulas, Red-eyed Vireos, a Blue-headed Vireo, a Winter Wren, Least Flycatchers, Chimney Swifts, Bald Eagles, and Red-tailed Hawks. Richard wrote, "Notable by their absence, I thought, [were] any thrushes or Common Yellowthroats." Brenda and Bill Thexton saw a Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Woodside. Judy Tufts wrote, "A Scarlet Tanager passed through our yard (Wolfville Ridge) early morning, singing briefly before it moved on. Merritt Gibson reports a Scarlet Tanager was seen in Berwick area last weekend. At Harris Pond in Canning there are now two very proud Canada Geese parents guarding FIVE fluffy goslings at the far edge of the pond below the home overlooking the pond. Single male Blue-winged Teal were seen in two locations: the pond by the DOT depot building, south west of Canning (Rte 358), and another in Canard Pond."



Jun 8, Jim Wolford and many others enjoyed seeing a family of Barred Owls in a barn at Woodside belonging to Shirley and Eugene Ells; the adult and three juveniles provided exceptional photo opportunities.

Jun 10, Bernard Forsythe saw a pair of Warbling Vireos on the grounds of Prescott House, Starrs Point.

Jun 17, Richard Stern reported, “there was a superb, almost glowing-in-the-sunlight, male Scarlet Tanager teed up on a snag singing in our subdivision here in Kentville.”

Jun 18, Dave Shutler saw two Turkey Vultures soaring over Hwy 101, exit 12 at about 5:30 p.m.

Jun 18/19, Brenda and Bill Thexton had six Pine Siskins at their feeder.

Jun 20, John Belbin wrote, “Everything I have read about Chimney Swifts says that they don’t perch except on a vertical face to roost at night, and probably spend all day flying. Well, that may be a bit of an exaggeration. At least one pair of swifts are using my home chimney and have been in and out several times this morning. As you would expect, they are very nervous when wanting to enter and make lots of passes and fake tries before actually going in. After seeing just how vulnerable they are I can understand the performance they go through. On one attempt this morning a swift was clearly worried about a large group of starlings, grackles and others that were noisily moving about the area. After several aborted runs this swift perched on the thin branches at the top of a nearby oak tree and hung there for about 30 seconds while it watched the other birds. It didn’t look very comfortable but it did it. It then made a circuit and fluttered into the chimney. The bird entering often stays for about five minutes and its partner does constant low level patrols while it is in the chimney, never leaving the area. When it leaves it does so very quietly and flies low to join its partner at a considerable distance – then they begin chattering and fly higher.”

Angus MacLean heard a Black-billed Cuckoo calling just east of the Scotian Gold juice plant in Coldbrook, the same location where he heard one last summer. Jim Wolford reported, “At 8:55 p.m. the nestling Red-tailed Hawk was standing up on the nest on the Acadia University Hall ledge, and it is quite large; it is perhaps three weeks old or older? is still mostly light grayish and downy, but its back and wings are very dark with contour feathers; I would guess that it will take another 2–3 weeks before this youngster fledges, and no doubt it will soon venture off the nest and onto the long ledge for good viewing.”

Owl Nest by Moonlight

by Bernard Forsythe

Birding sometimes drags a bit during March. Our winter birds have been carefully looked over and it will be several weeks before the northward spring migration reaches Nova Scotia. An exception involves owls, as another nesting season has begun. What is it like to visit an owl nest alone at night, climb the nest tree, and look into the nest? One such visit to a Barred Owl nestbox several years ago is still near the top of my birding experiences.

In mid-March of that year, a couple of feet of snow covered the ground under an inch or more of fresh powdered snow. After the evening drive to Peck Meadow Road near Black River Lake, Kings County, it was necessary to park and walk to the nest site. There are no houses at this end of the road, and therefore it is not plowed in the winter. The temperature hovered around 0°C with no wind, creating perfect conditions for a snowshoe hike. A full moon was rising over the meadow beside the nearby brook. Powdered snow sparkled in the moonlight while the surrounding woods were illuminated in various shades of grey. There would be no need for another source of light to travel.

The soft swish of my snowshoes was the only sound breaking the silence of the one-mile hike before the turn onto an old woods road leading to the nest. Soon, this road narrowed to an overgrown path. Alone at night, the mind wanders. Grey shadows of leafless maple branches reach out across the snow to enclose one's drifting thoughts. Relief came when I spotted an old landmark. The near-dead pine tree stood against the moonlight, towering over the younger trees below. With this giant to my back, it was easy to find the spruce-covered slope bordering a hardwood swamp where Barred Owls have used my nestbox for many years.

The nestbox is 30 feet up in a mature Red Spruce beside the swamp. With snowshoes removed, I began the climb, making a stop on a large branch just below the nestbox. More than an hour had passed since I had left the world of making-a-living. It was time to savour the moment. The previous June, while I rested on this same branch, the garbled song of a

Canada Warbler came from the dark swamp below. A few squeaks from me brought the warbler shooting up from the shadows and onto my branch almost at an arm's distance. As it glared at me through yellow spectacles, its incessant chip notes told me I was not wanted here. Hopefully it had spent the winter safely in a similar swamp in South America and was beginning the return trip to the Cinnamon Ferns now resting below the snow cover of his Nova Scotia summer home.

HOOHOOAW cut through the night air from a neighbouring tree. All my senses jumped to full alert. A large grey form floated past me on broad wings into the spruces. Next came a marvellous penetrating duet of hoots, cackles, and hyena-like barks. The hairs on the back of my neck bristled as my grip on the branch tightened. A unique wilderness experience near to home. Remembering the object of this trip, I returned to the task at hand. My flashlight beam into the nestbox revealed a neat nestcup dug in the shavings, with a soft owl feather as a lining. There would be eggs to count on my next visit in early April.



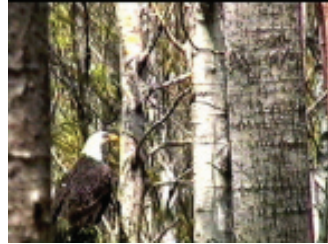
Nest visits should be short, so the climb down was swift. With snowshoes back on and mind racing, my tracks to the nest helped guide me on the return trip. The male owl followed part way, periodically giving a series of low-pitched hoots identifying his sex. The moon was now almost overhead, helping me to commit the high of this evening to lasting memory. At the meadow near my car I paused to reflect on sparkling snow crystals under moonlight, grey shadows, tree climbing, and Canada Warblers, but mostly courting Barred Owls at one's nestbox. How could birding in March be better than all this?

First published in Nova Scotia Birds, Winter 2002, volume 44, issue 1. This story was meant to be in the Spring 2003 BNS newsletter, but was inadvertently left out. Mary Pratt's cover illustration from that issue is reproduced on this page.

The Eagle and the Hummingbird

by Roy Bishop

My grandson Justin Bishop (age 12) told me about the eagle. As he was walking through my Avonport woods on May 31 it flew within a few feet of him and lit in a tree about 100 feet away and 15 feet above the ground. The eagle sat there for over half an hour. We did not try to approach it for fear it would leave.



I noticed a hummingbird flying near the eagle from time to time, and at one point I saw in my binoculars the hummingbird land in a nest not far from the eagle (but not in the picture). The nest is in a crotch of a spindly birch tree, about 20 feet above the ground. Had the hummingbird not landed in it, I would never have noticed the small lichen-covered nest.

Meanwhile, Sherman Williams had arrived with his video camera. I was standing behind him viewing the eagle when I saw a small twig wiggle. I stepped sideways to see what had made it wiggle, and there was the hummingbird. Sherman was videotaping the eagle, and I whispered to him to take one step to his left to get the hummingbird too. *(Just over half way up the light-coloured poplar tree immediately right of centre is a twig in front of the trunk, sloped in a 9:30-to-3:30 direction. On the 9:30 end sits a hummingbird, facing in the same direction as the eagle!)*

On leaving, as when it arrived, the eagle had difficulty navigating its big wings through the crowded branches. We last saw it as it disappeared behind some spruce trees.

The hummingbird tended its nest from that day until I left for a two-week trip to BC. I did not see the nest from June 19 until July 4, at which time there was no sign of activity. Perhaps the chicks (assuming they hatched successfully) had fledged. The nest is too high to see into it.

I wonder what the hummingbird would have done to the eagle if the eagle had landed closer to the nest?

Eastern Annapolis Valley Weather

Spring 2003

by Larry Bogan, Cambridge Station, NS

I was not in Nova Scotia for March and April and, when I did return, was told that I “didn’t miss much,” meaning the weather was not all that good. The highlights of the spring season were

- the large amount of snow on the ground through most of March
- flooding due to heavy rains and melting snow at the end of March
- the overall cooler-than-normal spring delaying the growing season by weeks
- an unusually cloudy May

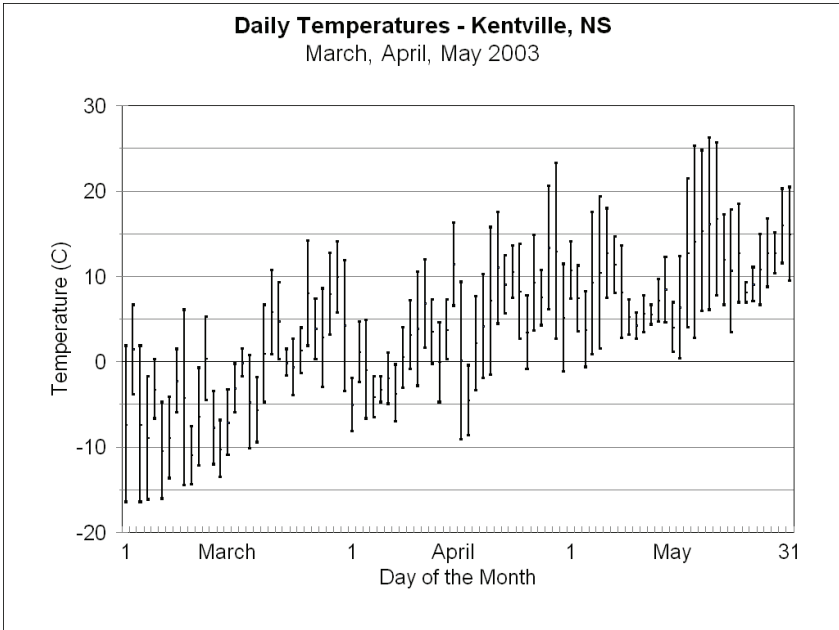
	Mean temperature (deg.C)	Snowfall (cm)	Total precipitation (mm)	Bright sunshine (h)
March (42 yr. average)	-1.9 (-0.9)	17 (46)	136 (108)	141 (133)
April (42 yr. average)	3.8 (4.5)	7 (14)	57 (82)	196 (151)
May (42 yr. average) (5 yr. average)	10.1 (10.6) (12.1)	0 (2) (0)	58 (79) (67)	137 (204) (233)
Season (42 yr. average)	4.0 (4.7)	24 (60)	251 (269)	474 (488)

Source: Food & Horticultural Research Centre, Kentville, NS.

Temperature

The whole spring season was 0.7°C cooler than the 42-year average, with March a full 1°C cooler than expected. We may remember May as a cool month, but it was only half a degree below the long-term average. But compared with the last five Mays, this one was 2°C cooler than average because we have been having warmer-than-normal weather lately. I have included the average monthly statistics for last five years for the month of May to show you how different the recent weather has been.

The graph of daily temperatures for the season shows rapidly rising temperature throughout March, with a sudden drop of 15°C after the heavy rainfalls at the end of March. After that, the temperatures are up and down with the passing weather systems. The warmest period of the season occurred during the one sunny week we had in May.



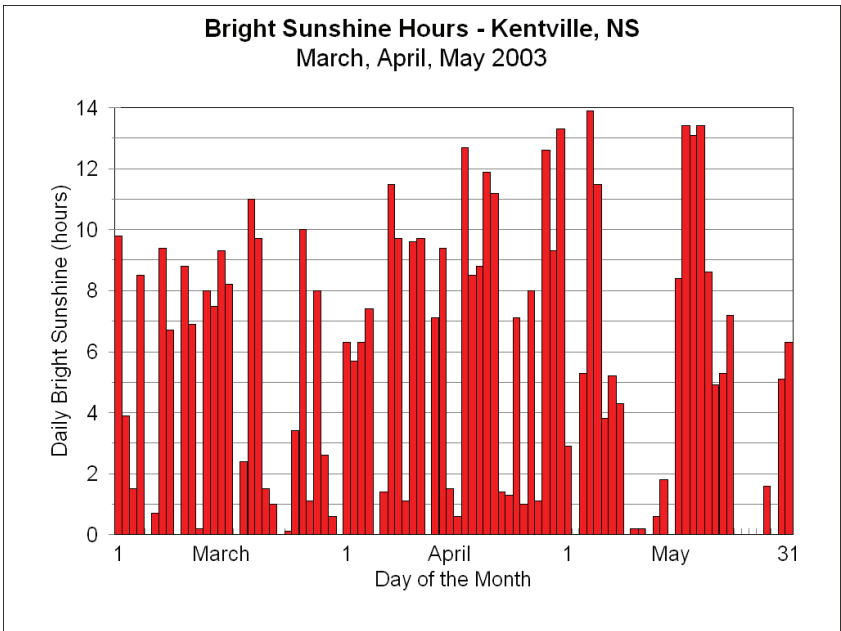
Precipitation

As I mentioned in my winter weather report, the continued snow cover was due to cooler-than-average temperatures, not higher snowfall rates. That was also true for most of March. Although the deep snows stayed until late in the month, March had below-average snowfall. The total precipitation for March was high, but that was due entirely to rainfall of 70 mm on the 30th and 31st. This occurred at the end of a warming spell that was melting the snow. One week earlier there had been a fall of 13 cm of snow, raising the snow depth to 63 cm. The combination of the melting and rain caused the extensive flooding in the Valley area. On April 1, all the snow was gone.

The season as a whole had nearly average precipitation because April and May saw only 70 percent of average long-term rainfall.

Sunshine

The most unusual aspect of May was not so much its slightly lower temperatures and rainfall, but the large amount of cloudiness. Comparing 2003 with the last five years, this May had less than 60 percent of the bright sunshine we've come to expect recently. I have included a chart of the bright sunshine hours for the spring, which shows the ups and downs we've had in sunshine. During the whole season the only full sunny week of the month occurred during and after the Victoria Day holiday. The rest of the season was characterized by a day or two of sunshine, then two or more days of cloudy weather. During this time the jet stream sat over Nova Scotia and channelled weather systems rapidly through our area, producing very unsettled conditions.



March and (especially) April were sunnier than the long-term averages and, contrary to May, these months have been slightly cloudier over the last five years.

What's In The Sky?

by Roy Bishop

New Moon: July 29, August 27, September 26, October 25

Full Moon: July 13, August 12, September 10 (Harvest Moon),
October 10

Autumn begins on Tuesday, September 23, at 7:47 a.m. (ADT)

A Second Total Lunar Eclipse

In the spring 2003 newsletter I wrote: “2003 is unusual in that there are two total eclipses of the Moon. Moreover, all phases of both of these eclipses are visible from Nova Scotia – assuming clear skies!” Unfortunately Nova Scotia was covered in cloud during the first eclipse on May 15/16.

Our second chance to see a total lunar eclipse occurs in November. On the evening of Saturday, November 8, the Full Moon begins to enter the umbra of Earth's shadow at 19:32 AST. Total eclipse extends from 21:07 to 21:31, and the Moon is clear of the umbra by 23:05. The best time for a quick look is shortly after 21:00. Use binoculars to fully experience the beauty of the event.

Lying in the Galaxy

I also remarked in the spring newsletter that early on a May evening the plane of our galaxy lies near the horizon. Thus, at such times the ground under our feet lies nearly in the plane of our galaxy and we are literally “standing on” the galaxy. On an August or September evening the geometry has changed such that the plane of our galaxy is high in the sky and we are, in effect, “lying in” the galaxy (provided we are standing!). Overhead, the sky is rich with stars as we observe an edge-on view of our galaxy, the Milky Way.

Perseid Meteors

This annual shower will be at its best on the evenings of August 11, 12, and 13. Unfortunately, the Moon will be full on those nights and only the brightest meteors will be noticeable.

Mars

One planet dominates the night sky this summer: Mars. This famous planet is at opposition and therefore close to Earth at intervals of just over two years. Because of its elliptical orbit Mars comes especially close to Earth at intervals of about 16 years. Not only is 2003 one of the special 16-year oppositions, but on August 27 Mars will be closer to Earth than at any time in recorded history! Look low in the southeast (about 11 p.m. early in August, 9 p.m. late in August) for a very bright, slightly orange, steady point of light. Mars will be unmistakable. Mars will continue to dominate the evening sky throughout September.

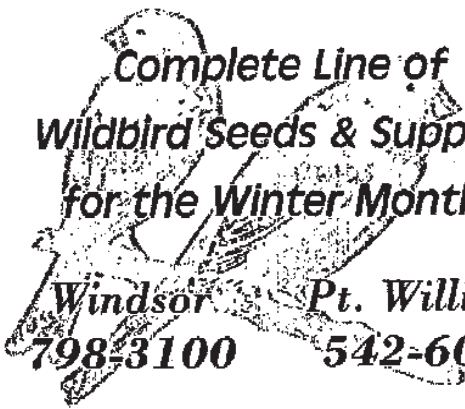
Mars is the only planet that shows surface features in an Earth-based telescope. Mercury is too small and close to the Sun to reveal any surface detail. Venus has a solid surface but it is hidden behind thick clouds. Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune are cloud covered and without any solid surface, and Pluto is too small and far away to appear other than as a point of light in a telescope.

The first person to see the surface of Mars was the Dutch astronomer Christian Huygens in the mid-17th century. Any good-quality astronomical telescope having an aperture of 100 mm or greater will show details on the surface of Mars this August and September – provided that its surface is not hidden by a dust storm. The atmosphere of Mars, composed mainly of carbon dioxide gas, is very thin by Earth standards. However, strong winds occasionally result in a veil of suspended dust that obscures the surface of the entire planet. Astronomers are hoping that a major Martian dust storm does not occur this summer.

The southern hemisphere of Mars is tilted toward Earth this summer, and its white south polar cap will be visible in a telescope. The most prominent of the dark surface markings is Syrtis Major. Compared to the bright orange regions of Mars, the dark areas appear greenish, but this is a colour-contrast effect in the eye. Before 1965, when images taken by the spacecraft Mariner 4 revealed the barren nature of the Martian landscape, some observers thought the greenish-appearing areas indicated the presence of Martian plants.


A Star Party

On Saturday, August 2 (9:30 a.m. to midnight), at Smiley's Provincial Park near Brooklyn, the public is invited to observe the Sun and stars with amateur astronomers. The event is "Nova East," the annual camping/observing weekend sponsored by the Halifax Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, Minas Astronomy Group of Wolfville, and Nova Central Astronomy Club of Truro. For more information contact Roy Bishop (542-3992, <rg@ns.sympatico.ca>).



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Blomidon Naturalists Society

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Sources of Local Natural History (compiled by Blomidon Naturalists Society)

Information	Source	Office	Home
Amphibians & Reptiles	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604
	Jim Wolford	585-1684	542-9204
Astronomy	Roy Bishop		542-3992
	Sherman Williams	542-3598	542-5104
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	Darryl Grund		542-9214
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Hawks & Owls	Bernard Forsythe		542-2427
Indian Prehistory & Archeology	Ellis Gertridge		542-2816
	James Legge		542-3530
Mosses & Ferns	John Pickwell		792-1830
Mammals	Tom Herman	585-1469	678-0383
Rocks & Fossils	Geology Dept Acadia U.	542-2201	
Seashore & Marine Life	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604
	Jim Wolford	585-1684	542-9204
	Michael Brylinsky	585-1509	582-7954

