

INVITATION

You and your family and guests are invited to a pork
barbecue at the Kentville Research Station to celebrate 30
successful years of the
Blomidon Naturalists Society.
Sunday, July 11, 2004
(details page 7)



2004 PICNIC

Blomidon Naturalists Society

Summer 2004 – Volume 31 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 registered charity. Receipts (for income tax purposes) will be issued for all donations.

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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 deadline

Fall, September 15, 2004

Editorial Board

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Editorial

Welcome to summer, as it seems to have arrived finally, weather-wise. There is much to be thankful for in the green lushness of our countryside this year, and we hope our visitors fall in love with Nova Scotia and return again soon. Tourism is undoubtedly one of the more positive forms of income for this province, as it has the potential for being never-ending as long as we nurture and protect our environment and special places. Eco-tourism is a more commonplace spinoff, but we are probably only seeing the tip of the iceberg compared to what we could do with it. On the other hand, we have to be very careful not to overuse certain areas and destroy them with too many footprints. It is already becoming a problem on some of the trails in Kejimikujik National Park. How do we achieve a safe and happy balance for all creatures concerned? Something to think about as you go about your vacations and trips in the next few weeks.

I want to thank particularly Mike McCall for coming on line with the bird sightings once more. You just can't keep a good ex-editor away from the scandal sheet for too long. Thanks to many people who have arranged for and led field trips recently or have had to cancel when there were too many clouds to see the heavenly bodies. There are many more intriguing events coming up, so keep your newsletter and its schedule handy, and join us often with friends and neighbours over the summer months.

Do have safe and happy holidays, and please consider writing up some of your nature highlights for the fall newsletter, the deadline being September 15. Contributions can be sent to Jean Timpa, 1 - 25 Gaspereau Ave, Wolfville, NS B4P 2C5, or to my e-mail address <jtimpa@ns.sympatico.ca>, which is probably the handiest way if you have computer access. And there is much gratitude to all of you who help make another edition of the BNS Newsletter possible through your written musings or production assistance.

Jean Timpa, editor

FOLLOWUP
North American Migration Count (NAMC)
May 8, 2004

I wish to express my deep thanks to each and every one of you who participated in another successful provincial spring bird count. Your time and invaluable efforts were greatly appreciated. Annapolis Valley results will be published in the next issue of the BNS Newsletter, with highlights.

Although the count took place over a month ago, I am sure participants will still clearly remember that cold and windy day even under sunshine – certainly not the easiest for finding birds. Gusty winds (30–70 kph) prevailed and very cool temperatures (from -2°C up to 12°C , if you were lucky) made it rather miserable for everyone. Indeed, some counties in Cape Breton even had to contend with some light snow flurries. However, in spite of the weather many migrants succeeded in safely arriving in our province, and not all of them huddled down under cover.

207 species were tallied for the province.

Judy Tufts (NAMC Provincial Coordinator)

NOTICE
Still Wanted: Young Naturalists

Robie Tufts Young Naturalist Award

We need your help to identify a promising young naturalist to receive a fabulous award (field guide of their choice and a one-year subscription to BNS). The adventuring soul must be 15 years old or younger and have a keen interest in the natural world. If you know of a youngster that is roaming the fields, woods, and marshes this summer please contact me. We would like to present this award at our September meeting, so please do not wait until the last minute to suggest a candidate.

Stephen Petersen

tel: 902 585-1772 e-mail: <stephen.petersen@acadiau.ca>

Blomidon Naturalists Society

Summer/Fall 2004

Meetings

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are held on the third Monday of each month 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 20, 2004 – The Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Dr. Bill Freedman, chair of the regional board of directors, will give us a presentation on the work of the Nature Conservancy of Canada in Nova Scotia and explain how its work relates to that of the Nova Scotia Nature Trust.

Monday, October 18, 2004 – Ancient Shores of the Bay of Fundy.

In 1841, Sir William Logan discovered the first Carboniferous tetrapod footprints the world ever knew near Blue Beach on the Minas Basin. Since then a wealth of fossils has been found including tetrapods, fish, invertebrates, and plants. Chris Mansky has made an extensive collection of fossils from this area and has established the Blue Beach Fossil Museum near Avonport. Chris will share his enthusiasm and experience with the biology and geology of our area as it existed some 350 million years ago. (See also the field trip with Chris on August 1).

Monday, November 15 – Walk the Long Walk.

Put on your backpack. We are going to hike the 2,658-mile Pacific Crest Trail with Janet Roberts. We'll cross southern California's searing deserts, rise to glorious heights in the Sierra Nevada, and follow the volcanoes of the Cascades all the way to Canada. Learn about Janet's six-month journey and view some of the spectacular vistas she enjoyed along the way. Janet is a member of the Cobequid Naturalists Club.

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 10, 2004 – Early Summer Butterflies. Jean Timpa (902 542-5678) will lead us on a search for early summer butterflies. Meet at the RTNC at 1 p.m.

Sunday, July 11, 2004 – BNS 30th Anniversary Celebration. Members and guests, past and present, are invited to a pork barbecue at the picnic grounds of the Kentville Research Station to celebrate 30 successful years of the Blomidon Naturalists Society. (Menu: whole pig roast, potato salad, salads, veggie burger alternative, dessert, tea, coffee, and juice. Cost: \$8 adult, \$5 under 14, free under 5, payable at the park). Ruth Newell (902 542-2095) will lead a nature walk up the ravine through the majestic mature pine/hemlock forest, starting from the picnic park at 4 p.m. If you are not up to the hike down and up a steep hill, come anyway to the barbecue at 5:30 p.m. For the caterers we must know how many people will be attending. Please register by e-mailing Simon Forsyth <simon.forsyth@ns.sympatico.ca> or phoning Harold at 902 542-5983 to let us know how many will be coming. To get to the picnic park, go to the Agricultural Research Centre at the east end of Kentville, proceed up the hill, go left around the main building and on up the hill.

Sunday, July 18, 2004 – Rare Plants. In the 1940s, David Erskine found two very rare plants up the Gaspereau River: the Broad-lipped Twayblade and Pointed-leaved Tick Trefoil. They can still be found in the same place, and Bernard Forsythe (902 542-2427) will lead us on a rigorous hike up the river from White Rock to find these rare plants as well as the notable rattlesnake fern and much more. This is a long hike – about an hour up the river we have to ford the stream (bring old sneakers to change into)

and then another quarter hour from there (not counting stops). Meet at the RTNC at 9:30 a.m. and bring a lunch.

Saturday, July 24, 2004 – Dragonflies. Dragonhunter Tom Herman (902 678-0383) will show us some of the darners, cruisers, skimmers, gliders, meadowhawks, and other winged creatures found at local streams and ponds. Meet at the RTNC at 1 p.m.

Sunday, August 1, 2004 – Blue Beach Fossil Museum and Research Centre, with Chris Mansky (902 684-9541). Signs lead to Blue Beach on Bluff Road between Avonport and Hantsport. Meet at the RTNC at 9 a.m. or at the Blue Beach Fossil Museum at 9:30 a.m. Take a stroll down beautiful Blue Beach, where we will explore back 350 million years to the earliest part of the Carboniferous Period, when this part of Nova Scotia was a recently acquired terrane, formerly a part of Africa, with sharp-topped mountains and swift streams washing their sediments down into a giant freshwater lake. These sediments would one day become the shales and sandstones of the Horton Bluff Formation. We will discuss the geology, biology, and paleoenvironment of this site, and Chris will explain the process of fossilization and many of the enigmatic markings left by both organisms and inorganic methods – a virtual classroom of sedimentology in the rocks of the beach.

Long famous for its fossil footprints, Blue Beach is gaining worldwide recognition for the latest finds. This is the world's only known source of tetrapod fossils from what is otherwise a 20 million year gap; the tetrapods from here are central to the question Where and when did the land animals begin?

After visiting the museum and seeing for yourself what all the excitement is about, you can try your luck on the beach, where researchers still search for the big find that will help unlock our origins.

Saturday, August 14, 2004 – Late Summer Butterflies. Butterflies change with the seasons, so Jean Timpa (902 542-5678) will lead a second walk looking for later summer species. Meet at the RTNC at 1 p.m.

Attracting Bats

by John Belbin, Kingston

The two most important considerations are food and temperature. Obviously, because bats eat insects a reliable and heavy supply of these is essential or the bats will not be attracted to the area. Those areas where people make continuing efforts to minimize insects by clearing and spraying will not be attractive. The box itself must be sited largely in the open in these latitudes, as studies have shown that bats like high internal temperatures in their roosts and homes. Some US studies recommend that the boxes should be in full sun for several hours each day so that the internal chamber is at 80–90 degrees F for at least 12 hours, and 90–100 degrees for seven hours. Obviously, you don't want to fry them, but low temperatures seem to be the major problem in these parts.

These considerations mean that relatively open locations close to streams or water bodies are ideal.

(Story originally published on NatureNS 7 Jun 2004)

Yard Sale Birdwatching

by John Belbin

The neighbours on our street decided to hold a community yard sale and asked us to participate. Normally this would not be a problem, but that day was the one planned for my wife's music recital, an event in which I am normally general odd-job, resident photographer, and token male. Not to be! I soon found myself "volunteered" in the best tradition of the Royal Navy and, despite protests, sitting alone in the back yard all day amidst a pile of our leftover possessions. So I took my binoculars and determined to while away the hours usefully between those sporadic events where I tried to persuade friends and strangers to give me money for our junk. It actually worked!

Almost the first birds I saw apart from the robins and grackles were two male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in different parts of the garden. There do seem to be quite a few about this year, and these two both sang their hearts out.

At least ten Tree Swallows entertained most of the day. A couple even perched on the nearby telephone wires and sang, just like in the old days.



Song Sparrows and Chipping Sparrows were also about all day long, as were a large number of Mourning Doves. A Downy Woodpecker flew into the dead pine tree, under which some of my tables were placed, and hammered away for a while, much to the delight of some visiting children. Hummingbirds flew past all day long, but you had to be quick to see them. Maybe they were visiting the lilac bushes in full bloom behind where I was sitting.

The Chimney Swifts visited every ten or 15 minutes all day long and dropped into the chimney a few times. Why is it that a pair of swifts is almost always three birds? Maybe they are Moslems? At one point I had a noisy visit from ten Chimney Swifts; they made enough of a stir so that my potential clients at the time all stopped to watch. A couple from Halifax said they had never seen Chimney Swifts before.

A squadron of 14 Cedar Waxwings worked the treetops near the brook all afternoon. It was quite amusing to watch two of them spend at least ten minutes trying to get into the bat box. I assumed at the time that they were excited about a potential nest site. Now I realize that they could probably hear the bats inside.

The goldfinch came by a few times, but as the niger feeder is on the other side of the house they were mostly content to feed their faces over there.

A Red-tailed Hawk did an extensive tour, flying round and round for quite a time. It attracted what seemed to be every crow and grackle in the area, all of which tried to drive it off. It ignored the lot and only left when it was

good and ready. Later on, an American Kestrel also did several detailed circuits. It was completely ignored by everything.

Late in the afternoon at least 50 starlings landed in the clump of trees that gave me shade; at least 30 of them were fledglings. The noise of the youngsters begging from their parents was incredible – you couldn't hear yourself think. Shortly after that I gave up and took down the signs so no one else could bother me.

In the evening I decided to relax from my heavy day by watching the hockey game, but I was soon distracted by the Little Brown Bats outside, who were numerous and very active. For quite a while they were more entertaining and obviously more successful than the Calgary Flames. Not such a bad way to spend the day after all, but I won't tell my wife that.

(Story originally published on NatureNS 6 June 2004)



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BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT
Kingsport Intertidal Exploration
by Sherman “Slugger” Bleakney

June 5, 2004, was one of those wonderful rare mornings for exploring the vast expanses of Kingsport’s intertidal flats – sunny, warm, and not a breath of wind. Windless means no rippling of the water surface and no stirred up silts. Every body of water, large or small, was a crystal-clear aquarium.

The weather was perfect, the ten-person group was just right, the two experienced professional assistants (Pat Stewart and Jim Wolford) were appreciated, and what we saw and discussed was informative – ah, those yummy muds of Minas.

That initial visual impression from the wharf – an intertidal desert of sand, mud, and boulders – was soon shattered upon closer inspection. Firm surfaces were coated with creatures, some active, some sessile. The soft substrates were honeycombed with tubes and tunnels, and their surfaces were crisscrossed with trails – the usual Minas Basin tens of thousands of individuals of each of the many species (obviously too numerous to mention in this brief report) beneath a mere square metre of “barren” flats.

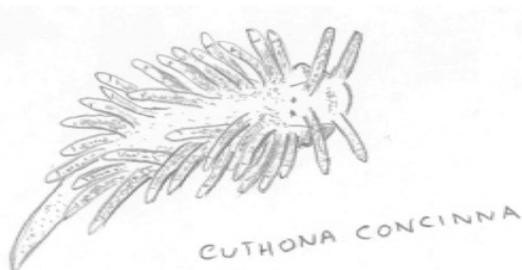
Most interesting to the three of us who were on the October 26, 2003, night field trip (Jim Wolford, Harold Forsyth, and me) was that the devastation wrought by the October hurricane low-tide storm was still very evident. The *Sabellaria* tube worms had not yet re-cemented the sand grains into ridges (normally there are acres and acres of worm colonies); the substrate storm-stripped silts and sands were just re-accumulating, and broken mollusc shells were still scattered everywhere; much of the area looked like an exposed boulder field; and things like sponges, hydroids, and ectoprocts (bryozoans) were noticeably scarce. However, giant moon snails and razor clams had made a comeback; in fact I have never seen so many moon snail sand-collar egg cases.

Jim gave an in-depth (about six or seven inches) demonstration of how different types of flat fish swim, using a live flat shark (skate) and a live

left-right flat flounder. He also found a large inebriated sculpin that had drunk too much air.

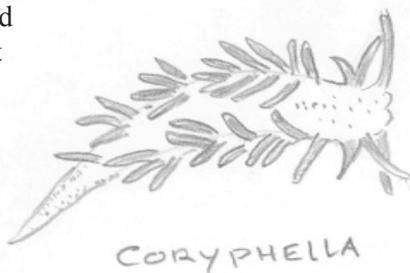
Naturally, I am saving the best for last. We (well, actually it was me) found

sea slugs! On a sand collar were two colour phases of pincushion Dorids, and on a huge colony of *Sertularia* hydroids there were several colourful species laying strings of eggs: some bushy-backed Dendronotids and (as we three experts so confidently declared to one and all therewith assembled) many bright red common “Coryphellid” sea slugs. However, a few days later



I had a closer look and discovered our red carnivores were the uncommon *Cuthona concinna*, a species that feeds on large stinging hydroids (astoundingly, it consumes the hydroids and somehow incorporates those stinging cells into its own skin for its own defence purposes), living in strong currents, in large estuaries. Two classic sites for this species in Nova Scotia are the Bear River and the Annapolis River where they rush into the Annapolis Basin on the ebb tide.

We did enjoy ourselves and were glad that most of you BNSers were not with us, as such a mob would have trampled all that delicate intertidal fauna into oblivion. In fact we did have a conscience confrontation. Early on in our excursion, one lady’s Wellingtons refused to take another step after they realized how many hapless *Heteromastus* worms



and carefree *Corophium* shrimps would be annihilated with each step forward. Sadly, she had to accompany her recalcitrant boots back to her car. But, thankfully, we know there will always be other fine days and other low tides; it’s only our schedules that deny us the pleasure.

BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT
Gaspereau Fish Watching
by Jim Wolford

May 15, 2004 – a gorgeous sunny, warm (26°C), and calm day for watching fish at the White Rock Canal fish ladder. The field trip of approximately 25 participants was co-led by Jamie Gibson and several employees of Nova Scotia Power.

We first met at the White Rock power plant and signed waiver forms for Nova Scotia Power. We watched numerous Double-crested Cormorants flying overhead, heading inland to fish for smelt and Gaspereau, etc. Later they head downstream to return to their nests on Boot Island off northeast Grand Pre. We also saw several Great Black-backed Gulls flying below the power plant and a couple of immature Bald Eagles.

We drove in a caravan along the White Rock Canal (normally just a public walking trail) to the normally locked fenced compound surrounding the new fish ladder at the White Rock dam. In each of the compartments of the fish ladder were lots of obvious Gaspereau on their spawning migration inland, and we could see them ascending from compartment to compartment.

Jamie told us that the Alewives, or Gaspereau, had now been in the river for about two weeks, and he guessed about 6,000 to 7,000 of them were passing through the ladder each day. The number might reach a peak of about 50,000 daily near the end of May, when the fishing stops (as a conservation move, the 15 or so square nets below the town of Gaspereau are fishing just four days per week). Jamie told us about the basic life cycle of the Gaspereau; their seaward migration takes them to the area of Brown's Bank.

Along the diversion channel, we saw some collected salmon smolts, which were released upstream as fry a few years ago and now were heading toward the sea. Last year only seven adult salmon entered the river; this number is now so low that all of them were captured and taken to the Coldbrook hatchery, where they were artificially spawned and their youngsters raised there, again to be released eventually into the river. The

inner Bay of Fundy salmon are all considered endangered.

Despite the lovely warm weather, I saw very few black flies, and only one of them bit me; usually the earliest ones in any one area are non-biting males.

I'd like to say something positive about Nova Scotia Power and its efforts with the new fish ladder, etc. In local publicity concerning the fish and the power company, NSP comes out to some extent as the bad guy. I had a tour of the new fish ladder last year. It was clear that this state-of-the-art facility is very complex, involving not only the ladder with its trapping and counting facilities, but also the diversion louvre, or curtain, plus diversion channel and trapping facility (for salmon smolts) and diversion channels on either side of the White Rock power plant. And NSP is working on an ongoing basis – along with the Kings County Wildlife Association, local residents, and fisheries scientists such as Jamie Gibson – to keep improving the situation for various sorts of wildlife.

One of the NSP men told me that they are even thinking about figuring out a way to help the baby American Eels (whose migration pattern is the opposite of the smelts and Gaspereau and salmon) get past the White Rock dam to get further inland, where the females mature over a period of several years.

(Originally published on NatureNS)

WITH SORROW

Since our last newsletter issue, we have lost two very special friends to the Blomidon Naturalists Society: Dr. Darryl Grund and Dr. Roger Pocklington, both of Wolfville. Their past contributions to our meetings and field trips have been very much appreciated, and their time and talents to us will be keenly missed. To their wives, Susan and Patricia, children, and other family members we extend our heartfelt sympathy.

JOINT BNS-NSBS FIELD TRIP REPORT
Spring Birds in Kings County
by Jim Wolford

April 25, 2004 –Temperatures began at –2 to 0°C and the day ended at 9°C, but a very cold west wind made us feel like martyrs. The trip began with ten cars, perhaps 20 people in total.

At Bernard Forsythe’s yard on Wolfville Ridge, Bernard showed us the perched male Barred Owl first, then inspected a nestbox – neither parent attacked him at the box – where there were two tiny, very round owl chicks. Prey items in the box included 11 small mammals (Meadow Voles, Short-tailed Shrews, Deer Mice) and a Palm Warbler. The female returned to the nestbox quickly after Bernard left. Bernard offered a large chicken chick on his feeding platform, but the male did not come for it while we were there (this pair of owls nests earlier than other local Barred Owls, thanks to the supplemental food they receive for part of year). We heard and saw a Yellow-rumped Warbler.

At Van Nostrand’s ponds at Starrs Point, we walked around both the older and new ponds. We saw at least two Yellow-rumped Warblers, 20+ Tree Swallows with five Barn Swallows, four male Ring-necked Ducks, one pair of Canada Geese, two adult-looking Bald Eagles flying together (possibly failed nesters or not really adults yet).



At the Wellington dike, a female Northern Harrier was flying around (in late afternoon after the trip disbanded, I saw another female along Middle Dyke Road just north of New Minas).

At the Bald Eagle nest east and south of Jawbone Corner, the male eagle flew off to chase a flying raven. A second raven joined the interaction

briefly, and the eagle returned to the nest. We also saw other aerial harassing going on there high in the air: crow and raven interacting, raven chasing immature eagle, raven harassing a soaring Red-tailed Hawk.

At Canard Pond we saw one Great Blue Heron, five Northern Shovelers (one pair and a group of 2m,1f), two Ring-necked Ducks (m,f), five Green-winged Teal, and one male Belted Kingfisher.

On Fred Thomas Road (north of Canard Pond), Suzanne Borkowski, Wendy and Bob McDonald, and Jay McConnell saw an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull that was part of a large group of gulls and a couple of ravens – some were feeding actively on some sort of sludge pile in one corner of a plowed field. The Lesser was quite close to the road where we stopped but flew away before other people could be alerted.

The Department of Transport pond southwest of Canning had two American Wigeon (m,f) and two pairs of Blue-winged Teal.

At the Canning Aboiteau we saw what was probably a m/f pair of Common Goldeneye in the river upstream toward town.

Along the Habitant River in Canning were two Greater Yellowlegs (Richard Stern saw four there by himself) and 15 Canada geese (others were heard in unseen bends of the river – we would have needed some very long walks to find more geese and to look for the Greater White-fronted Goose seen with 350 Canada geese by Judy Tufts the previous day).

In Harris Pond in Canning were two Gadwalls (m,f), two pairs of American Wigeon, 14 Ring-necked Ducks (four pairs plus six males), one Double-crested Cormorant (the only one seen today), one muskrat (the only one seen today), One Belted Kingfisher, 20 Tree Swallows, and two Yellow-rumped Warblers.

At Hennigar's Marsh (north end of Middle Dyke Road, west of Sheffield Mills) a single Canada Goose (perhaps with a mate on a nest) was west of the bridge; east of the bridge were a pair of Canada Geese (possibly still laying or not mature) and a single Canada Goose (again likely with a mate on a nest) plus a group of three female Common Mergansers.

Saxon Street Pond was partly drained. It took us a while to see the pair of Canada Geese north of the road in the marsh, and the female was swimming in a very peculiar fashion with her neck stretched straight out along the water surface in front of her like she holds her neck when incubating on the nest. (Is she laying now or waiting for nesting habitat to appear? Last year the geese were subsequently flooded out by raised water levels after the drop. Or is she immature?)

All in all, we did pretty well for diversity of dabbling ducks, moderately for diving ducks, and poorly for geese, with several nice bonuses. In all, the group counted 43 species of birds.

NOTICE

BNS Calendar Photo Op

Yes, another wonderful calendar is planned and is already in the initial stages. We need, of course, those great pictures of the Blomidon area that you have taken over the years. Although we can stretch the definition a bit if we have to, we prefer to keep it as local as possible, but they definitely have to be taken in Nova Scotia.

Submit your photos to Roy Bishop (542-3992), who is in charge of pictures. If you have digital selections, Roy will accept e-mail submissions to <rg@ns.sympatico.ca> (please, no files bigger than 1MB). You can submit one or up to a baker's dozen, one for each month and a cover picture. We use horizontal shots. Slides are fine; prints should be at least 4 x 6.

The last day on which pictures will be accepted is August 1. If for some reason you cannot locate Roy, please contact Sherman Williams at 542-5104 or Merritt Gibson at 582-7569, the other members of our faithful calendar committee.

SEEN IN THE WILD

Whumpp!

by Roy Bishop

One day last spring I was privileged to witness a few hours in the life of a bird. Other than mentioning some thoughts that sprang to mind at the time, this is an account of what I saw.

On the sunny afternoon of Saturday, May 1, I was alone in a vacant house doing some plumbing and carpentry. Suddenly I heard a loud “Whumpp”!

The sound came from another room, but it was unmistakable: a large bird had struck a window. Looking out, I saw two pheasants on the ground below a window: a male with its wings spread over a female and copulating with her. Within seconds the female was obviously dead, apparently having broken her neck from the impact with the window. I was at an adjacent window, and a screen helped to hide me from view. I remained motionless.

Several times the male used his beak to lift the female’s head up only to have it drop lifeless back to the ground. My impulse was to chase the male away, to end this stark juxtaposition of life and death; however, I told myself to leave nature alone, not to interfere.

After a few minutes the male backed away from the female and began walking back and forth in a semicircle about a metre from the lifeless body (the side of the house made a circular path impossible). He moved slowly, his scarlet face held low to the ground, his iridescent plumage puffed out and

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tilted toward the female, and his tail fanned in a vertical plane.

This display ended several minutes later when he went to a basement window two metres from where the female lay and began to strike the glass with his beak. I immediately went to the basement and, without turning on a light, watched in the semi-darkness as the pheasant, now at my eye level, walked slowly back and forth in front of the window, occasionally giving it a whack with his beak. Did he see his reflection as another male and engage in what we humans call an “instinctive” aggression response, or did he have some inkling of what had happened to his mate a few minutes earlier? There was no flapping of wings, no obvious agitation, no calling, only a slow pacing back and forth interspersed with strong, methodical strikes at the glass . . . whack! . . . whack! I stood spellbound in the darkness.

This continued for half an hour, strikes at the glass alternating with displays near the female. Finally, he slowly walked away from the scene and entered the nearby woods. I then noticed another male deeper in the woods. The two met and began an aggressive display, every few seconds rising clear of the ground in a flurry of wings and strident calls. In the tangle of wings and underbrush I immediately lost track of which bird was which. Whether the fight had anything to do with the dead female I do not know. After a long ten minutes of battle one pheasant flew off and the other disappeared into the woods. There, I thought, the drama is over and I can return to what I was doing.

An hour later I took a break from my work and went outside to look at the female. Her mottled brown plumage was the perfect camouflage in our fields during the spring breeding season, but it had been no defence against a reflective pane of glass erected by humans. Evolution requires more than a century or two to cope with a new hazard. It had taken countless centuries for the aesthetic sense of the female pheasant to create the spectacular plumage of the male, and now, in the case of this female, that small brown head lay lifeless in a puddle of blood. I left her where she fell. Later I would dispose of the body.

I continued working while there was light, skipping supper. In mid-evening, I paused to watch the sunset. Shortly thereafter I saw a movement out of the corner of my eye – a male pheasant at the edge of the woods

looking toward the house. Once again I was transfixed.

It was soon apparent that this was the original male. With measured steps he walked directly toward the female, paused, and then spread his wings over the cold bird, occasionally trying to lift the female's head as he had done some five hours earlier. After two minutes he stopped and once more went through a courtship display, slowly parading near the female. This time he paid no attention to the basement window. Although my window was closed, every few seconds I could hear a soft call coming from him. Here, in the fading daylight, this bird was doing all it could to elicit a response from its mate.

I wondered how long this diurnal bird would stay, for its vision is not designed for seeing in the dark. But he stayed. Half an hour later in the gathering night, he paused beside the female and stood motionless for a full five minutes. My legs were cramped, for I too was motionless, but I dared not move. In no way did I want to intrude into his world.

After another brief courtship display, he walked slowly away. At the edge of the woods he stopped and turned for a moment, apparently looking back toward the female, now illuminated more by moonlight than by twilight. At this point I was telling myself that this was just a bird, that it was a mistake to impute a human perspective to all I had witnessed, that my body shouldn't be trembling. He then continued slowly into the woods, and I lost sight of his shadowy form amongst the dark trees.

Early the next morning I went back to the house, approaching slowly in case the male might be there. There was no sign of him, and the female was gone. All that was left near where she had lain were some feathers — body, wing, and tail feathers scattered about. Likely a hawk had discovered her at dawn.

I picked up a feather, went home, laid the feather on my desk, and began typing before time could dim the memory of what I had seen.

Bird Sightings

by Mike McCall

The last few issues of the newsletter has been missing that which for so long has been one of its most popular features – a compilation of interesting or offbeat bird sightings, reports of species seldom seen in our viewing area, and accounts of unusual bird behaviour. I missed it and I know others did too. So rather than curse the darkness, I reached for the phone and called Jean Timpa, and she agreed to sign me on as the bird report man.

This report covers the period from mid-May to early June only. With your cooperation the next issue should be more comprehensive.

Marty Snyder had a male Indigo Bunting at her feeders west of Gaspereau in late May.

Avril and John Harwood report a male Eastern Bluebird on their clothesline at Woodside. It was a one-time spotting with no sign of a female. Unusually for this time of year, a Red-winged Blackbird has been a regular visitor to their feeders.

Jim Wolford reported on May 23 a “new” Bald Eagle nest, on the Visser property off Black Rock Road, with two eaglets about one-third grown.

On a cold, breezy May 26, Judy Tufts reported 200+ swifts emerging from the RTNS chimney around 10 a.m., while Jim Wolford reports regular evening sightings of 150–200+ birds. The hungry Merlin has been hanging around for a snack, but no successful (for him) attacks have been noted. Much swift activity in Middleton as well with, once again, a hungry Merlin hanging about. Some locals have been muttering about “doing something” about this handsome predator. I think of this as the Walt Disney effect – cute little bunnies should live forever but nasty predators ought to be severely dealt with.

A late May CBC report had thousands of songbirds perishing in the waters of the Bay of Fundy. Wildlife biologist Dan Busby believes that

the migrating birds ran into a fog bank off Grand Manan, causing the birds to become cold and wet so that flight was very difficult and energy consuming, and inducing hypothermia. Some birds landed on islands and some on fishing boats, but fishermen reported “thousands” of dead birds in the water. Busby noted that while it may seem that many birds died the number is only a fraction of those that are killed flying into office towers.

Herewith a report from Ian McKay at Scots Bay: “Just thought I would let anyone who came out this way in on a treat. In one of the shore banks, about 300 m north of the bridge over to the beach, is the start of a colony of Bank Swallows. My wife and I have been sitting near the tidal pools and watching as about 25 twitter and dive all around us feeding on the flies from the seaweed.

“If you come on to the beach from the bridge, just turn right and walk along till you see the exposed earth banks near where the basaltic outcrops begin. Sit low or, better yet, lie down near one of the large tidal pools and they will swoop over you, putting on quite the show.”

Angela Slaunwhite of Windsor reported a crow with crusty growths around the eyes and much larger gnarled growths on the front and back of the feet, but it appeared to fly and walk without difficulty. It appears that the crow was suffering from a typical avian pox infection, whose cutaneous form may give rise to the following:

- Wart-like nodules appear on the featherless areas of the body, including the feet and legs, margins of the eyes, and base of the beak.
- Birds may appear weak and emaciated if the nodules have interfered with feeding.
- Laboured breathing may be observed in birds where air passages have been blocked.
- Growths can form clusters, which may impair sight, breathing, and feeding.
- Secondary bacterial and fungal infections of pox lesions are common.
- Birds may fully recover provided they are able to feed. The disease usually is self-limiting and leaves only minor scars.

Bill and Brenda Thexton first saw at an adult Little Blue Heron in a ditch

near the small white church at Grand Pre on May 19. The bird remained there for three days, attracting many viewers.



Seeking Contributions

I welcome your reports by phone (678-6273), by mail (3957 Hwy 359, RR 3, Centreville B0P 1J0), or by e-mail <mikemccall@ns.sympatico.ca>. Here are a couple of principles to which we shall try to adhere. We will concentrate on Kings and parts of adjacent counties – that is, the local birding area – making exception for extremely unusual species anywhere in Nova Scotia. Reports should deal with unusual bird sightings or unusual behaviour. Reports of exceptionally early arrivals or very late departures of common summer residents, or unusually high or low numbers of species will be considered, but the operative word should be “unusual.” That said, send me anything that you think qualifies and I’ll decide – in consultation with higher authority – what is printed.

Mike

BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT
Gaspereau–Greenwich Herpetofauna
by Michelle McPherson

On June 12, 11 eager participants headed out for a reptile and amphibian walk with Fred and me. Our first of three stops was the cattail pond by the Greenwich Hwy 101 exit, where we netted numerous Green Frog tadpoles, odonate exuviae and larvae (dragonflies and damselflies), and assorted aquatic coleoptera. In a deeper artificial pond across the field, we saw a Green Frog, Yellow-spotted Salamander larvae, and, to the children's delight, a mummified Red-spotted Newt.

We then drove to Lumsden dam and investigated a roadside pond adjacent to mixed forest. There we found huge egg masses of Yellow-spotted Salamanders and large numbers of Spring Peeper tadpoles. On a nearby woods road, several people noted a piece of torn-up earth – likely the work of a bear. Our last stop was Goshawk woods in the Gaspereau, where we found dozens of Red-backed Salamanders, including one juvenile, in rotting logs.

Since the afternoon was overcast and quite chilly, we did not find any snakes. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate with us next year, and we'll see more of you come out to learn about herps.

Happy herping this summer.



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FNSN 2004 CONFERENCE REPORT
Cumberland County Nature
by Joan Czapalay

Thanks to all who attended the annual Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists conference and AGM the weekend of June 18–20 in Amherst. Some of us met at the Wandlyn Inn to socialize on Friday evening.

There was a variety of field trips on Saturday. At Wentworth Park some participants joined the NSBS field trip led by Clarence Stevens (senior) for some very successful birding (one highlight was a pair of Scarlet Tanagers). Elizabeth Doull reported on this trip on NatureNS. Jeff Ogden led a trip for bugs and beetles at Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary. Kathy Goodwin of the Fundy Geological Museum led an interpretive tour to Wasson Bluff near Parrsboro, site of Project Prosauropod. On Saturday afternoon, Heather Drope led a botany walk, and Peter and Linda Payzant shared their knowledge of the butterflies on Sunday after our breakfast AGM.

We missed seeing the Maccan tidal bore due to my use of the wrong tide chart. Sorry to all who joined me there to see the tidal bore. Dare I say time and tide wait for no one? Our banquet speaker was Jeff Ogden, of the Cobequid Naturalists, who gave an excellent talk on mosquitoes and deer ticks and their relationships to West Nile Virus and Lyme Disease, respectively.

Many made trips to surrounding special sites to see the Purple Martins, the Tantramar marshlands, and the Waterfowl park in Sackville, NB. One of the pleasures of moving the FNSN AGM around the province is that we all get to enjoy and appreciate a variety of special places.

FNSN FIELD TRIP REPORT
Wasson Bluff Rocks and Fossils
by Joan Czapalay

We took a trip back in time on Saturday (June 19). Fourteen of the FNSN 2004 conference participants met at the Fundy Geological Museum in Parrsboro. Our leader, Kathy Goodwin, gave us each a hard hat and an interpretive guide she had prepared for us. We drove to Wasson Bluff, about 8 km from the museum.

As we walked along the fault line we observed fine-grained rocks from the Carboniferous period. During this time about 300 million years ago, the Cobequid Mountains were formed when land masses collided to form the supercontinent Pangaea. We observed lava flows from the later Triassic, when Pangaea broke up and the continents began to drift apart. Many Bay of Fundy islands, such as the nearby Two Islands, were formed of basalt from the Jurassic period. Only in the Minas Basin is the Triassic/Jurassic boundary visible.

We stopped at a number of points along the walk, keeping a careful watch on the incoming tide, to see the various rock formations. Most of us could not resist picking up a few pieces of agate and other forms of quartzite. Kathy gave me a rock containing stilbite, our provincial mineral.

This is a “protected place” (no hammers allowed), but rocks found on the beach may be picked up, as they change with every tide. We were shown the Fish Bed, which contains fish-scale fossils, and the nearby site where dinosaur fossils have been found. In 1973 Paul Olsen found a dinosaur femur bone, and 11 years later more discoveries were made, making Wasson Bluff world famous. At least six partial prosauropod skeletons have been found here. To learn more about this research, visit the museum website <<http://museum.gov.ns.ca/fgm/lab/lab.html>>.

(Originally published on NatureNS)

BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT
Spring Birds and Plants
by **Bernard Forsythe**

Several members of this evening outing joined others already at the White Rock bridge enjoying the spectacle of 200 or so Chimney Swifts feeding over White Rock Pond. John Harwood expressed a desire to see an Ovenbird, so the 11 of us, including two from Norway, set off with a goal to aim for.

We made many stops to enjoy and discuss the wide variety of trees, shrubs, flowering plants, and ferns in this interesting ravine along the banks of the Gaspereau River. BNS field trips always have knowledgeable participants willing to help with information on the natural history we discover. This makes the leader's job easier, and I always learn a bit more to add to my enjoyment of the outdoors.

Last winter a large herd of deer overwintered up the steep slope from the nature trail. Several were taken by coyotes. All that remained of the coyote meals were rib cages, patches of hair, a skull, and a jawbone at various locations. The hair would soon be used by several species of birds for nest lining.

Several Veeries setting up territories entertained us with their lovely evening songs. Black-throated Green Warblers, Northern Waterthrushes, and Ovenbirds were also singing, while a Bald Eagle flew upriver. Some of us found a pair of Ovenbirds walking over the forest floor staking out a territory while a rival male tried to butt in. Soon, John caught up and had his first look at two Ovenbirds as they marched right up to him.

At the rocked-up river road we discussed some of the past human uses of the river. The light was now fading, so after a quick look at toothwort we headed back. All enjoyed the evening – especially John; he finally saw his Ovenbirds.



Eastern Annapolis Valley Weather Spring 2004

by Larry Bogan, Cambridge Station, NS

The biggest events in the spring weather this year, for most people I know, were the deep snow from “white Juan” that stayed on the ground through April and the coolness and cloudiness of the season. My Black Maple trees are still not in full leaf here in mid-June.

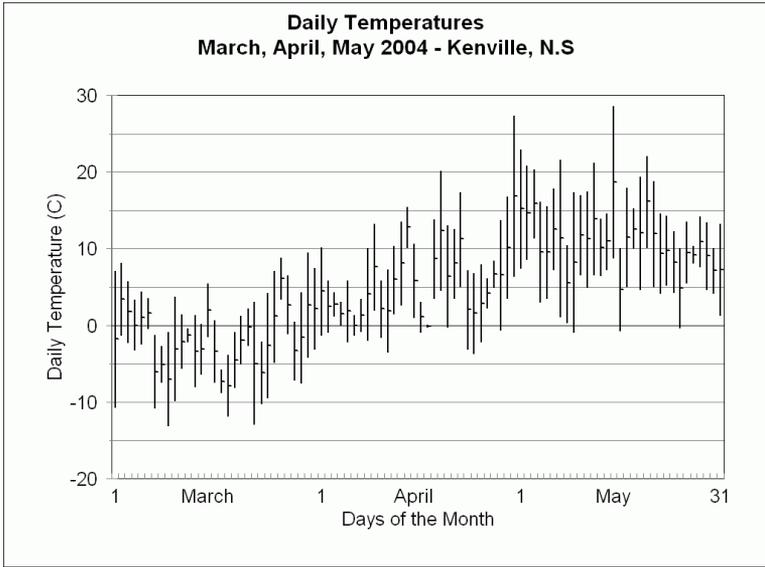
	Mean temperature (Celsius)	Snowfall (cm)	Total precipitation (mm)	Sunshine (h)
March	-1.7	12	96	122
23 yr average	5.33	146	1033	1133
April	5.4	4	115	143
23 yr average	7.5	114	320	1133
May	10.1	0	38	186
23 yr average	10.62	21	178	1212
Season	4.5	16	212	431
23 yr average	7.7	129	1233	1433

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

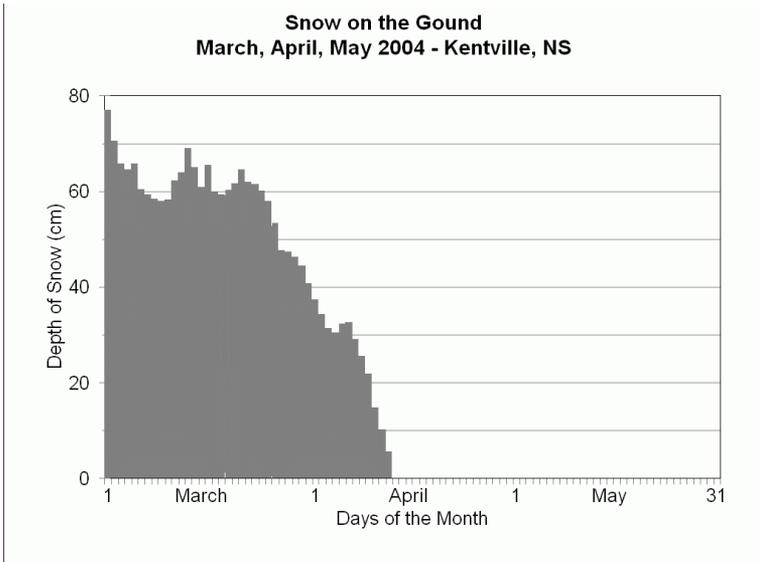
Temperature

March and May were below average in temperature, but April was enough warmer to compensate, and the season itself has just average temperature. Considering the late blooming of some flowers and late arrival of song birds, May seemed to be cooler than the monthly average would indicate. This occurred because May was actually warmer than normal at the beginning of the month, with a very cool later half. This can be seen in the chart as a levelling off of the rise in the temperature in May.

Precipitation



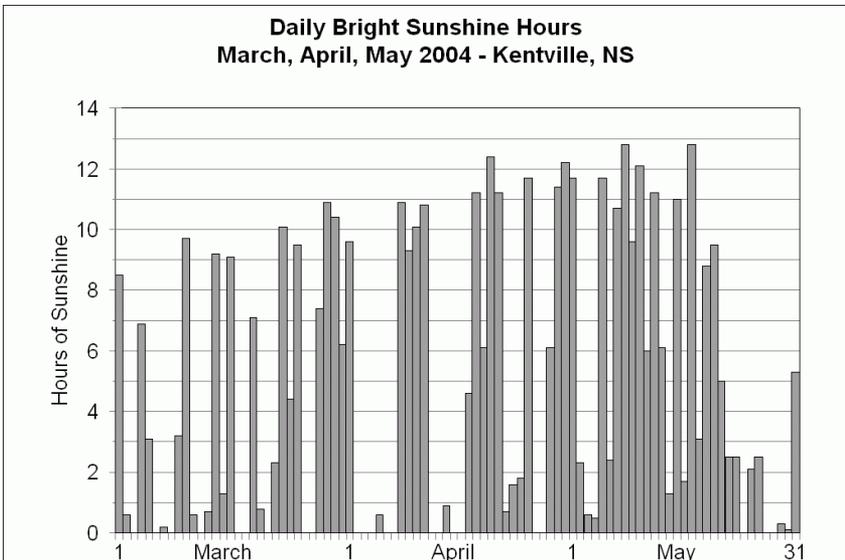
It is interesting that March, which has deep snow on the ground all month, was really very dry. Normally, March gets four times the snowfall and twice the rainfall we saw this year. The chart of snow on the ground shows the rate at which the snow melted during March and April. May



also had only half the expected precipitation for the month, but April had 50% more than expected. The net result is that the season as a whole had slightly below-normal precipitation.

Sunshine

Precipitation and cloudiness are usually connected, but despite the lack of precipitation this spring there was excess cloudiness. Ask the amateur astronomers in the area and you will hear complaints of poor viewing of the skies this spring. The chart showing bright sunshine hours illustrates the ups and downs of sunny days. There seemed to be several days of cloudiness every week. Only early May had periods of nice weather. That cool weather hung on into June, but now at last we are seeing some nice weather leading into summer.



What's In The Sky?

by Roy Bishop

New Moon: July 17, August 15, September 14, October 13

Full Moon: July 2, July 31, August 29, September 28, October 28

Autumn begins on Wednesday, September 22, at 13:30 ADT

Venus and Sherman Williams

As reported in the previous BNS Newsletter, the planet Venus was due to pass directly across the face of the Sun on June 8, an event known as a "transit." Usually, Venus passes north or south of the Sun and misses the solar disk. Before June 8, 2004, the last time there was a transit of Venus was in 1882. Thus I was able to say that no living person has seen a transit of Venus. Now I can say that no living person in Nova Scotia has seen a transit of Venus *except* for Sherman Williams.

In the early morning of June 8, 2004, all of Nova Scotia, southern New Brunswick, and much of Newfoundland and Maine were under a blanket of cloud. I was at Evangeline Beach with a dozen other observers, some of whom had come all the way from Texas to see the transit. Around 6 a.m. we noticed some rays of sunlight lighting the region east of Boot Island, toward Horton Bluff and the Cheverie shore. Through these brief breaks in the cloud Sherman Williams, at Horton Bluff, saw the silhouette of Venus against the Sun. All conversations and e-mail messages I have had since June 8 indicate that Sherman was the only person in Nova Scotia, and possibly in the Maritime provinces, to see the transit. Sherman was prepared to see the transit, and he was blessed with incredible luck.

Summer Highlights

Venus, post-transit, is now bright and unmistakable in the dawn sky. Venus reaches peak brightness in mid-July and is at greatest elongation west (furthest from the Sun in the morning sky) in mid-August. Venus's appearance in the morning sky always produces an increase in UFO (Unidentified Flying Object, or Unconfirmed Faulty Observation) reports. Since you have read this paragraph, Venus for you will be an IFO (Identified Flying Object) rather than a UFO.

The Perseids are one of the best meteor showers of the year. Unlike last

year when the Moon was full, 2004 is especially favourable for viewing the Perseids, since the Moon will be a waning crescent, leaving most of the night sky in darkness. Also, the 2004 Perseid shower is predicted to be stronger than normal. The peak of the shower is expected on Wednesday night, August 11/12. See the August page of your BNS calendar for viewing recommendations.

Nova East is the annual star party hosted by the Halifax Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC), by the Nova Central Astronomy Club (NCAC) in Truro, and by the Minas Astronomy Group (MAG) of Wolfville. Nova East is held in August around the time of the waxing crescent Moon at Smileys Provincial Park near Windsor. This year Nova East is on the weekend of August 20, 21, and 22. Viewing of the Sun and the nighttime sky for the public occurs on Saturday. If you wish to attend all events, including the talks, check the website <halifax.rasc.ca/ne/> for more information and registration and for reserving a campsite at the park. Anyone can attend. Families with children are especially invited.

Charlie Brown's Great Pumpkin will rise above farmers' fields four days before Halloween. A total eclipse of the Moon will occur on October 27. For more about this unusual and pretty event, see your BNS calendar. The calendar photo for October is of an earlier appearance of the Great Pumpkin.

REPORT

Wildlife Museum Visit

On the afternoon of April 18, eight or nine people met on the top floor of Patterson Hall, Acadia University, with Fred Scott, curator of the Wildlife Museum. Fred covered a range of topics. The use of the museum material for genetic research was brought up toward the end of the session. One of the participants had had quite a bit of time and experience doing just such work, so a very positive and interesting discussion developed about this vital research tool.

Blomidon Naturalists Society

2004 Membership Fees and Publications Prices

Each member of the Blomidon Naturalists Society receives four issues of the BNS newsletter annually. Because BNS is a registered charity, the society issues receipts for all donations. The membership fee itself is not tax deductible. Members may also join the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists through BNS and will receive FNSN News, the federation's newsletter. FNSN membership is not tax deductible.

Please send cheques or money orders in payment of membership fees and for publication purchases to

Harold Forsyth
10120 Highway 1, RR 2, Wolfville, NS B4P 2R2

No.	Membership classification	Price	Total
_____	Individual adult	\$15.00	\$ _____
_____	Family (number of family members _____)	18.00	\$ _____
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_____	Federation of NS Naturalists membership	5.00	\$ _____
_____	Tax-deductible donation		\$ _____
_____	2002 BNS calendar (\$12 + post.)	13.50	\$ _____
_____	<i>Natural History of Kings County</i> (\$15 + post.)	17.00	\$ _____
_____	Annotated checklist of Kings County birds	6.00	\$ _____
_____	Blomidon Naturalist crest	5.00	\$ _____
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Membership fees are due January 1 of the current year

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
	Larry Bogan		678-0446
Birds – General	Bernard Forsythe		542-2427
	Richard Stern	678-4742	678-1975
	Gordon & Judy Tufts		542-7800
	Jim Wolford	585-1684	542-9204
	Jean Timpa		542-5678
Butterflies & Moths	Jean Timpa		542-5678
Fish	NS Dept of Natural Resources	679-6091	
Flora – General Fungi	Ruth Newell	585-1355	542-2095
	Nancy Nickerson	679-5333	542-9332
Hawks & Owls	Bernard Forsythe		542-2427
Indian Prehistory & Archeology	Ellis Gertridge		542-2816
	James Legge		542-3530
Mosses & Ferns			
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

