

# Blomidon Naturalists Society



SUMMER 2011 NEWSLETTER

Volume 38 · Number 2

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❖ THE BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY ❖

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*The primary objective of the Society shall be to encourage and develop in its members an understanding and appreciation of nature. For the purpose of the Society, the word "nature" will be interpreted broadly and shall include the rocks, plants, animals, water, air, and stars. — FROM THE BNS CONSTITUTION*

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Rachel Cooper 582-3251

Darrell Slauenwhite 684-0430

Jean Timpa 542-5678

Barry Yoell 542-9240

The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a member of the Sable Island Preservation Trust and the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists (Nature Nova Scotia) and is an affiliate member of the Canadian Nature Federation (Nature Canada). The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a registered charity. Receipts (for income-tax purposes) will be issued for all donations. (Registration number: 118811686RR0001)

THE BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 2350

WOLFVILLE, NS B4P 2N5

**BNS Newsletter**

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BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY  
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:

1 – 25 GASPEREAU AVENUE  
WOLFVILLE, NS B4P 2C5  
*jtimpa@ns.sympatico.ca*

Digital photographs should be submitted to  
*doug@fundymud.com*

**Submission deadline for Fall:  
September 11, 2011**

## *Out and About*

Jean Timpa, editor

ALTHOUGH it doesn't feel as if we have had much spring really – with all the rain and cool weather – the new foliage has responded with incredible growth and brilliance of blossoms, both wild and cultivated. The same weather has kept the flying insects down, but there are five eggs in my nestbox in Bear River, so I hope the Tree Swallows will be able to fledge this family and perhaps another one. Nearby, my cousin has three of four houses occupied with more Tree Swallows, and the old barn may contain several Barn Swallow nests.

The board of directors would like you to think about several things over the summer, getting ready for our annual meeting in November. A name change has been proposed for this Newsletter from *Blomidon Naturalists Society Newsletter* to *Blomidon Naturalists Society Journal*. The board will be discussing this at our next meeting in early September, so we would like feedback from you any time before September 6. Please see our contact information in the front pages of the Newsletter opposite the contents.

Another issue is our declining membership and attendance, especially on field trips. Over the past two years we have lost about 18 percent of our members (currently 144). Every one of us needs to remember that we are all on the membership committee and invite “newbies” to come to programs and field trips for a few times and then ask them to join formally. Perhaps we are being too open with our events. Certainly people should be able to come on a trial basis, but someone in BNS ought to be sure they are formally invited to join after a period of time.

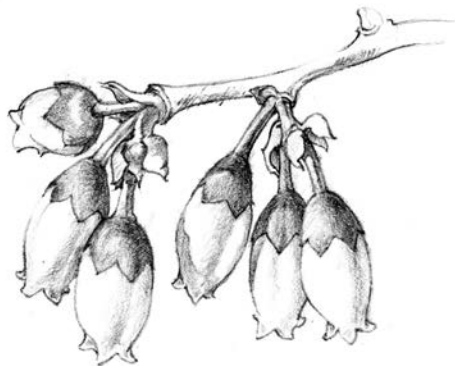
Either Ed Sulis or I may have extra copies of the Newsletter to hand out as “carrots” to potential joiners. If anyone has ideas or

experience in attracting new people into a volunteer organization and would be willing to take on this kind of activity for BNS, please contact Ed or me.

We especially need younger people and families to come out, and we need to provide suitable programs for our youth in addition to the Green Dragon camps.

Volunteers who run natural history groups are burning out. Several of Nova Scotia's natural history groups have disappeared altogether or are limping badly. The South Shore Naturalists do not currently have a president and are struggling along with a few activities. Gini Proulx tells me that she led the last Annapolis Field Naturalists field trip on June 5, 2010, and nothing else seems to be on the horizon. This problem has been discussed for a few years now at the annual Nature Nova Scotia conference and AGM. More than ever we need collective voices crying out in what little wilderness we have left about environmental degradation and climatic concerns. It is not a good thing to see other groups similar to BNS disappearing. It is not a good thing that our membership is declining. Strength comes in numbers, so after reaching a certain point of decline we may not be able to continue on, either.

Praises to all of you who do help BNS keep going in so many ways. Please don't burn yourselves out, and please look for new members. Have a very special and safe summer. Come back refreshed with many new nature stories to write and photos to share!



JACK MCMASTER

## *Call for Photos: 2012 BNS Natural History Calendar*

**P**HOTO submissions are invited for possible use in the 15th edition of our society's Natural History Calendar. Submissions should be in electronic form: JPEG format, with file size between 300 KB and 3 MB.

Photos should be of natural history interest, preferably taken in Nova Scotia. Please submit no more than ten (10) of what you consider to be your most suitable photos.

Suitability involves technical quality (sharp focus, not under- or over-exposed), composition (object of interest nicely positioned, no distracting background), and content (a photo that calendar users will enjoy looking at for a month).

Send submissions to:

Roy Bishop  
RLB@eastlink.ca  
RR 1, Avonport, NS BOP 1B0  
542-3992

**Deadline for submissions:** Labour Day, September 5.

*Calendar committee:  
Sherman Williams, Pat Kelly, Roy Bishop*

## *Board of Directors Report*

by Rick Whitman, BNS president

**Y**OUR board had a regular meeting on June 2. We received a report from John Belbin on our participation in the Annapolis Valley Regional Science Fair on March 30 and April 1 (see report p. 31). We awarded one prize at the secondary school level to an interesting project on a learning comparison between a fish and a dog. The board decided that in future years our two prizes will be awarded to the best projects at any grade level. We also made a final decision as to how we will sell the books received from the estate of P.C. Smith, and you will have seen this process started before you read this.

We received a financial update from treasurer Ed Sulis as to current balances and paid memberships, and we reviewed a draft report from the finance committee to the general membership. The focus of this report is the society's Endowment Fund.

We had a report from Pat Kelly on speakers at the monthly meetings and field trips through October. The three-person program committee was to meet on June 8. We hope to have a single meeting location for the 2011/12 season, but this is not settled as of June.

Jean Timpa reported on the Newsletter articles and deadlines.

A new business item was to review whether the Society should be more involved in public positions that could be considered "activist," but discussion was deferred to September. We wanted to close our meeting by 8:45 so that the entire board could go down to the Robie Tufts Nature Centre to enjoy the Chimney Swifts and show support for Jim Wolford, whose cumulative work on this project is huge. Thanks, Jim!

We also owe a note of thanks to the town of Wolfville. Last fall,



after the swifts had left, the chimney was repaired and strengthened, with close consultation with BNS as to specific details. This spring, the swifts' use of the chimney to date looks very encouraging.

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CLUB NOTES

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## *Upcoming Events*

### MEETINGS

*Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are held at 7:30 p.m., usually on the third Monday of each month, in the auditorium of The K.C. Irving Environmental Science Centre on University Avenue, Wolfville. Parking is available at Wheelock Dining Hall, along Crowell Drive immediately east of the Irving Centre, at the Acadia Arena, Festival Theatre, the Student Union Building, or on Westwood Avenue. Everyone is welcome.*

**Monday, June 20, 2011** – *The Eastern Arctic*, by Roy Bishop. Most Canadians live along the southern fringe of their country, never experiencing the vast land that lies to the northward. Having been captured by its singular beauty 38 years ago, last summer I returned to the Arctic. As for the first visit, I chose again to travel by sea, for that is the best way to access this remote wilderness and its wildlife. The voyage began on the west coast of Greenland, and included the coasts of four Canadian islands: Baffin, Bylot, Devon, and Cornwallis. Images from the first voyage, including Coburg and Ellesmere islands, will also be included.

Dr. Bishop is a founding member, a past-president, and an honorary life member of the Blomidon Naturalists Society. A native of Wolfville, he is emeritus professor of physics at Acadia and a past-president of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. His travels have ranged from Tasmania to Tristan da Cunha, from Grytviken to

Grise Fiord. Following his sojourn on the third planet, he intends to visit asteroid 6901, which the International Astronomical Union has named Roybishop.

**Monday, September 19, 2011** – *The Bloody Creek Structure*, by Dr. Ian Spooner. Details to follow.

**Monday, October 17, 2011** – *Important Bird Areas in the Bay of Fundy*, by Sue Abbott. The Important Bird Areas program is a worldwide effort to identify areas that provide critical habitat for birds facing risks due to habitat loss and fragmentation. The Bay of Fundy contains a number of IBAs. Come and see why these areas have gotten global attention. Sue will also talk about her recent trip to the Bahamas to conduct a census of Piping Plovers, one of the better-known endangered species in Nova Scotia.

Sue Abbott has worked for over 10 years on bird monitoring, research, and conservation projects – from seabirds to shorebirds to songbirds. Understanding the effects of human disturbance on birds and habitats and using outreach as a tool to mitigate this threat are two threads that link much of her past and present work. Sue is a program coordinator for Bird Studies Canada, a national non-profit dedicated to increasing the appreciation, understanding, and conservation of Canada's birds. She currently coordinates the Piping Plover Conservation program and the Important Bird Areas program in Nova Scotia.

#### FIELD TRIPS

*Unless otherwise indicated, all field trips will begin at the Wolfville waterfront. Everyone is welcome.*

**Every Tuesday until August 23** – *Acadia University Woodland Trail Biodiversity List*. For a fifth year we take a walk every Tuesday evening throughout the spring and summer to look for flowering plants, nesting birds, fungi, butterflies, dragonflies, etc. This long-term proj-

ect to observe the changes in biodiversity over the seasons and over the years is done in cooperation with the K.C. Irving Environmental Science Centre. Everyone is invited to participate. Come for one week or every week. You don't have to be an expert, but we need lots of people to show up to help spot and identify different forms of natural history. Some weeks we will have a special leader with an emphasis on a specific area of natural history. If you would like to lead a walk or be on one with a particular emphasis, call Melanie at 585-1916. Meet at 6:30 p.m. at the main entrance to the Harriet Irving Botanical Gardens on University Avenue.

**Wednesdays, June 8, 15, 22, 29, and Saturday, July 9, 2011** – *Blomidon Provincial Park: Birding for Beginners*. 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Come and meet some of our smallest and most vocal spring songbirds. Freshly arrived from their far-flung winter vacations, these tiny troubadours will be singing from the treetops and showing off their brilliant spring colours. We will learn who's who by voice, song, sight, habit, and habitat. Learning birding basics will wake up your senses and allow you to make new feathered friends wherever you are. Have you ever seen a Black-throated Green Warbler (“zee zee zoo zee”)? Warning: Those who begin bird watching do it for life! Fine-weather event. Bring binoculars and appropriate footwear. For information, call Blomidon Park, 582-7319, or e-mail [charlanebishop@gmail.com](mailto:charlanebishop@gmail.com).

**Saturday June 25, 2011** – *Beginning Birders Trip, Windsor, Hants County*. Leader: Patrick Kelly (494-3294 (w), 472-2322 (h), [patrick.kelly@dal.ca](mailto:patrick.kelly@dal.ca)). LIMITED REGISTRATION – PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED. These trips are geared for those who have always had an interest in bird watching but were not sure how it was actually done. Bring binoculars and field guides, if you have them. Meet at 9 a.m. at the parking lot for the Windsor Tourist Bureau, which is just north of Exit 6 (Water Street) on Highway 101. We should be 1–2 hours and will visit a few different types of habitat in the town of Windsor. No storm date for this trip.

**Saturday, June 25, 2011** – *Palmeters Woods*. Bernard Forsythe (542-2427) and Rick Whitman (542-2917) will lead this walk through the woods behind Evergreen Home for Special Care, located in the western end of Kentville (655 Park St.). Come and explore this little green gem with us: look and listen for local birds and search the woodland floor for flora and fauna. There will be a good chance to see a variety of warblers, other songbirds, and fascinating woodland plants. Meet at the Wolfville waterfront at 7:30 a.m. or at the parking lot behind Evergreen Home for Special Care at 8 a.m. Juniors to seniors are welcome; the pace is easy. The early time allows us to hear bird songs, as the birds are most active in the early morning. This year, the late June date means the birds will be established on territory and a somewhat different selection of flowering plants will be seen. No rain date: the leaders will be at the start, regardless.

**Saturday July 2, 2011** – *Blomidon Provincial Park: Birds of Prey in Nova Scotia*. Sponsored by the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, this is an interactive talk on hawks, eagles, and owls in Nova Scotia. There are lots of visual aids and fun family games to reinforce concepts learned. This is a great educational and interesting talk for the whole family. Meet at the maintenance shed at the park at 10:30 a.m. Contact Kim at 679-6097 or email [huskinkd@gov.ns.ca](mailto:huskinkd@gov.ns.ca).

**Sunday July 3, 2011** – *Blomidon Provincial Park: Blomidon Park Hikes*. Join the Valley Trekkers Volkssport Club for a 10 km or 13 km guided hike. Dress for the weather, wear proper footwear for varying terrain. Bring hiking boots, water, an extra sweater or light jacket, and a lunch to enjoy at one of the look-offs. Suitable for the whole family. Meet in the lower parking lot. Registration at 10:30 a.m.; hike starts at 11a.m. Contact Rick at 847-1772 or Bert at 755-4051, or email [ricklynda.kanne@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:ricklynda.kanne@ns.sympatico.ca).

**Every Tuesday from July 5 until August 23** – *Blomidon Provincial Park: Blomidon Nature Club*. This program is geared for children

aged 8–12 to let them learn about nature. There will be birdwatching, trail hiking, butterfly “identi-flying”, rock hunting, sketching, beachcombing, orienteering, helping to survey the park for birds and butterflies, wilderness survival arts, cloud watching, and kite flying. For info and registration call 582-2519 or email charlanebishop@gmail.com.

**Saturday, July 9, 2011** – *Cornwallis River Greenway*. Murray Colbo and Bernard Forsythe will lead this walk, which will start behind the Foodland in Coldbrook, on Highway 1 at South Bishop Road, about 3 km west of Exit 14 on Highway 101. The trail is on the old railbed, which is now resurfaced with gates and is restricted to walking and bicycles. The trail is flat with two rest sites with benches and tables and is designed to be wheelchair accessible, so all are welcome. This section runs through mixed forest with two stream crossings and parallels the Cornwallis River with its broad floodplain. There is also an interesting fen. To carpool from Wolfville, meet at the Wolfville waterfront at 8:15 a.m., or meet Murray and Bernard behind the Foodland in Coldbrook at 9 a.m.

**Saturday, August 13, 2011** – *Moon over the Water*. The view from The Lookoff on the North Mountain is something that many society members are likely familiar with. But how many have watched the Sun set and the Full Moon rise from that vantage point? Tonight, the Moon will rise around 8 p.m., about half an hour before the Sun sets and about four hours from being full. The tide will be coming in, although you will have to stay until after 1:30 a.m. if you want to see the moonlight with the tide all the way in. Arrive around 7:45 and enjoy the evening. We will likely hear lots of nature sounds as it darkens and the brighter constellations come into view. Weather permitting, of course.

**Friday, August 26, through Sunday, August 28, 2011** – *Nova East 2011*. Atlantic Canada’s longest-running star party will be held at Smiley’s Provincial Park near Brooklyn in Hants County. Some of the pre-

sentations and workshops as well as the Saturday evening observing session are open to the public. With the 2009 event shortened and the 2010 event cancelled by hurricanes, hopefully this year's version will actually take place as planned! Nova East is hosted jointly by the Halifax Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada and the Minas Astronomy Group. More information can be found at <http://halifax.rasc.ca/ne>.

**Saturday, October 8, 2011** – *Blomidon Provincial Park: Blomidon Park Hikes*. Join the Chebucto Hiking Club for a moderate 13 km hike at Blomidon Provincial Park. This hike is suitable for all ages and is rated 4C: a good deal of significant hill climbing and a significant part of the walk takes place on somewhat difficult terrain (rocky, rooted paths). Meet at the Blomidon Provincial Park lower parking lot at 11a.m. Please bring water, snacks, and hiking shoes or boots. Contact Shanna at 826-9384 or visit [www.chc.chebucto.org](http://www.chc.chebucto.org).



MARY PRATT

## *Harrison Lewis Coastal Discovery Centre Activities*

**July 8–10:** *Writing from Nature*. “To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work,” wrote American poet Mary Oliver. Award-winning poet and nature writer Harry Thurston will conduct a two-day workshop designed to sharpen observational skills, the foundation not only of nature writing but of all good writing. Focus will be on writing about the natural world. The workshop is open to writers of all skill levels. It will concentrate on poetry and creative non-fiction, but is designed to be relevant to any genre. Participants are to submit a short prose piece or selection of poems three weeks before the workshop date.

**August 12–14:** *Plein Air Watercolour Painting*, with Roger Savage, RCA. The richness and variety of on-site painting motifs (rugged beach, forest, bog, and ponds) will be our inspiration for this unique weekend workshop. Limited registration allows for one-on-one painting tips as well as daily critiques and demo paintings. Participants should have drawing skills, know the names of colours, and have had some previous painting experience. Roger Savage ([www.savagegallery.ca](http://www.savagegallery.ca)) is an experienced watercolour artist. His work sparkles with light and energy and is painted directly on location, inspired by sites as familiar as Port Mouton, NS, and as remote as Sable and Ellesmere Islands. His work is included in the permanent collection of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

**August 27:** *Maritime Hand Mowing Championships* – Come join the fun at Ross Farm Museum in New Ross for the annual demonstration of mowing with a scythe. Sponsored by *Rural Delivery* magazine. To

sign up, or for more information, phone 683-2763 or write HLC@eastlink.ca.

To register for workshops or for more information, phone (683-2763) or write ([www.HarrisonLewisCentre.org](http://www.HarrisonLewisCentre.org)), or join us on Facebook. *Fees:* Tuition, \$165. Meals (five full, home-cooked meals plus snacks) \$50. Cabin bunk \$40 (tenting \$20). Register no later than three weeks prior to course/workshop date. \$50 deposit with registration. (Please, when registering, identify any dietary restrictions.)

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FIELD TRIP REPORT

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## *Natural Hazards*

by David McMullin

**S**ATURDAY MARCH 5 – David McMullin, instructor in the Department of Earth and Environmental Science at Acadia, teaches the undergrad course on natural hazards. For this “indoor field trip,” his discussion of the major geological hazards that affect the Earth was well received by a small group.

David spent about two hours talking about a number of the recent geological events that have affected many different areas of the Earth. He noted that in the past few years we’ve seen major earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes around the world – from the Icelandic volcano that stopped air traffic last year, to the earthquake that devastated Haiti, to the massive earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia in 2004. He took some extra time to explain the nature of tsunamis as a series of pulses of water that rush ashore and up to considerable heights above sea level. His talk was almost prophetic, as we saw in detail this exact phenomenon only a week after his talk when an earthquake and tsunami devastated northern Japan.

We also got a chance to see the small, yet sensitive, seismometer



that is housed at the department. The seismometer will detect earthquakes of magnitude 5 and above anywhere in North America and above magnitude 7 virtually anywhere in the world. A screen capture of the seismograph record can be found on the department's website at <http://ees.acadiau.ca/seismo.html>.

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FIELD TRIP REPORT

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## *Wolfville Area*

by Patrick Kelly

SATURDAY, APRIL 30 – Jim Wolford, who normally leads this trip, was attending a wedding on the west coast, so Angus MacLean volunteered to lead the trip, with me as a helper. We had a reasonably good turnout. Our route was somewhat different than usual. One big change was not starting at Bernard Forsythe's to see Barred Owls. The pair in his back yard and quite a few of those in his other boxes didn't nest this year. Prolonged deep snow this winter meant that many were unable to secure enough food to kickstart the reproductive process. We had some people who had come out from Halifax, some locals, some beginners, some with lots of experience, and one woman who was newly arrived from Finland. It is great to see people getting a chance to see new birds and learn while they are having fun.

While we did go to some places from the traditional route, we also spent time looking in new spots. Not being an expert on the area, I didn't record things by location most of the time. We had only five species of ducks. The expected Mallards and American Blacks were seen in a few locations. One pond held 12 Ring-necked Ducks, which was a nice treat, and we also picked up American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal over the course of the morning. A Killdeer was observed

at the Canard Pond, which is where we also spotted a well-camouflaged Gadwall sitting on the far shore.

As expected, we saw a number of raptors, including Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Red-tailed Hawk. We stopped at one point to observe a Red-tailed Hawk that was nicely sitting in a tree by the road. Everyone had good view, and we were about to leave when it flew off and carried a branch to a nest in the top of a pine tree just opposite where we had parked (the address is 910 Church Street, about 1 km west of Port Williams, and I made sure to get the location, as I knew Jim would want to know when he got back). We got a great sighting of a Belted Kingfisher. We went to one farm field, as a Lesser Black-backed Gull had been reported there. Most of the gulls were not on the ground but circling high overhead, so while it may have been in the flock, no one could pick it out from the rest.

We stopped for lunch at the home of Helen and Fred Archibald (Helen always comes on the trip but leaves the caravan a bit early to get back to her place). As always, there were birds in the surrounding trees and we had a pleasant time sitting in the back yard having lunch and talking about birds. Helen has been hosting lunch for this trip for some time, and the hospitality is greatly appreciated.

In Kentville we made a stop at Willow Lane to try to see an Eastern Phoebe that had been reported but were unable to locate it, and the traffic noise didn't help. On the plus side, I have been driving on Highway 1 there for years with no idea there was even a stream. At the Miners Marsh Trail in Kentville we heard and saw our second cardinal of the day, and we had a chance to view two Northern Flickers that were interacting and chasing each other around in the hardwood by the bridge. Muskrats also put on a nice show, one coming up to the top of the bank to view our group more closely.

One of the last stops was behind the Evergreen Home in Kentville to see the Great Horned Owl and chick that were reported over the previous days. We arrived to find that Bernard was already there, so we got an owl presentation from him after all. We had some good views of the adult and chick, Bernard also found an owl pellet that was examined by all. There were two final stops, one near Richard

Stern's to see an active Bald Eagle nest, and another where it was hoped that Barred Owls could be found. I missed the lights at Belcher Street and, not knowing where the nest was, decided to head home, although I found out later the owls did not put in an appearance. The Great Horned Owl was adequate compensation! We ended the day with just over 30 species.

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FIELD TRIP REPORT

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## *Astronomy Observing Session*

by Patrick Kelly

**F**RIDAY, MAY 6, 2011 – This event was held jointly by BNS and the Minas Astronomy Group (MAG). The weather forecast for most astronomical events can usually be predicted well in advance: cloudy. That was not the case this time, as clear skies were around for most of the day and well into the night. Telescopes were set up by all of the MAG members who showed up, some of whom brought more than one. I counted at least eight, ranging in size from small refractors with lenses 60 mm in diameter to Mark Dryden's big reflector, which has a mirror over 600 mm across.

The two big draws were the crescent Moon, and Saturn. The Moon showed lots of detail, as would be expected given its large angular size – you don't even need a telescope to find it! There were several places along the terminator (the line separating the lit and unlit hemispheres) where isolated mountaintops could be seen where they were high enough to catch the rising Sun while their flanks still lay in shadow.

Saturn is always a spectacular sight in a telescope. That is especially so when Saturn is near opposition, which occurs every year when Earth laps Saturn and gets as close to the ringed planet as it can. The

air was quite still, and in Roy's telescope, one could not only see Saturn, but the shadow cast on the planet by the ring system was easy to see, as were two of Saturn's moons, Titan and Rhea.

An advantage of observing a crescent Moon is that it is low in the sky and not very bright, so other faint objects in the rest of the sky can still be well observed. The globular star clusters M13 in Hercules and M3 in Canes Venatici were seen in a number of telescopes. These spherical clusters are found in the Milky Way's halo and contain hundreds of thousands of stars. Several of the large, bright galaxies in the Virgo cluster were also the targets of some of the bigger telescopes. Double stars were also on display. The majority of stars come in pairs, triplets, etc., and by not having a companion, our Sun is in the minority. Many people are surprised to learn that the view of two setting suns, as seen from the planet Tatooine in the first Star Wars movie, is quite possible.

The only disappointment was that no BNS members showed up and, with one exception, the only MAG members who were there were those who brought telescopes. We did have some spectators: the person Roy had talked to in order to get the parking lot open showed up with his family, as did the husband and daughter of one of my co-workers who lives in Hortonville and whom I called before heading out. Hopefully, we will have a better turnout next time.

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FIELD TRIP REPORT

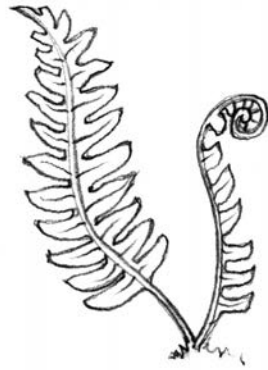
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## *Herbert River Canoe Trip*

by Patrick Kelly

**S**ATURDAY, MAY 7 – Despite initial projections of poor weather, the day turned out to be cloudy, with the Sun even coming out for a short while on occasion. With only three people for this

trip – myself, Larry Bogan (who has led a number of BNS canoe trips, but had never taken his kayak on a river before), and Bill Dixon, my brother-in-law – sorting out the cars was a bit of a problem, as it would mean leaving the boats unattended at one end or the other. Fortunately, a two-kayak car carrier and a lock and chain enabled us to solve that problem.



MARY PRATT

An Eastern Phoebe was singing at the bridge where we started, and while I was waiting for Larry and Bill to return, I saw it stop several times to fly up under the bridge. I also had the pleasure of hearing an approaching Belted Kingfisher that “rattled” by heading downstream with what looked like a fish in its bill. We got started from the bridge on Highway 202 around 10:30 a.m.

There was a good flow of water in the river this year, which greatly reduced the chances of bottoming out. There was only one place where we actually decided to make a brief portage. The river does change each year, and there were new gypsum boulders in the water at the usual spot, and no sign at all of the ones from past years.

We did make a few stops on the way down, although not all were scheduled – at about the time we would normally have stopped for lunch, I managed to flip my canoe! The river isn’t much more than a metre deep anywhere, and the water was not that cold, so it was more embarrassing and a nuisance than anything else. I normally have my binoculars and digital camera around my neck, but not on this trip, and oddly, the one other time I went for an unexpected swim in this river I also didn’t bring them. I’m starting to see a pattern! At this point we stopped to eat. I wrung out my clothes and would have put them back on but Bill had brought an extra set of sweatpants and a sweat top. As it turned out, I should have put my own clothes back on, for we had not progressed much further before I went in for a second swim! I think I really do need to get a kayak for solo paddling.

We saw and heard lots of the expected birds, with several of the

more common warbler species heard along the length of the river. At one point, we heard a Northern Cardinal singing but were unable to see it. We spotted Pileated Woodpeckers in two locations and saw at least five Belted Kingfishers, including one carrying something. Spotted Sandpipers were also common – we saw about a half dozen – including a pair that followed each other around and one that walked downstream along the water’s edge, allowing us some good viewing. Two Bald Eagles – one adult and one immature – were also keeping a close eye on the river, flushing from their viewing spot as we passed. A Northern Harrier was spotted over one of the pastures. Our progress was also monitored by a Woodchuck, who was sitting on the bank very close to where one has been seen on past trips.

Nearing the end we stopped, at the clearing where the Herbert River birding trip stops, to admire the Bloodroot that was already in bloom. The geocache has also returned, so I added an entry for the first time in a while. The trip was scheduled so that we would come out of the river on the rising tide, and we had the boats out by about 4:30 p.m. The sky had darkened over, and the rain started about five minutes after we started driving home. That’s timing!

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FIELD TRIP REPORT

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## *Cape Split*

by Patrick Kelly

**S**ATURDAY, MAY 14, AND SUNDAY, MAY 15 – Two hikes were offered back to back this year, as I had mistakenly thought that the Nova Scotia Migration Count was on the previous Saturday. Rather than trying to move the hike from the 14th to the 15th it seemed easier to go for two trips, with Sherman Williams and me going on Saturday, and Jim Wolford and me doing the Sunday trip. A

bonus would be that no one had ever hiked Cape Split on the count day, so we were really doing two things at the same time. The weather Saturday was overcast when we started, but with a hopeful forecast. We were a small group, only four people other than the leaders. The house by the parking lot had its usual flock of birds, including a Red-breasted Nuthatch and some very vocal Purple Finches, which seem to be a fixture there.

After a brief discussion of the tides and topography, we were off. We stopped in several places to look at various trees and plants as well as the geology. Sherman showed us the “internet plant,” better known as Wild Lily-of-the-valley, but he uses that name with children because all the plants in a single clump are connected together and, as he noted, will not be switching to wireless! It was at a stop to look at the fractures in the underlying basalt that we heard a Winter Wren singing quite loudly. As we passed the old clearcut, where we normally hear a Winter Wren, none were heard.

Eventually, we got up onto the higher part of the path where the forest changes to mature Yellow Birch and Sugar Maple. The young Yellow Birch is easy to confirm, as a break in the bark releases oil of wintergreen, which is very easy to smell (or taste). While the Sun was never out from behind thin overcast, we were surprised to find the Spring-beauty in full bloom. I have yet to see a picture that captures the effect of the woodland floor covered with the blossoms. The Purple Trillium (or Red Trillium, depending on your field guide) was also in full bloom as was the Dutchman’s-breeches. We were also able to relocate the patch of Toothwort with the finely cut leaves; that “mutation” still seems to be doing well.



JACK MCMASTER

It was about this time that Tuma Young and Nick Honig arrived with their cameras. Both are active birders, but today they were with the Photographic Guild of Nova Scotia. Tuma commented on having heard an unrecognized bird song. Sherman's iPod came to the rescue, and we quickly confirmed that, as we suspected, it was the Winter Wren he had heard.

Sherman was still recovering from leg surgery, so at the midway point he thought it best to turn around while I led the group the rest of the way. We heard a second Winter Wren and saw both a Sharpshinned Hawk and an immature Bald Eagle before reaching the point. There were some other birds, but not that many compared to previous years. At the point there were the usual gulls nesting on the split (Herring and Greater Black-backed) as well as a large raft of Common Eiders with a smaller one of Black Guillemots nearby. About a dozen cormorants were on the rocks around the base of the split along with a mystery duck that was too far away to be identified.

On Sunday the weather was decidedly wetter, and while Jim Wolford and I arrived to start the trip we were the only ones there, so Jim relieved me of duty, and decided to do the trip on his own. He later reported that he also had the pleasure of hearing two Winter Wrens, and as on the previous day, neither was at the usual spot.

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FIELD TRIP REPORT

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## *Blomidon Park Pond Life*

by Jim Wolford

**M**AY 29, 2011 – We had a nice warm day (up to 25 °C) for this joint BNS/DNR (NS Department of Natural Resources) trip, with sunny breaks but mostly overcast sky, windy at first but calm in the woods, humid with black flies present but not a problem (small



housefly-like flies were the biggest problem for me, since they seem to be attracted by my perspiration).

Perhaps 20 people were along for most of the way, including Andy Dean, Bernard Forsythe, and Richard Stern; thus I didn't need to point out the birds at all. Also with us was a seasonal employee of DNR and a family from Costa Rica.

My welcome to the walk emphasized the conflicting mandates of both provincial and national parks: protection of representative habitats and all forms of biodiversity *and* the recreational uses of the outdoors by people. I mentioned that everything is protected in these parks and that I had a special one-day permit to temporarily collect pond life with a dip net for educational purposes, with the proviso that anything collected was quickly returned to its habitat.

Usually this annual late-May foray finds an early-spring forest floor, but I found the flora to be quite advanced, despite our very cool and wet spring. Red Trilliums were nearly all finished with blooming. Flowering plants included Pin Cherry along the park road, trailing raspberries (or dewberries), blue-bead lily (*Clintonia*), Bunchberry (or Canada dogwood), Red Baneberry, Hobblebush, Fly-honeysuckle, Striped Maple (or moose maple), False Solomon's Seal, wild strawberry and Blue Violets in the big open field where we parked our cars by the park trail map, and Red-berried Elder near the registration building. Of course the abundant, but provincially very rare, Wild Leeks in leaf were shown and discussed. Other plants pointed out included Mountain Maple (lots), Sugar Maple, Red Spruce, Balsam Fir, Christmas Fern, New York Fern, Sensitive Fern, Royal Fern, and Ostrich Fern (or fiddlehead fern). Most of the latter in the northeast corner of the campground seem to be gone now; look for oodles of them along the descending steps just north of the lower park parking lot.

Birds heard or seen included Ovenbird, American Redstart, Black-throated Green Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Winter Wren (at the pond), Red-eyed Vireo, Common Raven, and Black-throated Blue Warbler.

Less than a mile along this part of the Jodrey Trail is the very spe-

cial vernal, or ephemeral, woodland pond with no inlet or outlet. Water here comes from spring runoff/melt plus any precipitation during the year plus perhaps seeps from springs. Such ponds with few predators are very important for such fauna as frogs and salamanders, mosquitoes and phantom midges, etc.

This year I was particularly interested in how the pond life would appear, since last year the water was extremely low and the pond nearly non-existent in late May after a very warm and very dry spring. This year the pond is predictably very large and very full of water, and the trail is partly flooded.

We had a moment of humour at the pond when we all had to wait a bit for my second rubber boot to arrive (volunteers carried the two buckets with one boot in each).

As usual I set up two upturned buckets and white enamel pans on top of them with pond water, and then swept my dip net back and forth a few times through the pond water. The net contents revealed much less life than we are used to seeing there.

Medium-sized dark tadpoles (of Wood Frogs?) were most obvious but much less abundant than in other years. And a single Spring Peeper was heard calling.

We did find the very-rare fairy shrimps (*Eubranchipus intricatus*), but only a few of both sexes, fully grown. The females had egg sacs at their tail bases. Very few eggs would have been laid last year, and it might take a few to several years to bring the population back up.

Other crustaceans seen included lots of tiny “water fleas” (*Daphnia* relatives). These Cladocerans were seen to form dense active clusters in the corner of the enamel pan where reflected light was maximal (adaptation for finding food; i.e., microscopic swimming algae). A few small red water mites were present.

Lots of black flatworms, or planarians, were gliding on the pan bottoms, and there were a few small snails.

Aquatic insects: This year there were no damselfly larvae, no caddisfly larvae in cases, very few fly larvae (one mosquito larva, one fly pupa, no midge larvae), only one aquatic beetle larva, several very



RICHARD STERN

*Black-throated Blue Warbler*

tiny hatchling dragonfly larvae, and one big adult swimming backswimmer (a predatory true bug).

Because the water level was so high, it was difficult to find places to look for bright-green masses of eggs of Yellow-spotted Salamanders, which are seen there in most years. My guess is that they were probably present but just not observable, being below the surface attached to sticks or aquatic vegetation. (The symbiotic alga is only found associated with amphibian eggs; the salamander larvae use the oxygen produced by the algae to speed their development, and in turn the algae utilize the waste products of the developing salamanders; thus the mutualistic symbiosis benefits both partners. Ryan Kerney at Dalhousie University is researching this symbiosis.)

And a big thank-you goes to Andy Dean, who took several good close-up photos of the pond life and sent them to me.

## *The Fairy Shrimp of Blomidon*

by Jim Wolford

THE fairy shrimp in the woodland pond of Blomidon Provincial Park is *Eubbranchipus intricatus* (Hartland-Rowe, 1967). This species is widely distributed in Canada from Quebec west to BC, but its discovery in May of 1988 in this pond was the first confirmed record for fairy shrimp in Nova Scotia. Since then, the same species was found just north of Somerset School northeast of Berwick, also in Kings County, but nowhere else in Nova Scotia. Annual field trips to the Blomidon Park pond in late May have confirmed the continual presence of this species up to 2011.

The original identification to species was made by Graham Daborn of Acadia University, following its discovery in 1988 by Pierre Taschereau of Dalhousie University, who was leading a park field trip



RICHARD STERN

*Fairy shrimp*

in which I was a participant. I rapidly collected some specimens and delivered them to Daborn. He identified them to species and then documented the discovery with a paper published in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* 105(4): 571–72 in 1992, written by Daborn with co-authors Wolford and Taschereau.

This paper also states that the Arctic Fairy Shrimp, *Branchinecta paludosa* (Muller, 1788), was apparently represented in a collection received in December 1928, with the locality given as “Taylor Harbor, Nova Scotia,” which researcher R.W. Dexter in 1958 thought may have been really Taylor Head on the Eastern Shore. Daborn did a search there in 1975 (unpublished) but found no fairy shrimps.

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CONFERENCE REPORT

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## *Nature Nova Scotia* *2011 Conference and AGM*

by Doug Linzey

JUNE 3–5, 2011 – More than 60 Nova Scotia naturalists (plus a couple from Moncton) gathered at the Gaelic College in St. Anns, Cape Breton, for a great weekend of camaraderie and natural history.

The event began with a reception on Friday night, complete with wine, snacks, and a terrific local Celtic music band (Rocky Shore). After sundown, Richard Stern led a group of owlers in the vicinity of the college, eventually scaring up a distant call from a lone Barred Owl. Clouds precluded a hoped-for stargazing session.

Saturday began with the usual early-morning bird walk for those able to get themselves going at 6 a.m., followed by breakfast and a morning session of illustrated talks: Don Anderson, a regional biologist with DNR in Baddeck, gave a very entertaining talk on the

odonates of Cape Breton; Fenton Isenor, CBU (Cape Breton University) professor of geology, introduced us to the ever-fascinating and world-connected geology of Cape Breton; James Bridgland, a manager at Highlands National Park, took us through the sleuthing process involved in explaining the role of centuries of disturbance (flood, fire, pestilence, human activity) on shaping the present-day forests of Northern Cape Breton; and Bruce Hatcher, CBU chair in marine ecosystems research, led us on a historical and scientific tour of the unique biodiversity of the Bras d'Or Lakes.

Following a hot lunch, we split into four groups for an afternoon of excellent field trips that variously involved forests, insects, birds, and waterfalls. The weather was fine, the insects minimal. Saturday evening, we enjoyed a sit-down banquet and an update on coyotes in Nova Scotia from NNS president Bob Bancroft, accompanied by some wonderful photos. A highlight of the evening was the announcement by Joan Czapalay, the Nova Scotia board member of Nature Canada, that Bob Bancroft is the recipient of this year's Douglas H. Pimlott award, Canada's highest honour for conservation (this is the same award given to George Archibald at the 2007 Nature Canada meeting in Wolfville). Bob was suitably stunned by the news.

Once again, the stars were unavailable, obscured by fog that arrived shortly after the sun set.

Sunday morning, following the birding and breakfast, Tim Lambert, a former DFO research scientist, gave us a historical and graphical overview of rising sea levels in Nova Scotia and a considered outlook for the future (it ain't gonna be pretty, folks).

The annual general meeting went as planned, attended by about 40 members. Once more, we managed to reduce Bob Bancroft to a state of speechlessness (an unusual condition for Bob). Nature Nova Scotia presented him with a special award to celebrate the International Year of Forests: a photo with an engraved plaque ("for your commitment to forest habitat conservation in Nova Scotia") and \$1,000 to be donated to an organization of Bob's choice (he has chosen to split it between the Young Naturalists Club and the Cobequid Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre).

Sunday afternoon, some of us went straight home, and a substantial group toured the Bird Islands by boat (see Richard Stern's photos on line for a taste of that trip).

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YOUTH

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## *BNS Annapolis Valley Regional Science Fair Awards*

by John Belbin

**M**ARCH 30 – APRIL 1, 2011, KING'S-EDGEHILL SCHOOL, WINDSOR, NOVA SCOTIA – The Regional Science Fair is the second level of competition for these students, each one having been selected to represent his or her school at the appropriate age level and category. They compete against other schools in the three counties of the Annapolis Valley. A select group of four projects are chosen to represent Nova Scotia at the nationals to be held at Seneca College in Toronto.

The Blomidon Naturalists provide two awards for excellence in the natural sciences, broadly interpreted as anything that might interest a significant number of our members. They are at the grades 7–9 and 10–12 levels. This year the board voted to improve our awards: we now offer each BNS winner \$100 in cash, a specially designed BNS certificate for framing, and a one-year subscription to the BNS Newsletter.

This year three members of the BNS executive were active as judges (there is always a shortage of capable people willing to judge at these events). Jean Gibson Collins and Barry Yoell joined me on March 30 in evaluating the secondary school projects and helped find suitable candidates for the BNS awards. Their input was invaluable. I returned

on March 31 to judge the elementary students, a process that proved to be a real joy. The enthusiasm and pleasure of these students was quite infectious. Some of them made far better presentations than almost anyone at the high school level. It was a real eye opener!

The awards ceremony was scheduled for the evening of April 1 in the beautiful theatre of King's-Edgehill. However, a vicious snow-ice storm resulted in its being cancelled at the last minute. It was rescheduled on Tuesday, April 5, and I was able to be present. I awarded the BNS prize plus several for CARP and other organizations unable to be there. It was decided that only one project at the secondary level met the somewhat loose parameters of BNS despite the presence of a number of clearly superior projects that would probably do well at even a national level. We did not want to stretch our awards into territory that might seem dubious to some of our members. I did not want to give an award just because I had one to give. If this approach is not correct, I would welcome input on the matter.

The selected project was Eleanor Gallant's "Goldie vs. Goldie." Eleanor is in grade 8 at Hantsport School. This was a comparison of the intelligence of her dog Sunny (Golden Retriever) with that of her fish Angel. She measured their success in learning and remembering a simple behaviour such as jumping or swimming through a hoop. She had to construct suitable equipment for each animal. Although initially very nervous and giving poor responses, the fish, after a number of trials, improved until it equalled the dog – a surprise for most people looking at her project. Both animals were encouraged by getting treats for successful actions.

Eleanor also repeated the process after a couple of weeks to establish their memory capabilities. She has managed to show that fish can respond and change to factors around them in a manner that is very nearly the equal of advanced animals. She has disproven the still-common idea that a fish is stupid, can't learn, and has no sense and no feelings. There are no more excuses for our treatment of marine creatures.

Well done, Eleanor. We need more projects like this!

In view of the difficulty of finding appropriate projects at the



exclusive secondary level, I would welcome a discussion on what we actually award prizes for. I might suggest that we could still award two BNS projects but do not restrict them to any given level. We could simply find the two most suitable projects in the Fair, regardless of the students' academic level. Several elementary projects might have been suitable: one on Green Crab infestation and another on "The Magnificent Insect" (Monarch butterfly) come to mind as very deserving of consideration. There were other excellent projects on fruit flies and Ovenbird habitat that might have proven worthy, plus efforts on local geology, seismology, water problems, etc.

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SCIENCE

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## *Bird Banding: A Commentary*

by Peter Austin-Smith, Sr.

ROY BISHOP's note (*BNS Newsletter*, vol. 2, 2010) regarding his experience with his banded canary and his subsequent comments about injuries to banded Piping Plovers does focus attention on a problem inherent in all animal marking techniques: that of placing the individual study animal at increased risk of injury or death. Regrettably, of 1,078 plastic and anodized aluminum auxiliary bands placed on Piping Plovers from 1998 to 2003, there were 17 apparent injuries ranging from abrasions to foot loss on 361 recaptured birds. All but two of the injuries were related to tall aluminum bands (Amirault et al. 2006). As noted in Amirault et al, "researchers must use caution regarding selection and use of novel auxiliary bands for Piping Plover or similar Charadriiformes."

While any losses or injuries to a threatened species under study are disturbing, marking individuals (bands, tags, radiotelemetry, etc.) is presently the only method for attaining data on the various facets of

their life histories. To band birds, banders must have a federal banding permit, and for some species a provincial one as well. To acquire these, the Bird Banding Office, Environment Canada, requires that they must be recommended by “two qualified ornithologists or persons holding active permits” and have taken training in how to handle and band birds. To ensure that certain standards are followed, they must use the federal banding guidelines. There is also a banders’ code of ethics, which banders should consider. One other point: birds are normally banded with butt-closed bands; that is, they can be removed by opening them up without cutting as Roy was required to do with his banded canary.

In addition, the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) guidelines on the care and use of wildlife (2003), to which research institutions and some wildlife agencies subscribe, address the requirements for the ethical treatment of wildlife when undertaking studies of free-ranging and captive vertebrates. In particular, Banding and Tagging is addressed under guideline 26 (p. 31), which states: “Investigators should weigh the research needs for greater visibility and individual recognition against the potential risks of injury that come with the use of specific marking techniques such as banding and tagging, and should consider the risks associated with the chosen technique.” Specific considerations for birds are noted in the CCAC guidelines online at [www.ccac.ca](http://www.ccac.ca).

Bird banding has been conducted in Canada since 1905 (Environment Canada) and presently there are approximately 900 banders who handle and band over 300,000 birds from 300 species each year. Banding studies have provided data on dispersal, migratory behaviour, lifespan, survival rate, reproductive success, and population growth. Present habitat protection and conservation, especially of important avian migratory and wintering grounds, would not be possible without marking birds. Indeed, the identification of the Minas Basin as an area of major importance to migratory shorebirds likely would not have happened without banding studies. Yes, bird banding and marking will undoubtedly result in some injuries or mortality to birds and other vertebrates, but we should support

such studies until such time as our knowledge of their life histories surpasses the need for their protection and conservation.

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#### NATURAL HISTORY

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## *Nova Scotian Myrmica*

by Barry Yoell

WE Nova Scotians might be accused of being somewhat smug when extolling the numerous virtues of our beautiful province. One of our claims is that we have an extremely safe environment: no venomous snakes, no significantly dangerous animals (although ... coyotes?), no truly perilous insects or sea snails, and rarely any hazardous vegetation.

Recently, however, several spots in the Halifax area have been inundated with an invasive and extremely unpleasant fire ant. Gardens in the Summer Street, Jubilee Road areas on the peninsula, parts of Spryfield, Lower Sackville, and areas of Abercrombie and Stellarton have become almost unusable as the ants attack humans and pets, inflicting numerous painful stings.

Initially the experts felt that these ants were the same as those that

have been causing great trouble in the southern United States: South American exotics, genus *Solenopsis*. There are evidently six species well established from Florida and the Carolinas in the east to the Pacific coast. However, a few years ago our fire ants were identified as European Fire Ants (*Myrmica rubra* Linnaeus) and, as such, are not truly fire ants at all – just a pesky, painful problem!

With the changes of apparent global warming, these invaders are thriving. Our less-cold winters fail to destroy their nests, and the damp, warm summers allow for rapid population increases.

They make relatively small nests, under rocks or decaying wood, and have numerous queens and up to three or four hundred thousand ants in each colony. They can spread by about 100 metres per year. Colonies “bud” and establish several new nests a metre or so from the original, and they can continue to bud in this fashion, gradually encompassing more and more land. Also, of course, they can expand through the inadvertent transport of nests in potted plants, pieces of infected wood, etc., by people.

The individual ants are small, 4–5 mm, the queens being slightly larger. They are reddish brown and have two spherical segments between the thorax and abdomen (all of our other ants have but 1). Seen under a magnifying glass, two backward pointing spines are noted on the posterior dorsal edge of the thorax.

So far, there is no concerted, organized attempt to eradicate this horde. There have been meetings in Halifax; the municipal government says it will closely monitor the situation on their own land but will not assist householders to attack the menace.

Evidently, boric acid bait cans have had some success in reducing the numbers, but nothing so far has completely eradicated the nests. Without an intensive attack, it seems inevitable that the infestation will spread.

We may have to become a little less smug!

## *Nova Scotia Migration Count 2011*

by Larry Bogan

KINGS COUNTY EAST

**M**AY 14, 2011 – On the Saturday of the Nova Scotia Migration Count the weather was overcast and cool, but there was no or little wind. The temperature rose from about 9°C in the morning to 12°C in the afternoon. Some birds were relatively quiet; for example, I did not hear any Hermit Thrushes during my many hours out birding even though I had heard them there a week earlier.

Starting as early as 6 a.m., 35 field observers in 22 parties spread out over a large area of eastern Kings County from Harbourville to the Dalhousie Road, Avonport, Grand Pré, Cape Split, and most areas in between. In addition, 31 indoor observers monitored 20 feeder stations from Berwick to Wolfville. The field parties covered about 120 km on foot in 90 hours, and driving nearly 390 km in 33 hours. The feeder watchers put in about 56 station-hours watching. The count ended at 8 p.m.

The field observers tallied 8,164 birds of 113 species. The feeder watchers added two species not seen in the field (Northern Mockingbird and White-crowned Sparrow) and counted a total of 842 birds of 41 species. The total was 9,006 birds of 115 species. This information will be sent to the Nova Scotia Bird Society's Chris Pepper, who will compile it with other bird counts that day from all over the province. This will give us a view of the migratory behaviour of our birds this year.

I found the most interesting observations to be a Red-necked Grebe, a Little Blue Heron, a Dovekie, 5 Great Horned Owls, a Black-backed Woodpecker, 5 Boreal Chickadees, a Lincoln's Sparrow, and 4 Vesper Sparrows. I was disappointed by low numbers of some spe-

cies, such as only two Gray Jays and no Common Mergansers. More details including a list of participants will be posted on the Blomidon Naturalists website ([www.blomidonnaturalists.ca](http://www.blomidonnaturalists.ca)).

#### KINGS COUNTY WEST

**M**AY 14, 2011 – Sheila Hulford coordinates a large group of feeder watchers and field observers on the borders of Kings and Annapolis County. This year she organized 49 feeder watchers at 32 feeders and six field observers in three parties to count birds in an area from the Kings County line to Aylesford. This area extended from the South Mountain to the North Mountain and along the Morden shore.

The feeders accumulated 272 feeder hours, while the field observers spent three hours on foot and 21 by car. The observers travelled 5 km by foot and 179 by car. The weather was 100 percent cloud cover with temperatures from 10 to 16°C. Winds were light and there was a light drizzle in the evening.

There were 1,624 birds of 65 species observed in the field and 1,218 birds of 43 species observed at feeders, for a total of 2,842 birds seen or heard from 77 species. Highlights were reports of American Bittern, four Northern Cardinals, two Common Redpolls, House Finches, and a towhee.

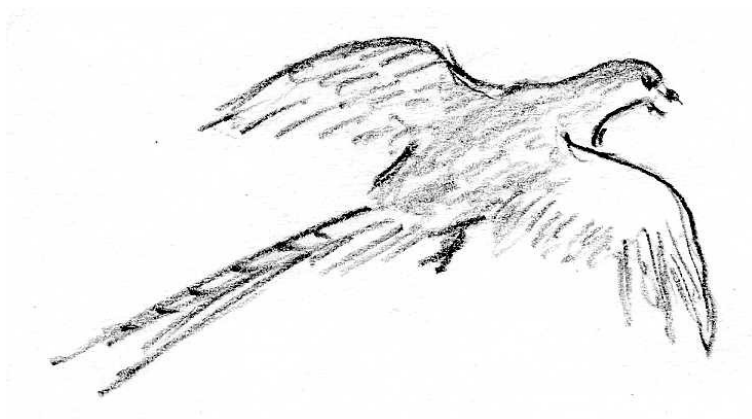
<b>Species counted</b>	<b>Kings East</b>	<b>Kings West</b>
Red-throated Loon	3	
Common Loon	26	
Red-necked Grebe	1	
Double-crested Cormorant	68	1
American Bittern		2
Great Blue Heron	4	
Little Blue Heron	1	
Canada Goose	77	4
Wood Duck	10	
Green-winged Teal	9	
American Black Duck	58	7
Mallard	164	16
Ring-necked Duck	17	

<b>Species counted</b>	<b>Kings East</b>	<b>Kings West</b>
Common Eider	126	30
Black Scoter	51	600
Surf Scoter	6	12
White-winged Scoter	3	
Bufflehead	3	
Red-breasted Merganser		2
Hooded Merganser	1	
Bald Eagle adult	16	
immature	21	
unknown age	6	
Northern Harrier		1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	
Red-tailed Hawk	19	5
Merlin	1	
Ring-necked Pheasant	113	16
Ruffed Grouse	17	
Killdeer	6	
Greater Yellowlegs	1	4
Lesser Yellowlegs	6	
Eastern Willet	12	
Spotted Sandpiper	12	
Common Snipe	8	4
American Woodcock	1	
Ring-Billed Gull	9	1
Herring Gull	428	35
Iceland Gull	1	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	
Greater Black-backed Gull	224	1
Dovekie	1	
Black Guillemot	37	1
Rock Pigeon	82	41
Mourning Dove	184	112
Great Horned Owl	5	
Barred Owl	15	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	17	34
Belted Kingfisher	6	3
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	19	5
Downy Woodpecker	74	46
Hairy Woodpecker	44	23
Black-backed Woodpecker	1	
Northern Flicker	126	10
Pileated Woodpecker	12	1
Alder Flycatcher	1	
Least Flycatcher	17	2
Eastern Phoebe	8	6
Eastern Kingbird	8	
Tree Swallow	192	21

<b>Species counted</b>	<b>Kings East</b>	<b>Kings West</b>
Bank Swallow	13	3
Cliff Swallow	6	
Barn Swallow	44	
Gray Jay	2	
Blue Jay	190	111
American Crow	391	133
Common Raven	158	15
Black-capped Chickadee	363	205
Boreal Chickadee	5	
Red-breasted Nuthatch	21	9
White-breasted Nuthatch	27	31
Brown Creeper	10	1
Winter Wren	14	1
Golden-crowned Kinglet	11	1
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	20	
Veery	5	1
Swainson's Thrush	3	
Hermit Thrush	49	16
American Robin	533	153
Gray Catbird	6	
Northern Mockingbird	2	
European Starling	633	266
Blue-headed Vireo	93	9
Red-eyed Vireo	6	
Nashville Warbler	7	
Northern Parula	126	20
Yellow Warbler	64	15
Chestnut-sided Warbler	10	
Magnolia Warbler	11	4
Black-throated Blue Warbler	8	
Yellow-rumped Warbler	232	34
Black-throated Green Warbler	153	10
Blackburnian Warbler	1	
Yellow-throated Warbler	6	
Palm Warbler	48	
Black-and-White Warbler	100	6
American Redstart	9	
Ovenbird	205	22
Northern Waterthrush	23	1
Common Yellowthroat	23	2
Northern Cardinal	25	4
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	11	6
Eastern Towhee		1
Chipping Sparrow	77	19
Vesper Sparrow	4	
Savannah Sparrow	108	5
Song Sparrow	424	85



Species counted	Kings East	Kings West
Fox Sparrow		9
Lincoln's Sparrow	1	
Swamp Sparrow	12	3
White-throated Sparrow	166	22
White-crowned Sparrow	2	
Dark-eyed Junco	97	50
Bobolink	2	
Red-winged Blackbird	345	81
Common Grackle	207	93
Brown-headed Cowbird	7	2
Pine Grosbeak	4	
Common Redpoll		6
Purple Finch	160	85
House Finch		2
Pine Siskin		14
American Goldfinch	419	192
Evening Grosbeak	19	26
House Sparrow	30	8
Gull species	19	
Duck species	1	
Raptor species	1	
Kinglet species		1
Vireo species	3	1
Blackbird species	2	4
Sparrow species		8



MARY PRATT

## *An Off Year for Nesting Barred Owls*

by Bernard Forsythe

THERE is work involved with a successful Barred Owl nestbox project. The season begins in the fall with changing the box lining and making any necessary repairs, usually from raccoon damage. New lining helps cut down on parasites. Last September I went to check a box on Wolfville Ridge and found the woods in the process of being cut, so I took the box home for repairs. When the tree harvester left, I put the box back up in the downsized woodlot. This was followed by the December 13 windstorm knocking down a large dead spruce, hitting the newly placed nestbox, sending it to the ground. Once more this box was hoisted up the nest tree. After the storm I had to revisit all the box sites. Several nest trees were down, so the boxes were recovered and repaired, new suitable nest trees located, and the boxes reinstalled. From more than thirty years of success with this project, I know the owls appreciate my efforts, and I look forward each April to recording nesting results.

As usual, in 2010 my backyard Barred Owls moved to their summer territory in the Dug Woods behind the home of Gordon and Judy Tufts. They returned to my owl feeder in November 2010, as they have for 18 winters, to enjoy carrion from the food tray throughout the winter. The female began visiting the nearby nestbox on February 18, 2011. However, by early April she returned to the Dug Woods. Why did these well-fed owls not lay eggs in my backyard nestbox? Following up on reports from the Tufts, I answered the question on May 17. During a search of the Dug Woods I found the female brooding her one owlet in a cavity at the top of a large pine stump. She preferred to nest in the summer territory, while the male kept returning to my feeder until cut off the free food in early May.

Barred Owl nesting attempts vary from year to year, mostly determined by availability of food. Deep snow cover during most of last winter kept many small mammals out of reach of the owls. In March the females began visiting the nestboxes, even finding the ones relocated after the December storm. Egg laying began two weeks later than last year, and the number of pairs producing eggs dropped from twelve in 2010 to six this year; and clutch sizes were smaller. Some females that do not produce eggs will defend the intended nest site long after eggs should have been laid. This year one female that usually lays at the end of March watched me from nearby trees during my visits to her empty nest. During my last visit on May 3, she struck me on my arm.

The female Barred Owl nesting in a maple tree cavity on Main Street in Wolfville in 2010 was nicely photographed by Richard Stern (see the March photo in our 2011 BNS calendar). In early April of this year she attempted to nest in the same cavity, but her eggs were predated by a raccoon. Occasionally, raccoons will take a Barred Owl nest, but the chain saw is a much more serious predator of the nest sites for these owls as well as other forest birds and animals. Without nestboxes placed in second-growth woodlots, many Barred Owls cannot nest successfully.

Last year the female Barred Owl in my Greenfield nestbox sat for over a month without laying any eggs. During four previous years she had only laid one egg per year. The usual clutch size is two or three eggs. Again this year she sat a month in the empty box. The male answered my owl call from nearby. This pair would make excellent parents, but she seems no longer able to produce eggs.

By early June, banding of this year's crop of owlets was completed. My reduced number of nests produced nine young. An additional three young from a box on Bennett Bay Road and three young from two boxes in the Kingston area resulted in a total of 15 young banded this year, a considerable reduction from the 36 young Barred Owls banded in 2010.

## *Evolution's Greatest Mystery and Nova Scotia's Amazing Treasure*

by Blue Beach Fossil Museum staff

NOVA Scotia has a treasure that few Maritimers know about. There are even people living in the Annapolis Valley who know little or nothing about one of the great paleontological sites of the world: Blue Beach, situated on the Minas Basin near Avonport. Paleontologists from the United States and Europe have visited this unique site and have marvelled at the fossils found here. Many scientific papers have been written about Blue Beach and its rare and wonderful fossils.

Nowhere else has such abundant fossil evidence been found to help us better understand the crucial period of the evolutionary transition of aquatic to terrestrial animals. This 20 million year break in the fossil record is known as Romer's Gap, and Blue Beach is the world's only locality whose cliffs and beach yield a steady supply of amphibian fossils and their trackways from within this period. These specimens are not only rare but are changing theories on the origin of these first animals to crawl on land. They are indeed helping solve evolution's greatest mystery.

At the present time, Sonja Wood (the owner of Blue Beach) and her partner Chris Mansky have built a small home-based museum to store and display these amazing fossils, which richly deserve to be properly preserved and displayed. If done right, this opportunity can result in the creation of a world-class museum, research centre, and geotourism site benefiting not only all Nova Scotians but also humanity as a whole. Simply put, Blue Beach holds the keys to one of the most important stories evolution has to tell.

Imagine the excitement Louis and Mary Leakey felt with their discoveries in the Olduvai Gorge in East Africa. That same excitement should be generated right here in Nova Scotia with this unsurpassed treasure we have here. Currently, without any special promotional efforts, over 10,000 visitors have discovered Blue Beach, and student tours of the facility have created many amateur paleontologists who excitedly hunt for and maybe discover fossils.

Blue Beach has been known about since 1841 when Sir William Logan discovered fossilized footprints. A generation later, J.W. Dawson reported on the rich fossil finds at this beach. In 1966, the first tetrapod bone was discovered by Donald Baird. The discoveries of additional trace fossils and footprint material failed, however, to stimulate interest because of their rarity, and key researchers eventually concluded that “unfortunately the site would probably never yield anything more than a few enigmatic glimpses at best” (Clack and Carroll 2000). Such a dismissive view was to be proven wrong, largely because many of the fossils had not been found anywhere before and led to confusion about what exactly had been found. Traces of tetrapods are, admittedly, rare, but they have been found here largely in footprints.

In 2002, the Blue Beach Fossil Museum and Research Centre was opened, and since then the Blue Beach site has generated a new understanding and appreciation of its treasures among geologists and paleontologists who now view the fossil collection as the world standard. The fossil collection at Blue Beach Museum is the largest collection of the oldest fossil footprints in the world, with over 1,750 specimens as of January 2011.

The Blue Beach Fossil Museum Society is now actively promoting the site and has architectural plans for a much larger museum and research centre for the vitally important work leading to a better understanding of how amphibians evolved to become land animals. The society recently acquired a tax number and thus became designated as a charitable organization.

Interest is building among local citizens, governments, and scien-

tists, and now it is the hope that Blue Beach is headed for worldwide attention and prominence.

#### REFERENCE

Clack, J.A., and R.L. Carroll. 2000. Early Carboniferous tetrapods. Chapter 3 in *Palaeontology: The Evolutionary History of the Amphibia*, (eds.) H. Heatwole & R.L. Carroll, vol. 4 in the series *Amphibian Biology*. Surrey Beatty Press, pp. 1030–43.

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#### SEEN IN THE WILD

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## *Putting Litter in Its Place*

by Derek Allerton & Laura Thompson

**A**FTER a long, wet spring, there are many things we look forward to: warmer weather, picnicking in the park, sitting out on the deck, and working in the garden – truly enjoying the season. What we do not look forward to is the litter on the sides of roads, sidewalks, and our favourite trails.

How many of us have seen coffee cups, fast-food wrappers, and beverage containers galore on our streets? Litter is not only an aesthetic eyesore consisting of every disposable item you can imagine; it also poses a real threat to our wildlife, our personal health, and the environment in general.

Most litter is food related and attracts wildlife and pets to the sides of busy roads and highways. Whether compostable or not, litter puts wildlife at risk: being struck by traffic, ingesting packaging that may shorten their lives, or just becoming a neighbourhood nuisance. Litter and wildlife do not go well together.

If not picked up (and properly disposed of), litter hangs around



*Sign on sidewalk garbage can in Dublin, 2009*

a long time. Paper coffee cups can take over a year to break down, while plastic takes centuries. Hard plastic may just break down into smaller pieces and work its way into the soil, but lighter plastics often end up in our waterways, posing threats to aquatic species that mistake them for food. Broken glass may look beautiful after years of wear on the beach, but is a high risk to injure people and animals no matter where it ends up. Almost all litter leaves the environment poorer than it was before. Moreover, litter appears to be increasing in volume with each passing year as our consumer society becomes addicted to disposable items.

Have we not been down this road before? In the 1970s, Canada took a hard look at litter to change the cultural mindset of its citizenry – that putting litter in its place was the right thing to do. Pitch-In Canada ([www.pitch-in.ca](http://www.pitch-in.ca)), a national non-profit charitable organization, tries to tackle this growing problem. Unfortunately, litter has taken a back seat to other seemingly more important environ-

mental issues such as climate change, threats to biodiversity, and the chemical make-up of consumer products such as cosmetics and baby products.

Many municipalities have bylaws against littering, although resources are stretched thin in regards to enforcement. There are anti-dumping and anti-littering signs posted along roadsides as well as an increasing number of garbage receptacles. In many provinces, there is a deposit on beverage containers to encourage collection for refund (although 5 and 10 cents is not what it once was). In the end, however, we need to get back to the cultural message that littering is not socially acceptable.

One way to get this message across is to actually pick up litter when we can. We find this small act of green easy to do when walking our dogs, as we have plastic bags on hand to pick up a few pieces of litter. Studies have shown that people are less likely to litter when there is no litter around. Another green act would be to participate in a community event organized to pick up litter in parks or beaches in your area. Your actions improve wildlife habitat and makes these civic places attractive to visit once again. For those of us who are more forward, one tactic is to actually confront people who litter (when safe to do so). This can range from striking up a conversation to honking your horn. While it can happen that people litter accidentally, most often littering is considered an inconsequential behaviour. Reasons for littering, while inexcusable, range greatly from lack of awareness to just not knowing where the local trash can is.

Finally, if you see large quantities of coffee cups or other specific items along the side of the road, contact those retailers and express your concerns. Retailers can enact practices to encourage consumers towards reusable items such as mugs and bags by offering them discounts. If their programs are weak, take them to task so they can improve their efforts to reduce packaging. Trust us – they don't want their brands considered as trash.



## Spring 2011 – Eastern Annapolis Valley

by Larry Bogan

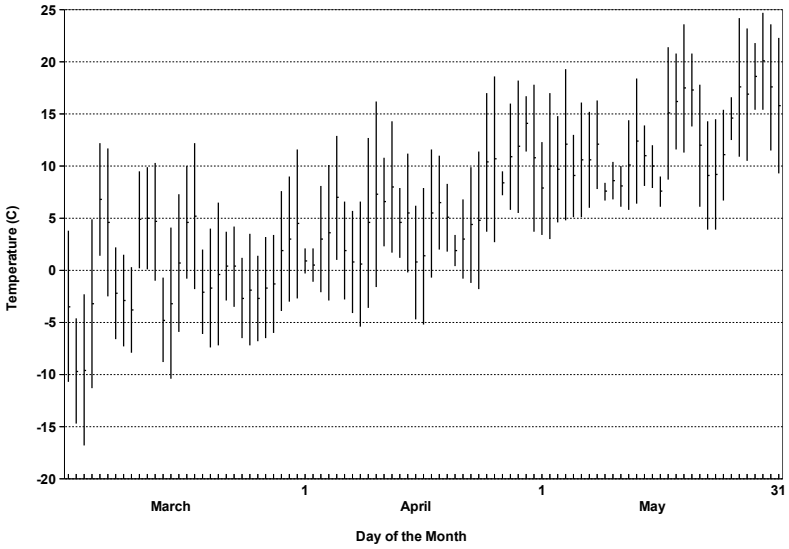
THIS weather report will depart from my usual ones. The weather data that I had access to directly from the Kentville Agriculture Research Station for decades is no longer available, and the equivalent data available from Environment Canada (EC) for Kentville is incomplete for April and May of this year. As a result I have chosen to use the EC data for Kejimikujik National Park for this report. The data are accessible to everyone at the EC website ([www.climate.weatheroffice.gc.ca/climateData/canada\\_e.html](http://www.climate.weatheroffice.gc.ca/climateData/canada_e.html)).

I was expecting to tell you that we had a very wet spring, but the data do not allow me to say that. In the western part of the province, we received less than the 30-year average amount for the season. We

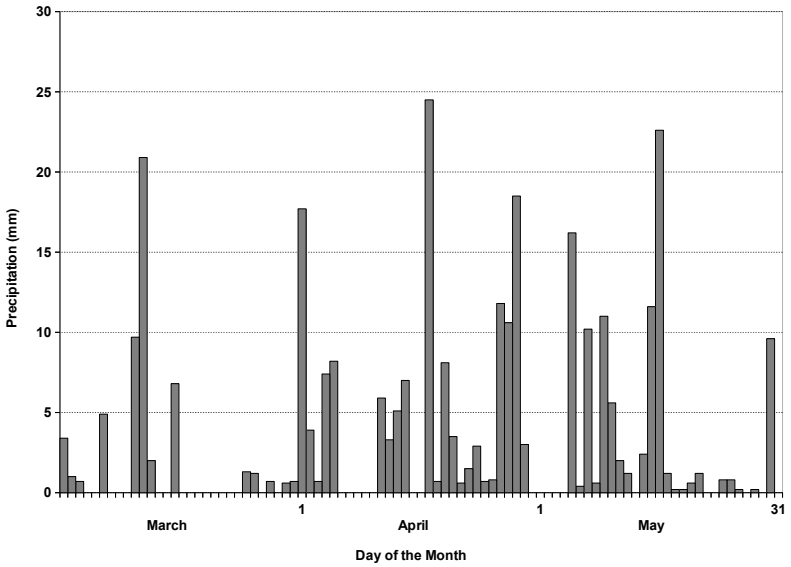
	Temperature			Total
	Max (°C)	Min (°C)	Mean (°C)	Percipitation (mm)
<b>March</b>	5.0	-5.9	-0.5	54
(30 yr. average)	(4.1)	(-6.2)	(-1.1)	(129)
<b>April</b>	10.6	-0.4	5.5	146
(30 yr. average)	(10.0)	(-0.6)	(4.7)	(116)
<b>May</b>	17.0	7.9	12.5	99
(30 yr. average)	(16.7)	(4.3)	(10.5)	(101)
<b>Season</b>	10.8	0.8	5.8	299
(30 yr. average)	(10.3)	(-0.8)	(4.7)	(346)

Source: Environment Canada, Kejimikujik National Park  
30-yr. averages apply to years 1971–2000

**Daily Temperatures**  
**Kejimkujik Park, Mar, Apr, May 2011**



**Daily Precipitation**  
**Kejimkujik Park, Mar, Apr, May 2011**



did have a very cloudy season, but I do not have the sunshine data to back that up. However, if you look at the large number of days that we received rain this spring, that is convincing enough.

#### TEMPERATURE

The temperature steadily climbed during the whole spring season and overall was slightly warmer than normal. The mean daily temperature rose above freezing at the end of March. May was the warmest month, of course, and was well above average by 2 °C. On the other hand, March was below average by 0.6 °C. It is interesting to note that in May the mean daily maximum temperature was only 0.3 °C above the average while the mean daily minimum temperature was 3.6 °C above the average. This is because we had such cloudy weather that we had few cold, frosty nights. If you look at the temperature graph you will note that there was no frost this season after April 23, whereas the usual last day of frost is in mid-May.

#### PRECIPITATION

I forgot how dry March was, probably because we had 45 cm of snow on the ground at the beginning and it stayed until the 16th of the month. It was down to 22 cm by the 8th and disappeared during the next week.

The graph of precipitation for the season is telling in that there are 56 days of the 92 when we had some precipitation. There were 18 dry days in March but only 8 in April and 10 in May. April was the wet month with 25 percent more rain than average; May was normal with 100 mm, but March received only 42 percent of the average precipitation. Frequent low-pressure systems that moved over Nova Scotia kept us cloudy and damp with few dry periods. The longest dry periods we had in April and May were five days, one at the beginning of April and the other at the first of May. Since then it has been cloudy and showery (as of June 6). Hopefully, the sequence of low-pressure systems will stop and we can get to some sunny, dry weather.

## *What's in the Sky?*

by Roy Bishop

### SPECIAL EVENTS IN SEQUENCE

**July 4:** Earth at aphelion (farthest from Sun)

**July 12:** Neptune's birthday\*

**July 15:** Full Moon

**August 12:** Perseid meteor shower (moonlight interferes)

**August 13:** Full Moon

**August 22:** Neptune at opposition\*

**August 26–28:** Nova East astronomy weekend†

**September 12:** Full Moon

**September 23:** Autumn equinox (6:06 a.m. ADT)

**September 25:** Uranus at opposition

**September 28, 29, 30:** Perigean-spring-equinoctial tides\*

**October 11:** The smallest biggest Moon\*

**October 28:** Jupiter at opposition

### VISIBILITY OF THE PLANETS

**Mercury – July:** Low in the western evening twilight sky. ☼ **August:** Not visible as it passes behind the Sun. ☼ **September:** Well placed in the eastern dawn twilight sky during the first half of the month. ☼ **October:** Very low in the southwestern evening twilight sky in the last half of the month.

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\* See the astronomy note in your BNS Natural History Calendar for that month.

† At Smileys Provincial Park, near Windsor. See Upcoming Events (pp. 13–14)

**Venus** – *July*: Not visible. ☼ *August*: Not visible; passes behind the Sun on the 16th. ☼ *September*: Low in the western evening twilight sky during the last half of the month. ☼ *October*: Low in the south-western evening twilight sky during the last half of the month.

**Earth** – Visible anytime, July through October, except in complete darkness.

**Mars** – *July, August, September, October*: In the eastern morning sky, rising earlier and becoming higher in the sky as summer passes into autumn. Mars moves from Taurus through Gemini, Cancer, and into Leo as the weeks pass.

**Jupiter** – *July*: Rises after midnight in the eastern sky. ☼ *August*: Rises near midnight in the northeast. ☼ *September*: Rises in the east in the late evening. ☼ *October*: Rises early evening and is visible all night. Opposition is on October 28.

**Saturn** – *July*: In the western evening sky and sets near midnight. ☼ *August*: Low in the western evening sky and sets in late evening. ☼ *September*: Vanishes into the evening twilight. ☼ *October*: Not visible; passes behind the Sun on the 13th.

**Uranus** – *July*: Rises near midnight in the east. ☼ *August*: Rises in the late evening in the east. ☼ *September*: Visible all night, with opposition on the 25th. ☼ *October*: Well-placed in the night sky, in Pisces. Visible in binoculars.

**Neptune** – *July*: Rises in late evening, in the east. ☼ *August*: Visible all night, with opposition on the 22nd. ☼ *September*: Well-placed in the night sky, in Aquarius. Visible in binoculars. ☼ *October*: Well placed in the night sky, in Aquarius.

# SOURCES OF LOCAL NATURAL HISTORY

Compiled by the Blomidon Naturalists Society

TOPIC	SOURCE	OFFICE OR HOME TELEPHONE
<b>Amphibians &amp; Reptiles</b>	Sherman Bleakney	H: 542-3604
	Jim Wolford	H: 542-9204
<b>Astronomy</b>	Roy Bishop	H: 542-3992
	Sherman Williams	H: 542-5104
	Larry Bogan	H: 678-0446
<b>Birds – General</b>	Bernard Forsythe	H: 542-2427
	Richard Stern	O: 678-4742 H: 678-1975
	Gordon & Judy Tufts	H: 542-7800
	Jim Wolford	H: 542-9204
	Jean Timpa	H: 542-5678
<b>Butterflies &amp; Moths</b>	Jean Timpa	H: 542-5678
<b>Fish &amp; Wildlife</b>	NS Department of Natural Resources	O: 679-6091
<b>Flora:</b>	Ruth Newell	O: 585-1355 H: 542-2095
<b>Fungi:</b>	Nancy Nickerson	H: 542-9332
<b>Hawks &amp; Owls</b>	Bernard Forsythe	H: 542-2427
<b>Indian Prehistory &amp; Archeology</b>	James Legge	H: 542-3530
<b>Mosses &amp; Ferns</b>	Ruth Newell	O: 585-1355 H: 542-2095
<b>Mammals</b>	Tom Herman	O: 585-1358 H: 678-0383
<b>Rocks &amp; Fossils</b>	Geology Dept., Acadia University	O: 585-2201
<b>Seashore &amp; Marine Life</b>	Sherman Bleakney	H: 542-3604
	Jim Wolford	H: 542-9204
	Michael Brylinsky	O: 585-1509 H: 582-7954

# BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY

## 2011 Membership Fees & Order Form

Members receive four issues of the BNS newsletter annually. As a registered charity, BNS issues receipts for all donations. Members may also join Nature Nova Scotia through BNS and will receive FNSN News, the federation newsletter. (Neither BNS nor NNS membership is tax deductible.)

NAME

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ADDRESS

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POSTAL CODE

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E-MAIL

TEL

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*In signing this membership application, I/we hereby waive & release the Blomidon Naturalists Society, its executive committee and members, from all claims for injury and/or damage suffered at any function or field trip organized by the Blomidon Naturalists Society.*

SIGNATURE

DATE

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No.	Description	Price	Total
_____	Individual/ Family Membership	\$20.00	\$ _____
_____	Junior (under 16 years) Membership	\$1.00	\$ _____
_____	Nature Nova Scotia Membership	\$5.00	\$ _____
_____	2011 BNS Calendar	\$15.00	\$ _____
_____	Natural History of Kings County	\$14.00	\$ _____
_____	Within the View of Blomidon	\$20.00	\$ _____
_____	Checklist of Kings County Birds	\$5.00	\$ _____
_____	Blomidon Naturalist crest	\$5.00	\$ _____
_____	Blomidon Naturalist hat	\$15.00	\$ _____
_____	BNS Calendar Photos (Screensaver)	\$10.00	\$ _____
	Postage: (calendar \$2) (parcel \$6)		\$ _____
	Tax-deductible Donation		\$ _____
	(Registration number: 118811686RR0001)		

**TOTAL** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Address cheques or money orders to Blomidon Naturalists Society for membership and other purchases to: **Ed Sulis, 107 Canaan Avenue, Kentville, NS B4N 2A7.** Due date is January 1 of current year.





JACK MCMASTER