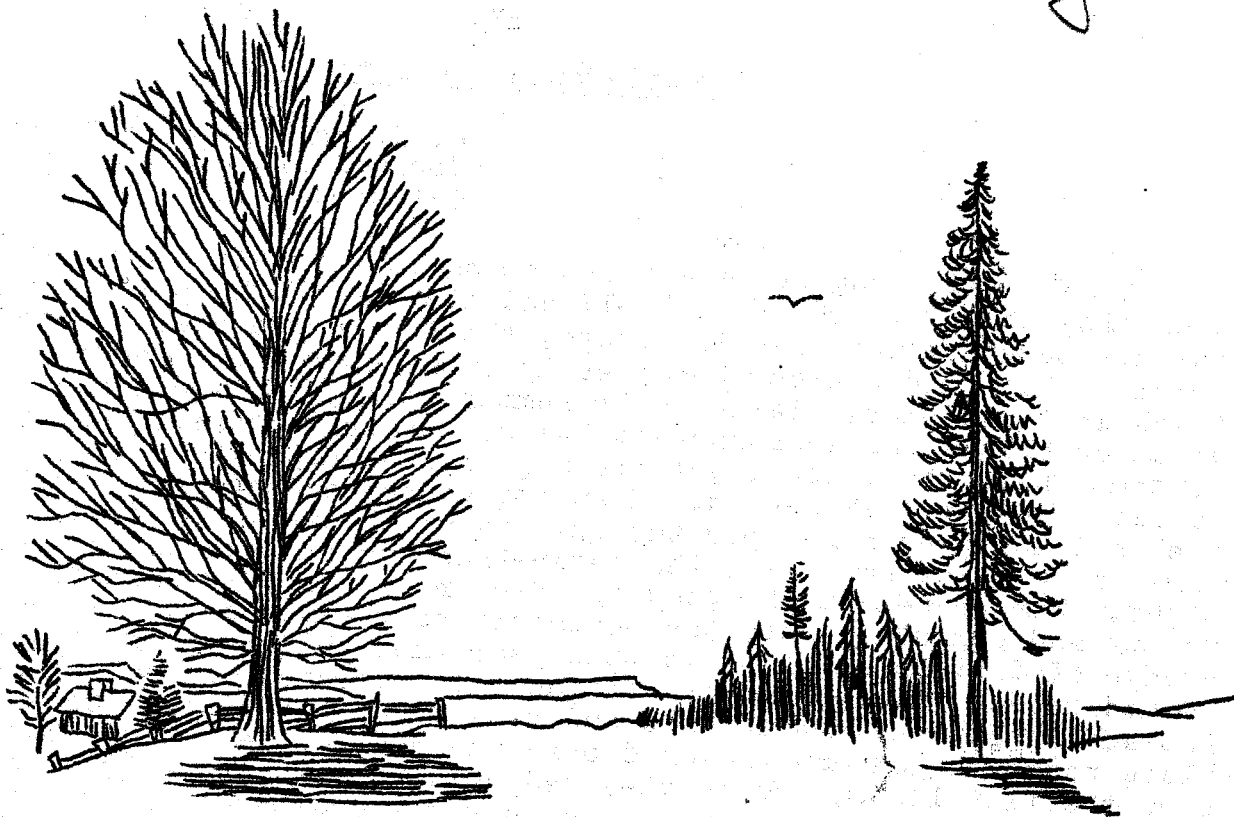


L. Bogan



# BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume 3 No. 1

March, 1976

## COMING EVENTS

### Iceland!

April 26 at 8:00 p.m., Wolfville High School, audio-visual room, Dr. Peter Smith will present a general overview of the Icelandic habitat with particular emphasis on the bird life. This will be illustrated with slides taken by Dr. Smith during the several summers he worked there.

### Special Meeting- BNS Futurists

As you may have heard, we did not have an annual meeting in March as planned because the attendance by members of the Society was too small to transact business. As a result, the past year's officers are still in their positions. Several active members are concerned and are going to have an informal discussion of the Society's Future on Tuesday, May 4. All persons sincerely interested in helping to plot the future of our only naturalist society are invited to meet at the residence of Larry Bogan at 7:30 p.m. that night. (Address: 5 Horton Avenue, Wolfville; two doors down from the student union building on the Acadia University Campus)

### A Spring Star Party

May 7, Grand Pre Park, 10 PM ADT (Friday) (In case of clouds, meet the same time May 8) Larry Bogan, Leader (542-3033). Bring your binoculars and dress warmly. We will learn some stars and constellations of the spring sky-many of these are dim and you may never have known they existed. We will also see Saturn and Mars close together near the stars Pollux and Castor. The Moon will be at first Quarter close by. A couple of small telescopes will be available to observe these objects.

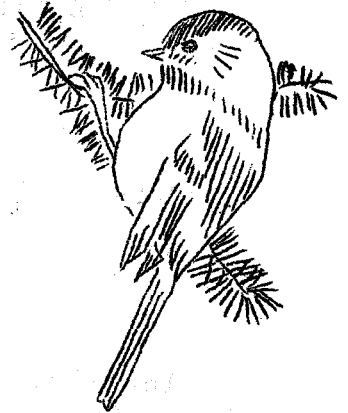
### Who's (Whose) Outdoors? A Conference on the Use of Your Land

Wheelock Hall, Acadia University, May 14, 15, and 16, 1976. Sponsored by the Association of Outdoor Nova Scotians; Supported by the N.S. Dept. of Recreation, Invited to participate: N.S. Depts. of Agriculture, Education, Environment, Lands and Forests, Tourism. Friday, May 14, 8:00pm registration at Wheelock Hall. Keynote speakers, discussions, field trips.

Habit-Bound Migrants

J. S. Erskine, Wolfville  
Journal of Education (N.S.)  
October, 1963

1962-63 will long be remembered among the notably stormy winters, equalling those of 1904-5, 1916-17 and 1939-40 but happily associated with no wars more serious than the Congo, the Indian frontier and the Cuban crisis. The cold weather began early in October while the oats still lay thick in the fields, flattened by summer rains, and the hay stood shaggily uncut or blackening in abandoned bales. Never had there been so much food to tempt birds to linger, yet the migrants disappeared with unusual punctuality, leaving few behind. Even chickadees seemed rare, perhaps because the rain had been hard upon the insects which are their food. The snow came and did not go again; the never-freezing springs in the marshes froze tight. The geese, which spend the winter on the eel-grass flats of Queens County and commute across the peninsula to the meadows of Grand Pre for a change of diet, shunned us in this year when the grass was covered. Brown-backed horned larks were rare on the tidal marshes and snow buntings and Lapland longspurs were in ones and twos along the dykes. Occasionally a black rough-legged hawk hovered over the snow, pigeon hawks scurried low over the flat lands, and short-eared owls rose unhurriedly on powerful buff wings and wandered along the dykes, but these depended upon mice rather than upon other birds. Then March came and the hope of spring.



Birds share our widely fostered illusion that spring begins on the twenty-first of March. No matter how severe the winter may have been, the spring migration will vary by only a few days, and these variations may directly contradict the weather. Lacking our means of storing and communicating experience, plants and birds must have their calendars built-in. Plants react chiefly to temperature, and a warm April will bring the more optimistic into tender leaf which a cold May will nip again. Migratory birds react rather to the length of day. The eye registers it, the pituitary gland sends out its messengers, the gonads enlarge, and the bird's behavior shifts from the impotent club-life of winter to the restless adolescence of spring. He must fly, even though in his first year he knows not whither. The caged bird points northward like a compass or beats his breast against the northern wires; the free bird flies.

Of course this, like all science, is an oversimplification of a complex reality. All species act somewhat differently, and all individuals within a species have minor variations. But the behavior of the whole species has been moulded by ancestral experience, successful behavior being copied and retaught generation after generation. We picture such learning as a beating of fixed pathways through the brain, choosing always one alternative in the branching of neural possibilities. If each brain-cell had only two alternatives, as our alphabet has only capital and small letters, a suitable pathway might have a formula like  $AbcDeFGh$ . Any changes in heredity that interrupted this pathway might make migration different or unlearnable; any which eliminated the alternatives,  $ABCdEfgH$ , would make the migration more automatic and effective, until at last the bird became moulded into an inalterable pattern of behavior. This process of fitting the species to its environment is usually one of reducing intelligent choice and therefore the species' chances of ultimate survival. Some species migrate by devious

routes that detour obstructions no longer there; others risk a thousand miles of sea because that course had been narrow and safe when first it had been beaten into the ancestral brains.

Even bird migration, however, is affected by other factors, though we only guess how. Perhaps underfeeding checks northward migrations so that insect-eaters do not overshoot the flies upon which they live, but a storm up the Atlantic Coast may lift the migrants forward hundreds of miles in a night and land them dangerously before their time.

This year the first definite migrants arrived on March 3, small groups of the dusty-backed, white-faced horned larks that nest with us, not to be confused with the larger yellow-faced larks that winter on the salt-marshes. Before the end of the month these new arrivals were tinkling thinly on thawed spots of barren pasture, claiming territories for their nests. This lark has only recently moved into Nova Scotia from a westerly region of earlier springs, and it makes many mistakes by nesting on the ground in April while the "smelt snows" are yet to come. But their nests may be found on into June, so they may well refuse to be discouraged by a first failure.

During the first two weeks of March this year there were strong gales, circular storms which blew damply from the south for a day and then turned into northers and snows. It is hard to be sure of the first new arrivals among species which overwinter with us in small numbers, but now song sparrows, robins and purple finches turned up in places where they had not been seen all winter. Flocks of cowbirds appeared after three months' absence, and a rusty blackbird was feeding with starlings in a farmyard a month before his time. But the northers brought another contribution, red crossbills in the pines and flocks of hundreds of snow buntings swirling and Lapland longspurs chatting over the dykelands.

There was warmth now in the sun, and the snow shrank away in the open lands. The mass migration of song sparrows, robins, fox sparrows and grackles arrived punctually in the last week of March. The black ducks began to pair, and geese again shifted in patterned hundreds across the Grand Pre meadows. Even tree swallows appeared weeks before their time. Then, in the second week of April a storm struck with hurricane force and dumped feet of wet snow over the province, and, when it was over, telephone poles lay in neat rows or hung loosely from their wires.

Winter had come again, but for the birds there was no return. Around the back door robins and starlings hollowed out apples in the snow, and the spring sparrows gathered for a meal of oat-tailings and weed-seed. They were a jealous crew, although there was food enough for all. The large chestnut-tailed fox sparrow chased the song sparrow which chased the house sparrow which chased the grey-and-white juncoes, and these, having no one smaller, chased each other. They all fed hungrily, scratching in the snow like ambidextrous hens, leaving delicate traceries of tracks upon the deep snow. Once they had fed, they remembered that it was spring. The song sparrows had already paired and were chanting their claims to different corners of the garden. The fox sparrows, though they were still far from their breeding grounds, sang their sweetwandering up-and-down whistles, each bird a little different yet always repeating his own pattern: "It's getting warmer. Can't we go?" And beside the wood, where dozens of them were chanting together within a few yards, a white April had nothing to envy June. The juncoes fluffed out their breasts and spread their white-edged tails. The robins that were planning to nest chased the black-backed robins of the north away from their territories and then mounted into trees to tune up their voices, preparing for the arrival of a robin who would not be chased away. The purple finches tinked in the cherry-trees and occasionally ventured snatches of varied song.

These were the hardy species which had not sacrificed their intelligence to specialized behavior. The swallows vanished in the blizzards, and a solitary woodcock was seen probing frantically for worms in a deep snowdrift. These were specialists, living things become mechanical, and for such there is no salvation. Once we picked up a woodcock which had broken his wing on a wire. We caged him against the cats and brought him worms to eat, but he would have none of them. Proper worms were to be found by probing in damp soil or among leaves, and nothing else was

acceptable, so that he starved in the midst of plenty. Once a nestful of swifts fell into our fireplace. I climbed the roof and fixed the nest on the ridge beside the chimney where the parents could not fail to hear the voices of their young. They heard and rushed frantically up and down the chimney, knowing that here and only here was where young ones belonged, and, at last convinced that the nest was no longer where it ought to be, they flew away in despair, ignoring the clamor of the little ones.

For two weeks the migration halted. The length of day told the birds that spring had come, and they could not disbelieve their instincts. "Nothing is certain, only the certain spring." The black ducks, which in other years would have paired and scattered inland or have moved northward, remained in flocks on the salt-marshes or in fields where laid oats protruded from the snow, and they paddled over the slushy drifts two by two, for it was spring. The summer larks had abandoned their nesting-sites and had returned to flock on the dykelands, running long-heeled over the snow and digging side by side with newly arrived Savannah sparrows. Now and then larks sang small tinkling songs as they ran, but they did it half-heartedly as though it were a ritual in which they no longer wholly believed.

The snow melted slowly in the fields, but the fishes and their birds arrived only a few days late. Ospreys hovered and plunged in still pools, herons and cormorants joined the gulls for the smelt harvest at the mouths of the rivers, and farther out the red-throated loons dived among the waves. The songs of the fox sparrows had gone, and unnoticed the black-backed robins had moved northward. The rising trill of the myrtle warbler edged the woods. Grackles, redwings and rusty blackbirds creaked and trilled by the river where the first spring-peepers had awakened. And on the dyke the geese still lingered, running with waving wings to rise in long clamoring shifting lines, hundreds together filling an eighth of the horizon with long back necks and thrilling voices and the swish of great feathers, while around them corkscrewed great flocks of black ducks and smaller faster groups with the thin piping voices of green-winged teal. On the snowy slopes willows and alders were in yellow catkin; tufts of moss stood up purple; and in the trickling springs the green gauze of Spirogyra waved in the current. Yet, lacing all the land, the great drifts of snow remained two feet deep, a threat that it was not yet too late for winter to return.

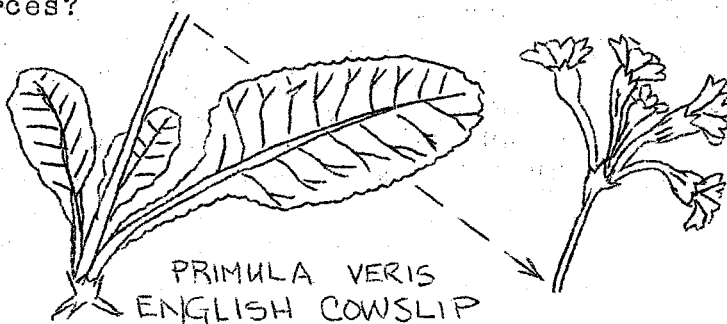
Cowslip Tea  
(18th Century)

Warm the teapot and put in three teaspoonfulls of cowslip blossoms for each person. Pour boiling water over it, cover closely and leave for twenty minutes. Country folk say that you will never have rheumatism if you drink this.

from The Family Weekend Book by Beryl Irving, an old book sent to one of our members, Mrs. G. F. Bayne, from England. Mrs. Bayne kindly copied out a number of "recipes" which she thought we might find amusing and interesting, if not always practical!

The Flora of Nova Scotia by A. E. Roland and E. C. Smith classifies the Cowslip as Primula veris L., a member of the Primrose family. Roland and Smith report that it is "commonly found as an ornamental in old gardens and about dwellings but gradually disappearing; reported by Macoun as well-established in meadows about a mile inland from North Sydney, as P. officinalis L. Introduced from Eu. and occasionally escaped, from N.S. to Conn." p. 573 of the Flora.

Do any of our members have Cowslip in their gardens or know of any local sources?



**NOTE:**

DO NOT Confuse this with the American Cowslip more commonly called Marsh Marigold (Caltha palustris) It has a poisonous glucoside in it!

Often Heard But Rarely Seen

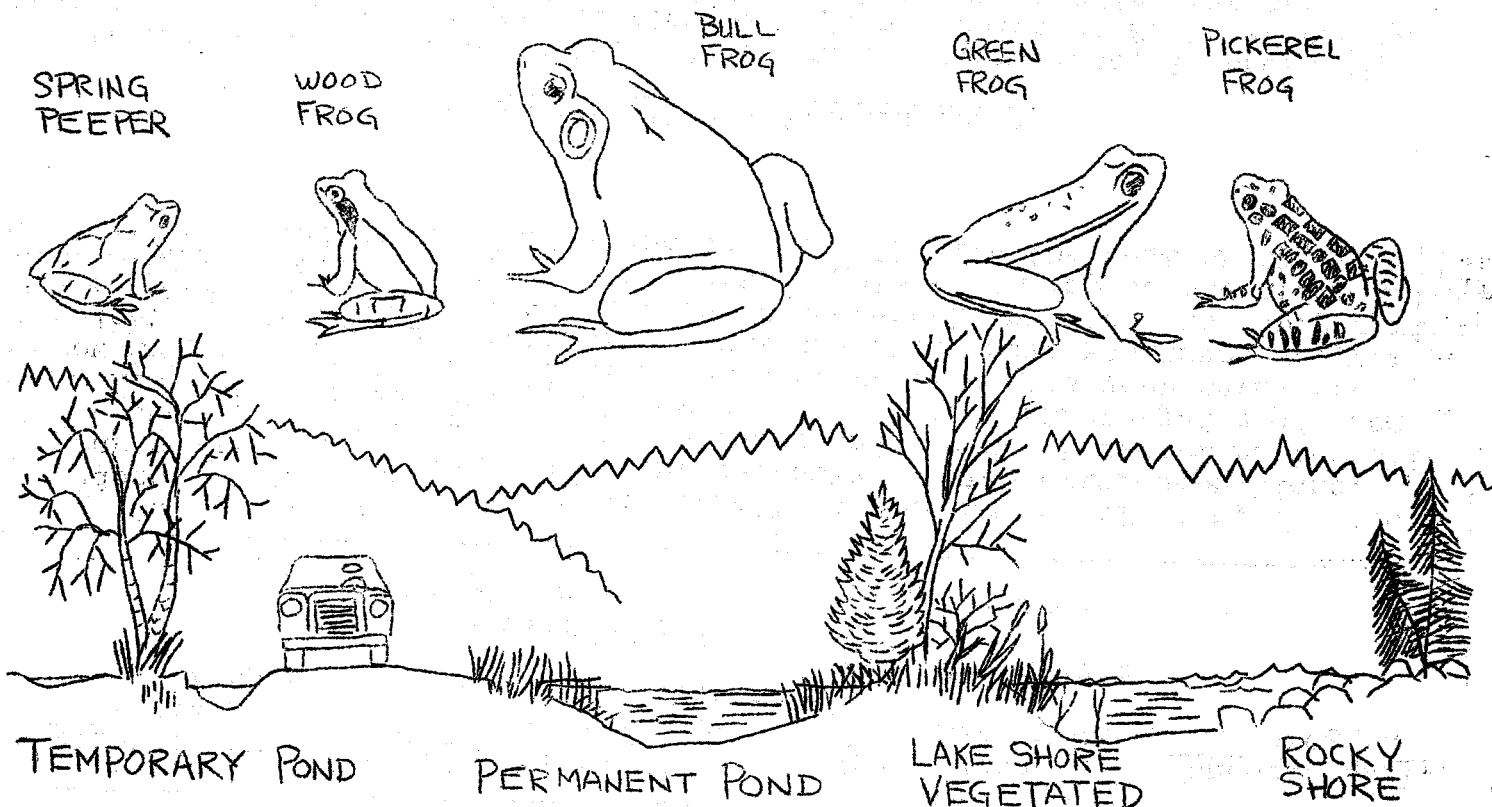
Sherman Bleakney  
March 2, 1976

Sometime in late April, when the mean daily air temperature reaches 42-44 degrees F, thousands upon thousands of Kings County frogs and salamanders will emerge from hibernation.

Their first activity is a migration to the nearest body of water (if they didn't hibernate in it last fall) and sing their little hearts out. Salamanders don't sing, but they are in the same ponds as frogs and can be seen at night. Only the male frogs are talented vocalists and their evening chorus serves the same function as that of our local birds which have a dawn chorus. The song of the male frog tells other males "This spot is occupied, stay away" but to the female frogs it translates "Try me, you'll like me". Through May, June and July millions of amphibians eggs will be laid in Kings County. One Bullfrog can lay as many as 10,000 eggs. If there are 50 female Bullfrogs in Kings County then there is the first half million. And there are 10 other species that do their share. Think how many tadpoles there must be by late June and how few will survive until the next June.

The amphibians that live farthest from water are the first to lay eggs and often these are laid in temporary pools and the tadpoles change to tiny frogs before the pools dry up. For a period of only two to three weeks in early spring it is possible to find Wood Frogs, Spring Peepers and Spotted Salamanders by the hundreds if you are willing to go out after dark and listen and look. After this brief annual period you would do well to find even one specimen of what are truly locally abundant species. The Wood Frogs will have migrated into the forests and thick shrubs and hedge rows and be hidden in brown leaf litter for which they are perfectly color camouflaged. The Spring Peepers will have migrated to the nearest large trees and climbed them with their tree-frog suction-cup finger tips, and there remain throughout the summer. The Spotted Salamander is a burrowing species and will spend the rest of the year underground. Other frogs are more easily found during the summer. The Toads will usually be underground during the day, but out at night or during rains. The Leopard Frog will be hidden in deep grass. The Green Frogs will be along the waters edge, while offshore amongst the water lillies are the Mink and Bullfrogs.

As a guide to local amphibian watching here is a sketch of habitats to visit, the best time of year and the species you can expect to hear and hopefully find. To actually see the frogs singing and laying, you need a bright flashlight and you must move quietly and wait patiently.



Temporary Ponds  
and Ditches

Permanent Ponds,  
Ditches, Flooded Meadows

Vegetated  
Shores of  
Lakes

Rocky Shore  
of Lakes

April-Wood Frog  
-Spring  
Peeper

April-Wood Frog  
-Spring Peeper  
-Spotted Salamander

May - Toad  
-Mink Frog

June-Pickerel  
Frog

May -Toad  
-Leopard Frog

June-Green Frog

June -Green Frog

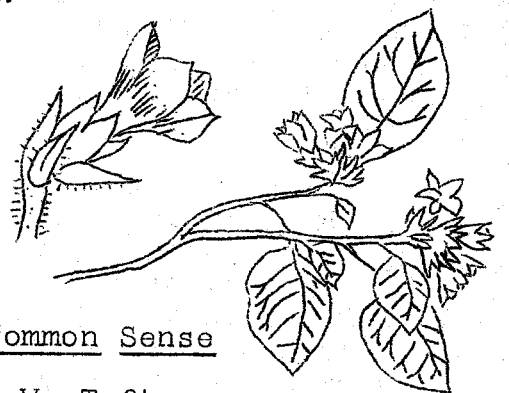
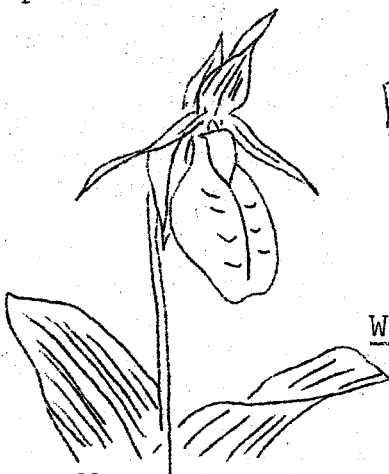
July-Bullfrog

On a summer's day, whether you stroll in town or out of town, you are undoubtedly passing near many silent secretive night-loving amphibians. Your heavy tread will be felt by the Toads and Spotted Salamanders tunnelling underground, your passing shadow will alert the bright-eyed Wood Frog or Leopard Frog in the leaf litter or moist grass beside your path, and how many Spring Peepers are there on the branches above you aware of your voice? Not until you explore that brief nocturnal interlude in early spring when half the adult frog population gets together to sing to the other half will you be moved to ask "But where do they all live the rest of the year?"

Where Have All the Flowers Gone?

Paul Keddy, President of the Halifax Field Naturalists, is presently compiling a list of Nova Scotia flowering plants which he feels should be included on an endangered species list. Paul's criteria is that the plant is known from four locations or less in our province. Anyone having suggestions as to plants which might be included on this list can write to Paul, % Nova Scotia Museum, 1747 Summer Street, Halifax, N.S. We hope that such a list will eventually lead to Nova Scotia's first plant protection legislation, something we have needed for a long time now. Most all states and provinces do have some form of legal protection for their plant life. Let's help promote such a move here in Nova Scotia!

With this in mind I look upon a few Mayflower buds which were carefully cut on the last beautiful March weekend, brought into the house and "forced." Although I know these delicately scented flowers which always advent our botanical spring are still abundant in Nova Scotia, I wonder how long they can withstand the pressure of so many people wanting at least one bouquet of them after a long season without any wildflowers around. Already the Mayflower is protected in some states where once it was abundant, too. Do we need to re-train ourselves to enjoy the flowers where they grow-even the supposedly common ones-and resist more and more the temptation to pick even a few here and there for our vases?



When Enthusiasm Overcame Common Sense

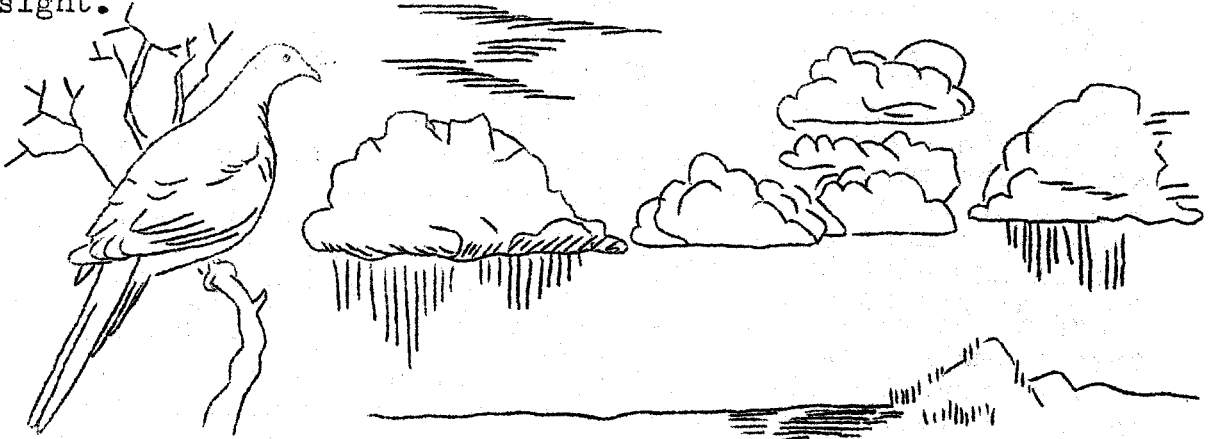
Robie W. Tufts  
March, 1976

Mrs. Timpa has kindly asked me for some further details concerning my early interest in bird study. In this connection it occurs to me that an account of the following incident taken from my old records might be appropriate.

I recall that I was an enthusiastic snow-shoer, often setting out alone for long hikes. January 10, 1910 was an ideal winter's day. The temperature was plenty low and there was an abundance of newly fallen snow. I headed for the Wolfville Ridge and from there went down into the Gaspereau Valley and followed the unbroken highway to a point near White Rock. I had covered about four miles without incident worth recording when I saw

a bird sitting on the snow in a near-by field apparently feeding on weed seeds. It was a Mourning Dove and though I had never before seen one I recognized it immediately from the illustrations I had seen in my books.

Now my bird-loving readers will, I hope, forgive when I say that I wanted to shoot it for a specimen to be added to my treasured collection of mounted birds. But I had no gun with me. Mine was in Wolfville and without taking time to consider the pros and cons I quickened my pace and started to retrace my steps homeward. On arrival I grabbed my gun and some ammunition and headed back for White Rock. About two and a half hours had elapsed before I again reached the spot where the much coveted bird had been feeding and my readers, above classified, will probably be very glad when I mention that the dove had not waited for my return for there was none in sight.



However, the day was far from being a 'lost' one for I had added a new bird to my list and in addition had enjoyed a 16-mile hike.

And despite the passing of so many years that particular field has changed in appearance but little and as, in latter years, I motor over the adjacent highway, long-since hard-surfaced, I never fail to recall the incident of my first encounter with a Mourning Dove.

### It's Only an Animal

a reprinted advertisement from Parade,  
February 22, 1976, contributed by Roy  
Bishop

Dying in a steel-jaw, leghold trap. An animal that feels pain much like we do. Imagine having your fingers crushed in a car door. Nobody opens the door for 24 hours. That's what happens in a steel-jaw trap. Less than half the states have laws requiring trappers to even check traps every 24 hours. No one has cared much. It's only an animal.

Every winter millions of fox, lynx, raccoons, minks, otters, muskrats, beavers, badgers, bobcats, skunks, and other animals suffer in these primitive traps. Why? Because humans think fur coats are "glamorous and chic." There is nothing glamorous about being clamped in a trap for hours or even days, exposed to the weather, without food or water, in pain and fear, waiting for the trapper and death. Some even chew or wring off their toes or paws to escape. But then, they're only animals.

This trap hasn't changed much since the days early fur traders and mountain men used it to nearly wipe out the beaver in this county. That was well over 100 years ago. Today trapping is a sport...a hobby...a recreation. Few people trap for survival. The reasons have changed but the trap has not. The pain and suffering it has inflicted on wild animals over the years is impossible to comprehend. Still, little has been done about more humane traps. Again, the victims are only animals.

It is time to change, time to stop making excuses for this needless suffering. It is time to outlaw the steel-jaw trap.

It is the only decent thing to do for the animals. Please help.

Mail immediately To: Belton P. Mouras, President  
The Animal Protection Institute of America  
P. O. Box 22505, Dept. P-5  
5894 South Land Park Drive  
Sacramento, California 95822

Enough is enough! Tell me more about what I can do to bring an end to the use of steel-jaw traps in the U.S. My tax-deductible contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed to continue your public awareness campaign and stop this abuse of wild animals.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Your contributions of \$10 or more entitles you to API membership and a year's subscription to Mainstream magazine. The Institute is a national, non-profit, charitable organization chartered by the State of California and listed with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Contributions are deductible for income and estate tax purposes.

Editor's note: This ad was also accompanied by a picture of a raccoon caught by a front paw in a steel-jaw leghold trap-not a pleasant sight by any means, but I wish it had been possible to reproduce it. This is quite obviously American oriented, but the information which this organization could provide those interested in the subject of trapping is certainly pertinent to Nova Scotians. The steel-jaw, leghold trap is still very much in use in our Province. Recently in the Chronicle-Herald there have been articles and letters on this subect. Apparently there is a much better trap-the Conibear-which is supposed to kill the animal immediately; however, it is much more expensive and very few seem to be in use in Nova Scotia. However, Roy feels strongly that the issue needs to be taken one step further and ask ourselves honestly why do we trap animals anyway? As this article points out few people nowadays need to trap to make a living, but do so rather as a "sport...hobby... or recreation." These so-called sportsmen should be encouraged to take up a more humane recreation to use up spare time and energies.



Look at the Birdie!?

Now Count Them ! ! !

With the nesting season soon to begin in a major way, the Maritimes Nest Records Scheme is looking for volunteers to look for nests and supply information on the progress of the egg laying and rearing of the fledglings. Anyone wishing to participate in this interesting programme should write to the following address and ask for the Maritimes Nest Records Scheme, Sixteenth Annual Report - 1975 and a supply of cards upon which to record the necessary data: A. D. Smith, Co-ordinator, Maritimes Nest Records Scheme, Canadian Wildlife Service, P. O. Box 1590, Sackville, New Brunswick, EOA 3C0.

To quote briefly from this 16th annual report: " The concept of collecting nesting information, particularly from people who would not otherwise publish their data, first began in England in 1939 by the British Trust for Ornithology. The English idea of a nest records scheme was brought to British Columbia in 1955 and since that time schemes have been established across the country.

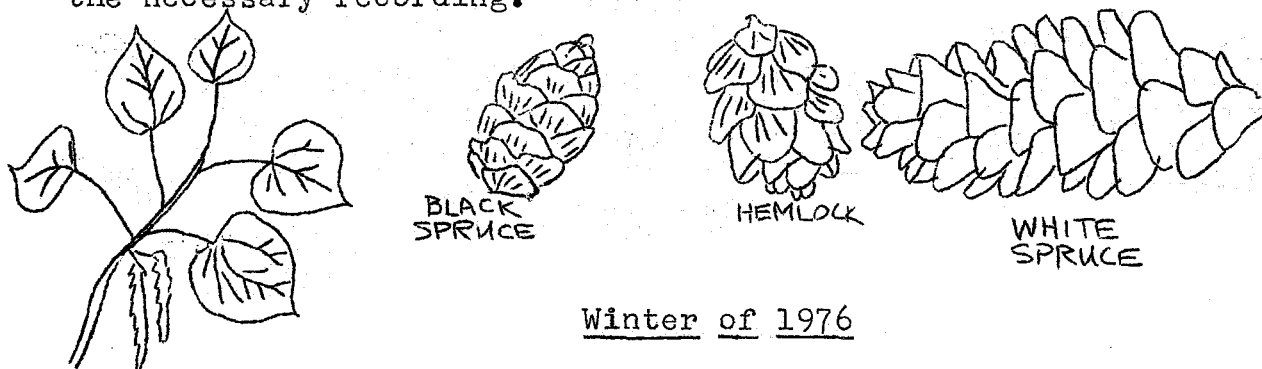
The Maritimes Nest Records Scheme was established in 1960 by Tony Erskine (John and Rachael's son of Wolfville!) of the Canadian Wildlife Service at Sackville, New Brunswick. Tony served as the co-ordinator until 1968 when he moved to Ottawa."

Tony outlines the purpose of the Scheme as follows (1971-A Nest Records Card Program in Canada):



"The main purposes for assembling such observations include studies of (a) breeding success, (b) nesting biology, and (c) breeding distribution. The first objective is of interest to all persons concerned about the continued existence of birds, and particularly those responsible for conservation and management of bird populations. It is the most critical as well as the most difficult objective. The second is probably most often pursued in university research programs, while the third objective is a primary concern of museums. Persons pursuing the other objectives can contribute to the first one, which by other means can only be studied on a local scale. Naturalists are interested in all of these, but especially in the last two objectives."

Several issues ago Rachael Erskine wrote up an article for our Newsletter on Bernard Forsythe and the nesting records and experiences which he had (Vol. 2, No. 3, September, 1975). This was Bernard's first year with the Maritimes Nest Records Scheme, yet he turned in a total of 55 reports or cards, the second highest in all the Maritimes! I am sure Bernard (542-2427) or Rachael (542-2388) would be glad to answer any questions on this programme or otherwise offer encouragement to "newcomers." Even if you do not decide to participate directly, but you find nests around your property this spring and are willing to have them "observed" once in awhile, contact Bernard or Rachael and they will attempt to have some one of the volunteers for the scheme come and do the necessary recording.



Winter of 1976

A few comments about the unusual weather of January, February and March '76 are certainly in order.

When winter officially began on December 21st we had already had enough cold and snow to make most of us think we were in for a long, cold, snowy winter.

Shortly after Christmas, however, the precipitation started coming as wet snow, changing to rain, or simply as rain. January's weather was basically cold when dry, and mild when wet-leaving us relatively bare with only a few small, dirty drifts in the cooler corners and an occasional dusting of snow off the Bay of Fundy.

Surely this kind of weather could not last much longer. But it did-right through February and March, making it one of the mildest, most snowless winters on record.

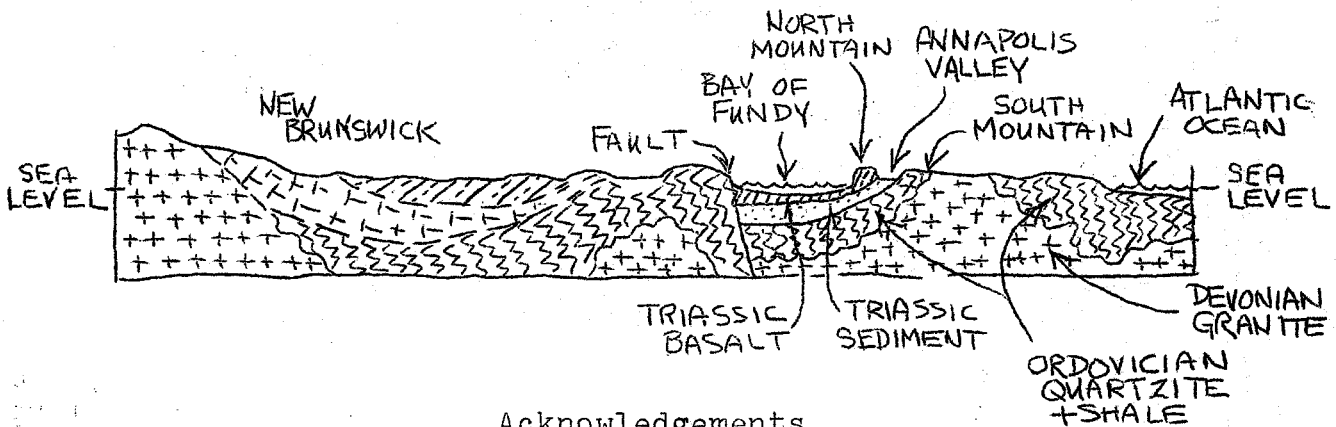
It is not likely, however, that the winter of 1976 will be so much remembered for its mildness, but for its ferocity in terms of wind-two winter hurricanes, February 2nd and March 17th.

Groundhog Day dawned gray and dismal with warnings of heavy rain and gale force winds as a storm was tracking up the U.S. East Coast. Thirty-six hours later, when the worst of it was over, historians were comparing the storm of Groundhog Day 1976 to that of the Great Saxby Gale of 1869. Particularly hard-hit were the coastal areas of Maine, New Brunswick, and south-western Nova Scotia and here in the Annapolis Valley. An estimated 10 million dollars in damage to buildings, boats, wharfs, fishing gear, telephone and hydro lines was done in Nova Scotia alone. Barametric pressure in Wolfville, checked by Mr. Edgar DeWolfe on his own instruments and by Roy Bishop on the instruments in the Dept. of Physics, Acadia University, was at a record low of 28.28 inches at approximately 11 a.m. Precipitation at CFB Greenwood was not so very great: .58 of rain and .3 of snow, but the rain seemed to come all in a very short time. The rain had stopped by mid-morning, and the skies began to clear with increasing winds, until at Greenwood at 1:08 in the afternoon the record gust of 102 knots or 118 mph from 220 degrees southwest was recorded. On Little Duck Island, east of Grand Manan, N.B., the winds were over 120 mph! But words and statistics can never impress upon us the way pictures can, and we are fortunate to have this storm well-recorded in photographs. A printing firm in Yarmouth has put together a series of photos during and after the storm with short commen-

tary . This may be obtained by writing to: Groundhog '76, P.O. Box 128, Yarmouth, N.S., B5A 4B1 and enclosing \$2.00 for each copy desired (please add .25¢ for addresses outside N.S., and allow approximately 3 weeks for delivery.) It is well worth every penny for this remarkable piece of memorabilia.

St. Parick brought the next storm. In the Valley, the winds were not so great (57 knots or 66 mph maximum at Greenwood), but coupled with 9.6 inches of snow and some freezing rain, it made the day one of the most difficult if not impossible to travel in of the winter. Mr. DeWolfe recorded a low of 28.35 inches, barometric pressure. The precipitation in Halifax was mostly rain and freezing rain, and it was the Atlantic Coast that suffered most from higher than normal tides and from the winds—a maximum gust at CFB Shearwater went to 104 mph. Areas of Cumberland and Pictou counties seem to have been hardest hit, however, with extensive drifting, blocked roads, zero visibility on highways, and considerable wind damage.

Certainly a winter to be remembered!



#### Acknowledgements

We would like to extend particular thanks to our guest speakers during the winter months, Dr. George Stevens, Dr. Donald Dodds and Greg Orr, who quickly filled in for Peter Smith, delayed in Boston, and gave us a most interesting and well-illustrated talk on the endangered Kirtland Warbler, recently depicted on the National Wildlife Stamps. Our appreciation, also, to all those who have made another issue of the BNS Newsletter possible.

#### Kejimikujik and Thereabouts

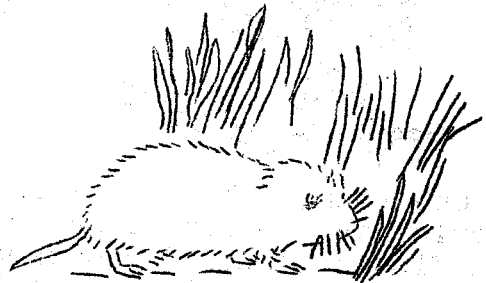
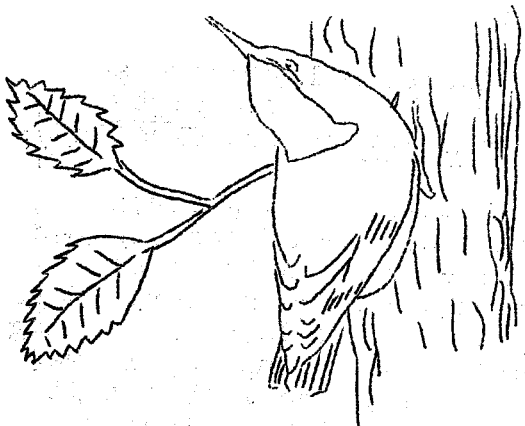
Roger Burrows, Amherst, N.S.  
March 12, 1976

In the middle of January I received a call from Parks Canada to wend my way to Kejimikujik National Park to present slide programs in the nearby schools. Being an ardent birdwatcher who had spent a very enjoyable summer in the park in 1974 I set out to see what I could find in the way of birds during my two winter months stay.

Birds are not too thick on the ground in winter in inland Nova Scotia but I kept my eyes skinned and lo and behold birds began to appear fairly regularly. For a few days very little turned up at all except for the common residents seen throughout the park such as Blue Jays, Ravens, Crows, and both species of chickadees. The only slightly unusual species were two Tree Sparrows and the first of a few Downy Woodpeckers and Gray Jays. However the Groundhog Storm changed all that by blowing in a surprise which I saw two days later—an Osprey from somewhere south, a very rare winter visitor north of Florida. The following day two more raptors appeared, one certainly a Redtailed Hawk, the other apparently a Merlin. At the same time I saw my first winter grouse, both Ruffed and Spruce. Things were indeed looking up and the next morning I was able to add single Whitebreasted and Redbreasted Nuthatches and two stray Darkeyed Juncos which promptly disappeared, I suspect inside a cat! It seemed a good time to put out feeders so up they went laden with sunflower seeds and supplemented by a bag of suet. So far the only visitors have been a Red Squirrel who used the feeders as a territory marker in the appropriate fashion and a pair of Ravens who made off with the suet!

So much for my ideas of window watching! But things were happening elsewhere. By mid-February the snow was back but so was an early (or late) Robin. At the same time another bird of prey—a finelooking Goshawk—showed itself and a Blackbacked Woodpecker flew over, although I have yet to see the Pileated Woodpecker that regularly inspects the Administration Building just before the afternoon coffee break! Common Goldeneyes started to reappear in late February along with one or two Buffleheads and early in March a Rusty Blackbird appeared from nowhere in the company of more Gray Jays and two Pine Grosbeaks. Outside the Park I had plenty of opportunities to catch glimpses of other winter birds in the Queens and Lunenburg County highways as I drove to and from schools. Blue Jays seemed to be everywhere and there were enough Gray Jays to keep me looking. Now and again something else would appear to vary the fare, such as a Barred Owl one evening in mid February, an out-of-season Yellowrumped Warbler with traces of summer plumage (!) later in the month, a few Common Grackles early in March and Hairy Woodpeckers at a feeder near Calendonia with nut-hatches and chickadees. My last bird of prey so far almost rivaled my first as I watched a Goopers Hawk hunting near North Brookfield on the tenth of March. As I'm writing this the snow is tumbling down and putting an end to my hopes of a day in the woods this weekend but all the birds I have mentioned were seen in or within 20 miles of the Park which just goes to show first impressions can be misleading. For those preferring hair to feathers I should add that mammals are harder to find but liable to appear at any time. Whitetailed Deer can be seen in fair numbers on any visit while Red Squirrels are also easy to locate. In addition I have noted Porcupines, an Otter, Meadow Vole and Snowshoe Hares and found evidence of Mink, Ermine, Chipmunk, Beaver and Deer Mice on the move in the woods. And to assure the fainthearted that the woods are safe in winter I have found no evidence that Bears or Snapping Turtles are awake yet or our famous dog ticks are on the prowl but come spring...!

In case you think I didn't take advantage of a visit to Blomidon country I added many more species in two visits to the Digby and Annapolis Royal areas but those visits and two drives along the South Shore are another story. (And we certainly hope Roger will share these adventures with us soon! Ed.)



NEWSLETTER      DEADLINE!

June 21, 1976!

Our thanks for a better response to our request for articles and fill-in material for our Newsletter! But don't slack off now—keep it coming, because once again the "larder" is empty. Now is the new season of activity—it should provide many ideas for articles, however so brief. Please send to Roy Bishop, Avonport, or Mrs. John W. Timpa, Box 1382, Wolfville, N.S. Thanks.

Halifax Field Naturalists- Spring and Summer Programmes

The Halifax Field Naturalists have extended a cordial invitation to the members of the Blomidon Naturalists Society to attend any meetings or field trips of interest. Therefore I am including their programme for the next several months and ask that BNS members take particular note of the May 30th trip to Cape Split. All meetings are held in the 5th floor lounge of the Biology Dept. at Dalhousie University at 8:00 p.m., although there is serious discussion underway about changing the place to the Nova Scotia Museum of Science at some future date. Field trips meet at the Biology Dept. parking lot. For more details and confirmation of trips contact Debbie Burleson, N.S. Museum,

1747 Summer St., Halifax, N.S., B3H 3A6 or phone 429-4610.

May 11: Regular Tuesday meeting. John Gilhen, herpetologist with the N.S. Museum, will tell us about the Reptiles and Amphibians of N.S.

May 15: 1 p.m. afternoon trip to a freshwater pond

\*\*\*May 30: A full day at Cape Split to watch for spring warblers and wildflowers. Meet at the Biology parking lot at 8 am., or at the beginning of the Cape Split trail at 9:30.

June 8: Regular Tuesday meeting. A Naturalist at Peggy's Cove, speakers yet to be confirmed. Emphasis on intertidal life and glaciation.

June 5: Day trip to McNab's Island. Boat leaves Shearwater wharf at 8 am, cost about \$3.00.

June 12: Afternoon trip to the heath, bog, and rocky shores of Peggy's Cove area. 1 pm.

June 27: 1 p.m. salt marsh field trip

July 10 and 11 (?) -weekend field trip to the Port Joli area.

July 13: meeting-talk on gypsum caves and associated flora.

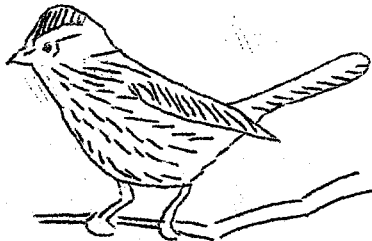
\*\*\*July 25: field trip to gypsum area near Windsor

Further details will be found in our next Newsletter.

### For Sore Eyes...

from The Family Weekend Book by  
Beryl Irving, contributed by  
Mrs. G. F. Bayne

Take a few handfuls of curled hemlock, pound it very fine, then put such a quantity of Bole-Armoniac as will make the hemlock of a deep red, mix as much honey with it as will make it of the consistency of a plaister; spread it upon white leather and apply it to the inside of both wrists; a fresh plaister to be put on every other night.



### Bird Notes from Digby

Louise Daley (known to  
readers of the Digby  
Courier as the Bird Lady! )

One thing I have noticed among the birds this winter and several people have spoken to me about this are the small number of females among the flocks of Evening Grosbeaks. Have five Whitethroats with me all winter and they still come to the feeder for breakfast and supper. Have had more persistent hawks through the winter. The Chickadees are eating from my hand. Have had a Mourning Dove all winter in the house, it was brought up from Freeport, rather dumpy but is fine now and will let it go very soon. The one male Oriole will have to stay a little longer. He is showing more black around his head now, it was a young bird. My one-legged song sparrow is singing a breeze along with a white throat, the kitchen music is lovely, the oriole joins in with a few sweet notes. (For those of you who have not been to Louise's house, one side of her kitchen is taken up by a huge, specially built cage for injured, orphaned, birds and those that have not migrated on time in the fall. Louise is known far and wide in the Digby County area for her ability to care for birds which have met with various misfortunes.) The Lesser Black Gull is still around. That is five years in the same place (Digby harbour), and the gulls are coming back to Freeport. Poor Westport surely caught it in the storm, great slabs of the paving from the main road are up on peoples lawns, don't want to see another storm like it.

### To Sandy (a Savannah Sparrow)

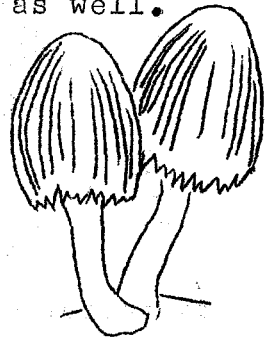
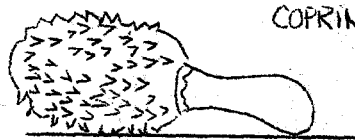
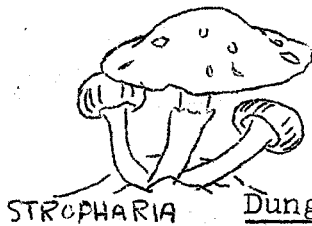
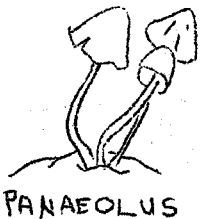
The little bird that came to stay  
Sadly now has passed away.  
His song was happy the whole day long  
Now he sings with the Heavenly throng.

Sandy came to me five years ago as a wee featherless orphan. He was fed from a medicine dropper and tooth pick until he was big enough to eat

and fend for himself then released. He stayed around the yard for a day, then left and joined another bird-loving family for several days.

Then one day I was having my lunch on the lawn. He arrived at my table and after having a few crumbs he flew in the front door. When I went in to look for him, I found him trying to get in the big cage with the other birds. He had never been loose in the house. How did he know his way?

As the cage was the only home he knew I decided that was the place he should be. He was a happy bird and made many others happy as well.



STROPHARIA Dung Fungi

Leslie Houck

Many people find animal droppings repellent, but they are, in fact, often small fungi gardens, easily found by those naturalists who are inclined to look for them.

Dung of herbivores such as horses, cows, rabbits (both domesticated and wild) and porcupines are especially good substrates for mushrooms and molds. When walking through woods and fields looking at plants, birds or the usual types of wildlife one can cultivate the habit of looking for droppings on which the fungi are growing. An easy way is simply to turn over cow pies (preferably those that have over-wintered and dried) as you find them. Frequently a number of small, non-edible mushrooms can be found growing from the moist, shaded undersides of the pads.

If it is winter and the ground is frozen, or if it is a dry summer these fungi will not be growing; but you can take the droppings home in a plastic bag or other container and grow them yourself. Simply put the droppings in a glass terrarium or similar container; water them so they are damp but not swimming, keep them out of direct sunlight and within a week you should have a small "garden" of toadstools.

The fungi enters the dung in this way: an animal eats grass, bark or grains containing fungal spores. These spores pass through its digestive system and are deposited with the dung. There they germinate and grow when conditions of temperature and moisture are favourable. The mature mushrooms then deposit spores around themselves on the neighbouring vegetation where they will again be consumed, thus completing the cycle.

The most common genera found are Paneolus, Stropharia, and Coprinus species which dissolve into black ink (deliquesce) after maturing (like "Shaggy mane").

There is no odor if you use rabbit or porcupine droppings because their dung seems to consist mainly of bark held together in pellets; or if you use horse or cow pies that have over-wintered and been repeatedly dried, wetted, frozen and thawed.

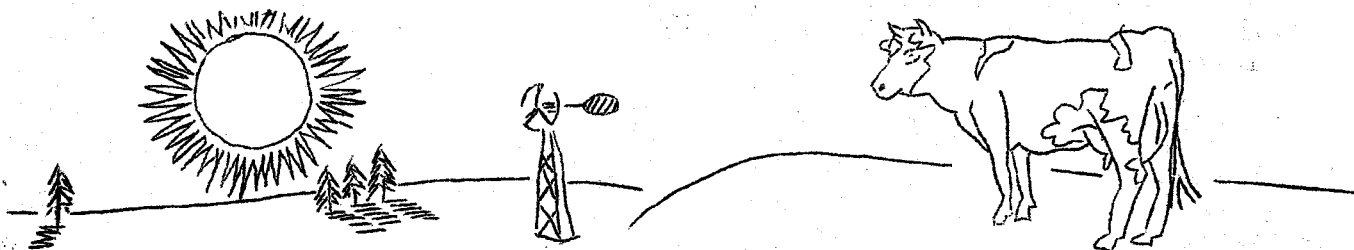
The beauty of these fungi lies in the fact that they can be "forced" to grow in the middle of winter when no other types of mushrooms will grow outside. Diet, obviously, affects the species composition of the fungal flora; animals that have been fed antibiotics may not yield any fungi at all. At any rate, growing them is a good project for you, for kids or a classroom, since they may be studied at any time of year.

### Eagles!

The Gaspereau Valley has always been a wintering area for the Bald Eagle, but this winter past we were blessed with a record number of 24 different individuals, 11 mature, and 13 immatures, according to a survey made by Cyril Coldwell and helpers in the Wildlife Unit at Acadia. However, there is one sad note. First year birds are easily distinguishable from the others, and only two first year birds from the 1975 nesting season were counted. Thus, 1975 was not a good year for building our Bald Eagle populations, but immatures still out-number matures which is a healthy sign. Cyril would like to know why 1975 wasn't a good year. I speculated it may have had something to do with the intense drought and prolonged heat. Cyril would be glad to hear from others with ideas about the poor 1975 crop! Some statistics from previous years: in the

1975 winter 14 Bald Eagles wintered in the Gaspereau Valley, 4 adults, and 10 immatures. Cyril feels these birds come from as far away as Hants and Halifax Counties and possibly the Bear River (Annapolis County) birds.

Cyril also noted that it has been a good winter for the Northern Shrike, and several people have reported seeing the Merlin which is not common at any time of year. Eight immature Iceland gulls stayed around the ACA Poultry Cooperative this winter. And then there were the lovely Bohemian Waxwings!



The Sun, Methane, and Rural Nova Scotia

(A report on the Alternative Energy Exposition in Middleton, March 15-16)

Larry Bogan

Are you interested in alternatives to high electric and oil bills, to unreliable service and power blackouts? Do you like to be self-sufficient and not waste anything? Maybe you like to tinker, invent, or try to understand new developments? Or maybe you are concerned with a need for new power sources for rural Nova Scotia in the near future to reduce the need to import our energy? These are the things that attracted people from Halifax, the South Shore, Western Nova Scotia and the Annapolis Valley to Middleton last March 15 and 16.

This was the Alternative Energy exposition organized by Steve Foster of Middleton and founder of the New Earth Institute which sponsored the activity. There were workshops in the afternoon and public seminars in the evening.

Bill Zimmerman, an environmental consultant, was resource-person for the first workshop which discussed wind, solar, and wood heat power for the individual home. The first public seminar featured John French, director of research for the Nova Scotia Energy Council. Mr. French outlined some of Nova Scotias problems and plans on the larger scale. He explained that electricity prices will be going up because 85% of our electricity is generated from burning oil and the price of oil has gone up. Alternatives must be considered but solar and wind on the large scale are not economically viable. Coal and Tidal power seem to be the only possibilities since nuclear power is not being considered at the moment. Since a third of our energy use is in the heating of homes, considerable savings can be realized by better insulation and supplemental solar heating. He stated that Nova Scotia now plans to emphasize conservation on an equal footing with power production.

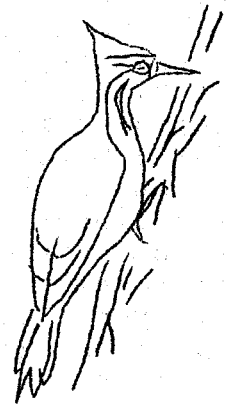
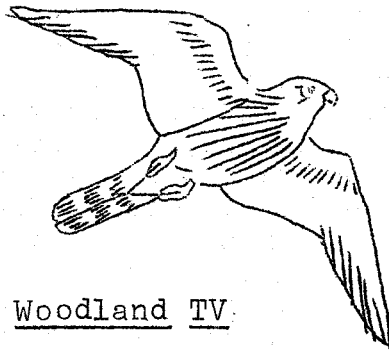
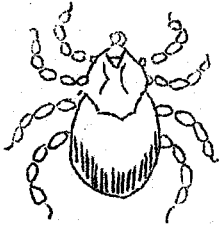
The next speaker, after a brief panel discussion, was Dr. E. Hayes of the Acadia University Chemistry Department. He presented the energy costs of farming and processing of foods and noted that most of the energy costs are in the food processing. Fertilizers and pesticides are major energy consumers while farm labor consumes very little energy. He pointed out the fact that our increased farm production has been due to increased energy uses and questioned as to what will happen in the future when energy costs rise and fossil fuels disappear.

An answer to this last question may be in the topic discussed the next day in the workshop on methane production from animal and plant wastes. Large plants to produce methane are being tested by the Department of Agriculture in Winnipeg, but a couple of valley farmers are already using it to run a truck and cook with. Another plans to heat his house with methane. All this was done at low cost and a few problems remain such as purifying and storing the methane before use.

The rest of the workshop was concerned with discussion of solar heating of houses in the Annapolis Valley. I presented the solar house design and heating calculations that I had done using solar radiation data for Kentville. The results indicated that a well insulated, 1200 sq. ft. house with 240 sq. ft. of south-facing windows and a simple half day heat storage, can obtain over 50 percent of its required winter heating from the sun. Three out of ten days during the period from October through May are sunny enough to heat the house the whole day. Even on most cold, cloudy days more solar radiation comes through the south windows than heat

lost out the windows.

The Exposition ended with a repeated presentation of Solar and Methane discussions in the public sessions in the evening. From my point of view and others present, the Exposition was a partial success in that it brought together those persons with common interests, to exchange information. I hope that the next Exposition or conference will cover more on wind power and wood heat and include data from some successfully working models of alternative energy power sources.



Woodland TV.

Woody Davis of Bear River (Digby Co.) has as his place of residence, a small, comfortable camp of his own construction, approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from the Bear River-Morgantown road (dirt), deep in the woods, "away from it all!" Equipped with two wood-burning stoves, kerosene lamps, a battery-operated radio, other amenities, and one large picture window and several smaller ones, Woody lives what many of us "naturalists" consider an idyllic life, but one we never dare quite try ourselves. Several years ago, when Woody first moved from town, at age 60 or thereabouts, he discovered how truly fascinating his neighbours are. He has gone to great lengths building many and various types of feeders, always attempting to outwit the pesky squirrels. Unlike most of us "townies" he does not supply his feathered friends with seeds, but uses bones, pork and ham rinds, and the drippings. Thus, there is an absence of the seed-eating birds which undoubtedly are present in the area, i.e., he has never mentioned any of the sparrows, juncos, finches, grosbeaks, or siskins. However, one winter he had a large (as big as a crow) black bird with white on it, with woodpecker-type bill and behaviour come near the camp on several occasions. How many of us can boast of a female Pileated Woodpecker at out backyard feeders!? Following are several excerpts from letters he has sent me this past winter.

Feb. 1, 1976: Yesterday I had 8 chickadees, 4 woodpeckers, 2 Hairy and 2 Downy, 2 Canada Jays, and 2 Blue Jays which do not come every day. Yesterday one chickadee perched on my ragged sweater cuff and picked at my hand. Those chickadees are fascinating. I go 2 ft. from them. Cute. They flutter and flit around like leaves. They play. I like to listen to the flutter (whir, whir) of their wings. Sometimes, they, in pairs, fly straight up and down. ... Oh, you should see the Blue Jays attacking the frozen buds on the fir trees. Bang. Bang. Of course the woodpeckers are the old man's (meaning himself) favourites. The way they handle their bills. You should see them eat pork off the rind. They plough it off. Then tis easier for the chickadees. Can't get close to the woodpeckers. Yep, the woodpeckers peck hard for a time. Thenttheyrrrestea bit. Look at the pork. Then go at it again. Sometimes you would think they are listening for the sound of a bug or worm. ... I note that birds and squirrels prefer bacon fat and ham and pork better than beef fat. Chickadees and Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers care not for white bread-bakery junk. ... Ha ha, I am watching the squirrels. His hind legs slip on the hard peeled spruce which was peeled last summer (the vertical post of one of the bird feeders). He sure is a glutton for pork. S'pose I'll kill them with too much protein. ... So now I can relax on my cot and 18 ft. away I have live T. V. Such action. The woodpeckers, when they come to eat are serious, all business. Chickadees, eat a little, play a lot, sometimes. The woodpeckers will let the chicadees eat at the same time about 6 inches apart. These birds have changed me. Gone soft. I care not about killing deer, any more. I like to talk and whistle to the rabbit which comes at dusk to eat maple bark and birch buds, 75 yards from camp to the south.

February 8, 1976: Free show at noon. 6 Chickadees, 1 Meat Bird (oh, another one) on the beef bone. I scare M.B. away. Now 2 chickadees at

the meat bone. Now a female Woodpecker. How her tail feathers are stained. I suppose from being pressed on old fir trees. Now a small male woodpecker. Now a bigger female woodpecker. How diligently she uses that long sharp beak. 1 chickadee waiting its turn. Woodpeckers are getting used to me. Now chickadee is on bone with Woodpecker. Tis interesting to watch chickadees perch on the icicles. What looks like a chickadee? Sometimes two come-longer bills, stripes, white on head (nuthatches he discovered later). Now the meat bird. Shy, timid creatures clumsy when compared with chickadees and woodpeckers. Oh, there comes the biggest, fattest blue jay. What a scene. Woodpecker (female) at meat bone. Chickadees in small larch and on the clothes lines. Male woodpecker in the pig's trough. The acrobat is upside down cleaning fat off the bottom of the bone. I can hear the "jar" when she hits the bone. The bone is tied to a shingle which is nailed over the window. Now comes the squirrel. At the pork fat on the spruce feeder. So far the squirrels have not attacked the beef bone. Good. Now I have 2 Chickadees at it on opposite sides. Yep, I have fun. So close to Hairy and Downy, I can count their eyes blinking. Oh, good, the squirrel is nipping off fir buds-eating them. I now get chickadees to sit on an end of a foot long piece of maple with bacon fat there on. This is good for will power. Sit here without much movement. ... Sometimes I look out. Not a sign of life. I put out some pig products. Within minutes they come, chickadees and woodpeckers.

February 10: Some fun to watch chickadees and woodpeckers from a distance of 4 feet yesterday. I watch the heartbeats of the chickadees.