

# BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

## BNS -- Spring Meeting

*Members' Night:* Bring your best 10 slides. 35mm slides on any aspect of nature are appropriate and should provide an interesting and varied evening. Screen, projector and refreshments will be provided.

Where? Beveridge Arts Center, Room 241

When? Wednesday, April 5, 8 p.m.

Plans for 1978/9 will also be laid at this meeting: a new executive will be confirmed.

Volume 4, No. 4

December, 1977

### Letters to the Editors

*Those of you who attended the lecture meeting last winter when Anne told of her first summer's work on Leopold Island will be particularly interested in the following account of her second summer there.*

Leopold Island, N.W.T.  
24 August 1977

To the Editors:

I've been up at Leopold since the 3rd of June. The Fulmars were laying by then so we were busy right from the start. That early part of the season, while the ice was still fast between Somerset and Leopold, was the most interesting as far as sightings made of birds and mammals not commonly seen around the island. Several times we saw polar bears (sometimes with cubs) at seal kills on the ice just below camp. Yellow billed loons were frequently seen off the south spit in the open water at one side - and we saw a sandbill crane one day flying big circles above camp. Ivory gulls have been spotted regularly - so much so that we're almost positive they are breeding here - or at least have a colony located somewhere on the island. We just haven't been able to locate it.

The season has been warmer and more favorable to successful breeding this year than last. Several of our plots which were wiped out by late-staying snow last year, are thriving this year. The food production near this island seems to be optimal as well - as the feeding rates of the Fulmars and Murres is higher than it was last year. We have about twice the number of regurgitated food samples from Fulmars this year. The nesting has been very successful. I'll have my hands full when it comes to analyzing all of that.

One thing we concentrated on this year was completing an adequate census of Fulmars on the island. It's been a long job as the birds are distributed around almost the entire island. We did a lot of work involving setting up plots along each kilometre of coast which had Fulmars on it, plus taking out the zodiac inflatable boats and marking in distribution of the birds on the cliffs from the water. It's been good fun and gave us a good idea of what the whole island is like - not just the southeast cliffs where we spend most of our time.

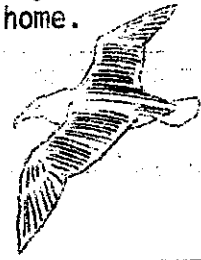
have also made trips (again to do census work) to several other Fulmar colonies, Baillarge Bay (Baffin Island, the largest Fulmar colony probably in the Eastern Arctic), Hobhouse Inlet and Cape Liddon (both on South Devon Coast). The work at Baillarge was very important because they have just started up a large lead & zink mine nearby at Strathcona Sound, and the tailings (dumped in fresh water ponds behind the mine) may well seep out into Admiralty Inlet and affect the Fulmars and production at the Baillarge colony.

We've had two really good snow storms already this month. But lately the weather has been really fine - calm and sunny. The thick-billed Murres are at the peak of fledging. I saw two chicks go last night - just hurl themselves off the cliffs and down 1200 feet with the parent bird (probably male) right behind them. It's amazing to see - and so many go at once on a good night.

I've done some plant collecting and identifying as well this year and have pressed specimens that I hope to check while I'm in Ottawa on my way home.

Sincerely,

Anne Linton



THE BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

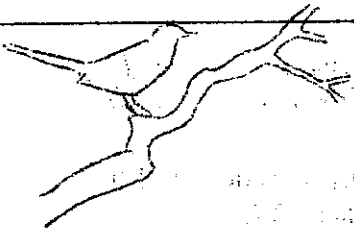
is published quarterly by the Newsletter Committee of the Society.

*Co-editors:* Jean Timpa and Roy Bishop

*Art/Production:* Larry Bogan

"....the primary object of the Society shall be to encourage and develop in its members an understanding and appreciation of nature. For the purposes of the Society, the word 'nature' will be interpreted broadly and shall include the rocks, plants, animals, waters air and stars..."

from the BNS Constitution.



A Highlight of Summer, 1977

Jean M. Timpa  
Wolfville, N.S.

Approximately the second week in July we arrived in Cape North near the northern tip of Cape Breton for a three week stay in an old farmhouse. After our first breakfast, while I was washing up the dishes, my husband and two boys decided to cross Gray Glen Brook and pick the large wild strawberries which carpet the pasture.

They returned much sooner than I had anticipated and urged me to come with them. They had seen a Killdeer and a strange bird. I was not able to locate the Killdeer, but the "stranger" was quite willing, not only to be seen, but heard as well. It wasn't long before I was quite convinced that we were "thrilled to hear the song of the mockingbird!"

Upon returning to the house, the bird book confirmed my identification. For nearly a week we were able to go to the pasture and observe and listen to the various melodies of this unusual visitor. On one occasion I was able to identify the songs of the Ovenbird, Grackle, and its cousin, the Catbird, intermingled with its own bubbly song. Another time there was a very distinctive Robin aria!

Our landlord, Jim MacEvoy, was very interested in the bird and kept a watchful eye on its whereabouts as he worked in his fields. One morning he reported seeing not one, but two mockingbirds sitting side by side on the hydro wires. Our hopes then turned to finding a nest, but these aspirations were soon dashed when the birds disappeared completely - I guess, to Mockingbird Hill.

Wolfville Christmas Bird Count, 1977

Peter Smith  
Wolfville, N.S.

This year the Christmas count was held on December 18, a blustery day with intermittent squalls of various forms of precipitation from the north-east. Under these circumstances it was particularly gratifying to have 38 observers in the field and at feeders.

In travelling 308 miles on foot and by car during a period of 83 party hours 54 species were observed. Of particular interest were the American Widgeon at E. Grand Pré, the Wood Duck in the Gaspereau River, the Black Scoter in the Minas Basin near Canning, the American Kestrel N.W. of Port Williams, the Glaucous Gull in the Gaspereau Valley, the Winter Wren along a stream-edge near Henniger's Canteen and the Northern Oriole at Mrs. Urban's feeder in Avonport.

With respect to the oriole, R. W. Tufts acquired one in Kentville prior to the count period which he is overwintering at home. In addition, the sightings of American Widgeon and Wood Duck have not been the only ones in the area recently. Duck hunters shot one of each of the former and latter on E. Grand Pré on 2 December and in early November, respectively. Perhaps we shall see more of these birds in future years.

In contrast with the exceptional count last year, numbers of finches and sparrows were much reduced. This year, however, it is unusual that Pine Grosbeaks were considerably more numerous than the Evening Grosbeaks.

It is also unusual not to have had any Red-breasted Nuthatches observed on the count whereas last year 38 were reported. In fact, only one was recorded during the count period. This has been visiting 2 feeders on Westwood Avenue on a fairly regular basis.

The count of crows warrants comment. The crows sighted by all observers during the day are not included as during late afternoon personnel of one party counted them as they crossed the Guzzle along the major flight-line to their roost on Boot Island off Grand Pré. The 3 observers counted 16,400. On 1 January, 6 observers in two parties counted birds along the two flight-lines utilized that evening. The census yielded 24,426 crows.

The observation of the "peep" sandpiper off E. Grand Pré is intriguing. On three other occasions in December a small flock of "peeps" was sighted in the same area. Unfortunately, the observers have not been sufficiently close to enable species identification.

Finally, 6 additional species were observed during the count period of December 17 to January 2: Goshawk, Barred Owl, Short-eared Owl, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Mockingbird and Northern Shrike. Just prior to the count period, there were sightings of Long-eared Owl.

Thank you for your able assistance and co-operation.

#### NOVA SCOTIA CHRISTMAS COUNT CHECKLIST

Canada Goose	90	Common Snipe	1	Golden-cr. Kinglet	45
Mallard	24	"Peep" Sandpiper	1	Starling	2498
Black Duck	586	Glaucous Gull	1	House Sparrow	1428
American Widgeon	1	Gt. Black-back G.	1047	Northern Oriole	1
Wood Duck	1	Herring Gull	2355	Common Grackle	3
Common Goldeneye	13	Rock Dove	1622	Brown-head. Cowbird	1527
Black Scoter	1	Mourning Dove	161	Evening Grosbeak	197
Common Merganser	68	Hairy Woodpecker	6	Purple Finch	3
Sharp-shin. Hawk	12	Downy Woodpecker	14	Pine Grosbeak	261
Red-tailed Hawk	37	Horned Lark	164	Pine Siskin	41
Rough-legged Hawk	19	Blue Jay	345	Am. Goldfinch	8
Bald Eagle, adult	3	Common Raven	271	Savannah Sparrow	23
imm.	1	*Common Crow*	16400	Dark-eyed Junco	338
Marsh Hawk	4	Bl.-cap. Chickadee	266	Tree Sparrow	39
Merlin	1	Boreal Chickadee	24	White-thr. Sparrow	11
American Kestrel	1	White-br. Nuthatch	10	Song Sparrow	44
Ruffed Grouse	12	Brown Creeper	2	Lapland Longspur	2
Ring-neck. Pheasant	255	Winter Wren	1	Snow Bunting	702
Gray Partridge	46	American Robin	23		

No. of Species 54 + 1 "peep" Sandpiper

No. of Individuals 31,059

\*see notes



## Current Bird Sightings in Our Area

Reported by: Cyril Coldwell  
Gaspereau

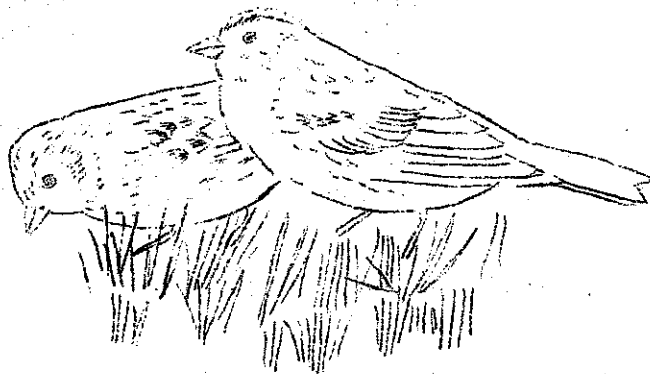
This winter the American Bald Eagle population in the Gaspereau Valley has been somewhat lower than usual, the greatest number having been thirteen at any one time. One count by Lands and Forest personnel covered a somewhat larger area including Canning and Canard, and resulted in a count of seventeen birds. A recent aerial survey along ten miles of the Shubenacadie River brought very encouraging news - a total of 53 eagles! There does seem to be some movement back and forth between the Gaspereau and Shubenacadie birds. Two eagles were live-trapped in Gaspereau, marked and released and later were seen in the Shubenacadie River system. It is believed that a run of tom cod are keeping more of the eagles in the Shubenacadie area than usual.

In the lower part of the Gaspereau River (Melanson) Cyril also reports the presence of a male Bufflehead, 17 or so Goldeneyes, 20+ Merganzers and one day as many as one hundred Black Ducks.

Once again a wildlife student at Acadia University is banding Ravens on their wings and legs with various colour combinations. Another student is banding crows. Anyone seeing any of these birds please call the wildlife unit at 542-9037 and give as much detail as possible.

A flock of Bohemian Waxwings has been seen around the top of Westwood Avenue, Wolfville and on the campus. Perhaps they'll come your way.

Sixteen Lapland Longspurs were observed among a flock of Horned Larks on Long Island (Evangeline Beach) recently. The Longspurs are not a commonly seen species.



### Exerpts from "Outdoor Chat"

-- a regular column which appeared in  
the *SHELBURNE COASTGUARD*

Dr. Harrison F. Lewis  
Sable River, N.S.

January, 1954, No. 12

The strongly crusted snow that covered Shelburne County from the 12th to the 20th of January provided excellent travelling conditions for the snowshoe rabbits or varying hares. Swamps that had been very wet and difficult to cross became suddenly firm and dry. The rabbits were prompt to take advantage of these conditions and to appear in numbers in local areas where previously they were scarce.

It is probable that no individual rabbit travelled far, for it is characteristic of these creatures that they show strong attachment to their home range, which seldom exceeds one hundred acres and is often much less. Nevertheless, the home range of an individual rabbit is usually larger in winter than in summer and consequently when winter travelling conditions are good numerous rabbits may visit attractive brush patches where they were scarce a short time before.

It is well known that these rabbits increase in numbers to a population peak, then more rapidly decrease until they are very scarce. Successive peaks of population are usually about ten years apart. Such a peak does not, however, occur simultaneously in all parts of North America where these rabbits occur. Snowshoe rabbits may be abundant in Nova Scotia when they are scarce in Ontario or in the Yukon, or the reverse may be the case.

On rare occasions high population pressure and scarcity of desirable food may cause mass migration of these rabbits from one area to another. They have been observed on a frozen lake in numbers estimated at from twenty to fifty to an acre.

At about Christmas time each year, under a plan sponsored by the National Audubon Society, hundreds of all-day bird counts are made by individuals and groups of observers scattered across this continent. The results are published, thus making a permanent record and enabling changes from place to place and from year to year to be noted. On December 26, 1952, two observers in the West Middle Sable area recorded 31 kinds of birds. This winter three observers made the count in that area on December 28 and found 34 kinds of birds. A larger group of competent, co-operating observers would presumably have found a larger number of bird species. In such a count, restricted to one day, some of the kinds of birds known to be present in a given area are always missed.

This winter's count in the West Middle Sable area included eleven kinds of ducks, the black duck, old-squaw, American golden-eye or whistler, American eider or sea duck, greater scaup or bluebill, buffle-head or dipper, the red-breasted and American mergansers or shelducks, and three kinds of scoters or coots, the white-winged, surf and American. There is no doubt that on the day of the count the area contained at least three other kinds of duck, the mallard, pintail, and harlequin, but the observers missed them.

The count included 6 myrtle warblers, which were found as one small flock near Louis Head. This is the only kind of warbler that winters regularly and in moderate numbers in southwestern Nova Scotia. Although, like other warblers, they feed chiefly upon insects, myrtle warblers can, if necessary, subsist for some time on the small gray berries of the bayberry bush, which is common in Shelburne coastal areas. It is this ability that makes it possible for them to winter here.

Of the common starling, an introduced European bird that has become plentiful in this region in recent years, the count recorded 257. Most of the hordes of starlings that nest annually in Nova Scotia and other parts of Canada migrate south in the fall, but substantial numbers remain to spend the winter in this country, occupying all but the most northern parts of the summer range.

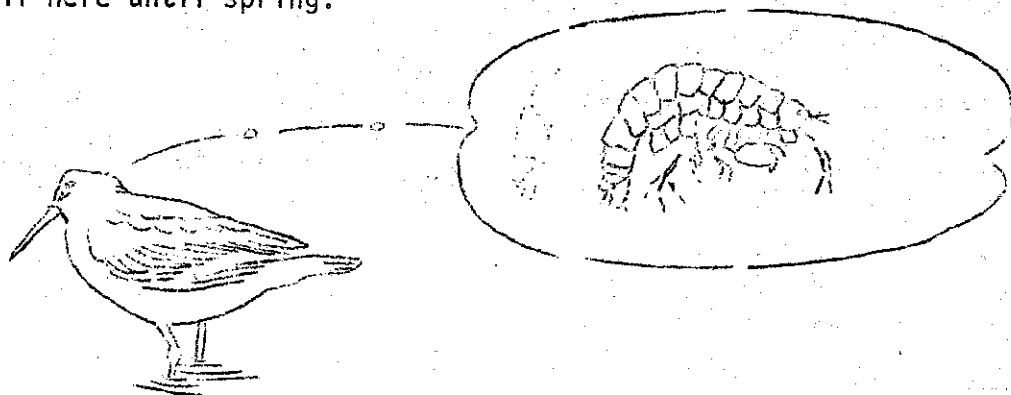
The greatest rarities in this winter's count are a flock of 11 red-backed sandpipers at Matthews Lake and a flock of 5 meadowlarks in Sable River. The red-backed sandpiper is rather uncommon in Nova Scotia at any time and occurrence of a flock of these birds here in the last week of December is extraordinary. No doubt the exceptionally mild December weather that we experienced in 1953 induced these birds to remain so late. They were watched for some time and seemed to be very chipper and contented as they scurried about a tide flat among Canada geese or took their daily exercise by flying innumerable circles and figure eights a few feet from the ground. How they have made out in the severe weather of January is a question.

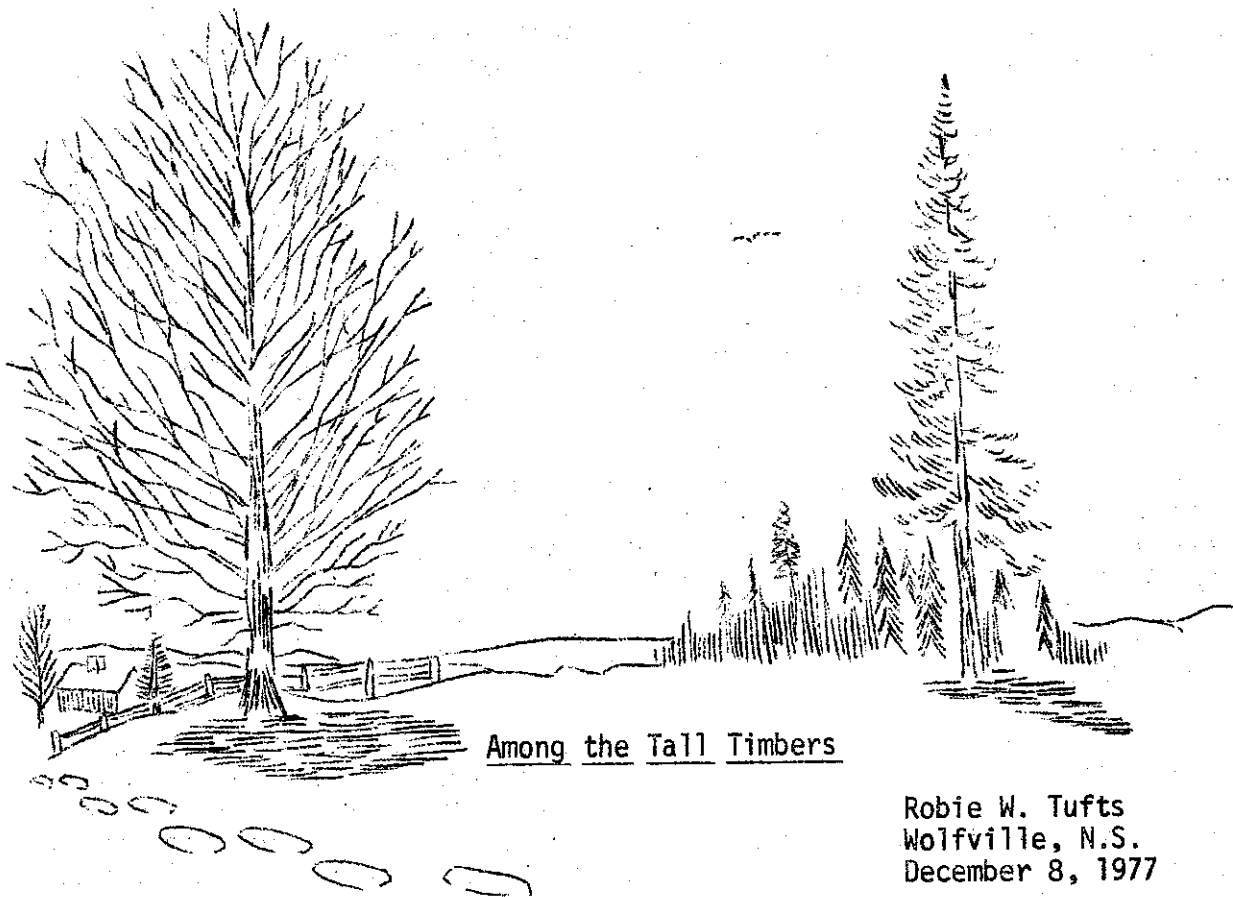
Meadowlarks are occasionally reported in Nova Scotia in winter, but a flock of 5 of them in this province is unusual at any season.

In the Christmas bird count of 1952 the West Middle Sable area led North America in number of white-winged crossbills (71), but none of this species was found there in the corresponding count in 1953.

On Craig's Island, in the mouth of the estuary of Sable River, a flicker, yellow-hammer, or highhole, which is one of our woodpeckers, was seen on December 30. This is a common bird here in summer, but only occasionally does one remain through the winter.

A great blue heron, generally miscalled "crane" in this province, was seen in flight near Sable River estuary on January 6. It is doubtful if it will be able to maintain itself here until spring.





Robie W. Tufts  
Wolfville, N.S.  
December 8, 1977

March 13, 1915, found me comfortably located in the farm-house of a friend who lived in Albany, Annapolis County. A fresh fall of snow the night before had made conditions for snow-shoeing excellent. Though I was not familiar with the heavily wooded Scrag Lake area my tracks in the snow assured me that I would have no difficulty in finding my way back.

It was one of those calm frosty days when even the note of kinglet or chackadee could be heard for a considerable distance. I was walking through forest land of heavy hard-wood growth noting with interest the tracks of the various forms of wild creatures that had recently passed by, but those which claimed my closest attention were made by a wildcat, and it so happened that they were very fresh. Suddenly the silence was broken by the loud call of a bird. It was one that I had never heard before. It suggested the chatter-call of a Flicker but the tone was louder and the repetition of the notes seemed slower. Under existing conditions the sound would have carried a mile or farther, but it was close at hand. It was as though my approach had disturbed the performer who was thus protesting my intrusion into its little kingdom. Following up the source I was soon rewarded by the sight of my first Pileated Woodpecker. There he was - a bright male - in all his colourful splendor, high up on a rotten stump working away in search of his dinner which would consist of wood-boring insects. And judging by the way the chips were flying and by the intensity with which he stuck to his job in spite of my presence directly below, I decided he must be faring well. Sixty-two years have come and gone since that memorable incident, and though the Pileated is not considered too much of a rarity in Nova Scotia I have seen relatively few of them since.

But to return to the bob-cat tracks. I had not gone much farther when I noted the actual foot prints abruptly disappeared and in their place was a trench-like trail as though the animal had flattened its body into a creeping position. Within a few yards this distinctive trail ended in front of a dead-fall lying prone. At this point it was obvious that the cat had taken-off in a typically feline forward spring over the dead-fall in what was soon shown to have been a futile attempt to procure a meal. Peering over the fallen tree the picture of what had happened was as clear as though it had been written in a bold hand. For there on the snow scattered about the point of contact were many of the tail-feathers of a cock Ruffed Grouse. I examined the snow for possible traces of blood and was pleased to find none which assured me that the bird had narrowly escaped without serious injury. But why was I pleased that the grouse escaped? Why was I not sorry for the cat who was no doubt badly in need of nourishment? I had had a glimpse of Nature's grim workshop in action, and I had no justification for allowing my sympathies to favour either of the participants in the drama.

From there on the cat's tracks resumed their regular pattern, and noting that the shadows were lengthening ominously I altered course and trudged homeward well pleased with my experiences among the tall timbers.

*Editor's Note: Robie has recently agreed to write for us on a regular basis, so we can all be looking forward to more of his observations in nature.*