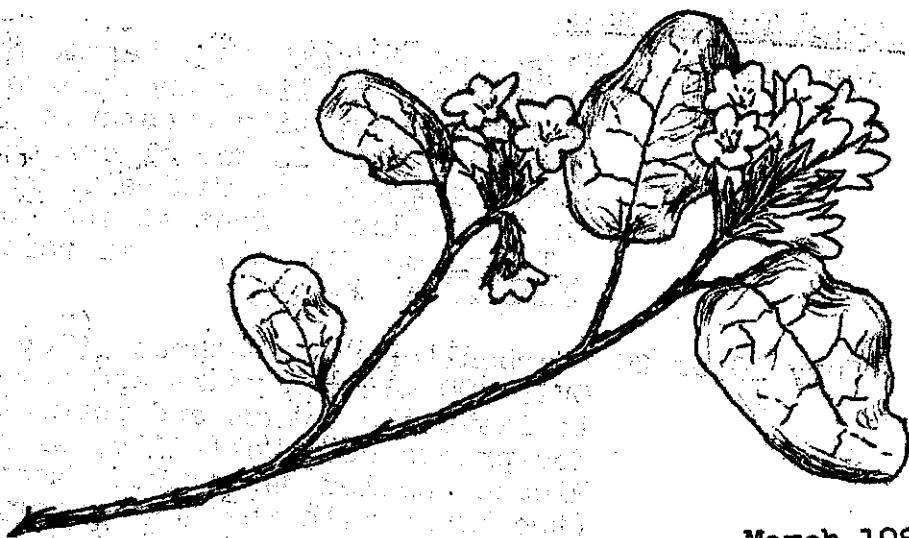


# Blomidon Naturalists Society Newsletter



Volume 7, No. 1

March 1980

The BNS Newsletter is published on the equinoxes and solstices

Editors: Jean Timpa and Roy Bishop

Art/Production: Roy Bishop

Typist: Barbara Gerritse

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, waters, air and stars.

From the BNS Constitution

## Upcoming Meetings (mark your calendar now!)

### (1) Regular Meetings

May 12 (Mon.) Dr. George Stevens

"A New Geological Use of Satellite Imagery  
in Nova Scotia"

June 16 (Mon.) Marjorie Knowles, Home Economist, N. S. Dept. of  
Agriculture, Kentville, N. S.

"Food from the Wild"

Both meetings will be held at 8 p.m. in Room 241 of the Beveridge Arts Center, Acadia.

### (2) Field Trips

April 23 & 30 "Springtime Amphibians" (Jim Wolford)

Meet at 9 p.m. at the canteen at the top of Gaspereau Ave., just past the 101 overpass (These field trips were announced at the April 21 meeting).

May 20, 21 or 22 "Astronomy Evening" (Roy Bishop & Sherman Williams)

Come and see what the rest of the Universe looks like from planet #3. Meet at the parking lot of the Grand Pre park at 9 p.m. on the first clear evening of May 20, 21 or 22. If you have binoculars or a telescope, bring them along too.

May 24 "Cape Split Walk" (Jim Wolford & Sherman Williams)

Come and see the spring flowers and warblers along one of the most spectacular trails in eastern Canada (Note, however, that this is a 14 km round trip. So wear suitable footwear and pack a lunch. Also, because of the distance and danger associated with the steep cliffs, young children should not attempt this hike.) Meet at the Acadia gym parking lot at 9 a.m. Hopefully there will be sufficient transportation to accomodate those who do not have cars.

More on  
page 2 !

(2) Field Trips, cont.

June 21 or 22 "Bugs and Things" (Dr. Harold Stultz)

A look at the lives and habitats of the many, multi-legged, tiny creatures that share our world. Harold Stultz is one of our charter members and is an entomologist, now retired, from the Research Station in Kentville. Meet at the Acadia gym parking lot at 10 a.m. on June 21, or if rainy, on the 21st, on June 22 at 2 p.m.

July 19 or 20 "Carboniferous Creatures" (Roy Bishop & Sherman Williams)

Over 300 million years ago some of the first creatures to leave the oceans and populate the dry land left their footprints near Wolfville, along the rocky beach that the Micmacs called Maktomkus. Meet at Roy Bishop's home (the house with the observatory) on the Bluff Road, Avonport, at 2 p.m. and wear footwear suitable for a 2 hour stroll along a damp and occasionally muddy beach. (In the case of rain on the 19th, come on the 20th)

1980 - 81 Executive

At the March 17 meeting, the position of Secretary-Treasurer was split into two positions and the nominees for these positions were elected by acclamation at the April 21 meeting. The other executive positions were filled in a similar manner on March 17th.

President Peter Austin-Smith, Wolfville 542-2109

Vice-Pres. Sherman Williams, Avonport 542-5104

Secretary Peter Armstrong, Wolfville 542-5852

Treasurer Roy Bishop, Avonport 542-3992

Editors Jean Timpa, Wolfville 542-5678

Roy Bishop, Avonport 542-3992

Program Committee: Alf Gerritse (Chm.) Canning 582-3206

Jim Wolford, Wolfville 542-5278

(The President)

Youth Committee: Peter Armstrong, Wolfville 542-5852

Publicity Committee: Rachel Erskine, Wolfville 542-2388

Jean Timpa, Wolfville 542-5678

The President's Commentary --

The BNS is alive, but not entirely well, having just survived a very lean year or two. The fact that the Society exists is no small tribute to the tenacity and drive of a small core of BNS members who just would not give up! Larry Bogan, Roy Bishop and Jean Timpa, among others, worked unreasonably hard to sustain the life of the BNS, and we owe much to them.

Throughout the next twelve months your new executive will endeavour to offer informative, at times perhaps challenging, but always we hope, interesting and varied evening programs as well as workshops and field trips. But you, the members, must lend active support to the BNS. When the BNS was formed, it was not viewed as just another organization offering a series of monthly seminars for a largely passive membership! It was, and is, intended to be a fully active, strongly motivated group composed of members having a common interest in natural history. Mere dues-paying members are not enough! Active participation is required from all of us if the BNS is to be restored to full health. As Larry Bogan noted in the June '78 issue of the BNS Newsletter, "It is clear that the BNS will change unless we have more active involvement. What should we do? Do you really care?" Write to the Newsletter, Box 1382, Wolfville, N. S. with your suggestions, comments or complaints. If you are truly concerned, attend the meetings and become involved in them!

Peter Austin-Smith



WINTER BIRD NOTES

Cyril Coldwell  
Gaspereau, N.S.

Well, the Winter of 1979-80 is now history, and regardless of what the experts predicted last Fall, it was a mild one, good for the conservation of energy, but not so good for those trying to hold birds at banding stations for study purposes.

Since reporting the release of a Golden Eagle in the last Newsletter there has been a new addition to the eagle flight cage. A Turkey Vulture picked up from the side of the road at Centreville, Digby County, in early January in a weakened condition, seems to be fully recovered and will soon be banded and released. Sharing its living quarters with three Bald Eagles does not appear to cause any problems.

Numbers of Bald Eagles at the feeding station showed signs of a sizeable increase with many juveniles showing up for the first time. They arrived much earlier in the Fall and stayed around much later in the Spring, with a count of 27 on the morning of March 28. Today, April 14, there are still 3 at the feeder. The day of the area count, February 24, there were 31 birds (9 adults, 22 immatures) at feeding stations, which is a record number. The count for the whole area was 34.

One rarity this winter was a Yellow-headed Blackbird, which stayed around a couple of feeders for a few weeks. It appeared to be a first year male.

A Contest !

The Blomidon Naturalists Society should have a symbol (emblem, logo, crest, ...?) If you agree then put on your thinking cap and send us your ideas. Submissions should be sent to Jean Timpa (Box 1382, Wolfville, N.S. BOP 1X0) before June 10. All submissions will be examined by an ad hoc committee to be formed at the June 16 meeting, and the winning design will be announced in the Summer solstice Newsletter.

Wolfville Christmas Bird Census, 1979

Fifty-one individuals in 19 field parties and at 10 feeding stations participated in the Christmas count on 22 December 1979. It was a pleasant day for the count -- overcast, light westerly winds and temperatures hovering around the freezing point. Sixty species were observed and, overall, 45051 individual birds were counted, of which almost 27000 were crows. The crows were censused in the evening as they flew to roost on Boot Island.

In a few respects it was an unusual count. Some species that we might expect to have in December were either lacking (Pine Grosbeaks, Redpolls) or low in numbers (only 73 Horned Larks, 3 Pine Siskins and 1 flock of 45 Snow Buntings). On the other hand, there were a high number of birds not normally seen here at this time. These are Red-throated Loon (Minas Basin), Hooded Merganser (Lumsden's), 2 Marsh Hawks (dykeland) Kingfisher (Gaspereau), 2 flickers (Grand Pre and Gaspereau), Catbird (Wolfville), and 2 warblers (Pine, Wolfville; Common Yellowthroat, N.W. of Port Williams). In contract to other years, unusually high numbers of Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers and White-breasted Nuthatches occurred. The number of Gray Partridges (15, in 2 coveys) is the lowest count in recent years. This is probably a reasonable reflection of their status as from all accounts few have been seen this autumn and winter.

The day ended in grand form in Canning where, as last year, we thoroughly enjoyed the warm hospitality of the Gibsons.

Three additional species have been recorded for the count period. These are Glaucous Gull (Canard), Yellow-headed Blackbird (Gaspereau) and Lapland Longspur (Canard).

It was good to have so many folk involved in the count. Thank you for your interest and participation!

Peter Smith

Nova Scotia Christmas Count Checklist - Wolfville; Dec. 22, 1979

Red-throated Loon	1	Common Snipe	4	Catbird	1
Canada Goose	45	Iceland Gull Im.	1	Golden-cr. Kinglet	16
Mallard	20	Gt. Black-back Gull	979	Starling	3845
Black Duck	1436	Ring-billed Gull	3091	Common Yellowthroat	1
Pintail	3	Rock Dove	1771	Pine Warbler	1
Common Goldeneye	9	Mourning Dove	166	House Sparrow	2450
Common Merganser	30	Short-eared Owl	1	Red-Wing Blackbird	13
Hooded Merganser	1	Belted Kingfisher	1	Brown-head Cowbird	656
Goshawk	2	Common Flicker	2	Evening Grosbeak	251
Sharp-Shin Hawk	11	Hairy Woodpecker	14	Purple Finch	14
Red-Tailed Hawk	45	Downy Woodpecker	34	Pine Siskin	3
Rough-legged Hawk	19	Horned Lark	79	Am. Goldfinch	309
Bald Eagle, adult	5	Blue Jay	562	Savannah Sparrow	1
imm.	5	Common Raven	320	Dark-eyed Junco	1059
Marsh Hawk	2	Common Crow	26810	Tree Sparrow	53
Merlin	3	Bl.-Cap. Chickadee	218	White-thr. Sparrow	49
American Kestrel	3	Boreal Chickadee	5	Swamp Sparrow	2
Ruffed Grouse	5	White-br. Nuthatch	17	Song Sparrow	117
Ring-neck. Pheasant	286	Red-br. Nuthatch	3	Snow Bunting	43
Gray Partridge	15	Brown Creeper	3	Common Grackle	1
		American Robin	139		
. No. of Species 60				No. of individuals 45051	

Treasurer's Report

Balance as of Sept. 17, 1979	\$ 62.22
Memberships (56 @ \$4.00)	224.00
Gifts	25.00
Interest	.64
Expenses (postage & supplies)	-94.85
Balance as of April 22, 1980	\$217.01

Roy Bishop

1979-80 DUES

This Newsletter has been sent to those members in good standing. New Members, or those wishing to re-join, should send their name and address and \$4.00 to Roy Bishop, Avonport, N. S. BOP 1B0. (Dues for members under 16 years of age are \$1.00. If anyone in this category has already paid \$4.00, please contact Roy Bishop for a refund).

A Wintering Catbird

R. W. Tufts  
Wolfville, N. S.  
Feb. 26, 1980

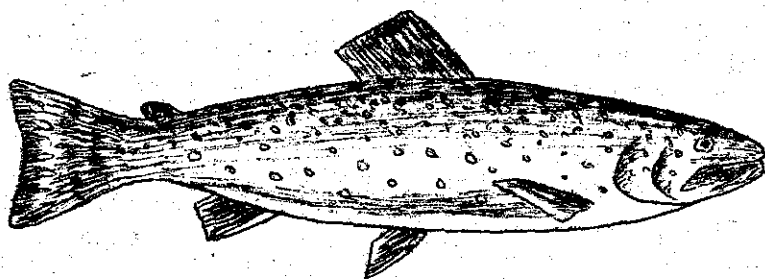
Those of us who are familiar with the Catbird think of it as one of our rather fragile but highly desirable summer birds. They normally return from the south during the latter part of May, remaining until late September, thus avoiding possible hardships imposed by inclement weather. In other words, Catbirds fare better in warm weather. Such being the case, the account given in a recent Newsletter by Oscar Morehouse of a Catbird lingering about his premises in Wolfville until November 25 causes a bit of eye-brow raising.

As a matter of fact his Catbird reappeared after November 25 and visited his premises irregularly until late in January. He told of seeing it eating 'rose-hips' and mentioned that it did not come to his well-stocked foodtray which was attracting the usual run of winter birds. In discussing the incident we thought that the bird's survival was probably

due to the relatively mild and open winter with which we were being favoured. A further discussion regarding its chances of living through the winter resulted in agreement to attempt its capture and care for it under cover.

This was accomplished on January 26 when the bird, enticed by a slice of fresh apple, entered the trap device. Knowing that I was willing and well-equipped to care for the waif, Mr. Morehouse brought it to me, and presently it appears to be quite content with its lot in my large, airy 'hospital' where it is provided with a varied menu of hard-boiled egg yolks, peanut butter, blueberries (from a stock of frozen ones I happen to have on hand), grapes and sliced fresh apple of the Delicious brand. Of the lot, it favours the apples. Catbirds like thick shrubbery in which to hide. Such has been procured and arranged in the rear of the enclosure. Incidentally, it is sharing its quarters with a Robin which was in trouble. They get along quite amicably. Both birds will be released at appropriate times when warmer weather is dominant.

But right here the natural question we are all asking, is: why didn't this bird go south last Fall with others of its kin? Might it be that we have here a mental defective, a bird that lacks the normal 'know-how' of migration? A possibility. If the bird had been left to its own resources it probably would have died, - a fate of which Mother Nature would have approved, for she wants only the "fittest" of her children to survive.



#### SMALL FISHES

John. S. Erskine  
(From the Journal of  
Education, Nov. 1957)

(continued from the last Newsletter)

#### Small Fishes

The fishing fades into glimpses and pictures, chiefly of towing the end of a seine through the water, of still sunny days when the lake was warm around the thighs, and of one bleak July morning when we dragged the shallows of Pubnico Lake with the temperature below forty degrees. There were sandy ponds where the killifish hurried in clouds and the schools of sticklebacks danced like gnat-swarms in abrupt jerky dashes. There were dark waters where families of tiny black catfish wriggled among dead leaves while their protecting parents dashed froglike for deeper water. There were roadside pools where trout-fry had been impounded by the shrinking of the stream, and evening-still lakes where in a few minutes the trap came up gleaming gold with heavy-bodied shiners. There was Spectacle Lake behind the Digby shore, where snags and angled boulders kept trapping the seine and the shallows shone with a pale garden of tiny awlwort, a submarine mustard, and a slender young pickerel drifted uneasily in front of the net.

Pickerel are not native, but some enthusiast introduced them years ago, and now they are increasing and playing havoc with the trout of this watershed. There is something to be said for such introductions, since the greater the number of species, the more thoroughly the environment is filled and the more productive it becomes. But inevitably each new species feeds upon other species and depresses the native species either by predation or by competition. Black bass have been introduced in the neighbourhood of Amherst, but it is only in the minnow-rich and sludgy northern lakes that they are likely to find enough food. Throughout the granite backbone of the province, trout are likely to remain the standard game-fish for some time to come, and to a collector trout are now as interesting as garden vegetables, since almost all rivers have been artificially stocked.

For some species the season of love was coming. A few male three-spined sticklebacks had taken on an unwholesome peacock-green hue that suffused even their eyes, while their underparts were mustard yellow. And in the shallows of Elliott Lake the iridescent killifish were frisking in the sun-warm shallows, striped and unstriped dashing flirtatiously for an instant side by side, their bodies undulating in practice for the coming mating.

### Gaspereaux

The coarse quartz sands of Aylesford Lake, rimmed with summer cottages, yielded tiny silvery beasts with delicate scales that came off in a fine powder on one's fingers. These were young gaspereaux. The grown-up fish are like deep-bodied herrings and belong, like them, to the shad family. They pass their adult lives in the sea, but, when the spring comes, the taste of the freshening water brings them to the river-mouths, and, when the floods of late April and early May are still pouring down to the sea, the behaviour of the fish changes as suddenly as though they had shifted gear. Now they must swim upstream, up and up, through rapids and over obstacles until they reach the quiet lakes where they spawn.

The run of the gaspereaux varies from year to year. I recall one notable run long ago. When the sight of the blackbacked gulls and cormorants winging inland warned us that the fish were moving, I took my small boys to picnic beside the river. At the old dam a leaky fish-ladder, a sluice built in a Greek key-pattern of angling curves, slowed the falling water, and grey forms came shooting up the channel, now halting to rest in an eddy, now dashing away again, a dozen together. Down below, where the ladder poured its waters into a pool, the fish were waiting in their thousands, and in the river below it, new thousands were arriving. If I dipped my hand in the water, it was jostled by the passing fish, and, when the great rush of them came, one could hear them from afar, their fins cutting the surface with a rustle as of a breeze in the leaves, while here and there a fish rose struggling above the water, squeezed upward by the pressure of other fish beneath. In the shallow by the shore an eel, all caution abandoned, lay gorged in the sun. A trout-fisherman was packing up his rod. "It's no good," he said. "Every cast I get a gaspereau in the back."

Of course, that was Sunday. On week-days the great dip nets are busy along the river, ladling the fish to the bank to be salted and barreled. This has been a great local industry, and once the fish were winter meat for the farms, as herrings still are in Scandinavia, and the surplus was sold to the fish-hungry West Indies. But today the power-dams block the river and grow higher and higher, and the demand for power creeps up even faster, so that there is no water to spare for fish ladders. I have seen the ladders dry and the fish dying by thousands in the leaking pockets. Sometimes enterprising farmers have carted the fish around the obstacles so that there might be a new generation for later years; but this is unorganized, dependent upon the self-sacrifice of a few. If these were game fish, the cry would reach even the government, but these are only commercial fish, only the food of generations to come. So the runs of the gaspereaux become less and less impressive with the years.

(to be continued)

### CONSERVATION CORNER

As members of the Blomidon Naturalists Society, we have so far been concerned with the enjoyment of our natural surroundings. With increasing population and its ensuing technology, more and more threats to our ecosystems have become evident. If we are to have the privilege of enjoying unspoiled natural surroundings we must be prepared to change our life style even in little ways. We hope you will incorporate into your lives as many of these suggestions as possible, spread the word among friends, relatives and neighbours, and above all send us your suggestions (Box 1382, Wolfville, N.S. BOP 1X0)

.... Try to avoid the use of disposable plastic, paper, and metal products. Items such as styrofoam cups, paper towels and aluminum foil are very wasteful of raw materials and energy, and soon end up as garbage.



## Conservation Corner, cont.

.... Refuse to buy "no deposit, no return" glass bottles, and let your grocer know it. The bottle may say "no deposit", but you are paying for it, and such bottles add weight and bulk to the growing garbage problem, plus broken glass around the countryside.

.... When you buy a car, choose a 4 cylinder model rather than a V8. This will be a step toward minimizing the immense impact that the automobile has on raw materials, fossil fuels and pollution.

.... Tired of unending junk mail, and troubled by the waste of paper and energy it represents? Don't put it in the wastebasket. Let it accumulate (unopened) for a few months and then place it in a larger envelope and send it back to the original senders, postage due!

.... Don't burn grass or leaves. This both pollutes the air and destroys valuable organic matter. Make a compost pit instead.

.... While driving - blow your horn at people who throw litter from cars. Let them know it's your world too!

## More About Torpidity in Hummingbirds

Feb. 18, 1980

R. W. Tufts  
Wolfville, N. S.

There was a time when circumstances which had developed convinced me that all hummingbirds undergo a state of torpidity at day's end when darkness prevents them from further feeding. It was supposed to be a provision of Nature, made necessary because the bird's unique manner of flight uses up more energy than that supplied by its daily food intake.

In discussing the matter with a prominent ornithologist, I found it was his opinion that some hummingbirds become torpid at night, and some don't, but he did not elaborate nor give any reason or basis for his thesis. Dissatisfied with the result of our discussion, I decided to pursue the subject further. The foregoing is **substantially what appeared in the latest issue** of our Newsletter and for the enlightenment of interested readers, here is what I believe to be the truth of the matter.

My informant is Crawford H. Greenewalt, a widely known authority on the life-styles of hummingbirds in general. I quote verbatim from his reply to my enquiry: "There is an enormous literature on hummingbirds, and a great deal has been written on the energetics and occurrence of torpidity. By way of summary, I might say simply this - that torpidity does indeed occur but not on a nightly or indeed on any regular basis. I think a generally accepted conclusion would be that the birds use torpidity when their food intake has been too small to allow them to pass through the night at the energetics of ordinary sleep. I forget the numbers at the moment, but the energy requirement of torpidity is about a tenth of that of normal sleep."

In other words as I see it, if the daily food intake of an individual hummingbird falls below about one tenth of the margin of the bird's requirements for a normal sleep, a benign Nature comes to its rescue by putting it in a state of torpidity.

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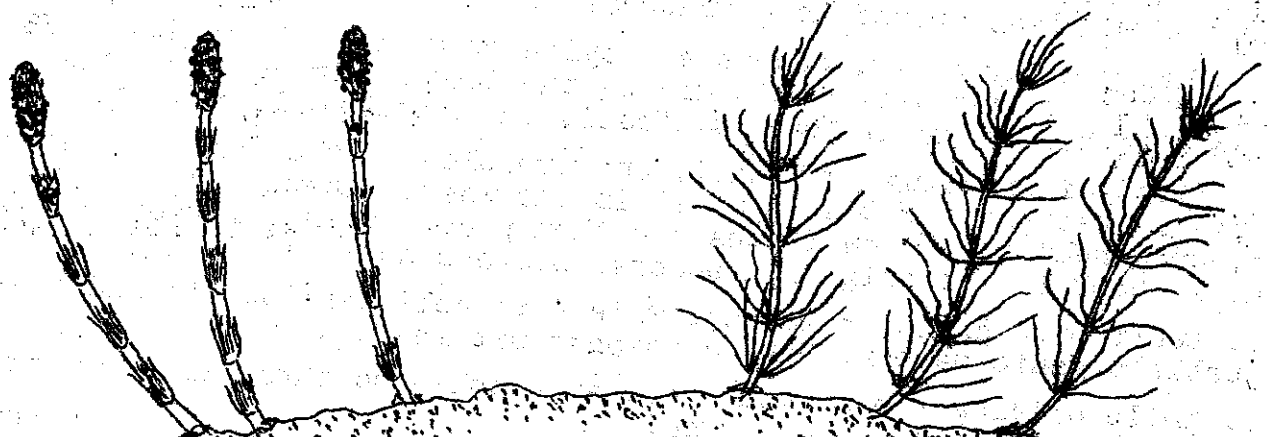
## A Naturalist's Guide to Kings County

Alf Gerritse

An application to the Summer Youth Employment Program was submitted to solicit funding for the employment of four people for 16 weeks. Our objective is to collect data on the natural history of Kings County in order to print a guide book for residents, tourists and others interested in the natural history of our county.

It is our intention to include all those things which at one time or another have been the interest of our society. This is obviously a very large task and one that cannot be accomplished without your help. If you have a trail you like, bird observations, a rock formation or location with interesting fauna, we would like to hear about it. We need your help; a call or note will be fine. The people assembling the data will be contacting you further, perhaps asking for your assistance to describe what could be of interest to others.

At the last meeting our President reported enthusiastic response from the authorities. Please help us to make this guide as complete as possible. We need your input. Please help us and the people we employ to make this Naturalist's Guide the best in the Maritimes! Write a short note or phone one of the executives of the BNS. Thank you.



OUTDOOR CHAT

Dr. Harrison F. Lewis

From the Shelburne Coastguard 1955

Horsetails are plants of ancient lineage. Those growing today are comparatively small, but large, tree-like plants of this group that lived in the Carboniferous geological period, millions of years ago, played a large part in building up coal deposits that are mined in our time. They are not flowering plants, but reproduce through the agency of fine, dust-like spores. Their leaves are greatly reduced in size and importance, but their stems and branches are well supplied with chlorophyll, which gives them their green colour. Most modern horsetails carry their spore-producing structures on their green stems, but that is not the case with the field horsetail. This plant lives through the winter in the form of a long, dark stem, a short distance underground. In April pale branches, containing no chlorophyll, spring up quickly from these stems. At the tip of each such branch is a cone-shaped structure from which great numbers of tiny spores are scattered. The spore-producing branches then wither away, while at the same time the green branches well known in summer grow up from the underground stem to begin the process of making food. Horsetails are called scouring rushes because their stems contain so many fine bits of silica that they are suitable for scouring knives and other utensils.

On May 30 Forest Ranger Art Smith and your columnist had the good fortune to discover, in deep woods some miles northwest of Shelburne, the occupied nest of a pair of pileated woodpeckers. These magnificent birds, which are often called log-cock or cock of the woods are nearly as large as crows and are our only woodpeckers with black underparts. The nest entrance was about 30 ft. up, in the decayed trunk of a yellow birch.

Pileated woodpeckers are uncommon in Nova Scotia, though they are widely distributed in extensive tracts of woodland that contain large trees. In search of insect food, consisting in large part of carpenter ants, whose galleries pierce the heart of many a forest tree, these powerful birds often excavate great furrows, four inches deep and a foot or more long, in the trunks of trees, living or dead. They are true tree-surgeons, making such excavations only where insects have already ruined the tree. So characteristic is their surgery that it often reveals the presence of one of these birds in an area where the woodpecker itself has not been noticed.

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#### A Sooty Tern Arrives In Nova Scotia

A tern, identified as a Sooty, on the basis of contrasting blackish upper parts and white underparts with a white patch across the forehead, was picked up alive at Melmerby Beach in Pictou County on September 7, 1979 by Arthur McKay, Forest Technician. The bird died shortly after it was found and the carcass was sent to Bob Bancroft, Regional Biologist, who suggested that it was blown northward far out of its normal range by Hurricane David. The bird is now being prepared as a museum specimen.



### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Don Dodds (African Mammals), Ross Anderson (Bird Banding on Brier Island), and Jim Wolford (Springtime Amphibian Activity) for very interesting and beautifully illustrated talks at the last three meetings. Bouquets also to all those who have contributed to this Newsletter.

### BNS NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

the 1st day of Summer - June 21 !

Our larder is quite bare, said old mother Timpa!  
Please help! Send articles, original or just ones enjoyed, poetry, interesting sightings, to :  
Jean Timpa, Box 1382, Wolfville, N. S. BOP 1X0  
Or call 542-5678 to report short items.

