



# BLOMIDON NATURALISTS' SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 11  
NUMBER 1  
MARCH 1984

The BNS Newsletter is published on the equinoxes and solstices

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

From the BNS Constitution

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS SPRING-SUMMER 1984

1. Wednesday, April 25: A second amphibian field trip led by Jim Wolford. Meet at the Acadia University parking lot at 9:30 p.m. Dress warmly and wear waterproof footwear; bring a flashlight if possible.
2. Sunday, April 29: A field trip with the Nova Bird Society led by Jim Wolford. We will be going to various locations in Kings Co. so plan on a trip which will last until at least 3-4 p.m. Meet at the Grand Pre' Historic Park parking lot at 10:00a.m. or at the Acadia Gym parking lot at 9:45a.m. "Brown bag" lunch is advisable.
3. Tuesday, May 1: A field trip to look at and hear woodcock and owls led by Bernard Forsythe. Meet at 7:30 p.m. at the University parking lot. In case of windy weather this trip will take place on the following night.
4. Saturday, May 5: International Astronomy Day. A field trip to look at the stars and planets led by Roy Bishop and Larry Bogan. Meet in the Grand Pre' Historic Park parking lot at 9:00 p.m. or at the Acadia University gym parking lot at 8:45 p.m. If the night is cloudy, this trip will be rescheduled.
5. Sunday, May 13: An all day walk to Cape Split led by Bernard Forsythe, Ruth and Peg Newell. Meet at the Acadia University gym parking lot at 8:15 a.m. or at Scots Bay at 9:00 a.m. with lunch and sufficient drinks (there are no pop stands!) and comfortable footwear.
6. Monday, May 21: "Trekking the Sahara", a multi-faceted presentation by Scott Cunningham, relating highlights of his desert adventure. Beveridge Arts Centre room 244, 7:30 p.m. Many of you will remember the fine presentation which Scott and his partner gave us just about two years ago on their epic canoe voyage around the entire Nova Scotia coastline. Quite a contrast!

7. Sunday, May 27: A "repeat" field trip to the Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary. Meet at the Acadia University gym parking lot at 7:00 a.m. or at the A.P.B.S. at 10:30 a.m. An all day trip please bring your lunch!
8. Sunday, June 10: A field trip to look at the intertidal life with the Halifax Field Naturalists at Peggy's Cove. Meet at the Acadia University parking lot at 8:00 a.m. or at 10:00 a.m. at a turnoff area on the road to Peggy's Cove from Rt. 333. Bring your lunch.
9. Sunday, June 17: A field trip led by Jim Wolford to look at the yellow lady slippers near Windsor. Meet at the Acadia University gym parking lot at 9:00 a.m.
10. Monday, June 18: "The Natural History of Fishes of the Minas Basin", a talk and slide show by Mike Dadswell, Fisheries biologist at the St. Andrews, N.B. Biological Research Station. Beveridge Arts Centre, Room 244, 7:30 p.m.
11. Thursday, June 21: A field trip to listen to evening bird songs led by Bernard Forsythe. Meet at the Acadia University gym parking lot at 7:00 p.m.
12. Sunday, July 29: With the Halifax Field Naturalists we will go looking for shore birds led by Jim Wolford. Meet at the Acadia University gym parking lot at 1:15 p.m. or the Grand Pre' Historic Park parking lot at 1:30 p.m.
13. September, Richard Stern is attempting to arrange a bird field trip, including, possibly, boats to look at the pelagic birds on Labour Day weekend on Briar Island.

It is our field-trip policy to meet at the Acadia University gym parking lot so that people without transportation can have as much opportunity to participate in the field trips as those who do own cars. Rubber boots are advisable for many of our field trips; binoculars, flashlights, cameras, fly dope where applicable.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are indebted to many for the fine talks or field trips they have been willing to present. Since December, we would like to thank Peter Smith and the Merritt Gibsons for organizing the Christmas Bird Count, our president Dr. Richard Stern for the January programme and a February birding field trip under less than ideal conditions (fog!!), to Dave Lawley for a lovely winter hike in Kejimikujik National Park, to Tom Herman and Fred Scott for a fine presentation in February on small mammals, and to Don Pentz for helping us celebrate our tenth birthday at our March meeting with his interesting talk on the development of his talents as a wildlife artist. A great many thanks to Rachel Erskine for her continued efforts with the refreshments after meetings, and to the many people who have contributed articles to make this Newsletter possible or time and talents in its production and distribution.

#### BNS NEWSLETTER DEADLINE - JUNE 21

Newsletters don't just happen! But now is the happening season. We would sincerely appreciate more observations sent to us. They don't have to be long or "scientific" to be interesting and of value to our Newsletter. See Ellis Gertridge's "Unrelated Observations of Mexico" in this issue, "A Weasel Visit" by Martha Dodge in our December 1983 issue or in our September 1983 issue, "Can You Beat It?" by the Sircoms of Hantsport. They were brave and you can be also!! If you were keeping bird yard records from November 1, 1983 to April 15, please send them in before June 21, and we'll see what kind of interesting patterns (if any) emerge. The address is: Jean M. Timpa, P.O. Box 1382, Wolfville, N.S. BOP 1X0.

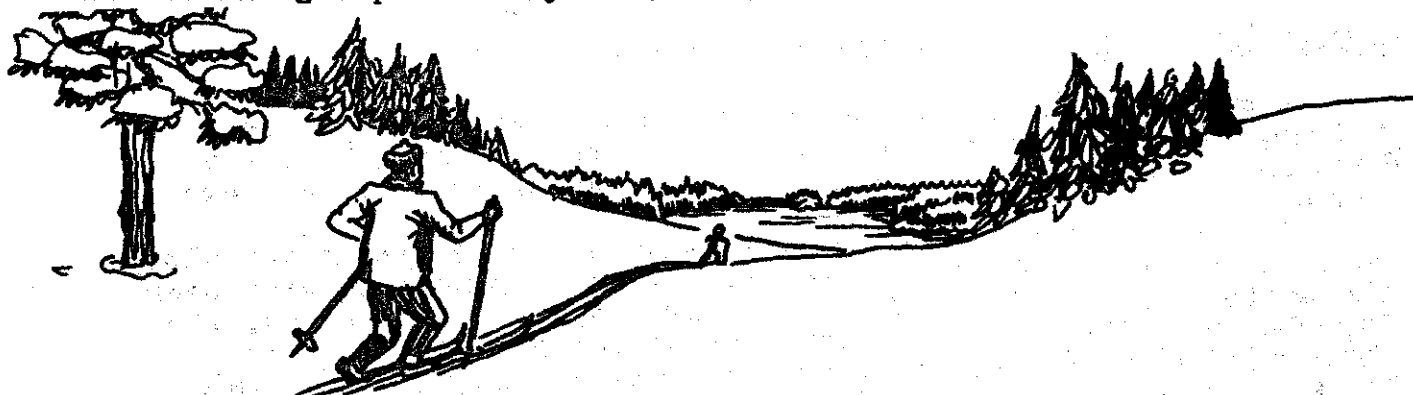
## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### KEJIMKUJIK NATIONAL PARK FIELD TRIP - Jim Wolford, Wolfville, N.S.

January 22, 1984. We couldn't have had a more perfect day for this winter outing. It was a very cold but windless and frequently sunny day, and there was plenty of fluffy fresh snow everywhere. The result was a very pretty and very quiet "winter wonderland" for the eight snowshoers and approximately 15 Nordic skiers. This was a combined trip for both the Halifax Field Naturalists and the BNS; David Lawley, a park naturalist, invited us and led the trip.

The skiers went with Dave along the Big Dam/Frozen Ocean Trail and later he took them to Peter Point (see L. Bogan's description below). Dave suggested that we snowshoers take a nearby trail; our first hour consisted of wandering and occasionally floundering about on the wrong side of the Mercey River looking for the trail! The tough going (a jungle of young conifers) but very beautiful snow-scapes resulted in a not unpleasant mixture of good exercise and good spirits from various entertaining comments (about us being lost but not really caring much).

Eventually we did find our trail along the river and we walked it for perhaps a mile before turning back. We saw a variety of tracks: deer, bobcat, snowshoe hare, mink(?), porcupine, and shrews(?). We also saw very fresh feeding signs of a pileated woodpecker on stumps and trunks, a snow-filled old vireo nest, and a raven plus a black-capped chickadee. Along the park roads were several groups of very observable deer.



After our walk we gathered at a cabin with a fired-up stove, around which we compared observations, sipped hot drinks, and had our late lunches. Thanks are extended to Dave and the Park staff for inviting us and hosting the day.

On our way back to Wolfville, four of us stopped near Annapolis and saw the vagrant grackle (the current opinion is that it is probably a great-tailed, rather than a boat-tailed). At the Annapolis Causeway we saw common goldeneyes and both common and red-breasted mergansers. But our final and most memorable sighting for the day was a beautiful red fox along highway 101 somewhere near Kingston.

.....Larry Bogan-Cambridge, N.S.

The snow conditions were nearly perfect for skiing in Keji this weekend and the skies were clear. The Valley had been cloudy and it had been an extreme pleasure to drive up the South Mountain into sunshine. The Park personnel had groomed the trails well and the skiing was smooth, fast, and enjoyable.

The trail to the lower end of Big Dam Lake had many ups and downs which entertained the children as well as myself. Despite the cold temperatures (about -19C) we warmed up quickly. At the end of the trail we had a panoramic view up the narrow southern section of the lake with its perfectly flat blanket of snow bordered with snow covered pines. We saw little wildlife, only a chickadee and several crows and the tracks of a bobcat.

After lunch Dave led the skiers down the side of Kejimikujik Lake out to Peter Point. At the end of the peninsula we skied out onto the lake and along the shore of Pelee Island. (This island supports some very old Birch and Ash trees) From there we made a direct line over the flat lake to the warm hut and home. The departing views of the sunlight low over the lake with distant islands black among white, will always stick in my memories. By all means Keji-in-the-snow is a place to visit next year.

## WINTER BIRDING FIELD TRIP - Richard Stern, Kentville

A joint field trip to see hawks in the Kings County area was undertaken by the Blomidon Naturalists Society and the Nova Scotia Bird Society on Sunday, Feb. 5, 1984. The day dawned in dense fog which persisted as seven intrepid carloads of birders set off down the road across the Grand Pre' dykes. Much peering into the fog produced crow-like silhouettes some 20 yards away and even an identifiable Rough-legged Hawk. Luckily, however, the fog cleared and we soon saw Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks in profusion, and a beautiful flock of about 1000 Snow Buntings silhouetted against the green grass.

After leaving Grand Pre', the party visited the Port Williams, Canard, and Sheffield Mills areas. Red-tailed Hawks were everywhere, with about 50 being seen altogether. Several Bald Eagles were also seen, with about 12 being at one farm at Sheffield Mills. A sharp-shin was observed chasing starlings and a Northern Harrier was on the Canard Dyke. During lunch overlooking this dykeland a Kestrel was also espied upon a fence post. Other birds seen, include Pheasants and Mallards. By mid-afternoon the fog came down again and the rain started, too.

"The " birds of the area, two different Gyrfalcons that had been around and well watched in the few days prior to the field trips were nowhere to be seen. However, despite that and the fog and the rain, it was a satisfying day, especially for the people who enjoy watching Red-tailed Hawks.

## HORTON HILLS HIKE - Roy Bishop, Avonport, N.S.

A group of 12 members met at my home on Saturday, March 3. A damp, -7°C west wind was blowing, but the ground was mostly bare in the interlude between the two snowy periods of the past winter.

As leader, I took the group southward across fields and along edges of spruce woods to a high hill giving a panoramic view over the eastern end of the Valley, Boot Island, the Minas Basin, the Parrsborough shore, and the entrance to the Avon River. Once a bedraggled and apparently hungry Red-tailed Hawk flew over the group, but, deciding that none of us were small enough to pounce on, flew on. Chick-a-dees, Nuthatches, and Kinglets decorated the edges of the forest. Once a sharp-eyed observer noted a Red-tailed Hawk perched in a tree more than a kilometre away.

From the scenic hill, the group hiked north-eastward across rolling fields bordered by forest, across the Bluff Road, and down an oak-bordered ravine to Blue Beach on the Avon River. Here the falling tide gave a broad expanse of rocky beach, so we proceeded beneath the cliffs toward Horton Bluff. Stalactites of ice hanging from the ancient cliffs matched the mood set by the greying sky and biting wind. Near Horton Bluff I chose to take a direct route back by climbing a gradual portion of the bluff; however, the ice made this more challenging than in July. We arrived back at the cars at 5 p.m. having walked about 7 km.

## TRIVIAL TIDBITS of Local Natural History

Jim Wolford, Wolfville

Several months ago Jean Timpa pleaded with me to start a regular column on "rarities" for the Newsletter. For this issue, I have culled from my own journal an assortment of "oddities", i.e., either items that are not seen or not reported often, or events that are unusual in their timing or magnitude.

In the future, we will partly depend upon all of you readers to make occasional contributions. Any kind of observation that you consider as remarkable can be treated in two ways:

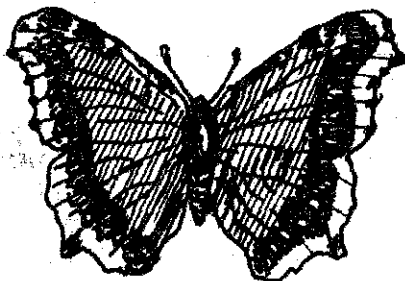
- (a) We encourage every person with such observation to write a paragraph or more to be submitted to Jean as a separate short article (I think lots of short contributions are much better than a few long and cumbersome ones).

(b) Jot down a place and date and a few phrases for future inclusion in this Tidbits Column, than give it to me at a BNS meeting or send it to me ( Jim Wolford, Biology Dept., Acadia University, Wolfville, N.S. BOP 1X0) or phone it in (542-2201 ext.391).

The "tidbit" need not be a bird or some other animal, or a plant, but may be anything that may seem extraordinary in some way, and that can be considered under our very broad notion of natural history.

#### Tidbits for the Winter of 1983-84

- Oct. 18- A field full of giant puffballs in the Lumsden Dam area found by Sherman Bleakney.
- Nov. 3- A dormant ('hibernating') adult mourning cloak butterfly found by Jean Timpa in her woodpile. The same woodpile was also very productive for spiders and their egg cases and assorted fungi.
- Nov. 17- Near Annapolis Royal, a very large grackle appeared at a feeder and stayed there for over two months. It seemed to be an adult female and probably was a great-tailed as opposed to a boat-tailed grackle (only recent field guides list these as separate species).
- Nov. 20- A female ruddy duck at Canard Poultry pond.
- Nov. 21- A "resting" adult painted lady butterfly found on one of Sherman Bleakney's window screens.
- Nov. 27- A male hooded merganser at Canard Poultry pond.
- Nov. 28- Bohemian waxwings in Wolfville. This entire winter proved to be exceptional for this species in our area, with frequent sightings of up to 150 birds through early April.
- Dec. 3- Near Annapolis Royal, an adult midge (a fly) flying about and resting on the snow.
- Dec. 13- After a very warm drizzly day, several large earthworms were seen on a Wolfville lawn at night.
- Dec. 27- A female cardinal (now known in new field guides as the Northern Cardinal) seen near Canning, by Merritt Gibson.
- Dec. 28- A female rufous-sided towhee in Canning, killed by a cat (reported by Chris Hawes).
- Dec. 28- Mark Elderkin saw and photographed an immature dark-phased gyrafalcon at Grand Pre'. Presumably the same bird stayed there until at least March 22. On the latter date a white-phased gyrafalcon appeared in Wolfville and in February there were sightings of a gray-phased gyrafalcon in the Canard area. (Not only has this been a good year for gyrafalcons, but this is our second consecutive winter that has been very good for red-tailed hawks and bald eagles.)



MOURNING CLOAK

- Jan. 5- Merritt Gibson estimated about 900 Canada Geese at the Canard aboideau (an unusually high number for a wintering flock).
- Jan. 12- A rusty blackbird at Lana Churchill's feeder complex in Port Williams.
- Feb. 15- A few days of unseasonably warm weather culminated in record high temperatures; then on this drizzly evening I heard a couple of spring peepers calling very weakly in Wolfville. Also there was a report of one peeping at Gaspereau. (Coincidentally, I also heard two reports of active honeybees that same day.)

- Feb. 18- Near Sheffield Mills several of us noticed a "coronae" of the moon ( a circular narrow halo of dim light around the moon at night).
- Mar. 7- A probable Oregon junco (now considered a western subspecies of the dark-eyed junco) in Wolfville, first noted by Mark Elderkin. Subsequently, this bird or another was seen by several observers at least until early April.
- Mar. 28- A pair of hooded mergansers on a pond near Starr's Point seen by Brenda Thexton and Jean Timpa.
- Mar. A flock of 14 snow geese seen by Karen Casselman sometime in March.
- Apr. 3- An Ipswich sparrow ( now considered a subspecies of the Savannah sparrow) seen at Wolfville sewage ponds by Bernard Forsythe and Richard Stern. Edgar Spalding saw one there in January.
- Apr. 5- Merritt Gibson reports a mature white-crowned sparrow in his yard. This handsome sparrow is only an infrequent visitor and consequently a treat to see in our area.

GYRFALCONS AND GYRFALCONS AND STILL MORE.....! -Mark Elderkin  
Wolfville, N.S.

Your readers will find it of interest that on December 28, 1983, a dark phase immature Gyrfalcon was sighted on the Grand Pre' dykelands of Kings County. To my knowledge, this was the first date it was seen. I first saw it perched on a telephone pole at about 2:45 in the afternoon. After I drove back to Wolfville to get a camera equipped with a 300mm lens, the bird was found still sitting at the same spot, and four photographs were taken before a passing motorist honked his horn and scared the falcon away. While observing the bird, I noted the overall large size, the long tail, the uniformly dark chocolate-brown back, the dark breast streaked with buff, the indistinct facial mask, and the cerulean blue eyelids, bill, cere, and feet. Above all, the bird was exceptionally tame. Because I was reloading my camera when the Gyrfalcon flew from the post, I did not see its flight route. After scouring the area thoroughly with no luck, I decided to drive to Gaspereau and inform my good friend Cyril Coldwell of my experience. He was very keen that we should return to the area immediately, and this we did despite my pessimism about locating it again-- however, my next encounter with this falcon was to exceed even Cyril-the-optimist's expectations.

When we reached the dykelands we did not find the bird sitting passively on a post as we drove across the meadows. As we approached the branch in the road heading to the west end of Long Island, we both caught sight of a large dark-brown bird flying at high speed low over the ground along the creek bed, modifying its flight path with the contours of the landscape. We drove faster so that we might follow it. Also, some distance ahead, we could see a large flock of about twenty birds fly from the ground in front of the falcon. At first we took them to be Gray Partridge, so great was the difference between the extent of their wings and those of the hunter. In the twinkling of an eye, the Gyrfalcon had singled out one of the birds which were now scattered in every direction. It tightened its wings back along its body as it closed on the quarry. On contact there was a puff of feathers, and momentarily we lost sight of both birds as they went down on the south side of the creek. When we had reached a point on the road parallel to the creek, the Gyrfalcon was about 80 metres away on top of a hen pheasant, mantling with its wings spread downward over the kill. From the truck we watched intently with a 20 powerspotting scope as it plucked the breast of its prey. After about 15 minutes, we decided to try to get closer to it so that we might get more photographs. As we walked on an angle towards it, the bird screamed and flew from the pheasant; both of us feared that it might not return. To our surprise it took a direct line of flight, not away from us as we had anticipated, but rather toward us; and upon reaching a point eight metres directly overhead, it hovered there, looking down at us and screaming in defiance at our intrusion. Shortly thereafter we returned to the truck to return to Wolfville.



On our way , we met Brenda Thexton and Jean Timpa, two avid birders and members of the Blomidon Naturalists' Society, who just happened to be out in search of a rare bird that day. They could not have been more fortunate. To make sure that they did not miss this opportunity, we went back to the site with them. As we passed Cyril's scope back and forth, discussing what we were seeing, the Gyrfalcon suddenly looked beyond our position, screamed and took flight toward the east. A red-tailed Hawk, perhaps thinking this bird a Raven dining on carrion, apparently had it in its mind to pirate this morsel. The hawk could not have been more wrong in its assessment of this diner. As the hawk reached a high position over the kill, the Gyrfalcon plummeted, unseen from the rear, and hit the Red-tail hard on the shoulder with a closed foot. The hawk catapulted earthward, landing with a thud, but was apparently only shaken up. It then turned its attention back to the sky in search of its attacker. The Red-tail had unfortunately landed only about 25 metres from the pheasant and eight time the Gyrfalcon climbed in the air to swoop at the grounded hawk. With each pass, the hawk flipped over on its back, with its feet and talons outstretched, perhaps hoping to "scratch" the fleeting bullet of brown. Soon realizing it would gain neither flight nor food from its position, the hawk hopped a good distance away from the pheasant in a very undignified, "un-hawklike" manner. After finally



GYRFALCON- DARK PHASE

gaining flight and needed distance from the area, it perhaps was thankful to still be aware that its crop was not full. The Gyrfalcon soon returned to its kill and resumed dining. It was about 4:45 when Cyril and I left the area for home. Very, very pleased!

#### Further Notes by Jim Wolford and Jean Timpa

Over subsequent weeks, until at least February 19, presumably the same dark immature Gryfalcon was seen on several occasions by a variety of observers. It was seen capturing another pheasant and a field vole and it was also feeding on the remains of a black duck.

Also during February, there was at least one more Gyrfalcon in our area, an adult in the light gray phase which was closely observed by Bernard Forsythe in the Canard Valley.

On March 22nd, Stephen Fleming spotted, without benefit of binoculars, in the back of the Acadia University gym, a large white bird flying swiftly towards Grand Pre'. He felt fairly certain it was a white phase Gyrfalcon. Brenda Thexton and daughter, Dianne Thorpe, took up the challenge as soon as they heard the report, headed to Grand Pre' and had a very fine look at the dark -phased Gyrfalcon only.

The white gyr apparently circled around because at approximately 1:15 p.m. Dianne's friends, Jimmy and Debbie Daigle, were just approaching their warehouse by the Port Williams railway crossing when they noticed a very large bird with white head, breast, "leggings" and speckled back sitting on the dyke on top of something it had just killed. They watched the bird ( which Debbie identified as a Gyrfalcon) consume its prey at close range for about 15 minutes. They also noticed its characteristic tameness and approachability.

At 7:00 a.m. on the 31st of March another person coming across the Port Williams dyke described a large white bird which sounded like the one the Daigle's had seen.

## LICHENS

Karen Leigh Casselman  
Cheverie, Hants Co., N.S.

If lichens excite me, perhaps it is because their plain unprepossessing exterior hides the exciting dye potential, yielding as they do a wide range of colours from pink and rose to purple, magenta and plum. I specialize in using Umbilicate lichens whose preferred habitat is granite outcroppings in semi-forested areas often near water. I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to teach in many places and so to work with the Umbilicate lichens from Alberta to Michigan to Newfoundland. I will add further specimens to my collection later this year when I teach Aeolian Workshops at Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, and in 1985 when I travel to Scotland and Ireland to work on my next book.

While it was once thought that each Umbilicate species gave a different dye colour, my research has indicated otherwise. I now use species interchangeably, no matter where collected. A small amount of dry lichen will dye a surprisingly large amount of yarn, but a long processing time is required before a vat can be used. The species I most often rely on include Umbilicaria muhlenbergii, Umbilicaria mammulata, and a recently reclassified Umbilicate, Lasallia papulosa.

Like other authors, I guess I have to say I wrote Craft of the Dyer because it is the book I wish I had when I began. To quote Mason Hale: "Books for identification have been so badly out of date, overly technical or inaccurate that one has little chance to correctly name an unknown specimen." Having no background in botany, studies in journalism and history nevertheless prepared me as a researcher but even so the six years spent working on the manuscript were busy ones. In addition to collecting and identifying lichens, I gave workshops, taught, and personally tested four to six dyebaths for each of the more than 150 plants and lichens in my book.

Whereas art, weaving and writing are recreation for many, they are my fulltime work. I am grouchy and bored when idle, and cannot sit without reading, scraping a specimen, skeining yarn or tying warp ends. Each aspect of my career, exclusive of teaching, is solitary by nature, but I am comfortable with this. Looms and typewriters are not easily shared. Outings such as the BNS fieldtrips are especially pleasurable in contrast to my studio work, as I can collect while I socialize and attempt to learn about birds.

There is a common myth that it is "easier" to make non-realistic or abstract art than it is to make representational art. I came from an art background where I specialized in portraiture and figure drawing. Now, in weaving, it takes me as much time to do a non-functional gallery piece as it does to make, say, a wrap or throw. Each item I create usually requires about thirty steps, from collecting the dyeplant to the final washing. While I mind very much standing in line at the supermarket, I happily tend lichen vats for a year or more and thread 1000 strands of wool through the loom heddles. Such are the idiosyncratic tendencies of those of us obsessed with our work.

When it became clear that my current research was pointing to new conclusions, I realized a second book was lurking within my record files and stacks of paper. While I accept the challenge and enjoy the fringe benefits, I sometimes sit behind my typewriter wishing I were Mason Hale. Lichens can be puzzling when a species is collected far from the usual range. I always consult Hale, my right hand, and Dr. Brodo, my left hand, and hope for another field trip with Dr. Mass of NRC. I visit the Acadia herbarium, yet often I am left feeling I know so little of all there is to understand about lichens. One of the greatest benefits of teaching a course such as that I have at the Nova Scotia Art and Design is that keen students contribute to their teacher's ongoing self-teaching.



A study grant from the Canada Council will assist me in the research I undertake in Scotland and Ireland next spring. This along with work done in Cornwall, Devon and Wales in 1981, will comprise a second book whose focus will be dyeing with lichens. I enjoy hearing from former students scattered now from Inuvik to St. John's. They send specimens, which I identify if required, and they keep me in touch with their own work as dyers. Botanists and naturalists often give me papers, magazines and clippings, all of which are appreciated as my own reading does not



regularly extend to many scientific publications now available. Someone recently sent an article written in Finnish, and thoughtfully, an English translation, while another writer located this obscure fact: Scottish highlanders were convinced of the benefit of wearing socks knitted from lichen-dyed wool. Apparently these socks not only wore longer but prevented blisters. This lore is always of great interest to me, and it helps make the writing of a book far more human and more enjoyable than the serious task it seems to be.

HAWK BANDED HERE FOUND IN THE STATES  
from "The Acadian" Wednesday, April 4, 1984

A young Red-tailed hawk, banded a year ago in Port Williams is recovering well from surgery according to the Wolpole, Mass. Times.

The injured bird was discovered by wildlife officer Norman Smith and taken eventually to the Moosehill Wildlife Sanctuary. The hawk became an object of public sympathy in the Walpole area.

Smith contacted Wolville area bird banders Cyril Coldwell and Bernard Forsythe, who had first encountered the hawk as a nestling.

Local ornithologist Sherman Boates says it is uncommon for banded birds to be discovered. The chances are as rare as five in a thousand, he notes.

Boates, himself, had some unusual luck this past summer on Sable Island when he found a Sanderling banded 13 years ago. His discovery marked the oldest banding of that species of shorebird on record.

Editor's Note: We reprint this article from the Kentville Advertiser so that our readers outside the Advertiser circulation area can also be aware of some of the results of the bird banding some of our members have been carrying out.

Wolville Christmas Bird Count

The 1983 count, on December 18, was held relatively early due to Christmas and New Years falling upon week-ends. This early date undoubtedly had bearing upon the presence and abundance of certain species and the absence of others. Moreover, the weather was open during the week prior to the count and there was little ice in the fresh water and estuarine areas. These features too contributed to what was seen.

Fifty-three people participated in the count. There were 19 field parties, and 13 feeders were observed for at least part of the day. It was an enjoyable day to be out: temperatures and winds were invigoratingly brisk, walking and driving conditions were excellent, and lighting for binoculars and telescopes was quite reasonable. In addition, we had the fine hospitality, company and cheer of the Gibsons to look forward to that evening.

With respect to the attached summary list for the count, several comments and features are worthy of mention.

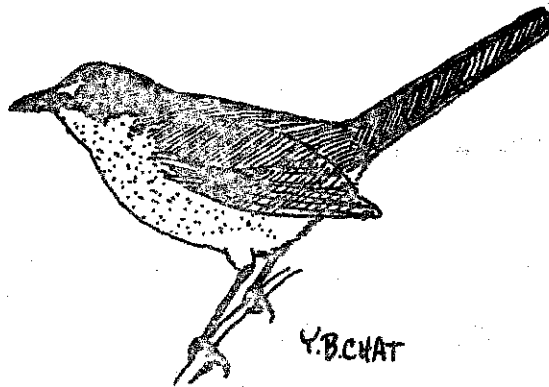
Comments:

Green-winged Teal - a rare occurrence for this area; the early count date and open weather enhanced the chances of sighting this species.

Red-tailed Hawk - the high numbers reflect an upswing in vole populations as well as the usual availability of food at meat processing plants. Certainly some of the same individuals were counted more than once during the day; this last comment is also applicable to Rough-legs and eagles.

Common Crow - numbers based solely on the late afternoon count by four observers of the two main flight-lines to the Boot Island Roost. The count is minimal numbers as crows were still flying when it was too dark to acquire estimates and a third flight-line was not observed.

Yellow-breasted Chat - unusual for a count day but not a rare winter sighting in the Wolfville count area.



Other Features:

- Ring-billed Gulls are becoming a regular occurrence on the count. The presence of sewage lagoons and poultry processing plants undoubtedly contributes to the presence of these birds.
- The relatively low number of sparrows may reflect the open weather prior to, and during, the count. In addition, Tree Sparrows (and larks and buntings) had not arrived in appreciable numbers up to the count date.
- Absences are part of any count. Notable amongst these this year are Common Merganser, Gray Partridge, and of recent years - Long-eared Owl and Mockingbird.
- Red-throated Loon, Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon, Winter Wren and C. Grackle were reported during the count period (3 days before and after count date). Loons, eider, and scoter will probably become more frequent components of the count as they are more common in Minas Basin during winter than previously thought. Often, one can observe these birds in the basin over the high tide period.

In closing, it would be very satisfying to see more young folk involved, not only in this annual count but in all activities of the Blomidon Naturalists. It is up to us to encourage their interest and participation.

With grateful thanks to all,  
Peter Smith, Wolfville N.S.

Species seen:

Great Blue Heron	2	Common Raven	444
Canada Goose	501	Common Crow	18300
Mallard	14	Blk-cap Chickadee	145
Black Duck	1400	Boreal Chickadee	5
Pintail	1	White-br. Nuthatch	7
Green-winged Teal	6	Brown Creeper	2
White-winged Scoter	2	Red-br. Nuthatch	9
Sharp-shinned Hawk	6	American Robin	13
Red-tailed Hawk	80	Golden-cr. Kinglet	15
Rough-legged Hawk	16	Bohemian Waxwing	56
Bald Eagle, adult	8	Cedar Waxwing	30
immature	10	Starling	5255
Marsh Hawk	5	Yellow-breasted Chat	1
American Kestrel	1	House Sparrow	1802
Ruffed Grouse	6	Red-winged Blackbird	1
Ring-necked Pheasant	230	Brown-headed Cowbird	135
Common Snipe	1	Evening Grosbeak	483
Great Black-backed G.	1007	Purple Finch	38
Herring Gull	5332	Pine Grosbeak	5
Ring-billed Gull	35	Common Redpoll	25
Rock Dove	1725	Pine Siskin	8
Mourning Dove	91	American Goldfinch	386
Barred Owl	2	Savannah Sparrow	4
Short-eared Owl	1	Dark-eyed Junco	179
Belted Kingfisher	1	Tree Sparrow	19
Hairy Woodpecker	7	Song Sparrow	35
Downy Woodpecker	18	White-throated Sparrow	14
Horned Lark	95	Snow Bunting	5
Blue Jay	302	Total of 56 Species	38326

UNRELATED OBSERVATIONS OF MEXICO

Ellis Gertridge  
Gaspereau

(Editors Note: Ellis and his wife toured much of Mexico during the 1983 Christmas season.)

Coconut Palm groves for coconuts and copra may be seen in Yucatan. In all, Mexico has about 130 varieties of palms.

At altitudes of 3000 to 600 feet much cacti grows. One tree-like cactus is referred to as the "uncombed Cactus" as the branches grow in all directions from the large trunk. The cactus that produces straight, vertical limbs or branches from one large trunk is called the Organ Pipe Cactus.

Near Tuxtla Gutierrez, a fly factory covers many acres. At this laboratory, 20 million Mediterranean Fruit flies are reared and subjected to radiation to make the male flies sterile. As the female fly mates only once, these sterile males are released as a control measure. Many flies are exported to areas where the Fruit Fly is a problem.

A Christmas flower that grows wild is the Poinsette, often a large shrub in the yards of small adobe buildings. Another Christmas flower is the Calla Lily. They are taken to the market by people carrying large bundles or two large bundles on the backs of burros. Nativity scenes are made using Spanish Mosses, cones and bromeliad flowers.

In the higher parts of the Sierra Madra, pine forests are under government control, and no trees can be cut without permission even on privately owned land. Small trees are dug up and sold as transplants, especially at Christmas time. This can be done without permission from the government.

At the approach to a village on the highways is a large man-made bump, much the same as used in parking lots and here called speed traps. In Mexico they are referred to as "Sleeping Policeman". They are very effective as they are larger than here and the top is corrugated in form.

The rock formation in the Sierra Madre Mountains is very interesting. Stratification at all angles, in some places, vertical; syncline and anticlines can be seen driving along the roads. Many rocks are limestone, others are red with iron, some green with copper, some volcanic. The roadside in one area had

volcanic ash swept in windrows to the side. These are necessary to keep cars from sliding on the bad curves. The local description of crooked roads is "Monkey-tail curves".

Sugar cane is a crop of the Yucatan and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec where there are large fields and refineries. Cane is cut soon after it blooms with a large white plume.

Banana is a major crop on the low fertile lands of tropical Mexico. While most bananas grown are of the appearance of those on our markets, the native markets have a variety of kinds. Some are large and others are quite small. The apple banana is a tasty and favorite small banana.

Chicle is a gum-like substance made from the juice of the sapodilla tree. It is much the same as rubber from the rubber tree. The tree grows in the jungle of eastern Mexico, mostly in the remote areas. The farmers, Chiclaros, tap trees about once in four years. In some cases it is flown out from private air-fields in small planes. Chicle is the basis of chewing gum.

Due to the hot climate, the only cattle that are thrifty are the Brama breed from India. They are white or light grey in colour and are herded by Rancharos on small horses. The Egret are constant companions of the cattle (the egrets are mostly of the white species).

Some flat areas that have more depth of soil are used for rice growing. Planted during the rainy season, rice will thrive and be harvested at the beginning of the winter or dry season. Extremely large fields stretching for 20 miles or more are harvested by combines on caterpillar treads.

The coastal plain of the Yucatan Peninsula is basically level limestone and coral with little top soil and much broken rock, and is about ten metres above sea level. The soil and rock are porous and even during rainy times there is no water remaining on the surface for over an hour. There are no brooks or ponds. The roads need no ditches or bridges and many roads are straight for miles. Water supplies come from underground rivers and many windmills are seen. Some places have water holes which are caves or slump-holes above underground streams. Mayan cities and villages were built near these cenotes and were considered sacred to the water god, Chaac.

(To be continued in the next issue of the BNS Newsletter, Ed.)



Sapodilla  
*Achras zapota*

## ILE HAUTE

John Erskine

(This is the conclusion of the article we started in the December 1983 of the Newsletter; from the Journal of Education Dec. 1956.)

We woke to a cold wet day, to low fog and a bleak north wind. With my painful cough I did not look forward to pushing through dripping alders, so I voted to explore the cliffs of the southern shore which would be sheltered from the wind. In most ways this was a bad choice, as we found, for the cliffs lifted pink and sheer from the steep beaches of biscuit-shaped pebbles or from tumbled cubes of basalt slimy with weed. The green slopes that we had thought to climb, turned out to be crumbling rock-faces tufted with seaside goldenrod and dangling clusters of bluebells.

Tide was low and flies were buzzing about the rockweed, and small birds flitted among the flies. Redstarts and yellowthroats fluttered about the rocks, and a pewee, first of the season, mewed unmistakably from a fallen spruce. Then another small flycatcher flirted for a fly and alighted in front of me, a yellow-bellied flycatcher which I do not see every year, though that morning I had good views of four of them. Once a chunk of rock exploded above us as it ricocheted from a ledge, and, looking up, we saw the curved wings and fanned tail of the duck-hawk towering up into the fog.

We clambered over a barrier of sea-stacks which projected from the shore, and a group of birds rose in chequered black and white and dropped again in a long line opposite us where they rode the waves and whistled at us enquiringly. They were black gull-mots, "sea pigeons", black with a white splash in each wing and with scarlet bills. Three larger birds rounded an outlying rock, caught sight of us and dived. They emerged a little farther away and cried out the trembling mirthless laughter of loons. Two were in pale immature plumage but one had the striking black and white of the adult, no doubt an unmated bird.

In some species of birds the proportion unmated is very high, and it seems probable that the pattern of their lives incorporates some automatic control of the birth-rate. To some extent human beings plan their complex activities with an end, if only a fictitious one, in mind. We work a little more systematically than a hand-to-mouth existence demands if we keep ahead of us some goal, such as "getting on", "saving for a rainy day", "getting married", and this makes it difficult for us to realize the state of mind of birds which have no knowledge of any goal, even when they have achieved it many times. For them life is a series of small activities which are touched off by trigger situations when the birds are in suitable psycho-physical state. This is not to deny them intelligence in the adjustment of these drives to the actual situation, but intelligence does not initiate or give purpose to their actions, for they cannot symbolize these purposes in words. Of course, in much of our behaviour we are no more purposeful than birds. We do not eat in order to obtain more energy but because we are hungry or because dinner-hour has come.

Every species of birds has its own chain of activities leading to rearing a family. Most males select a feeding area and then set out to find a mate to share it. Normally the female needs to be excited by one or more males before she is ready for mating. Many males go through an elaborate sexual dance, others proffer a beakful of nesting material. All methods seem to work like cranking a motor, the initiation of an activity which will then continue automatically to its conclusion, and the cranking is part of the previous activity. A break anywhere along the chain may abort the whole process. Lack of spring food may counter the growth of the gonads; lack of an available nesting site or range may preclude courtship; uncourted females may pass the whole season unaroused. The planet Jupiter swings to its nearest point to the sun and intensifies the whirling storms in the solar atmosphere; on the earth the northern lights flicker and glow in sympathy, and storms rush untimely about the world, so that whole species of birds pass the season unmated. Are we so very different?

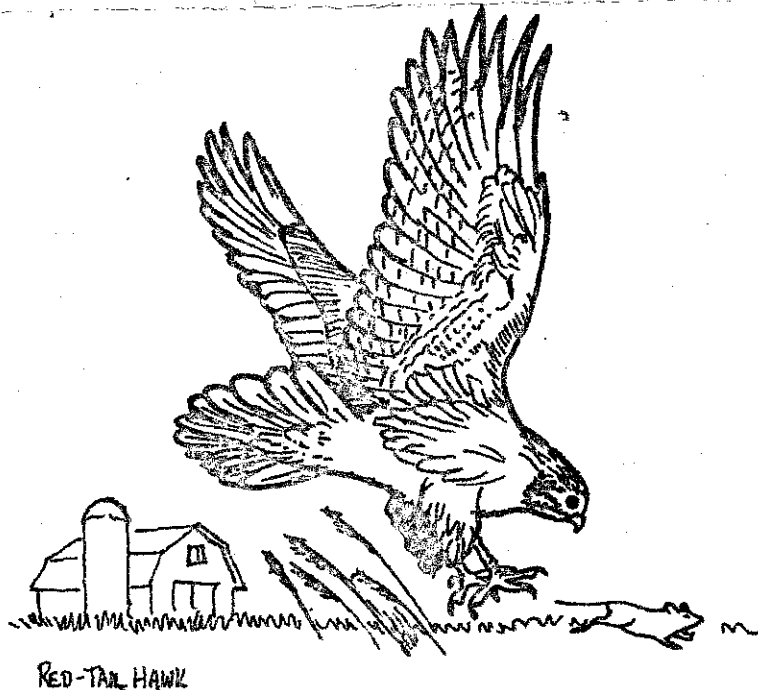
The untimely storms bear heavily on the farmers, and the failure of their purchasing power shakes industrial societies, and the great uneasiness of peoples breaks out in long wars in which men die and children go unborn.

We stumbled on around the cliffs. Once a slope came down nearly to within reach, but the wet crumbling rock was slippery and dangerous, so we went on. Then steep cliffs rose direct from the sea. We might have waded around them, but we could not see beyond, and the tide was already turning. So we returned dismally. Later we learned that we had rounded the western point where climbing was possible, but the fog had wrapped everything in grey and had cut off our view even to the top of the cliff.

That evening we came out to have a look at the weather, and I commented upon the pale gleam of moths flying in the beam of the light. How did they avoid being knocked down by raindrops? Later we were awakened by much shouting and running up and down the stairs to the tower, and in the morning, when I came downstairs, I found a row of birds laid out on the table. My "moths" had turned out to be migrating birds, and the ornithologist and the entomologist had stood under the light, catching birds in butterfly nets, letting the unwanted ones escape and killing with a cyanide bottle those needed for the museum. These included a blackbilled cuckoo, a pewee, a yellow-bellied flycatcher and three warblers, chestnut-sided, magnolia and mourning. Seemingly our island lay along a local flyway for migration. Birds and a red-backed salamander were the only native vertebrates of the island, though once there had been rabbits, and the son of a former lightkeeper had introduced toads and bullfrogs.

The next morning was our last, and Wilfred and I scrambled down the northern slope where the whitlow-grass flowered white and the mealy primroses made small azure patches on the crumbling rock. Here, hiding in the damp sunless crevices, were the northern mosses which we were seeking--Encalypta with its extinguisher-like caps, Tortula mucronifolia not known nearer than Cape Breton, and a single patch of Desmatodon longifolius of which the nearest known station was in Gaspé and the next in Greenland. Here was another problem of distribution. The cliff-flowers might have come from the west, but this moss was from the Arctic. Such things cannot be attributed to accident, especially when we have other plants that fit into the same pattern. A long cold period in Nova Scotia after the ice had withdrawn but while it still existed as a barrier to the hardwood flora of the west, would have allowed the southward spread of plants from the northern nunataks.

We climbed again up the cliffs of the east end, where in a damp gully the twisted-stalk was dangling its fringe of shell-pink bells, and came out at last in the open pastures along the southern cliff. There was no sun, and the distant shore was misty blue and indistinct except for Cape Split which lifted its ragged point against grey distance. From this height the waves were smoothed from the sea and only ground swell showed, and we saw the tiny boat approaching from Harbourville across the heaving leaden bay.





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OR, see him at the next meeting , or give it to some other member of the BNS executive.

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**Editors' Note:**

Some readers may have wondered where the events described in Wildlife Encounters, by Edgar McKay, took place. (This article was published in the last two issues of the Newsletter) The encounters occurred behind Bear River, Nova Scotia, near the border of Digby and Annapolis counties.

