

BLONIDON NATURALISTS' SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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MARCH 1985

The BNS Newsletter is published on 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, water, air and stars."

from the BNS constitution

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the time and talents of all those who have kept our voluntary organization running so smoothly, especially: speakers Don Purchase, John Cohrs, John Pickwell, and all those who have contributed to the ever interesting and successful member's night; field trip leaders, Richard Stern, Merritt Gibson, Bernard Forsythe, and Jim Wolford and Tom Herman for leading the Keji snowshoe and ski trips; to Rachel Erskine and Brenda Thexton for the delicious goodies served at the end of meetings; and to all those who have written for or assisted in the other ways in the production of this newsletter.

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SPRING AND SUMMER PROGRAMS

EVENING PROGRAMS (Monday Evenings 7:30 pm)

All these meetings will be held in Room 234 of the Beveridge Arts Center at Acadia University.

1. May 13: Jim Jotcham will speak to us on the Environmental Effects of Herbicides

2. June 17: Dr. Albert Roland, an author of "Flora of Nova Scotia" and "--Physiography of Nova Scotia" will speak to us on the Early History of Geology of Nova Scotia.

There are no evening meetings in July and August but come to the field trips.

3. September 16: To be Announced - the June 1985 issue of this Newsletter.

FIELD TRIPS (Unless otherwise noted, meet at the Acadia Gym parking lot at the time indicated)

1. April 24 (Wednesday): An evening trip to look at owls, woodcock, and amphibians. 6:30 pm. Led by Bernard Forsythe and Jim Wolford. Bring warm clothing, boots and flashlights.

2. April 28 (Sunday): Local birding with the Nova Scotia Bird Society. 9:45 am or 10:00 am at Grand Pre Park; led by Jim Wolford. This is an all day outing, so bring a lunch.

3. May 12 (Sunday): Nature walk to on the trails of Blomidon Park to look at spring flowers, ferns, and birds. 8 am or 8:30 at lower Blomidon Park; Sherman Williams leader. Bring a lunch

4. May 26 (Sunday): All day at the Amherst Bird Sanctuary. 7:00 am or 10:30 at the Sanctuary. Maps will be available at the May 13 evening meeting. Bring a lunch.

5. June 9 (Sunday): Canoeing on Black River Lake. 9:00 am. Bring a lunch and a canoe if you have one. We will explore the islands in the middle part of the lake, looking at plants, animals and birds. Led by Tom Herman and Larry Bogan.

6. June 16 (Sunday): Yellow Lady's Slippers field trip, 9:00 am. Led by Sam van der Kloet to the Poplar Grove area in Hants County.

7. July 7 (Sunday): A look at intertidal life with the Halifax Field Naturalists, 10:00 am. Led by Jim Wolford and Sherman Bleakney to Kingsport or Evangaline Beach. Bring rubber boots.

8. July 21 (Sunday): Shoreline geology of the Noel Shore. 10:00 am. Led by David Hope-Simpson. This will be an all day trip; bring boots and a lunch.

9. August 11 (Sunday): A field trip with the N.S. Bird Society to look at shorebirds. 8:45 am or at Grand Pre Park at 9:00 am. Led by Jim Wolford. Bring boots.

10. September 29 (Sunday): A look at the late shorebirds with the N.S.B.S. Meet at 12:45 noon or at Grand Pre Park at 1:00 pm. Led by Jim Wolford. Bring boots.

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE- JUNE 21

Please send any contributions, including interesting sightings, longer articles of a subject of interest to you, or nature poetry as soon as possible to: Jean Timpa, P.O. Box 1382, Wolfville, N.S., B0P 1X0. Our Newsletter cannot flourish without contributions from each member at least once in awhile. Too often the same people seem to have to write for us. How about some brave new words from some brave new authors? It really isn't so bad. Try soon and see for yourself!

BLOMIDON NATURALISTS' SOCIETY ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are still only \$5.00 per person (only \$1.00 for persons 16 years old or younger) and are due for 1985.

Please send or give your dues to:

Dr. Norman McGuinness
% School of Business
Acadia University
Wolville, N.S. BOP 1X0

See him at meetings, field trips or give the money and address to some other member of the BNS executive. How about a membership to BNS as the ideal Easter present for those who have everything except us!??!

SAVE YOUR ONION SKINS

The next time you peel an onion, consider setting the dry brown outer skin aside for Karen Casselman. She needs them to dye wool. Karen is off to Scotland and has offered to speak on the Lichens of the Hebrides when she returns.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

CROSS-COUNTRY SKI OUTING AT KEJI

Bob Helleur
Wolville, N.S.

The weather and snow conditions couldn't have been better for the beginning of Canada Ski Week and for our annual BNS winter outing at Kejimikujik National Park (January 19). It was sunny with little wind, a temperature of -10 C and a light, dry snow coverage of about a 50 centimeters. This made cross-country skiing a winter, outdoor treat. A good turnout of skiers (10 adults, 6 children and one eager youngster strapped on his father's back) gathered at the Park information centre, all of us impatient to hit the trail. After wishing our fellow snowshoers a good outing, we drove 2 km inside the park to popular ski trail that would lead us to Big Dam Lake. The 5 km, double-track trail was in excellent condition. Some of us waxed our skis to help stop backsliding. It wasn't lunchtime yet so we decided to work up a good appetite and

eat after a full day's skiing. A number of hills at the beginning of the trail helped us limber up our unused muscles and test our balance. The soft snow broke our falls.

The skiers soon separated into groups, setting their own pace. One group ventured onto a side trail towards the Mersey River which looped around and back to the main trail further on. Animal tracks were abundant; rabbit and white-tail deer tracks were seen often; the presence of mice, squirrel and porcupine were also noted. One set of tracks near the shores of the Mersey River suggested to us that a weasel had been stocking after a mouse not long ago. In the forest where there were stands of young hardwood trees, we noticed where rabbits had been feeding on their winter diet of tender bark.

The soft sound of boreal chickadees overhead quickly reminded us we were neglecting our feathered friends. We stopped skiing for a moment to listen and watch. Black-capped and boreal chickadees, red- and white-breasted nuthatches were sighted darting in among the evergreens. A few solitary white-winged crossbills were seen perched in full view on top of the pines. A flock of pine grosbeaks crossed our path further on. Other bird sightings reported included hairy woodpeckers, juncos and kinglets.

The groomed trail came to an end at the campsite of Big Dam Lake, but fortunately someone had broken trail ahead. Several of us, full of adventure, not wanting to turn around, skied on. The winter scene was even more beautiful here. The snow-covered branches of the conifers made for a very picturesque trail, the closeness of the forest, peaceful and serene. Up ahead, a community of birds were making their presence heard, somewhere among a grove of hemlocks. A barred owl was sighted perched high up on a majestic hemlock, seemingly taking the verbal abuse lightly. The woodland trail came to an end in a pine stand of white pine near the lake's edge.

It was getting late and the sun was low. We had forgotten all about lunch. After rounding everyone up, we headed back the way we came. We knew a hearty meal and a hot drink was waiting for us back at the cars. It had been a perfect ski outing except for one of us, T.H., who unfortunately lost his car keys somewhere near the end of the trail, some 7 km back! I volunteered* and skied back to

where he thought he dropped them but couldn't find them in the deep snow. I was rewarded with delicious chocolate brownies.

*(Editor's Note, J.T.: I'm glad Bob thought he volunteered to go back for those keys. Actually he was "elected" by popular demand as the rest of us were too worn out and inexperienced to make the trip twice in one day! He was the only one qualified! Nice try for the "needle in the haystack", Bob.)

SNOWSHOERS IN KEJI ON JANUARY 19

Jim Wolford

Wolfville

Just like last year our choice of a date was, by dumb luck, very fortuitous. There was plenty of deep fluffy snow, the temperature was just cold enough to prevent thawing and we had partly sunny skies.

I was one of the snowshoers and, after a pause to replace a brand new but faulty binding, off we trekked on the Jeremys Bay Trail. This year the birding was much more productive than last year's very cold day. Among the species seen were several flocks of crossbills including some white-winged, groups of pine grosbeaks, gray jays looking for offerings from us, several red-breasted nuthatches and chickadees, a few golden-crowned kinglets and a foraging hairy woodpecker.

There were lots of tracks, those of deer and snowshoe hares being abundant and everywhere. We saw fewer signs of red squirrels, weasels, small mammals such as mice and shrews, a grouse, and only one porcupine. For the porcupine, we saw the "track" first, then spotted one up in a tree, and later I discovered a den under some low spruce boughs.

WINTER-BIRDS FIELD TRIP, NSBS-BNS

Richard Stern

Kentville, N.S.

The annual (this is the second year we have had it) combined winter Kings County Field trip of the Blomidon Naturalists' Society and the N.S. Bird Society was held on February 2. The weather was atrocious. Last year we had warm, damp fog and rain which made visibility almost zero, and this year there was a heavy snowfall warning, and

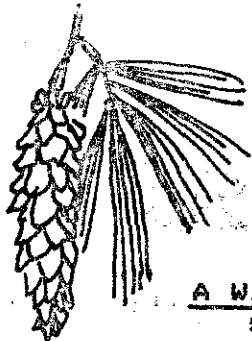
indeed it continued to snow heavily all day which made visibility poor and driving difficult.

Nevertheless several brave and hardy souls managed to make it in one piece from Halifax, and several other brave souls made it from Wolfville and Kentville region, and off we set to the dykes of Grand Pre and Canard area. Despite the atrocious weather, we were well-rewarded with lots of raptors, in particular, and it was a great day for those people, of whom there were several, who had not yet seen bald eagles in large numbers or rough legged hawks. The route was a slight variation on last year's; we went up the Gaspereau Valley, down to Grand Pre then across to Port William's dyke to Lower Canard, around to Canard Poultry and finishing up again back at Wolfville. The snow never let up at all, but despite this we managed to see a total of 36 bald eagles, 27 red tailed hawks, an estimated 9 rough legged hawks, and stopping at various feeders on the way, we saw evening grosbeaks, one purple finch, both downy and hairy woodpeckers and a white breasted nuthatch which was a lifer for at least one member of the party.

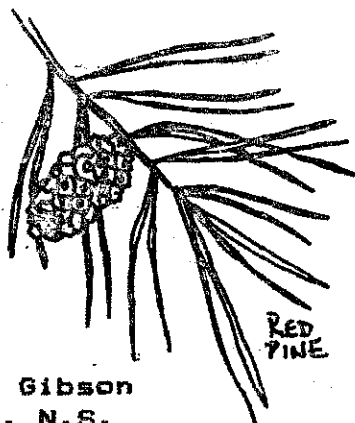
The particular highlights were nine bald eagles in one tree in the Gaspereau Valley, and then at lunchtime there were 14 eagles in one tree with several more soaring overhead before disappearing into the snow. When we turned off the road to have lunch about 20 pheasants "exploded" from the bush right next to us.

We finished off the day at Canard Poultry where, among the enormous flock of greater black-backed and herring gulls, were three glaucous gulls all in first winter plumage. These were easy to compare with the black-backed and herrings sizewise, and obligingly stood close to the road and allowed us to study its plumage and bill coloring, etc.

As far as gyrfalcons were concerned, the same situation occurred as last year. A beautiful bird had spent all the previous week sitting on a pole in the middle of Grand Pre dyke so tame you could almost talk to it, but on the day of the field trip, it was, of course, nowhere to be seen. Despite this we all had a good day and once again a big thank you to the people who drove all the way in the heavy snow to make the trip worthwhile.



WHITE
PINE



RED
PINE

A WINTER NATURE WALK

Sunday, March 3

Merritt Gibson
Canning, N.S.

Eighteen people participated in our Winter Nature Walk held this year in Greenfield. The day was sunny, and we following a path through a mixed woodland and along the edge of a swamp.

The snowshoers in the group, lead by Bernie Forsythe, crossed the swamp to look for birds. The highlight of their trip was a northern shrike which patrolled back and forth along the swamp. Later, everyone returned to the swamp and found it perched on top of a dead spruce tree.

The rest of us strolled along the woodland path, and practiced "keying-out" winter shrubs and trees while looking through the tree tops for birds. The shrubs identified included hazelnut, wild raisin, lambskill, spirea, willows, and rhododendron. Red maple, oak, trembling aspen, large-toothed aspen, white birch, and wire birch were all identified by the shape and arrangement of their buds. The conifers were more fun; white and red pine, white spruce, fir, and tamarack were easy to identify, but convincing Wolford of the differences between red and black spruce proved to be a challenge! White-winged crossbills were numerous, and we had several excellent opportunities to watch them in the tops of spruce trees. Red-breasted nuthatches were present as were also black-capped chickadees and one downy woodpecker.

After the two groups joined, Bernie found the markings of a black-backed woodpecker on a dead spruce tree. This woodpecker prefers dead conifers and, rather than drilling, peels away large strips of bark while it searches for insects.

We returned to Wolfville by way of Lumsden Dam where we looked for mergansers (5) and golden-eyes (0).

WILD LIFE REPORTS

TRIVIAL TIDBITS

No. 5

Compiled by Jim Wolford



- *Dec. 22, 1984--an orange-crowned warbler, a palm warbler, and a chipping sparrow (ES) on the Christmas Bird Count at Economy.
- *Dec. 24, 1984--a harbor seal in Cornwallis River just east of Port Williams (JSB).
- *Dec. 25, 1984--many cardinals, fox squirrels, and gray squirrels in Chicago (JW).
- *Jan. 1985--entire month was unusually sunny and snowy with lower than average rainfall (H. Chron. Herald)
- *early Jan.--Bill Martell caught a stunned goshawk at Starr's Point.
- *Jan. 1--five water pipits and 125 Canada geese at Grand Pre (BBT).
- *Jan. 2 to 7--a canvasback drake, two saw-whet owls, a harrier, a woodcock, a black-bellied plover, six water pipits, two myrtle warblers, two palm warblers, two common yellowthroats, and a vesper sparrow on Bon Portage Island (ME, PCS).
- *Jan. 8--a partial-albino goldfinch at a feeder in New Minas (DJD). 125 Canada geese at the mouth of the Canard River (BBT, JT).
- *Jan. 12--a jackdaw (a small European crow) seen in Halifax (MG, JW) and reported there from mid-December to mid-March (LL, NSBS, BBT).
- two long-eared owls and, separately, two short-eared owls roosting in spruces at Grand Pre Park (BLF).
- *Jan. 14--dark-gray-phase gyrfalcon at Grand Pre until March 20 (JSB, SB, EE, ME, BLF, PM, RRN, MP, RS, BBT, JT, JW)
- *Jan. 16--Lana Churchill saw a sharp-shinned hawk get an evening grosbeak and a house sparrow at one pass of her feeder (See article this issue).
- *mid-Jan.--downy woodpecker seen several times foraging on cattail stalks (BH, BBT, JT).
- *Jan. 19--tracks of coyote, red fox, and moose seen in Parrsboro area (MK, GT).

*Jan.21--a very large flock of Canada geese near Kingsport (AS).

--a pigeon apparently on a nest was covered to its head by newly fallen snow, at Acadia University (TH).

*Jan.22--an adult broad-winged hawk in Wolfville (JSB).

--a peg-legged herring gull had difficulty trying to walk in the deep snow near a feeder in Wolfville (DGT).

*Jan.24--an immature broad-winged hawk at Grand Pre (BLF).

*Jan.26--a pure flock of 72 Lapland longspurs at Grand Pre (PCS).

*Jan.27--unidentified crossbills at Port Williams (TH)

--a glaucous gull at Canard Poultry Pond (BBT).

*Jan.29--four Barrow's goldeneyes and one hooded merganser in Halifax (BBT).

*Feb.1--a pine warbler and 16 black-headed gulls in Halifax (MG, JW).

-- thirty red-tailed hawks near Canard Poultry (BBT).

*Feb.3--several ruffed grouse in trees along the New Ross Road (BF, JW).

--a young cowbird in Wolfville soliciting and being preened by a female red-winged blackbird (BBT).

*Feb.6--a flying barred owl was harassed by crows in the late afternoon at Cheverie (KLC).

*Feb.7--An ermine pursued a mouse at Cheverie (KLC).

*Feb.12--a light-gray-phase gyrfalcon seen at Grand Pre (BBT).

--four purple sandpipers at Hall's Harbour (JSB).

*Feb.15--a muskrat trapped at Grand Pre had its liver infected with cysts containing young tapeworms; the adult worms are found in cats (MB).

*Feb.16--two pintails and two ring-necked ducks at Sullivan's Pond in Dartmouth (RS, MT, JW).

--an otter near Lawrencetown, Halifax Co. (MT, JW).

--two horned grebes near Sheet Harbour (MT, JW).

*Feb.17--a cecropia moth cocoon in Wolfville (JSB).

--dark-gray gyrfalcon seen catching a black duck in flight at Grand Pre (BLF).

*Feb.20--about 50 (greater?) scaup in Annapolis Basin (BBT).

--woolly bear caterpillar of the Isia moth in Wolfville (WE).

*Feb.24--annual 'Eagle Count' for our Valley area totalled 36 bald eagles (16 adults, 20 immatures) by 15 observers on a foggy day.

--about 12 roosting owls in a woodlot near Prescott House (MB).

*Feb.25--a common grackle in Wolfville (JSB).

*Feb.26--a lesser black-backed gull at Digby (LL); seen March 10 by BBT.

*Mar.2--two separate flocks of 100 Canada geese in Canard area (BBT).

--captive great horned owl on its nest (CKC).

*Mar.3--a northern shrike near Greenfield; also lots of snow-fleas, springtails, on the snow there (BNS).

Mar.9--at least 400 Canada geese near Starr's Point; a hooded merganser below Lumsden Dam (JSB).

*Mar.10--a harbour seal just above the Annapolis Causeway; also 20 red-throated loons and many other diving birds in the Annapolis Basin (BBT).

--an Iceland gull and two Savannah sparrows at Wolfville (BBT, JT).

--two snow geese, a blue and a white, on P.E.I. (LC).

--a flicker at Grand Pre (JGT); one was at a feeder in Hortonville most of the winter (MD).

*Mar.11--a mink below Lumsden Dam (BBT, JT).

*Mar.13--a rat foraging among pheasants at a Wolfville feeder (JSB).

--at least 1600 Canada geese in Canard Valley (MG, DT, JW).

--two rough-legged hawks (PJA-S).

*Mar.14--a yellow-headed blackbird, and eight grackles at Port Williams (LC).

--three flocks of cedar waxwings, Wolfville (ES, BBT, JT).

--two crows nest-building in Wolfville (ME).

*Mar.17--a killdeer at Lower Canard (LL); also sighted at Canning, Mar.29 (BBT), Port Williams (LC), and Grand Pre (JGT).

--400 cedar waxwings and 50 robins in orchards at Gaspereau (EG, BBT, JT); there was a widespread invasion by waxwings in March and in greater numbers than usual.

*Mar.18--two Bohemian waxwings in Wolfville (ME).

--two fox sparrows at Greenwich (LL).

*Mar.22--a woodcock giving flight song near Lumsden Dam (ME, LL).

*Mar.23--a woodcock seen at White Rock (RRN).

*Mar.24--common murrees and many diving ducks in Chester Basin (JSB).

*Mar.27--a red-tailed hawk sitting on a nest with one egg, many cedar waxwings and robins, and robins and grackles singing all on the South Mountain (BBT).

--a raven on its nest with 3 eggs near Gaspereau (ME, BLF).

--a rusty blackbird singing near Gaspereau (ME, BLF).

*Mar.28--a Barrow's goldeneye in Pugwash area (BBT).

*Mar.29--a flying mourning cloak butterfly at Greenwich (LL).

--hazelnut catkins opening in Wolfville (JW).

--barred owl nest with one egg near White Rock (ME, BLF).

*Mar.30--two goshawks at a nest near Sunken Lake (ME, BLF).

*Mar.31--a kestrel and a harrier at Grand Pre; alder catkins opening in Wolfville (MT, JW).

--a chipping sparrow and three crows carrying twigs to a nest at Canning (MG).

--two Iceland gulls at Wolfville (BBT, JT).

--a large painted turtle basking in Wolfville (SB).

Thanks to all the following contributors:

Peter Austin-Smith (PJA-S), Sherman Bleakney (JSB), Mike Boudreau (MB), Sherman Boates (SB), Cyril Coldwell (CKC), Karen Casseiman (KLC), Lana Churchill (LC), Debbie and Jim Daigle (DJD), Martha Dodge (MD), Ed Eagles (EE), Mark Elderkin (ME), Wendy Elliott (WE), Bob Flecknell (BF), Bernard Forsythe (BLF), Ellis Gertidge (EG), Merritt Gibson (MG), Bob Helleur (BH), Tom Herman (TH), Mollie Kernohan (MK), Lance Laviolette (LL), Bill Martell (BM), Peter MacDonald (PM), Reg and Ruth Newell (RRN), Mark Pulsifer (MP), Albert Scott (AS), at BNS field trip (BNS), Edgar Spalding (ES), N.S. Bird Society (NSBS), Peter Smith (PCS), Richard Stern (RS), Brenda and Bill Thexton (BBT), Dianne and Gordon Thorpe (DGT), Dan Toews (DT), Gerry Trueman (GT), Jean Timpa (JT), Judy and Gordon Tufts (JGT), Miriam Tams (MT), Jim Wolford (JW)

WOLFVILLE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, 1984

Peter Smith

Wolfville

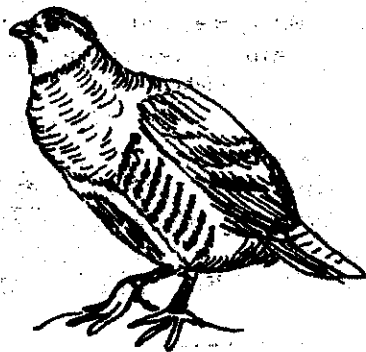
December 16 arrived with a broad, sunny smile and a calm, reflective atmosphere. It was a superb day to be out on the annual Christmas Bird Count. Crisp morning temperatures gave way to just above freezing conditions in the afternoon, made more palatable by freshening winds. At dusk, participants went to a comfortable and hospitable roost at the Gibsons' where the day's notes were compared.

It was a year for records: 76 observers (23 field parties and feeders), and 50,480 birds of 69 species. As in 1983, the count was early and conditions were open. Undoubtedly this had bearing upon the presence, absence and relative abundance of certain species.

Increasing coverage of Minas Basin continued to pay dividends. This year the rewards were Red-throated Loon and Purple Sandpiper. Birders certainly have no hesitancy in frequenting sewage lagoons and no wonder with species such as Black-headed and Ring-billed Gulls. Inland, fresh water ducks were markedly absent or low in abundance. The usually complete list of raptors enjoyed the addition of Broad-winged Hawk. Other rarities were Killdeer, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Palm and Common Yellowthroat Warblers. The count gave every indication that it was going to be a good winter for Red-breasted Nuthatch, American Goldfinch, and White-winged Crossbill. In overall abundance, crows head the list; individuals were counted on three Boot Island flight-lines in late afternoon. Gray Partridge continue to be a cause for concern. Hopefully their will be more of these delightful birds with their precise call notes in years to come.

Thank you to all those helpers.

GRAY OR
HUNGARIAN
PARTRIDGE



CHRISTMAS COUNT SUMMARY

Red-throated Loon.....4	Common Crow.....21210
Great Blue Heron.....1	Black-c Chickadee....408
Canada Goose.....385	Boreal Chickadee.....1
Mallard.....54	White-br. Nuthatch.....3
Black Duck.....2368	Brown Creeper.....1
Pintail.....1	Red-breasted Nuthatch..42
Common Eider.....53	American Robin.....68
Common Merganser.....7	Golden-cr. Kinglet....43
Goshawk.....2	Ruby-cr. Kinglet.....1
Sharp-shinned Hawk...14	Cedar Waxwing.....50
Red-tailed Hawk.....110	Starling.....8606
Rough-legged Hawk...16	Palm Warbler.....2
Bald Eagle adult.....15	Common Yellowthroat...2
immature..19	House Sparrow.....1595
Marsh Hawk.....4	Red-winged Blackbird...1
Broad-winged Hawk.....1	Common Grackle.....5
Ruffed Grouse.....4	Brown-h'ded Cowbird..2105
Ring-neckd Pheasant..144	Evening Grosbeak....414
Gray Partridge.....2	Common Redpoll.....13
Killdeer.....1	Purple Finch.....11
Purple Sandpiper.....53	Pine Grosbeak.....10
Iceland Gull.....2	American Goldfinch...828
Great Black-b. Gull..929	White-w. Crossbill...105
Herring Gull.....6736	Savannah Sparrow....48
Ring-billed Gull.....16	Dark-eyed Junco.....214
Black-headed Gull.....1	Tree Sparrow.....102
Rock Dove.....2002	Chipping Sparrow.....1
Mourning Dove.....219	Swamp Sparrow.....5
Barred Owl.....2	Song Sparrow.....118
Short-eared Owl.....5	White-throated S.....26
Common Flicker.....4	Lapland Longspur.....5
Pileated Woodpecker...2	Snow Bunting.....4
Hairy Woodpecker.....12	
Downy Woodpecker.....41	
Horned Lark.....170	Total Individuals..50480
Blue Jay.....744	Total Species.....69
Common Raven.....288	
Pine Siskin.....2	

LETTERS AND COMMENTS



SHARP-SHIN GETS TWO BIRDS

Lana Churchill
Port Williams

One stormy January day (the 16th, 1985) an immature sharp-shinned hawk flew into our yard, startling all the birds at my feeder. The birds scattered in all directions with the hawk in full pursuit. A female evening grosbeak flew toward the house and hit the window, stunning herself. A male house sparrow, fleeing in the same direction, flew into a bank of snow up to his tail feathers. The hawk landed between the two, then decided on the grosbeak, and flew off with her. After ten minutes I pulled the house sparrow out of the snow, only to discover it was dead. I left it there partially covered by the snow. After approximately ten more minutes, the sharp-shinned hawk returned, landed on its original spot, spied the sparrow, took it and flew off.

MORE ON OTTERS

Brian Kenefick
Sackville, N.B.

I read with interest Shirley Cohrs account of seeing otters on East Lawrencetown marsh. I wonder if anyone else in the Society reported the pair of otters that inhabit the area around the dam outlet on the Falmouth side of the Avon River. I saw them several times in October last as I passed over the on highway 101 and they were oblivious to the traffic roaring by above their heads.

(Editor: At the March 18th meeting, Sherman Williams mentioned seeing otter slides in the snow on the banks of Avon River.)

A TOWN MINK

Dianna Thorpe
Wolfville, N.S.

In early February my family and I first spotted a mink in our backyard at Grandview Drive. Since then we have seen it at least six or seven times, as recently as March 16th and 18th. It is very dark and large. Would its size suggest it might be a male?

It usually appears mid-morning, darts swiftly in and out of the shrubbery at the back of the garden, into the neighbor's woodpile and under their shed. Many tracks have been visible in the snow so it probably has been there far more often than it has been seen.

A short distance from us are two ponds, one of which is at Jack Scott's. He also has seen this mink on several occasions in his backyard. But, so far, we have not been able to photograph it.

THAT WARM BLANKET OF SNOW IN JANUARY

by Larry Bogan
Cambridge Stn.

There is no doubt that we will all remember January 1985 as a cold, snowy one. The Kentville Research Station's weather report for that month shows it to have been 3 C below the 30-year average of -5 C. The snow accumulation was a bit above average at 88.5 cm compared a 71.6 cm norm. It is interesting that normally we get 65 mm of rain in January but this year we got only .8 mm. That allowed the snow to build up to 60 cm by late in the month. It all added up to a lot of shovelling and quite a bit of good skiing. But it was cold, only getting up to +1 only three times in the month.

Several times late in the month, I was surprised to find that the ground surface below the snow blanket in the woods was not frozen hard. When snowshoeing in the woods, I use an ash wood staff for balance and for knocking down those nasty dead spruce branches. Upon jamming the staff through the snow, it encountered soft ground rather than the expected, hard surface.

This is a good illustration of the insulation value of snow and the warmth of the soil deep in the earth. Actually, the ground temperature at 1.5 meter depth is lowest in March at only 2.7 C, while it is 4.3 C in January. Of course it is colder nearer the surface, normally -.1 C one centimeter below the surface. The deep, stored heat can 'warm' the surface if the snow is light and fluffy, hence a good insulator, while the ground is a relatively good heat conductor. Wetter soils are better conductors than dry soils and my woods are rather wet. In contrast, a nearby dry, sandy field, which had had the snow blow off several times in the month had a well frozen surface.

I am tempted to do some calculations and show that the physics of the situation is easy to predict--but I won't. Test the soil yourself if you are ever in the same situation.

As a post-script, and a plug for solar heating, January was phenomenally sunny with 112.5 bright sunshine hours rather than the usual 73.2 hrs. On clear days with -15 C outdoors and the wind blowing up a wind-chill factor of -35 C (32 km/hr winds), the sunshine provided all the heat my solar home needed for the day. The snow cover on the ground helped also by reflecting additional sun energy through the windows.

I FOUND AN ARROW-HEAD

Ellis Gertridge
Gaspereau

As the sun shines brightly, the winter snows are only patches; the plowed ground is thawing and drying; this is the ideal time to look for Indian artifacts. The frost reveals stones while rain leaves them washed clean and makes it easier to see the chipping done by earlier men, who lived on the soil now used as agricultural land. The best sites are located where their canoe navigation ended.

When others are more conscious of the birds returning, I recall other times when a tool made centuries earlier became a prize when it was once more in the hand of man.

About thirty-five years ago such were my thoughts as I recalled that others had said an area at Melanson was a camping ground for the wandering Micmacs. It was a desire to find just one arrow-head; to see if that was possible, that I wandered alone over the area to see if any were still visible. Most of the afternoon was spent looking, picking up, throwing away stones that were just stones. Finally, one stone looked like an arrow, not exactly as I had pictured, but at any rate, it must be an arrow or tool since it appeared to be chipped in a manner that could not have been done by a plough or other land-breaking tool.

When at home, I happily displayed my find. The only comment I received was that I had rocks in the head. But I was sure it must have been in the hands of an Indian with a definite use in mind.

Two obsessions came to mind; I must find out what this stone was made of and I must find more.

The government information bulletins were procured from Ottawa and thus began my education by reading. The bulletins had many illustrations of 'artifacts' (this was a new word for me and required a dictionary-- definition: any object made by human work). One illustration was similar to my first point and was probably a spear as it was too heavy to be propelled by a bow. This spear point was sharp on one end and like a blunt screw-driver on the other end (no barbed notches). There are many shapes of spears and arrow points; as I read, I concluded that various peoples made things differently but generally the shapes were a progression of invention over long periods of time. Mr. Erskine had many publications along this line; and I deduced from these that perhaps it took over a thousand years for my first point to make it from its maker's hand to mine.

Yes, I looked for more and found other artifacts; broken, almost perfect and a few perfect pieces. The next thing that my inquiring thoughts turned to was the stone itself. What was it called and where did it come from?

A prospector's short-course was offered at Acadia by Mines and Resources. I enrolled and received a crash course in Geology during one winter at evening classes. One member told me, he had always liked to hunt, but his hunting trips were not for deer after this course, since he could not watch game and the rocks at the same time. The same was true for me, and the comment "rocks in the head" was heard more often.

Back to that first point; it was a rock from the basalts of the North Mountain, in a class that includes agates and Jaspers. Another person who became interested in Indians at about the same time was William Dennis (brother of Clara Dennis, a writer of Nova Scotia). We spent many hours talking about the people that lived in the area before Columbus. Mr. Dennis had a heart condition and could not go on field trips. He wanted so badly to find things on his own, but he said he must be content to purchase his collection. He bought a few from me, but his greatest thrill came when I directed him to a new ditching job on the edge of the highway. When he stepped across the ditch, he found his artifact.

Finding an arrow point is just about the same as finding gold. It becomes a must; one leads to a desire of another. Not all artifacts are spears and arrows. Hammer-stones, grooved hammers, knives, awls, scrappers and others such as celts, axes, etc. turn up along with chips that are discards made from stones that will flake. Besides the jaspers and agates other stones that were used are of quartzite, milky-quartz, and hard slates. Some came from underfoot, while other came from far away. An archaeologist who looked through my collection spotted an artifact that was made from a rock only found in Labrador. Many stones from Blomidon are found in Liverpool. Many references are made of points made of flint, but since we have no flint, any flint would have to come here from early European visitors. Another popular material is volcanic glass or obsidian. This is not native to our area.

Any information is a matter of deduction relating discoveries in our area with early accounts written by the first European contacts. Charles de la Tour of Champlain's Port Royal wrote, and his writings have been translated. Reading became more important to me than hunting artifacts. This is the greatest detective story one might get involved with, as it has not ended; we are right in the middle of it. Any statement made may be proven wrong as a new site is discovered and recorded.

Back to the Indians. They were wandering hunters, very little, if any agriculture was practiced. Micmacs belonged to the Algonquin family and are loosely described as Eastern Woodland Indians. They took advantage of the Salmon, Gaspereau, and smelt runs and stayed here only when



STONE SCRAPER



FLAKED
STONE SPEAR POINT

the area offered easy food. Probably many followed the run up the river to Gaspereau Lake. Evidence of camps and drying areas for fish exist near the lake. Artifacts are to be found along the river and at the lake. Probably winter camps were in this area, away from the cold sea winds of the snowy months.

Along with stone artifacts are found clay pottery pieces (shards). These are found near fire pits and are of unglazed pottery most of which was decorated by scratches and impressions but of a quality that would stand little in the way of bumps. It was made by coiling a mixture of clay and sand, then smoothing with the hand when wet. Some pottery is made from clay and ground skulls. There is evidence along the coast near Mahone Bay, Port Joli, etc. of clams and other shellfish being a seasonal source of food.

As one reads and learns about pre-European people in this area we find that people have been in N.S. for over 10,000 years. In fact many think people followed the retreating ice as it left here near the end of the last ice age. The most popular belief is that the earliest came from Russia across what is now the Bearing Sea. That is probably one source, still in the detective story stage. Many writers have other beliefs as to European, African and Asian contacts that would add to the overland route.

Another writer recently tried to interpret the life and wanderings of Prince Henry Sinclars of northern Scotland and his making friends with the Micmacs in our area of Nova Scotia. The writer suggests that Sinclars became in legend, Glooscap, the god of many Indian tales. Silas Rand of Port Williams and Hantsport recorded many legends in the 1800's as told by the Micmacs. He worked with and ministered to them during his life, and developed a written language with an alphabet in their native tongue. He also found that they had a sign language. Another writer suggests that this language was similar to Egyptian.

There are so many books about civilizations in North, Central, and South America that it becomes such a mass of information and deduction that this farmer had to see for himself. So that one little arrow point has lead me to visit Mexico to see the ruins of the ancient Maya, Aztec, and Olmec and to see other of our own places in unwritten history.

Don't find an arrow, it may lead you on and on and on....



"YOU'RE STANDING TOO CLOSE. FOLLOW THROUGH WITH THAT SWING AND KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE FISH!"

FROGS

(from "info" published by the Nova Scotia Museum)

In spring the naturalist's fancy turns to frogs. Eight kinds of frogs live in Nova Scotia. The sight and sound of them is part of most peoples' childhood experience, although a few misconceptions have given some frogs a bit of a bad name.

Like their tailed cousins, the salamanders, frogs and toads are amphibians. Their skin is generally smooth and moist; some part of the life cycle takes place in water. The frog face features a wide mouth, two large exposed eardrums, protruding eyes with transparent lids and some sort of inflatable vocal sac. The vocal sac, usually located near the throat or along each side, amplifies male frogs' sounds into the loud mating calls we hear.

During spring and early summer, frogs gather in wet habitats to spawn. The males arrive first and begin calling to attract a mate. Each species has its own call, and most are easy to recognize. Once a female locates and joins a male, the male climbs "piggy-back" onto the female (a position called amplexus). Spawning usually takes place shortly after, and the eggs hatch quickly into tailed tadpoles. Transformation into adult frogs may take 2 months to 2 years, depending on species and conditions.

Since most frogs are less secretive than salamanders, they are more vulnerable to predators. Large beetles, turtles, birds, snakes, fish and mammals eat frogs and their tadpoles. Also, cars kill many frogs as they cross roads on rainy nights.

The Toad, Spring Peeper, Green Frog, Leopard Frog and Pickerel Frog are all widespread in Nova Scotia. Mink Frogs are known from scattered localities, and Bullfrogs have not been reported from Cape Breton Island.

Now let's meet the frogs and toads of Nova Scotia.

Toads- the Eastern American Toad

Some people call these common creatures "hop toads", and they do indeed move about in short hops rather than long leaps. Most Toads are brown, but their colour can range from grey-brown to red-brown. Breeding males have a black throat and are smaller than females. Toads emerge

from hibernation and fill the night air with long, trilling calls in May and June. Strings of 6 to 12 thousand eggs are laid in warm shallows; the small tadpoles transform into miniature Toads by September. Toads are among the last amphibians to hibernate each fall, and may be seen into late November.

Toads have dry, "warty" skin. The "warts" are glands that contain a white sticky substance intended to turn away predators biting the Toad. Handling Toads will not cause warts in people. Some people say Toads have the most "character" of all the amphibians, when kept as short-term pets.

Finding Frogs

Wet highways, roadside ditches and ponds on warm spring nights are your best places for seeing (and hearing) Spring Peepers and Wood Frogs. After breeding, they return to woodland habitats, eventually hibernating there, and are rarely noticed. Leopard Frogs prefer grassy places in summer, while Toads use many terrestrial habitats including lawns and gardens.

Most frogs make good temporary pets. Put Peepers, Wood Frogs, Leopard Frogs and Toads in mossy terrariums; the other frogs need shallow water in an aquarium. Live earthworms and insects make suitable food items. Remember that big frogs often eat smaller frogs!

Frogs' eggs placed in pond water will usually hatch indoors. Feed the tadpoles pond algae, strained spinach baby food or tropical fish food. Avoiding direct sunlight (too hot) and aerating the water makes successful rearing more likely. Toads, Peepers and Wood, Leopard and Pickerel Frogs mature in one season; Bullfrog, Green Frog and Mink Frog tadpoles overwinter before transforming completely.

Return your temporary amphibian pets to a suitable habitat for them--- preferably the one in which you found them.

Treefrogs - the Northern Spring Peeper

Who can ignore a deafening chorus of Spring Peepers on a warm spring night? These thumbnail-sized frogs leave their woodland hibernation sites as early as March in southwestern Nova Scotia. Perched on grasses and sedges at the edge of ponds or roadside ditches, the males call mates with a shrill "peep peep peep". Their brown and gray

colour, always with a dark stripe on the sides of the head and dark markings on the back provide excellent camouflage against the dead spring grasses. If the night is cold, the peeper's retreat under leaves and stems. You'll likely hear hundreds before you ever see one.

About 1000 eggs are laid singly on twigs and leaf litter at the pond bottom. Then it's back to the woods, where the males may continue to call from trees, clinging there with adhesive toe pads. Small spiders are a frequent food item.

Typical Frogs

Bullfrogs are our largest frog, found in quiet coves of lakes with lots of vegetation, especially waterlilies. Most are green or yellow-green, but rarely a blue Bullfrog (lacking yellow pigment) turns up. Bullfrogs are the last to emerge in spring. Their booming bass call is heard from mid-June to July, although last year's tadpoles may emerge a month or two earlier. Their season is short. By early September most are hibernating in muddy pond bottoms. The Bullfrog menu includes birds, frogs and fish as well as the usual insect fare. Note- when held by the hind legs, Bullfrogs may let out a scream or squeal.

Green Frogs look something like small Bullfrogs, but their colour varies from yellow to green or bronze, sometime with brown spots on the back. Look for a ridge above the eye that extends part way down the back- this will distinguish Green Frogs from young Bullfrogs. Breeding is in June and July, in lakes, ponds and streams, large or small. The males's call has been compared to the sound of a loose banjo string.

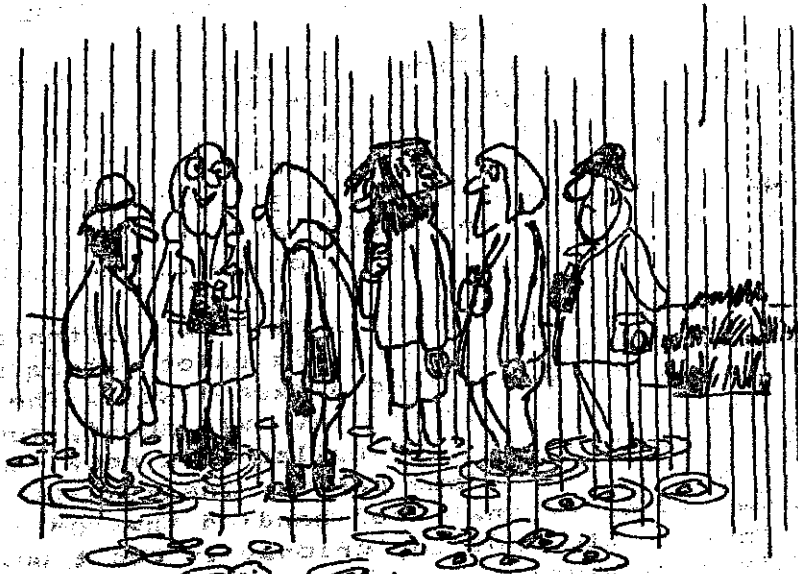
Mink Frogs are generally green to brown, often spotted or mottled. Their preferred habitat is quiet waters with lots of plants like lily pads and pickerel weed. The male calls day and night with a "cut---cut cut" sound, something like the sound of shingles being nailed to a roof far away. Mink Frogs are very timid. Some careful sneaking is required to get close to one. When handled they emit a smell like mink (or like rotting onions, if can't quite recall the odour of mink).

Northern Leopard Frogs, also called meadow or grass frogs, are bright grass-green with oval black spots. Their breeding call is a long rattling noise followed by several

rapid grunts. About 3500 eggs are laid in a loose oval mass in shallow water in late April or May. The tadpoles hatch and transform quickly.

Pickerel Frogs are also spotted, but with irregular rectangular brown spots in rows. The basic colour is yellow-brown with orange on the groin and the underside of the back legs. Pickerel frogs are especially common along lakeshores near inlets and outlets. Their call is a short low-pitched snore which does not carry far. In May they produce a gloagular mass of about 1000 eggs attached to plants below the surface.

Wood Frogs are brown or tan coloured. A dark brown mask on the sides of the head has earned them the nickname "robber frog", although the mask is not obvious in breeding males. Some females in red sandstone areas may become red coloured. Wood Frogs are among the first amphibians to emerge in spring, calling with a sound like ducks quacking. Breeding is over by May in most regions, resulting in fist-sized masses of about 1000 eggs. Except for breeding, Wood Frogs live in damp deciduous or mixed woods. They are about twice the size of Spring Peepers, and tend to be found with them in ponds in spring.



"... AND WHAT WE HAVEN'T SEEN IN THE WAY OF BIRDS, I'M SURE YOU WILL AGREE HAS BEEN AMPLY COMPENSATED FOR BY JUST BEING OUT IN THE FRESH AIR."

The following are some Questions with answers that may tickle your lighter side. These contributions are from Frank Cheeseman and Sean Timpa.

- Q1: What animal can jump higher than a house?
Q2: What does a penguin have that nothing else has?
Q3: Why does a giraffe have such a long neck?
Q4: Why does a newt eat worms and insects?
Q5: What is a salamander's favorite cookie?
Q6: What do you call a tarantula that can't stay on a diet?
Q7: What do you call two spiders that just got married?
Q8: What are the most faithful bugs?
Q9: How does a caterpillar start the day?

- A1: Any animal. A house can't jump!
A2: Baby penguins, of course!
A3: Because its head is so far from its body!
A4: Because they are NEWTritious!
A5: A + 19 NEWTON!
A6: A wider spider!
A7: NEWLY webs!
A8: Ticks, they always stick to their friends!
A9: It turns over a new leaf!