

BLOMIDON NATURALIST'S SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 14
NUMBER 1
MARCH 1987

SOCIETY NEWS

BNS Spring - Early Summer Programme

MONDAY EVENING MEETINGS: All meetings will start at 7:30 p.m. and will be held in Room 244 of the Beveridge Arts Centre at Acadia University. All lectures and field trips are open to the public and BNS members are encouraged to bring friends and neighbours. Any changes in the date, time or subject of meetings are announced on posters, the Kings Kable notice board and in The Kentville Advertiser and The Hants Journal.

1. April 20 -- Professor Sherman Bleakney will describe some unusual aspects of natural history from the past and the present in a talk entitled "A Tale of Two Drifters - Australia and New Zealand".

2. May 11 -- Mr. Randy D. Milton will talk about "Factors Affecting Bird Abundance in Rural Indonesia". Mr. Milton recently spent two and a half years working for the Indonesian Forest Protection and Conservation Department.

3. June 15 -- Mr. Gary Saunders will speak about the natural history of the Gander River, Newfoundland, based on his own and his father's experience. This material formed the basis of Mr. Saunder's recent book Rattles and Steadies: Memoirs of a Gander River Man as well as a half-hour feature on CBC's "Land and Sea".

(See inside for further information about the speakers.)

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The BNS Newsletter is published on equinoxes and solstices.

Editors: Jean Timpa, George and Margaret Alliston
Art: Mary Pratt
Production: Larry Bogan
Distribution: Lana Churchill and Brenda Thexton

"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

The Blomidon Naturalists Society is an Affiliated Member of the Canadian Nature Federation.

Field Trips: Unless otherwise noted, all times are given for meeting at the Gym parking lot of Acadia University. Morning trips sometimes extend into the afternoon so you may wish to bring lunch.

1. Tuesday, April 7, 6:00 p.m. (or 6:30 at Wellington Dyke) -- Canada Geese Flypast led by Sherman Bleakney.
2. Tuesday, April 21, 7:00 p.m. -- An Evening of Owls and Woodcock led by Bernard Forsythe. Inclement weather date - the following night.
3. Sunday, April 26, 9:45 a.m. (or Grand Pre at 10:00 a.m.) Local Birds, in conjunction with the Nova Scotia Bird Society. Leader: Jim Wolford.
4. Saturday, May 9, 8:30 a.m. (or Scots Bay parking lot at 9:00 a.m.) -- Spring flowers and birds at Cape Split led by Sherman Williams.
5. Sunday, May 24, 7:00 a.m. -- Bernard Forsythe will lead an all-day field trip to see warblers and spring plants on the Delaps Cove Trail.
6. Saturday, June 20, 11:00 a.m. (for lunch at Smiley's Park at noon) -- Yellow Lady's Slippers and Damsel Flies. Leader: Tom Herman.
7. Saturday, July 4, 7:00 a.m. -- Jean Timpa will lead us back to Delaps Cove to "blitz" the priority square on the annual Breeding Bird Atlas Day in the Maritimes. All-day trip.
8. Saturday, July 11, 1:30 p.m. -- Mark Pulsifer will show us fossils at the seashore at Newport Landing and Avondale, Hants County.
9. Saturday, July 25, 1:30 p.m. -- Mud Lake Bog to look for orchids, etc. Led by Bernard Forsythe and Jim Wolford.
10. Tuesday, August 4, 8:00 p.m. -- an evening field trip to see Chimney Swifts and Bats. Leader - Tom Herman. Inclement weather date - the following night.

Speakers

BNS Spring - Early Summer Programme

Professor Sherman Bleakney

Professor Bleakney graduated from both Acadia and McGill Universities then served as Curator of Herpetology and Ichthyology at the National Museum of Canada before joining the Biology staff at Acadia University. His research interests have more recently involved the marine life of Minas Basin with special emphasis on sea slugs.

Mr. Randy D. Milton

A graduate of Mount Allison University, where he studied Sora and Virginia Rails, Mr. Milton began his M.Sc. research at Acadia in 1977. He studied the winter habits of crows in Kings County; in particular, the Boot Island roost of over 20,000 crows. Since then he has been employed by the Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forests, the Canadian Wildlife Service, his own consulting company and the World Wildlife Fund. He has studied various ecological aspects of crows, ravens, cormorants, gulls, and the pine marten as well as the avifauna of Indonesia.

Mr. Gary Saunders

Mr. Saunders is an Education Officer in the Program Planning Branch, Forest Resources Education, Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forests. A keen educator, he devotes much of his spare time to free-lance writing, illustrating and painting.

SOCIETY BUSINESS

Acknowledgements

Many thanks since the last issue to:

Peter Austin-Smith, Dr. Julie Porter and Mark Elderkin for very interesting presentations on Bald Eagles, sea bird colonies and Barred Owls respectively;

our winter field trip leaders: Bernard Forsythe, Richard Stern, Sherman Bleakney, Ruth Newell, Cyril Coldwell, and Bill and Brenda Thexton;

Judy and Gordon Tufts for trying to take us to the Blandford Peninsula (maybe the weather will cooperate next year);

all those who contributed to the production of this Newsletter;

Rachel Erskine for supplying refreshments for meetings and to those who serve them.

Membership and Fees

Annual membership fees in the Blomidon Naturalists Society are \$5.00 per person for adults and \$1.00 per person for those under sixteen. Each member receives four issues yearly of this Newsletter. Membership is not essential to attend either meetings or field trips; guests are always welcome at these functions. Forward the fees along with your name, address including postal code, and telephone number to:

Mrs. Judy Tufts
P.O. Box 1313
Wolfville, N.S. B0P 1X0

BNS Newsletter Deadline - June 21, 1987

The Newsletter is a forum for the dissemination of information among Society members and all members are urged to contribute. Articles, reports, letters to the editor, poetry, sightings, trivia, jokes, etc., are all welcomed.

Trivial Tidbits of Local Natural History is selected, compiled and edited by Jim Wolford. Giving or sending Jim a written list of your observations in chronological order would greatly simplify his task. Jim's address is:

Biology Department
Acadia University
Wolfville, N.S. BOP 1X0

Last-minute observations can be called in to 542-2201, ext. 334 (leave a message).

All other contributions to the Newsletter should be sent or given to:

Jean Timpa
P.O. Box 1382
Wolfville, N.S. BOP 1X0

or to other members of the BNS executive. Please double space all contributions.

Field trip reports are included in the Newsletter to preserve a record of Society activities. Currently a few members write most of these reports. Other members are encouraged to share this responsibility. If you are willing to write one of these reports, please notify the trip leader at the beginning of the trip. Your contribution will be most appreciated.



The Robie Tufts Young Naturalists Award

The Robie Tufts Young Naturalists Award was established by the Blomidon Naturalists Society in 1983, in memory of Dr. Robie Tufts, to encourage an interest in natural history. Winners have been:

1984	Tammy Ashley of Newtonville
1985	Paul Fairclough of Coldbrook
1986	Kasia Muldner of Wolfville
	Sean Timpa of Wolfville.

Any resident of Kings County, fifteen years of age or younger, may enter the competition. Projects entered may cover any subject concerning natural history: for example, a wildflower collection, descriptions of local bird observations, an essay on a natural history subject, a project describing the life cycle of insects, a geological collection, etc. The applicant should display an ongoing interest in the subject.

Questions concerning the competition should be directed to:

Mr. James Wolford
President,
Blomidon Naturalists Society,
P.O. Box 127
Wolfville, N.S. B0P 1X0.
Telephone: 542-2201 ext 391
or ext 334,

or any member of the BNS Executive.

Completed entries should be submitted by mail or in person to the President, Blomidon Naturalists Society, by August 31, 1987.

Entries will be judged by the Executive Committee of the Society and the award(s) presented at the annual meeting in October. The prize will be one year's membership in the Society and a field guide of the recipient's choice.

Members of the Society are asked to encourage young people to enter the competition.

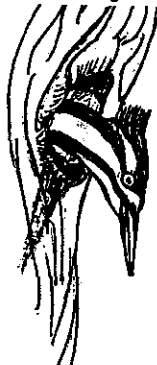
FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Winter Woods Walk at Lumsden
January 25, 1987

by Bernard Forsythe
Wolfville, N.S.

Snow conditions were ideal for skis and snowshoes as eight of us set out on this cold, but otherwise pleasant, outing. We made an early stop on University Avenue to watch eight or possibly more bright American Robins feeding on multiflora roses, a lovely sight on a winter day. Arriving at Lumsden we found that the road was not plowed across the dam so the walk began from this point. Other than a few call notes from several species of birds, it was very quiet. The beauty of the fresh snow covering the trees, along with the various light patterns, made up for any lack of wildlife. From a field along the road to Black River we had a marvelous view of Lumsden Pond far below and could hardly believe how distant our cars looked back on the dam.

The return route was through an orchard and strip of woods to the power line. Some members of the party headed back because of other commitments while the rest continued on along the line, stopping now and then to look at various trees and bushes, including an interesting ironwood tree.



The snowshoe hare cycle is at its low in our area so we only saw tracks in a couple of places. The only other tracks were those of a deer where it had crossed the power-line cut. By now it was after 4:00 p.m. and time to head for the Pileated Woodpecker cavity where a few days previously I had found a male going to roost. Woodpeckers will often roost in the same cavity, night after night, throughout the winter. As we neared the site a Hairy Woodpecker flew by us. Looking up at the cavity, I gave the pole a rap and at the entrance there appeared the brightly coloured head of a male Pileated Woodpecker, glaring down at us with shining eyes. He soon sank back down into his snug home and we headed back to our cars, ending a successful outing.



Winter Birds
February 8, 1987

by Richard Stern
Kentville, N.S.

On Sunday, February 8, 1987, a group of some 20 people met in Wolfville for the annual joint NSBS - BNS birding field trip in the Wolfville - Grand Pre, Canard and Kentville areas. For the first time in the last four years the weather was reasonably pleasant. We started off exploring the Grand Pre dykes where Rough-legged Hawks did their usual trick of standing on telephone poles till we were within two pole distances of them and then flying off; it was nice to see the differences in plumages among individual birds. At Evangeline Beach we had a look at the sea at high tide and had a hard job picking out the Common Mergansers and American Black Ducks amongst the ice floes.

We then proceeded to the Port Williams and Lower Canard areas where we observed numerous Bald Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks. At about noon, we went back to the Stern's house for sandwiches, a warm-up and a good look at Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins at their feeder.

After lunch, we went to the Kentville Dump where, among several thousand Herring Gulls and Greater Black-backed Gulls, was one second-winter Glaucous Gull which was a "lifer" for at least two members of the party. These all-white gulls are common along the South Shore and in Cape Breton but here in the Valley they are quite unusual.

We then did a big circle back to Wolfville via more Bald Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks. One American Robin was seen and all along the way, in both the morning and afternoon, flocks of Snow Buntings and Horned Larks were observed. Large flocks of Snow Buntings were seen on several occasions perched high up in trees and, on one occasion, on the roof of a house.

In total we saw 32 bird species and everyone had an enjoyable day.

Tour of Acadia's Biology Department Museums

March 7, 1987

by Sherman Bleakney
Wolfville, N.S.

At 1:45 p.m. on a lovely sunny Saturday, about 35 persons assembled in Room 308, Patterson Hall. They listened to three mini-lectures by Sherman Bleakney, Ruth Newell and Cyril Goldwell. Some of the methods and care involved in collecting, recording, preserving and storing of plant and animal specimens were described and demonstrated and pertinent methodology books were on display.

It was pointed out that books such as Birds of Canada, Birds of Nova Scotia, Flora of Nova Scotia and Keys to Flora and Fauna of Minas Basin can be compiled only after large collections of biological specimens have been obtained. From these descriptive studies develops a public awareness of what is rare and endangered. Then follows a public outcry against any more "collecting" (killing for science); then the likes of Bleakneys and Coldwells (who, when you come to think of it, provided the museum specimens in the first place for the likes of Crosbys, Lansdownes and Batemans to study and portray) are forced to retire their guns and are encouraged to shoot rarities only with a telephoto lens.

Ruth demonstrated the different methods employed for collecting and storing flowering plants, fungi, mosses and seaweeds. After a brief question period, Ruth took the group on a tour of the E.C. Smith Herbarium. Afterward we hiked to the 5th floor R.W. Tufts Ornithology Laboratory and viewed an extensive display of museum material. Cyril had an interesting series of bird specimens in various stages of taxidermy (stuffed and injected methods) and other birds prepared as scientific study skins. A freshly killed (by a car at Grand Pre) Short-eared Owl provided an opportunity for everyone to examine the peculiar, large, asymmetrical ears, characteristic of owls, which account for their broad, rounded faces.

There was also much to see in the museum storage cabinets and we easily kept ourselves occupied until 4:00 p.m.

Birding in the Annapolis Royal/Digby Area

March 15, 1987

by Brenda and Bill Thexton
Wolfville, N.S.

Although the weather was windy and cold, with an advancing winter storm forecast, three cars of "enthusiasts" left the Gym parking lot at 9:00 a.m. heading for the Annapolis Royal Causeway and Digby. Along the way, occasional flocks of Snow Buntings, Horned Larks and a Ring-necked Pheasant or two were seen and a pair of Mallards was observed near Bridgetown.



Open water at the Causeway heightened everyone's expectations. A flock of Common Goldeneyes was spotted first and, to everyone's delight, a male Barrow's Goldeneye was with them. Shortly, a second male and three female Barrow's Goldeneyes were seen. One pair of Barrow's Goldeneyes was later observed courting. Also seen were Greater Scaups, Buffleheads (one pair), Red-necked Grebes, Red-breasted Mergansers, Red-throated Loons, American Black Ducks and Herring Gulls. Bernard Forsythe and Eric Muntz were quick to notice a Common Raven circling while carrying nesting material. While at the Causeway, we had hoped to find the Snowy Owl which had been observed there for four or five weeks, but - no luck.

From Digby to the Ferry Terminal the waters were quite rough and birding was not the best. However, three Great Cormorants were seen flying by; Oldsquaws, Common Goldeneyes and Buffleheads were here and there. In a large flock of American Black Ducks at the water's edge was a lone Canada Goose. In a flock of Greater Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls a Lesser Black-backed Gull was observed. This is a rather interesting bird - if it is the same one. In March, 1970, when it was first sighted, it was a third-year bird which would now make it twenty years old!

As we approached the Ferry Terminal, the water was calmer on the leeward side of the wharf. We spent some time observing a nearby flock of Red-breasted Mergansers resting with their heads tucked over their backs. Close by were Greater Scaups and a few Oldsquaws. Looking toward the Gut, the waters were very rough and the wind strong. A Red-necked Grebe or two were seen and three or four Red-breasted Mergansers were observed closer to the shore.

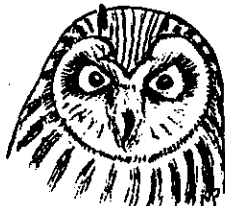
After enjoying the "comforts" at the Ferry Terminal, we ate lunch before driving to Bear River. Few birds were observed; however two deer were seen and we enjoyed our drive along the river to the village.

On our return as we approached Annapolis Royal, an accipiter flew across the road and perched in a tree long enough to be identified as a Northern Goshawk. A flock of redpolls and a flock of Brown-headed Cowbirds were seen before we left the Causeway for home.

It was a pleasant outing and we were glad we went. Twenty-eight species were observed during the trip.

Blandford Peninsula

This field trip, to have been led by Judy and Gordon Tufts, was cancelled twice due to poor weather.



 NATURE REPORTS

Wolfville Christmas Bird Count - 1986

compiled by Peter C. Smith
 Wolfville, N.S.

The 1986 Wolfville Christmas Bird Count was conducted between 7:15 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on December 20. Skies were partially clear, temperature was between 27 and 29 deg. F. and winds were from the north at 15 mph. There was about five inches of snow on the ground; still water areas were only partially ice-covered and running water was completely open.

Sixty-two observers participated in the Count; 52 were in field parties and 10 conducted counts at feeders. The 21 field parties logged a total of 118 field-party hours (62 hours on foot and 56 hours by car) and 459 miles (114 miles on foot and 345 miles by car). Twenty-eight hours of observations were made at feeders. Sixty-six bird species were identified and 62,150 individual birds were counted. American crows and European Starlings constituted more than 70 percent of the total birds counted. "Unusual" species included Great Blue Heron, Dovekie, Belted Kingfisher, Northern Mockingbird, Water Pipit, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Cardinal and Swamp Sparrow.

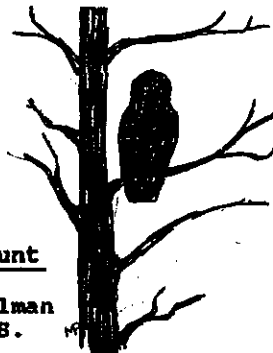
Common Loon	1	Common Raven	440
Great Blue Heron	1	Black-capped Chickadee	433
Canada Goose	254	Boreal Chickadee	1
Green-winged Teal	2	Red-breasted Nuthatch	5
American Black Duck	1,021	White-breasted Nuthatch	12
Mallard	23	Brown Creeper	6
White-winged Scoter	49	Golden-crowned Kinglet	21
Common Goldeneye	17	American Robin	9
Common Merganser	18	Northern Mockingbird	1
Red-breasted Merganser	3	Water Pipit	1
Bald Eagle - adult	28	Bohemian Waxwing	326
Bald Eagle - immature	28	Cedar Waxwing	4
Northern Harrier	2	Northern Shrike	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	6	Eur. Starling (2)	22,175
Red-tailed Hawk	108	Common Yellowthroat	1
Rough-legged Hawk	9	Northern Cardinal	1
Gray Partridge	9	American Tree Sparrow	143
Ring-necked Pheasant	224	Chipping Sparrow	1
Ruffed Grouse	2	Savannah Sparrow	16
Bonaparte's Gull	1	Song Sparrow	59
Ring-billed Gull	19	Swamp Sparrow	1
Herring Gull	6,819	White-throated Sparrow	18
Iceland Gull	5	Dark-eyed Junco	671
Gt. Bl.-backed Gull	1,363	Snow Bunting	1,330
Dovekie	1	Brown-headed Cowbird	48
Rock Dove	1,393	Pine Grosbeak	60
Mourning Dove	205	Purple Finch	17
Barred Owl	2	White-winged Crossbill	2
Belted Kingfisher	1	Common Redpoll	425

Downy Woodpecker	27	Pine Siskin	10
Hairy Woodpecker	18	American Goldfinch	473
Horned Lark	131	Evening Grosbeak	425
Blue Jay	486	House Sparrow	1,793
American Crow (1)	20,942		

Number of Species 66 Number of Individuals 62,150
(Note 3) (Note 3)

Notes

1. American Crow - counted only at roost (3 of 4 evening flightlines).
2. European Starling - includes count of departure from one a.m. roost.
3. Also observed during the count period for the Nova Scotia Bird Society were: American Kestrel (1), Merlin (1), Snowy Owl (1), Red-winged Blackbird (5), Common Grackle (2).



First Hants County Christmas Bird Count

by Ted Casselman
Cheverie, N.S.

Sixteen observers saw 46 species during the first Hants County Christmas Bird Count held on Saturday, January 3, 1987.

Areas of the county covered included Hantsport, Mount Denson, Falmouth, Windsor, Ste. Croix, Newport, Brooklyn, Upper, Lower and Centre Burlington, Summerville, Kempt Shore, Cheverie, Bramber, Walton, Riverside and Cogmagun.

A mild day and good driving conditions made for maximum hours to count and full participation by observers in cars and on foot.

Count results were tallied following a supper at Cheverie and the results forwarded to the Nova Scotia Bird Society in Halifax.

"Halifax West" and "Halifax East" Christmas Bird Counts

by Jim Wolford
Wolfville, N.S.

The following are highlights from the two Halifax Christmas Bird Counts:

"Halifax West" - December 21, 1986

Two double-crested cormorants, 2 gadwalls, 2 American wigeons, 1 lesser scaup, 1 ring-necked duck, 1 harlequin duck, 1 hooded merganser, 2 American coots, 18 common black-

headed gulls, 332 Iceland gulls, 1 lesser black-backed gull, 5 glaucous gulls, 2 black-legged kittiwakes, 6 dovekies, 1 common murre, 1 red-bellied woodpecker, 1 yellow-bellied sapsucker, 5 northern mockingbirds, 1 water pipit, 19 Bohemian waxwings, 2 northern shrikes, 1 orange-crowned warbler, 1 yellow-breasted chat, 3 Savannah sparrows, 1 fox sparrow, 4 swamp sparrows, 24 white-throated sparrows, 36 song sparrows, 5 common grackles, 1 northern oriole, 100 pine grosbeaks, 27 white-winged crossbills, 39 common redpolls, etc.

"Halifax East" - December 28, 1986

One pied-billed grebe, 1 American bittern, 9 great blue herons, 446 Canada geese, 1 Barrow's goldeneye, 2 hooded mergansers, 1 merlin, 58 common black-headed gulls, 2 Bonaparte's gulls, 2 belted kingfishers, 163 boreal chickadees, 1 ruby-crowned kinglet, 2 northern mockingbirds, 3 northern shrikes, 7 yellow-rumped warblers, 1 common yellowthroat, 16 Savannah sparrows, 3 sharp-tailed sparrows, 17 swamp sparrows, 72 song sparrows, 13 Lapland longspurs, 1 eastern meadowlark, 1 northern oriole, 78 pine grosbeaks, 157 common redpolls, etc.



Peregrine Falcon Predation of American Black Duck

by Richard Stern
Kentville, N.S.

At 1:00 p.m. on Friday, January 30, 1987, Ginny Lee of Kentville came to my door to tell me that she had just seen a large falcon chasing a Ring-necked Pheasant across the road just north of Kentville. I immediately went to search and there, beside the Gibson Woods Road, was an immature Peregrine Falcon dragging a freshly killed American Black Duck, clutched in one talon, up over the snow bank. I watched it at point-blank range for five minutes and noted the pale forehead and narrow moustachial stripe; I later verified that the field marks identified the bird as of the arctic tundrius race.

The Peregrine then flew up into a tree and was mobbed by three American Crows. I went back to get my camera and when I returned the Peregrine was back by the roadside. Alas, when I tried to approach to take a photo, it flew off towards Kentville in beautiful, Peregrine fashion. All that was left were the duck carcass, lots of feathers and blood in the snow.

The next day all evidence of the predation was buried in a 40-cm snowstorm and I have neither seen, nor heard reports of, the Peregrine since.

Evidently the Peregrine Falcon population is starting to increase after being all but exterminated by pesticides; I hope we see more of these magnificent birds in the future.

Editor's note. The arctic-breeding tundrius subspecies of Peregrine Falcon has not been as affected by pesticides as its more southerly-breeding cousin, the anatum subspecies. However, the same pesticides that essentially exterminated the anatum subspecies, currently very restricted in their use in North America, are now being used in those South American countries where the tundrius subspecies winters. While captive breeding and release programs appear to be working well at re-establishing Peregrine Falcon breeding populations in temperate North America, our arctic populations could still be in jeopardy.

Winter Weather 1986-1987

by Larry Bogan
Cambridge Station, N.S.

Everyone I have talked with is delighted that we are finally seeing the snow melt away. It seems to have been an abnormal winter this year; and it has.

I now have the monthly weather statistics collected at the Kentville Agricultural Research Station for November 1986 through February 1987; however, winter is not really over until the end of April. Here is how the 1986-1987 winter weather parameters compare to the 30-year averages. During the November - February period we had:

- only 50 % of average rainfall,
- 112 % of average snowfall with 58 % of that being dropped on us in January,
- 73 % of average total precipitation,
- 5 % higher than average heating degree days,
- 28 % more bright sunshine hours than average. (At least one solar home owner was delighted with this winter.) (Lots of skiers were delighted too. ed.)

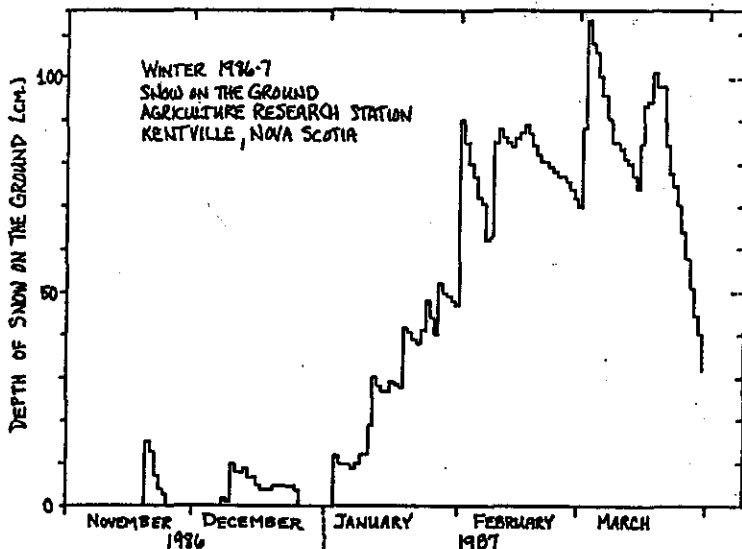
The following table compares the monthly mean weather parameters, measured at the Kentville Agricultural Research Centre, for November through February with the thirty-year averages (in parentheses).

Weather Data from the Agriculture Canada
Research Station at Kentville, N.S., 1986-1987

	Mean Temperature (deg C)	Bright Sunshine (hours)	Snow- fall (cm)	Rain- fall (mm)
Nov	2.1 (4.0)	76 (81)	29 (12)	63 (105)
Dec	-2.3 (-2.4)	92 (56)	13 (57)	46 (73)
Jan	-6.2 (-5.0)	102 (73)	133 (72)	33 (65)
Feb	-6.6 (-5.2)	123 (98)	56 (65)	0 (42)
Total		393 (307)	231 (206)	142 (285)

Our snow accumulated in January and stayed through February since we had no rain in that month when, on average, we get 42 mm. Since the mean temperature for February was 1.4 deg C. below "normal, this helped to keep the snow around. The build-up of snow is illustrated most dramatically in the accompanying plot of the depth of snow on the ground at the Agricultural Research Station in Kentville.

Except for the month of December, we had mean temperatures that were at least 1 C. deg. below the long-term average. This was a continuation of the trend we had last summer when monthly mean temperatures were consistently below the long-term average. Let's hope that the trend does not extend into this summer!



What can we expect for April? On average we get 15 cm of snow and 65 mm of rain and the mean temperature is 4.4 deg. C. We can anticipate the growing season a little in April because this is the first month when we have any significant growing degree days above 10 deg. C. (on average, 18 of them).

Pileated Woodpeckers at Cheverie, Hants County

by Karen Leigh Casselman
Cheverie, N.S.

After a recent sighting of three Pileated Woodpeckers in our back yard, I checked my diary for details of a similar incident four years ago. The circumstances of both events proved to be surprisingly similar.

	<u>Date of Sighting</u>	
	January 15, 1983	January 6, 1987
Time	11:30 a.m.	11:30 a.m.
Weather conditions	sunny, no wind 40 deg. F.	sunny, no wind 31 deg. F.
No. & gender	2 males, 1 female	3 females
Tree or perch	dead spruce; apple by deck	dead spruce; apple by deck
First awareness of birds	alerted by behaviour of 3 cats on the deck	alerted by behaviour of 3 cats on the deck
Observer's activity at the time of sighting	hammering nails into wood near the deck	chipping ice with sledge in driveway near the deck



Purple Martin Colony Registry

The Purple Martin has been managed by man longer than any other North American bird species. Even before Europeans colonized the New World native American Indians were enticing these companionable birds to nest in their villages by attaching hollowed-out gourd "nest boxes" to the support poles of their wigwams. Modern man has continued this gourd-using tradition to attract martins and he has also taken to using elaborate wooden, plastic or aluminum multi-compartmented bird condos (i.e. "martin houses") that he mounts on poles and proudly displays on his lawns.

Today, however, this man-dependent species is declining within parts of its breeding range. In an attempt to remedy the situation, The Purple Martin Conservation Association has been formed to help coordinate the management efforts of North America's martin landlords. Through its Colony Registry Program it is attempting to locate and register most of the martin colonies in North America in preparation for several worthwhile projects, including a continent-wide nest-record card scheme.

Your help is needed

If you know of someone who has a martin colony or is trying to attract one, or if you are interested in starting one yourself, please write to the P.M.C.A. You can further assist by looking for martin houses or gourds in peoples' yards during your travels. If you locate some, please try to obtain permission to submit their addresses to: P.M.C.A., P.O. Box 178, Edinboro, PA 16412.



TRIVIAL TIDBITS of Local Natural History

selected and compiled
by Jim Wolford
Wolfville, N.S.

Has this been a winter to remember?! In the monthly weather summaries from the Kentville Agricultural Research Station, what really stands out (as Larry Bogan has pointed out in his article) is the January snowfall, which was 60 cm (2 feet) more than the 30-year average! And most of the winter was cold enough that the snow just kept accumulating.

Northern birds to remember from this winter were a couple of gyrfalcons and snowy owls, many reports of shrikes and Bohemian waxwings, very large numbers of common redpolls and lots of flocks of snow buntings and horned larks. Bald eagles were abundant as usual but the proportion of adult birds seemed unusually high. Evening grosbeaks and blue jays were generally in very low numbers.

<u>Date</u> (1986)		<u>Obs</u>
Dec 20	-see Wolfville Christmas Bird Count elsewhere in this newsletter	
Dec 21	-"Halifax West" Xmas Count: see list elsewhere in this newsletter	
Dec 23	-4 snowy owls and 2 hoary redpolls on Brier Island	RS, ELM
Dec 24	-4 red knots, 3 dunlins at Evangeline Beach -flocks of 17 and 30 ring-necked pheasants in Wolfville (also Dec 28)	BLF, JGT BBT
Dec 27	-a Lapland longspur at Grand Pre with horned larks and a snow bunting -8 common grackles at Gaspereau	JGT JGT
Dec 28	-"Halifax East" Xmas Count: see list elsewhere in this newsletter	
Dec 30	-50 purple sandpipers at Port George-Fundy shore -25 Bohemian waxwings at Canada Creek - " "	JGT JGT
Dec ?	-a Say's phoebe on Economy Xmas Count	?

(1987)

Jan 1 -a snowy owl on Wolfville dykelands caught by CKC
hand since its feathers were so laden with BLF
frozen mud that it could not fly properly
-a gray-phase gyrfalcon at Grand Pre BBT
-a short-eared owl and 300 redpolls at Grand Pre BLF
-along shore of Blandford Peninsula (south shore)
common loons, red-necked and horned grebes, red-
breasted mergansers, lots of oldsquaws, a double-
crested cormorant and a belted kingfisher JGT
Jan 2 -6 rough-legged hawks at Grand Pre JGT
-30 + 30 pine siskins in Wolfville BBT, JW
-a barred owl in Wolfville ST
-a killdeer in east Wolfville SB
Jan 3 -a great horned owl hooting at Cheverie
(also Jan 28) KTC
-a northern goshawk at Falmouth BBT
-2 northern harriers at Grand Pre JW
-a northern shrike near Cheverie MP, JGT
Jan 5 -bright female northern oxiole still in
Wolfville orchard JGT
-caterpillars of European yellow underwing moth
on top of snow near Peggy's Cove CBC Radio
-a lesser black-backed gull at Digby JGT
Jan 6 -3 pileated woodpeckers at Cheverie KTC
-175 Bohemian waxwings at Bridgetown JGT
-the lesser black-backed gull at Digby JGT
-a Barrow's goldeneye at Annapolis JGT
Jan 7 -single snowy owls at Grand Pre and Annapo- JGT, RS
lis Causeway
Jan 9 -a male kestrel at Canard Poultry pond JGT
Jan 10 -40+ Canada geese at Grand Pre JGT
-60 Canada geese at Port Williams JW
-a Savannah sparrow at Grand Pre, a swamp sparrow
in east Wolfville and a chipping sparrow on Wolf-
ville Ridge (latter to at least Mar 15) HB, BLF
Jan 12 -a sharp-shinned hawk at feeder on Wolfville
Ridge JGT
(not many "sharpies" seen/reported this year?) JW
-a Townsend's solitaire at Blanche, Shelburne Co.
(Rare Bird Alert)
Jan 13 -a thick-billed murre at Canada Creek (Fundy sh.) JGT
-4 bald eagles at Kingsport and 15 at Sheffield
Mills JGT
Jan 14 -complete halo around moon (hazy sky)-again Feb 8 JW
Jan 15 -5 Lapland longspurs at Grand Pre BBT
Jan 16 -4 gray partridges near Starr's Point + 6 south
of Canning MG
(second-hand reports of coveys at Porter's Point,
Sheffield Mills and Hortonville) JW
Jan 17 -50 mallards at a Greenwich pond JGT
-a Savannah sparrow at feeder in Wolfville JSB
Jan 18 -6 gray partridges near Starr's Point BBT
-at Halifax/Dartmouth, a thick-billed murre, a JGT
black-headed gull, Bonaparte's gulls, 2 Ameri- et
can coots, a red-bellied woodpecker, a northern al
mockingbird, and a yellow-breasted chat
-female northern cardinal still at Gaspereau MT
feeders (also 3 common grackles and 1 JW
red-winged blackbird)

	-a Savannah sparrow at Starr's Point	JW
Jan 19	-2 separate sightings of single snowy owls, at Grand Pre and in east Wolfville	BBT,MP
	-a small insect (a wingless midge?) crawling on the snow on Wolfville Ridge	JGT
	-a northern goshawk killed a ring-necked pheasant in woods above Acadia University	MS
	-about 120 mourning doves being fed at Avonport	EU
Jan 21	-a northern shrike in Parrsboro	GT
Jan 22	-15 red-tailed hawks concentrated around poultry farms southwest of Canning	JGT
Jan 22 (cont)	-a northern shrike, flocks of red-winged blackbirds, common grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, 350-400 redpolls, 100 dark-eyed juncos and 15 American tree sparrows in corn field near Gaspereau	JGT
Jan 25	-200 Bohemian waxwings and 10 American robins in Wolfville	BLF,GT
Jan 27	-1000 snow buntings at Lower Burlington, Hants County	KLC, GR
Jan 29	-a snowy owl, 2 Barrow's goldeneyes, 15 common goldeneyes and 20 greater scaup at Annapolis Causeway	BBT
	-a great cormorant at Port George	JGT
	-one of six black-capped chickadees landed on Judy's hand looking for food!	JGT
	-a bald eagle along shore at Canada Creek	JGT
Jan 30	-a peregrine falcon consuming an American black duck near Kentville	RS
Feb 1	-a Savannah sparrow at Port Williams	LC
	-200 Bohemian waxwings eating crabapples at Gaspereau	EG
	-common redpolls approachable to less than a metre at my feeder	JW
Feb 2	-an immature northern shrike at Port Williams	LC
Feb 3	-40 snow buntings perched in a tree-top and on a rooftop near Stanley (also 2 flocks like this noticed Feb 8 in Canard Valley on BNS field trip)	MT,JW et al
Feb 4	-a deer on an ice-floe in Minas Basin off Evangeline Beach	AVR Radio
	-common redpolls in Gibson's yard in Canning became species #123 on his "yard-list"	MG
Feb 5	-a Savannah sparrow at feeder at Martha Dodge's home since end of January	HD
	-a northern flicker overwintering (partly on suet) at Hantsport	BS
Feb 6	-a sharp-shinned hawk on Wolfville Ridge	JGT
	-15 snow buntings and 3 Lapland longspurs in one flock at Grand Pre	ME
	-one "sick" horned lark caught by hand at Grand Pre	DS
Feb 8	-a sharp-shinned hawk at Grand Pre	JGT
	-an immature glaucous gull at Kentville dump (first seen in mid-January)	RS et al
	-water level of Gaspereau River extremely low, down to a bare trickle	JSB
Feb 9	-a northern shrike near Gaspereau	CKC
	-22 Lapland longspurs at Grand Pre	BBT

- Feb 10 -an ermine (short-tailed weasel) caught in a rat-trap in Bleakneys' basement in Wolfville JSB
 (Another caught there March 12. The first individual trapped was caged and kept at Acadia. It changed colour during late March.)
- Feb 11 -30 common redpolls at Cambridge PF
 -100 snow buntings at feeder at Starr's Point PBM
 -a mink on Wolfville Ridge far from water JGT
- Feb 12 -a northern shrike in Wolfville BBT
- Feb 13 -a saw-whet owl in Gibsons' yard at Canning MG



- Feb 14 -180 Bohemian waxwings in Wolfville JW
- Feb 15 -2 ring-necked pheasants high in coniferous trees (roosting?) in Starr's Point woodlot in late afternoon JW
- Feb 18 -a shrike at Cheverie KLC
- Feb 24 -raccoons active at Canning MG
- Feb 25 -fin whales at Duncan's Cove, Chebucto Head (south of Halifax) KTC
- Feb 26 -a brown creeper in Canning MG
- Feb 27 -a northern harrier in Gibsons' yard around feeder (snow too deep on dykelands?) MG
 -a snowy owl at Annapolis Causeway BBT
- Feb 28 -32 buffleheads at Bear River BBT
 -4 Canada geese at Grand Pre DGT
 -9 gray partridge at Starr's Point BBT
- late Feb -a shrike at Scots Bay, there for a week or longer, took a snow bunting and an American tree sparrow MH
 -snowy owl still at Annapolis Causeway BBT
- Mar 2 -a northern shrike caught a small mammal(!) on North Mountain GC
 -2 possible rusty blackbirds at a Wolfville feeder phoned to BBT
- Mar 3 -northern lights (aurora borealis) in early even. JW
- Mar 5 -a merlin seen several times at Wolfville feeder JS

Mar 7	-a gray-phase gyrfalcon at Grand Pre (later seen by several observers at Grand Pre and Hortonville. Last seen by ME, Mar 20, on the ground catching mice!)	BBT, JT
	-a badly injured short-eared owl at Grand Pre	BLF
	-a shrike at Starr's Point	BBT
	-12 Lapland longspurs at Grand Pre	BLF, BBT, JT
Mar 8	-a northern shrike at Starr's Point	PBM
	-another northern shrike on North Mountain	GC
Mar 9	-great horned owl sitting on nest platform at Gaspereau	CKC
Mar 12	-85 Bohemian waxwings in Wolfville	PCS
	-a dead brown creeper on a concrete support on 3rd floor of Huggins Science Hall at Acadia U.	EM
Mar 13	-rock doves copulating at Grand Pre	JW
Mar 14	-an immature (!) double-crested cormorant in a tree at Grand Pre, looking very out of place	BLF
	-110 Canada geese at Starr's Point and 150 American black ducks at Ells' farm in Sheffield Mills	EM, JW
	-a single common grackle in Wolfville	BBT
Mar 15	-5 Barrow's goldeneyes, 2 red-throated loons, at Annapolis; also a common raven carrying a twig	BNS
	-a northern goshawk west of Annapolis	BBT, GT
	-lots of tiny files on the snow along the Gaspereau River	JSB
Mar 16	-barred owl hooting in Wolfville	PCS
Mar 17	-200 snow buntings at Cheverie feeder	GR
	-fresh tracks and musk (!) of skunk in Wolfville	JSB
Mar 18	-over past few days, N.S. Lands & Forests received a great horned owl, a barred owl, and a short-eared owl, all fairly recently dead, apparently of starvation	ME
Mar 18 (cont)	-incredible amounts of ice, in very large blocks, not only in Minas Basin but also on Fundy shore	JW JSB
	-75 Bohemian waxwings in Wolfville	FS
Mar 20	-a gyrfalcon seen catching mice at Grand Pre	ME
	-a northern shrike in Port Williams	TH
Mar 21	-5 Iceland gulls at Wolfville sewage ponds, 90 common redpolls at feeder in Wolfville	JW
	-lots of gulls screaming in Wolfville at mid-night (?) (I also have 2 more reports of gulls heard recently in Wolfville after dark.)	JW
Mar 22	-a shrike in Canning	MG
Mar 23	-fresh road-killed skunk at Old Barns	BBT
Mar 24	-lots of "snow fleas" (springtails) on snow at Gaspereau	JSB
	-15 red crossbills in Wolfville	PCS
	-2 separate shrikes, one at Truro, other at Malagash	BBT
	-road-killed woodchuck at Old Barns	BBT
Mar 25	-at least 300-400 Canada geese flew northward over Woodville. (Steve Baxter also says that foxes are very abundant in Woodville area now; they killed many woodchucks last summer.)	SB
	-a harrier in Canard Valley	MG
	-1 brightly coloured American robin in Wolfville	KT
	-a large yellowjacket (hornet) actively crawling in Wolfville	JT
	-2 red-winged blackbirds in Wolfville	BBT

Mar 26	-a woodchuck in Gaspereau Valley	RN
	-a northern shrike singing and a fox sparrow singing at Advocate; also a hooting barred owl, a northern goshawk and 17 deer together	ME
	-several reports of single American robins, with weak "singing"; also flocks of up to 30 birds. Some courtship noted.	PCS,RN,JP,JW
	-fox sparrow in Wolfville	JS
	-a killdeer and common grackles in Wolfville	PCS
	-single northern shrikes at Upper Kennetcook and Cheverie	BBT
	-2 common grackles in Wolfville	BBT
Mar 27	-crocuses, snowdrops and aconites in bloom, and honeybees attending them, in Wolfville	HT
	-an all-white snowy owl and a killdeer at Cheverie	BBT
	-6 fox sparrows at Cheverie	GR
Mar 28	-4 woodcocks at Advocate	ME
	-1 snowy owl and a northern shrike at Grand Pre	JW
	-1 American kestrel in Annapolis Valley	BBT
Mar 29	-a great blue heron at Canard Poultry pond	JW
	-a white-winged crossbill in Wolfville	JSB
Mar 30	-2 great cormorants, 1 red-throated loon, 1 red-necked grebe, 4 red-breasted mergansers, 1 old-squaw, etc. at Harbourville	BBT
	-3 red crossbills in Wolfville	JSB
Mar 31	-2 ring-necked ducks at White Rock	RN
	-a ring-necked pheasant crowing and a woodpecker drumming in Wolfville	JW

CONTRIBUTORS

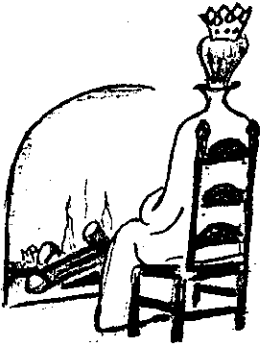
Many thanks to the following contributors:

BBT Brenda and Bill Thexton	JSB Sherman Bleakney
BLF Bernard Forsythe	JT Jean Timpa
BNS Blomidon Naturalists	JW Jim Wolford
BS Barry Sabean	KT Kimberly Thorpe
CKC Cyril Coldwell	KTC Karen and Ted Casselman
DGT Diane and Gordon Thorpe	LC Lana Churchill
DS Don Stewart	ME Mark Elderkin
EG Ellis Gertridge	MG Merritt Gibson
ELM Eric Mills	MH Marit Hancock
EM Erich Muntz	MP Mary Pratt
EU Eva Urban	MS Mike Shaffelburg
FS Francis Schwab	MT Miriam Tams
GC Gordon Callon	PBM Pat and Bill Martell
GR Gerry Rathbun	PCS Peter C. Smith
GT Gerry Trueman	PF Paul Fairclough
HB Harry Brennan	RN Reg Newell
HD Heather Davidson	RS Richard Stern
HT Hilda Taylor	SB Sherman Boates
JGT Judy and Gordon Tufts	ST Sean Timpa
JP Julie Porter	TH Tom Herman
JS Jack Scott	

FROM OTHER PUBLICATIONS

File on the Wood

Anonymous
contributed by
Rachel Erskine
Wolfville, N.S.



Birchwood fires are bright and clear
If the logs are kept a year.
Chestnut only, so they say
If for long 'tis laid away.
But ash new or ash old
Is fit for queen with crown of gold.

Birch and fir logs burn too fast,
Blaze up bright and do not last.
It is by the Irish said
Hawthorn bakes the sweetest bread.
Elmwood burns like churchyard mould
E'en the very flames are cold.
But ash green or ash brown
Is fit for queen with golden crown.

Poplar gives a bitter smoke,
Fills your eyes and makes you choke.
Apple wood will scent your room
With an incense-like perfume.
Oaken logs, if dry and old
Keep away the winter cold.
But ash wet or ash dry
A King shall warm his slippers by.

Environmental Interest Group

from The Advertiser
Kentville, N.S.
March 6, 1987

At a recent gathering in Wolfville, members of the Concerned Citizens about Canning organization and other concerned individuals met to explore the possibility of establishing a local environmental interest group.

The focus of this inaugural meeting, held February 25, 1987, was on the critical need to preserve the remaining agricultural land base in Kings County.

Loss of farmland is of both local and global significance. Only 11 percent of Canada is suitable for agriculture but, between 1976 and 1981 alone, 98,976 hectares were lost (to urbanization). Half of this urbanization occurred on the country's best quality land.

Agriculture in Kings County is of vital importance to the economy of the region. The proximity of class two and three soils to the Bay of Fundy and Minas Basin provides an exceptionally long growing season, allowing the production of crops of more value than can be grown elsewhere in the Maritimes.

Population growth in Kings County has been exceeded only by Nova Scotia's major metropolitan areas, resulting in a loss of over 16,000 hectares of farmland between 1961 and 1981. As is the case elsewhere, development largely occurred on the most valuable agricultural land according to a press release by the group.

Although there has been an increase in productivity on surviving farms, other factors including soil erosion, pollution and global climate change threaten to reduce the ability to feed ourselves says the press release.

The group believes it is important that farmland be exempt from not just urban sprawl but other detrimental factors as well.

In conclusion, the group agreed that it was vital to protect the remaining agricultural land base and that the importance of doing so be made clear to the public and to the decision makers.

Attending future public hearings pertaining to this issue or expressing concern directly to politicians was advocated. As well, there was general agreement that the formation of an environmental group would benefit the area.

A meeting is being planned to discuss urban agriculture with a focus on organizations such as "City Farmer".

Anyone wishing further information may contact Frank Sloan at 542-2353.

Colour Your Skies . . . rainbows and auroras

from Canadian Weather
Trivia Calendar, 1987

Many consider the rainbow to be the most spectacular of all atmospheric phenomena. It has inspired school children and poets and has been revered by cultures all through the ages. We view it as a visual delight, a magical sign and a pathway to good fortune.

The rainbow is an optical phenomenon produced through the refraction and reflection of sunlight by raindrops. In order to see the rainbow, you must stand with your back to the sun and face a shower of rain. Each raindrop acts like a tiny prism. The rays of sunlight coming from behind the observer pass through the raindrop and are bent and reflected to the observer's eyes. With a multitude of water drops, the result is a large arc of colour with red on the outside band and violet on the inside. The most spectacular rainbows are usually seen near sunrise or sunset and when the raindrops are large. Rainbows cannot be seen when the sun is more than 42 degrees above the horizon, because there are too few raindrops in the proper direction between the observer's head and the ground.

Another of nature's dazzling light shows, the aurora borealis or northern lights, is seen on many clear night skies in northern Canada. Displays are more frequent and brilliant in years with greater sun spot activity. They can be seen as shimmering, pulsating curtains of green and pink lights, or as an arc of faint light stretching low across the sky or as a diffuse glow of steady light, or as darting streamers and dancing rays that continually change their form.

The aurora results from the collision of fast-moving particles streaming out from the sun (solar wind) and rarefied gases of the upper atmosphere (magnetosphere). The collision of solar electrons and air atoms and molecules produces the auroral lights. The aurora can be roughly described as a gigantic electrical generator, producing light in much the same manner as a neon sign.

What causes the colours in the northern lights? Green is the most commonly seen colour, caused by the electrons striking the very cold oxygen of the rarefied upper air. Pink is produced when nitrogen is hit. In the summer, violet-gray shades are seen, caused by the electrons rushing through the very warm, sunlit portion of the night sky at high altitudes. Late at night, violet rays originate in the atmosphere hundreds of kilometres high, which is still illuminated by the sun.

Do northern lights produce sounds? Northern lights are never closer than 65 km above the earth, and sometimes as high as 1,000 km, but they usually occur at about 130 km. Consequently, anyone who claims to have heard a faint swishing, rustling or crackling sound must be mistaken. The distance separating auroras from observers makes it impossible to hear them, even if they did create sounds - which is quite unlikely.

One possible explanation [for the reports of sounds] is that the aurora induces electric charges at the earth's surface that result in a multitude of small discharges at the tips of foliage, etc. The observer watching the aurora associates the sound with changes in the aurora, although the sounds are produced near where the observer is standing [and not by the aurora itself].