

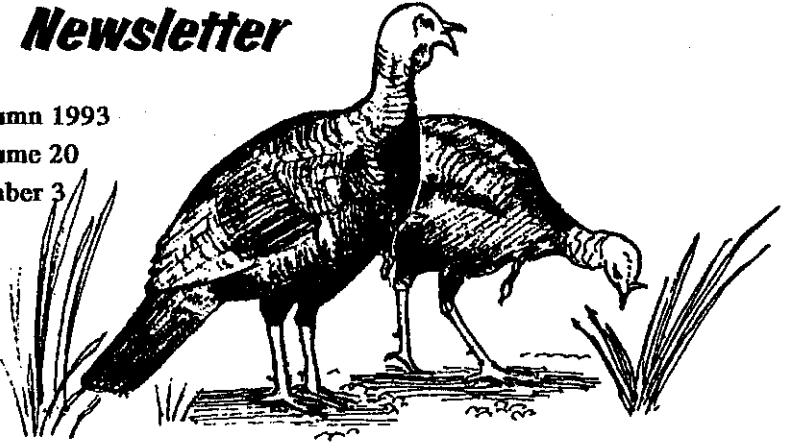
Blomidon Naturalists Society

Newsletter

Autumn 1993

Volume 20

Number 3



BNS Late Fall and Winter Meetings

Monday Evening Meetings: All meetings will start at 7:30 p.m. and, unless otherwise indicated, will be held in Room 244 of the Beveridge Arts Centre at Acadia University. All meetings 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 *The Hants Journal*.

18 Oct. Jim Wolford. "Temperate Rain Forests and Grizzlies" (See description in the last newsletter).

15 Nov. Tom Herman, Bernard Forsythe, and Carina Cameron. "Turtles, Owls and Bees." Each speaker will present their pet projects. Enjoy and evening of short and varied topics.

13 Dec. Philippa Shepherd. "Blood Worms and Shorebirds." Can a thousand-year-old migration of birds be jeopardized by bait harvesting for sport fishing?

17 Jan. Peter MacLeod. "Wolves and their Behaviour." Dr. MacLeod will present some of his extensive work with wolves at the Canadian Centre for Wolf Studies at Shubenacadie. **Elliott Hall 221**

21 Feb. Show and Tell. Members and guests are invited to present their own interests, collections, or slides. Please meet in Patterson Hall, Room 308.

Blomidon Naturalists Society Newsletter

Volume 20, Number 2, Summer 1993

Editorial Board

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The *Blomidon Naturalists Society Newsletter* is published quarterly, in January, March, June, and October, by the Blomidon Naturalists Society, P.O. Box 127, Wolfville, N.S. B0P 1X0. Printed in Canada. For subscription information, see "1993 Membership Fees and Form". Send change of address notification to the above address.

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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

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The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a member of the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists, an Affiliated Member of the Canadian Nature Federation and a member of the Nova Scotia Trails Federation.

The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a registered charity. Receipts for income tax purposes will be issued for all donations.

BNS SOCIETY NOTICES

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Mr. George Boyd, speaker at our September meeting. George is a waterfowl technician with the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources. He gave a very interesting presentation on his experiences banding birds, mainly black ducks and common eiders. His informative and humorous talk, accompanied by slides, found an appreciative audience. George was introduced by Randy Milton and thanked by George Alliston.

As always, we must also thank our field trip leaders who provide some of the most important services offered by the BNS:

Canadian Nature Federation Annual Conference

Mark on your calendar the dates for next year's Canadian Nature Federation Annual Conference, in Halifax, Aug. 4-7. Hosted by the Halifax Field Naturalists. More information in the next B.N.S. Newsletter.

A Natural History of Kings County, Nova Scotia

Now in its 2nd printing!! Copies may be obtained from local bookstores (\$16.95), or ordered directly from the B.N.S. (\$14.95),

P.O. Box 127,

Wolfville, N.S., BOP 1X0.

BNS Newsletter Submissions Deadline December 15, 1993

Please send all contributions to the Newsletter to:

Blomidon Naturalists Society

P.O. Box 127

Wolfville, N.S. BOP 1X0

Send submissions for "Trivial Tidbits" (everything but bird items) to Jim Wolford at:

Biology Department

Acadia University Wolfville,

N.S. BOP 1X0

Send observations for "Bird News", for Kings, Hants and Annapolis Counties only, as soon as possible after they are made to:

Richard Stern

40 MacDonald Park Road

Kentville, N.S. B4N 5C7

Last-minute observations can be phoned to Richard at 678-1975.

Christmas Bird Counts

Note: Everyone, novice and pro is welcome to participate in the Christmas Bird Counts. To learn the ropes, novices will be teamed with more experienced birders. A small fee is charged all participants to offset the costs of processing the data in the North American data base.

Wolfville: The Christmas Bird Count in the Wolfville area will take place on **Saturday, December 18, 1993**, or, if the weather is bad, on **Sunday, December 19, 1993**. After an invigorating day of counting birds, we'll get together for our traditional chowder supper and tally our results at the Acadia Biology Museum in Patterson Hall. Angus MacLean is the organizer. To participate, call Angus at 679-5878, or the Department of Biology at Acadia at 542-2201, Loc. 1334.

West Hants: The 8th West Hants Christmas Bird Count is planned for **Sunday, January 2nd, 1994**. Anyone interested should contact

Karen & Ted Cassleman, Cheverie, 633-2837. Contact them early to get your choice of territory. As always, the count will be followed by a delicious (8th Annual!) dinner while the results are tallied.

Kingston: The Christmas Bird Count for the Kingston area is scheduled for **Monday, December 27th, 1993**. Those interested in participating should contact Patrick & Barbara Giffen (765-8688) before December 15th.

Brier Island: Anyone interested in taking part in the Brier Island Christmas Bird Count should contact Richard Stern at 678-1975.

BNS SOCIETY REPORTS

Notes from the BNS Directors

by Tom Herman, President
Kentville, N.S.

The BNS Executive met on June 22 and September 7, 1993. Regular items of business, including reports from the Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, Program Committee, Special Publications Editor, Conservation Committee, Robie Tufts Nature Centre Committee and the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists were reviewed at both. A number of additional items were also considered.

Discussions of plans for a dyke-land trail near the Robie Tufts Nature Centre continued. The Wolfville Business Development Corporation

recently solicited proposals for an open space study incorporating such a trail. BNS will be represented during review of the proposals.

Several directors recently met with two local recreation managers to discuss concerns about the future of the Cornwallis River Valley and the need for a comprehensive management plan. BNS will attempt to organize a meeting this winter to seek input and ideas from the public, and to discuss greenway concepts. Christianne Lafferty, our Conservation Corps crew leader this past summer and presently a student at the College of Geographic Sciences in Lawrence-town, will be involved in compiling a comprehensive map of a portion of the river.

The Short-Eared Owl project, so ably organized by George Alliston, finally yielded a successful nest. We will be involving the Mammalogy class from Acadia this fall in an assessment of small mammal (=owl food) habitats and abundance near the nest site and at selected locations on the Grand Pre dykelands. Hopefully the project will continue in subsequent years.

Directors were pleased with the efforts of our summer conservation crew. Not only did they manage the Nature Centre, but they also completed considerable trail and boardwalk construction near the Centre and along the Gaspereau River. The latter work, done in cooperation with Nova Scotia Power Corporation, was a particular success.

The second printing of the Natural History of Kings County is now complete, and the Annotated Check List of Birds is nearly ready. The BNS also recently received approval of a major grant from the Environmental Partners Fund to produce information sheets on status of selected individual plant and animal species in the province. This project, carried out in cooperation with the Nova Scotia Museum, Acadia Centre for Wildlife and Conservation Biology and the Canadian Wildlife Service, will be announced publicly in the near future.



A Summary of Summer Employment 1993 with the BNS

by Christianne Lafferty
Canning, N.S.

This summer I had the wonderful opportunity to work with the Blomidon Naturalists Society and the Youth Conservation Corps on various environmentally oriented projects. With a crew of three members from the Youth Conservation Corps (included were Lisa Jones, Paul Williams and Samantha Bissix) our busy summer schedule began with an intense three day training session in the first few days of July at Debert's DND Communications Base, Nova Scotia.

The week of July 5-9 took the crew and I from Hants West all the way to Kingston visiting the day-camps in the area. We talked to the children about 'Environmental Awareness' and how they can make a difference. We had a lot of fun with children of all ages and they were very responsive to the "Nature Surrounds You" activities we introduced them to. We found that getting involved with the children using these activities taught them how to appreciate, look after and be aware that the Earth is sensitive to human impact is a much more effective method of teaching children about the environment rather than simply lecturing to them. If anyone is interested in finding out activities they can use to teach children in a fun way about the environment I would suggest contacting the Department of the

Environment in Halifax for a copy of their "Environmental Awareness" education package.

During this week we also found the time to do three Beach Sweeps. The beaches that were cleaned included Donneland's Brook on the Bay of Fundy (between Harbourville and Victoria's Harbour), Kingsport Beach and Blomidon Beach. The Bay of Fundy's Beach proved to be the most debris scattered of all three. In total, some 25-30 large garbage bags were collected between the four of us in one day's work, as well as approximately 150-200 plastic containers we strung on a long rope. Sad to say, we only covered a stretch of beach perhaps a kilometre long!

Starting July 12 to the end of our working contract (August 30) the crew concentrated on the projects assigned to us by the Blomidon Naturalists Society which included the construction of a board walk (across the train tracks from the Robie Tufts Nature Centre). The intent of this board walk was to gain access to the dykes directly north from the centre so that guided tours of the dykeland areas could be conducted. The board walk was accomplished and three tours a week were given to the public by the crew. The people that attended the guided walks were not plentiful and were from various backgrounds but this made for enjoyable walks. Some were amateurs, some were avid bird watchers, they came from Victoria, B.C., from New York, New York, or from "just over the hill" but all

expressed a large degree of interest in the beauty that surrounds Wolfville.

The crew also worked in the evenings counting Chimney Swifts for the next month (10 August was the last sighting). We circulated a visitors guest book and answered questions. The public were very receptive to our presence and seemed to appreciate our comments on the Swifts. We learned a lot about the Swifts with each evening, needless to say, we also grew very attached to them.

Another project that we worked on in conjunction with the Kentville Youth Corps was the White Rock trail (ie. Gaspereau "old-road"). For seven days in total we clipped, trenched, moved rocks, carved into higher ground, helped build a bridge with the N.S. Power Corporation, and put warning signs up around poison ivy and at Three Pools.

The crew rerouted a section of the Acadia Nature Trail that crosses onto private property. We conducted Loon surveys for the Youth Conservation Corps at Lumsden Pond and on Black River. Unfortunately no Loons were ever seen.

And this was only our fair weather day schedule! On rainy days we were kept busy with such projects as owl pellet analysis, Chimney Swift literature searches, a "Swift clock", upkeep of the Robie Tufts Nature Centre, tidal panel (still an on going project for me at the College of Geographic Sciences), annotated bird checklist and the list goes on.

On behalf of Lisa, Sam, Paul and

I, we would like to thank the Blomidon Naturalists Society for making our summer jobs possible, fun and full of new experiences! Keep in touch BNS!

NATURE REPORTS



The Wolfville Chimney Swifts

Summer 1993

by Christianne Lafferty
Canning, N.S.

One of the many projects assigned to the N.S. Youth Conservation Corps crew was the task of counting the Chimney Swifts. And oh what a task this was, a pleasant one mind you! We dressed in our Blomidon Naturalists Society uniform (which merely comprised a Robie Tufts Nature Centre T-shirt and jeans), carried our ammunition (a guest book, and smiles), and went out into the made crowds (decent, interested, nature loving visitors firing good questions). Actually not all of them were visitors, a third of the people each night were locals that, in some cases, had never seen the Swifts before or happened to be passing by

when they noticed a large crowd in front of the centre.

We thoroughly enjoyed mingling with the visitors of the Swifts and unfortunately did not always make it all the way around the parking lot with the guest book before the show was over.

We started observing the Swifts on 12 July. That night we counted approximately 135 Swifts and 60 visitors. Between the dates of 18-23 July were very excited with an influx of Swifts reaching as high as 375 on 19 July. With numbers this high it was guaranteed to be a good show. The spectators were not disappointed and would show their appreciation when the performance was over with a round of applause.

The visitors varied in numbers from night to night, but on average the crew counted between 80-100. Their home residences varied incredibly, which made for very interesting conversation for the crew and I. Looking back at the entrees in the guest book; a third of the Swift visitors were from Nova Scotia (182 entrees) with all parts of the province being represented. 20 entrees were from other parts of the Atlantic provinces; 42 were from Ontario; 15 were from B.C.; 14 from Quebec; 7 from the prairies and mid-western Canada; 42 from the United States and finally, 13 entrees were international visitors.

To concentrate on the "far away" visitors, listed are first the States then the international countries that were represented.

STATES: INTERNATIONAL:

Maine	Paris, France
New York	Cleebourg, France
North Carolina	Hong Kong
Vermont	Malasia
New Jersey	South Africa
Ohio	Bermuda
Florida	Bahamas
New Hampshire	Australia
Michigan	Africa
California	Amman, Jordan
Massachusetts	England
Conneticut	Scotland
Rhode Island	
Pennsylvania	
Virginia	
Georgia	
Maryland	
South Carolina	

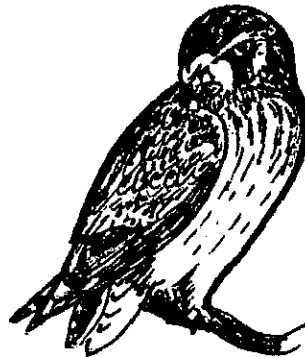
In closing, the night I remember best was the Friday night of Mud Creek Days, 30 July. Regardless of the noise and confusion and the large crowds (approximately 200 spectators just around the Nature Centre) the Swifts put on the most spectacular show I've seen yet! It was as if they were part of the performances of the evening, just for our benefit. One hundred and ninety Swifts were counted flying in perfect form and with no hesitation in one shot flew into the chimney at an incredible speed. They were not bothered in the least with the activities in Wolfville, which made me realize that they are not afraid of us, but rather enjoyed living close to us. Especially since they choose to live in our chimneys!

Short-eared Owl Project Update

by George Alliston
West Brooklyn, N.S.

We have continued to monitor, on a weekly basis, the progress of the nesting pair of short-eared owls found in the Canard area. As reported in the last Newsletter, when the nest was found (June 26) it contained three young. We are pleased to report that the three young have fledged (late July) and, at the time of writing (September 15) the complete family group is still resident in the nesting territory.

The nest was situated in a field which had not been farmed in several years (including 1993), and was exposed to neither danger from or disturbance by agricultural activity. When the young owls fledged they moved to adjacent actively farmed areas (mostly in forage crops). Their day roost sites, which were mostly in well vegetated drainage ditches, were immediately adjacent to fields where bulldozer activity occurred almost



daily from mid-August through early September. Obviously these birds are tolerant of high levels of human activity!

Monitoring the presence of the short-eared owl family during the post-fledging period has proved to be both easy and entertaining. The owls' activity has been quite predictable -- the birds confined their roosting sites to a relatively small area, emerging from them consistently between 15 and 30 minutes after sunset. Immediately after leaving the roost the family often indulges in several minutes of social interaction. The young birds are very curious and sometimes come to investigate the investigators, either flying by very closely or landing nearby to take a good look at us.

Since it was almost dark when the owls left their day roosts, we had little time to observe them hunting. A few observations were made of the adult birds hunting and it appeared that food was not in short supply. On one occasion we witnessed three items of prey being taken by an adult bird and delivered to young in a 20-minute period and, on another occasion, four prey items were captured and delivered within a half-hour period. Analysis of 27 pellets collected at the nest site and day roosts confirms that these birds were feeding virtually exclusively on meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*).

We intend to continue to monitor the short-eared owl family until they disperse from their nesting territory.

We have mapped the general types

of agricultural land use of most of the dykelands of eastern Kings County. In October mammalogy students from Acadia University will assess relative population levels of mice supported under these agricultural land use classifications. Such information should be useful in assessing the potential importance of different agricultural habitats to short-eared owls and other raptor species that are partially or wholly dependent upon mouse populations (e.g. long-eared owl, northern harrier, red-tailed hawk, rough-legged hawk, etc.).

The final report on the 1993 short-eared owl study will be completed in December. Should you wish to review a copy of the report, please contact me at 542-3651 and I will arrange to loan you a copy.

**Federation of Nova
Scotia Naturalists:
1993 AGM a Success!
Thank you, LADPA.**

by Jeff Pike

Les Amis du Plein Air hosted this year's annual meeting in Cheticamp from June 19 to 21. The event was a success; approximately 125 people attended. Its hard to believe this year's AGM could have been better than last year's, but the special approach to the event proved successful. Many thanks go to the organizers of the event and to all those who assisted with registration, etc. LADPA's director to the FNSN,

David Lawley, played a very visible role and helped keep all the events on schedule and running smoothly. Thank you, David.

The event got off to a rousing start on Friday evening, accompanied by traditional Cape Breton music. This member arrived late and missed what seemed to have been a very good time. The following morning, the lecture series got off to a solid start with a lecture by Erwin Zодrow entitled, "The Fossils of the Coal Seams," which described in detail this aspect of the geology of Cape Breton Island. In the afternoon I attended the walk led by Mary (Pixie) Williams in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park. This was an excellent walk and Mary focused on wild flora in general. While we were on the walk, others took a whale-watching cruise, and Rob Raeside presented a lecture on the geology of Cape Breton. Our walk with Pixie was so enjoyable that many of us stayed on and missed the second afternoon session. In the evening, the slide presentation by Hal Hinds on the "Rare and Endangered Plants in Cape Breton" proved very interesting to this amateur botanist. Hal's slides were remarkable -those that I saw - I was busily taking notes for an abstract on his presentation to be published later this year.

Sunday morning began with a bird walk with Blake Maybank which was very well attended. A few of us plant enthusiasts trailed behind and did some botanizing. It was well worth the early hour for me; I saw a

Canada anemone (*Anemone canadensis*). The first lecture of the day was an excellent slide presentation (accompanied at times by music) by Clarence Barret on the "Cheticamp River". He took us on a trip from the river valley up to the plateau and the source of the river. He then brought us from the taiga, through boreal forest, and back into deciduous forest. This was one of the most beautiful slide presentations I have attended and Clarence's ease in speaking to the group was much appreciated. Clarence finished his presentation with a quote by Kipling:

"Something hidden. Go find it.

Go and look behind the Ranges -
something lost behind the Ranges

Lost and waiting for you. Go!"

After coffee break, Tony Erskine reflected on natural history from the perspective of someone who began exploring and working in the area 25 to 30 years ago. Gilbert Von Ryckevorsel followed with amazing underwater photography of salmon in various rivers in the province, which included some "fresh" footage from a dive in the Cheticamp River on the previous day.

In closing, David Lawley summed up the conference with, "We saw many of the physical aspects of the natural history of Cape Breton Island." He then quoted (I missed the name), "Naturalists like to know what they see, not what they know." The conference ended with a nature hike on the Corney Brook trail to see a beautiful waterfall. Les Amis du Plein Air has placed pressure on the



THE BOX OF DELIGHTS

Post Office Box 899, Wolfville, Nova Scotia BOP

Phone: 542-9511

THE FAMILY BOOKSHOP

CHRISTMAS GIFT SUGGESTIONS:

1. **Against Darkness & Storm - Lighthouses of the Northeast**
Wayne Barrett/Harry Thruston -- \$29.95
2. **In the Annapolis Valley** - Terry James -- \$27.95
3. **Wild & Beautiful Sable Island** - Pat & Rosemarie Keough -- \$25.95
4. **Natural History of Kings County** -- \$16.95
5. **Coastal Nova Scotia** - Judith Light -- \$9.95
6. **The Day Niagara Falls Ran Dry** *Canadian Weather Facts & Trivia* -- \$19.95
7. **Dancing with Whales** - Peter Beamish -- \$8.95

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next group to host the AGM in 1994 to come up with something equally special.

**Reprinted from FNSN News, Summer 1993.

FNSN Addendum:

by Jim Wolford
Wolfville, N.S.

As Jeff indicated above, this year's AGM of the FNSN was extremely well organized, smoothly hosted and kept moving on schedule, and the speakers and excursion-leaders well chosen and prepared. Apparently a lot of people from all parts of the province were overdue for a visit to Cheticamp and Cape Breton, so that the weekend saw marvellous representation from both mainlanders and islanders.

All of the lecture/slide shows were

super presentations, including the one by Acadia University geologist Rob Raeside. Also, I attended a field trip on insects with David McCorquodale of the University College of Cape Breton - uncooperative weather did not prevent David from finding some local insects, both on land and in the river, to show us and discuss.

Finally, another vote for kudos to Les Amis Plein Air, our host group. Next year's Federation AGM will very probably be June 17-19, hosted by the Eastern Mainland Field Naturalists, at St. F.X. University in Antigonish.

Note: FNSN membership is available in conjunction with membership in the Blomidon Naturalists Society for \$5.00. See BNS Membership Information, inside the back cover of this issue.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

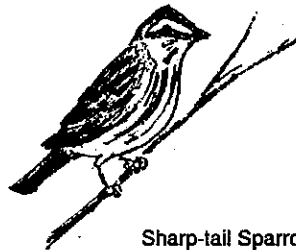
Pickett's Wharf

June 26, 1993

by J. Sherman Bleakney
Wolfville, N.S.

Our group of about a dozen persons, representing naturalists from as far away as Kedge and Halifax, were blessed with perfect weather for exploring tidal marshes: warm sun and a cool breeze which kept the biting flies at bay.

This was the Society's first field trip to that area and it proved to be



Sharp-tail Sparrow

rather interesting because of the variety of habitats in such a relatively small area. It certainly has potential for interesting field trips at other times of the year, as well. We determined that

half-day trips of 3 hours are adequate, so picnic lunches are not required.

To the accompaniment of the vocalizations (you couldn't say songs!) of sharp-tailed sparrows, we first discussed the general ecology of tidal marshes and then ventured forth to observe directly the community interdigitation of land and marine plants and animals: the juxtaposition of flowering plants and seaweeds; the brackish pools teeming with both flying insects and crawling sea snails; and of course those also teeming, tiny crustaceans hidden in the mud that serve to fatten and fuel arctic shore-bird migrants en route to South America.

Here is a brief resume of the sites we examined:

1. Upper tidal marsh with accumulated marsh grass detritus and a rich assemblage of salt-tolerant flowering plants.

2. Mid-marsh area with its grasses and drainage creeks, the latter creating deep pits, often hidden, of leg-breaking potential.

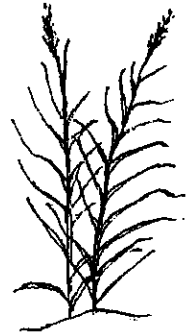
3. Marsh pools, rich in specially adapted species, and also important nurseries for several species of fish.

4. Lower marsh transition where tall grasses give way to mud and one-celled plants, and where mud snails pepper the surface ooze.

5. Pickett's Wharf, now derelict, provides an oasis of rocks and wooden timbers in a sea of mud, and here are anchored seaweeds, snails, barnacles, ectoprocts and many egg

cases. The exposed fill at the wharf has unusual rocks, shells and even tropical brain coral probably discarded ship's ballast.

6. Walking from the wharf area eastward to a treed point of land on exposed bedrock, there is a variety of coastal plant communities as well as a freshwater seepage area of sedges and fresh-



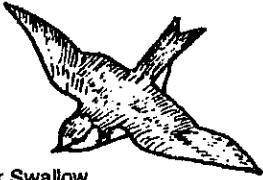
Salt-grass

water snails. There are also many small high tide pools, sandy beaches with burrows of large beach fleas, and an extensive high marsh area at the point with deep pools and schools of fish. The strand line along this section of the walk contained sponges, ectoprocts, shells, cast skins and interesting egg cases.

7. At the forested point of land is a particularly interesting colony of bank swallows for the burrows are at eye level, and the nests and eggs easily observed with a flashlight.

Having explored the point area, and it being 12:30 noon, there were left to us three options: retrace our steps to Pickett's Wharf and enjoy the ambience in reverse; picnic at the point and focus on the spectacular scenery; or continue walking along the shore to the nearby beach at Porter's Point and then follow the paved road past farms and north-south vistas back to cars at Pickett's

Wharf. Our little group actually managed to accomplish all three options, for, after a formal fini at the swallow colony, various individuals pursued different options, and, in all



Bank Swallow

Methal's Pond

July 11, 1993

by Bernard Forsythe
Wolfville, N.S.

Although the water was a bit choppy at times, it was otherwise a great day for a canoe outing. The lone occupants of two canoes soon returned to double up in a single canoe for easier handling. The leader's canoe glided effortlessly along, probably due to the quiet electric motor fastened to its side. He never did like paddling so why not save his energy for more interesting pursuits like poking through bogs for hours.

This field trip described in "A Natural History of Kings County" begins at Forest Home but due to transportation complications we covered the Methal's Lake end of the route. We worked our way between the long dead stumps towards the bog. Three species of ducks, grackles, tree swallows, kingbirds, and black-backed woodpeckers all use the stumps for nesting sites. Only the leader put on rubber boots for

walking into the bog. This fellow dislikes wet feet worse than paddling a canoe. Some time was spent discussing life in a bog such as how some plants trap insects, and/or associate with certain fungi to supplement their food needs. Two beautiful bog orchids, rose pogonia and calopogon were in full bloom while a third, white-fringed orchid was just beginning to flower. A higher, older area of the bog supporting heaths, black spruce and lichens was looked at on the way back to our canoes. Several species of birds were noted, including a couple of songs from the Lincoln's sparrows that returned to the bog this year.

After a stop on a small island for lunch we made our way around Methal's Lake enjoying the scenery. A short hike was made into an old eagle nest site. Here we looked at many species of forest plants, so different from the bog plants visited earlier. Although a few more bird species were observed such as an eagle and osprey overhead; the woods were a lot quieter than they had been a few short weeks before. Another nesting season was almost



Kingbird

over. The outing was also ending. On the way back the leader wondered if his companions noticed how relaxed he was now that he found out how to enjoy canoeing. No more tired paddling muscles.

Blomidon Provincial Park

August 11, 1993

by John Pickwell
New Minas, N.S.

This is a difficult field trip to write up because of the numbers of people, and so many things going on at once. Between 25 and 30 people showed up at the park registration building at 7 o'clock. Although my name was on the brochure "Parks are for People"; it was in fact, very much a combined effort from Ruth Newell, Bernard Forsythe, and myself.

We started out along the path from the registration building toward what I would call the meadow. Along the way we looked at a number of mosses both *Acrocarpous* and *Pleurocarpous*. That is, the mosses that grow straight up, and the mosses that creep. The species were Red Stemmed Feather Moss, *Pleurozium Schreberi*, Rough Necked Moss, *Rhytidadelphus Triquetrus*, Hair Capped Moss, *Polytrichum Commune*, one of the so called Broom Mosses, *Dicranum Polysetum*. Shortly after this Ruth spotted a Ragged Fringed Orchid, *Platanthera Lacera*. We continued on to the meadow where we

found a number of interesting plants, in spite of the fact it had been mowed. Along with plants like Eye-bright, *Euphrasia Americana*, we found Blue Lobelia, *Lobelia Spicata*, which is rare in the maritimes, and Cape Blomidon is one of the few places it is found.

On entering the woods on the far side, along the fence line, Bernard was able to show us Black Snakeroot, *Sanicula Marilandica*. Growing almost along side it was the Marginal Wood Fern, *Dryopteris Marginalis*, this we later found in at least two of its forms. All along the trail were Lady Ferns, *Athyrium Filix-Femina*, along with Silver Spleenwort, *Athyrium Thelypteroides*, and the Long Beech Fern, *Phegopteris Connectillus*. Perhaps the highlight of the trip were two orchids that Bernard was able to show us. The first one was just starting to bloom, it was the Broad-Leaved Helleborine, *Epipactis Helleborine*. The second was the Tall Leafy Green Orchid, *Platanthera Hyperborea*. At this point we cut across through the woods to the main woods trail. As we went, we came across the Red Baneberry, *Actaea Rubra*. This we found in two forms, the one with red berries and another with white. Although we looked, we were unable to locate the true White Baneberry, *Actaea Pachypoda* despite the fact that Ruth and I had found it a few days before. Everywhere we went we seemed to find Wild Leek, *Allium Tricoccum*. Only the seed pods were still visible as the flowers were over, and the leaves had withered in the spring. I was able to point

The Perseid Meteor Shower Observation Session

August 11, 1993

by Larry Bogan

Cambridge Station



Wild Leek

out a number of other ferns along the way such as Mountain Wood Fern, *Dryopteris Campylopera*, the Evergreen Wood Fern, *D. Intermedia*, also the Ostrich Fern, *Matteuccia Struthiopteris*, which had both this year and last year's fertile fronds showing.

Many other plants were found by both Ruth and Bernard that I cannot report as we were very much strung out along the trail. But at last the light began to fade, so we headed back. As we did, we found quite a number of Slender Ladies-Tresses, *Spiranthes Lacera*. It was all but dark when we reached our cars again. Some stayed to watch the meteor showers, although I don't know how they made out as I headed for home after an interesting discussion with Gini Proulx and her daughter from the Annapolis Field Naturalists, on the subject of ferns.



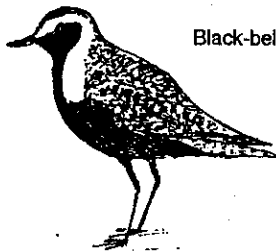
Red Oak

At dusk the crowds started to gather for an expected spectacular stellar show over Grand Pre'. During the previous week, the media had built up the expectations of the public for a meteor storm on this night. What the astronomers had determined was that the Earth was going to be close to the orbit of comet Swift-Tuttle that night and the dust from its earlier passage could hit our atmosphere and create a storm of meteors.

As the skies grew darker, Sherman Williams and Roy Bishop pointed out the constellations and bright stars that were visible in late summer. With the aide of several telescope, the group viewed some star clusters, galaxies, and double stars.

Just as Roy, was explaining how to view the meteor shower, several bright Perseid meteors streaked across the sky in the several minutes. The radiant of the shower in the constellation of Perseus was rising in the north-east. For over an hour most people stayed to watch the brighter-than-usual meteors. The OOOW's and AUGH's were common expressions heard over the period. Later, as the crowd thinned and drove home, most expressed the opinion that, although there had not been a meteor storm, the shower had been great

exceptional and well worth the night out. A few of us stayed after 11 pm and did a count of meteors. In the period from 11:30 pm to 12:30 am we saw 108 meteors and many of them were bright. Later, reports from all over the world reported that the shower peaked at about 3 hours Universal Time which corresponds to midnight Atlantic Daylight Time.



Black-bellied Plover

Shorebirds of the Minas Basin

August 14, 1993

by Judy Tufts
Wolfville, N.S.

The morning excursion began at 8:00 a.m. under partial cloudy skies, with the temperature in the 15-20 degree range; comfortably cool enough to be pleasant and with high tide at 10:15 a.m.

Ten participants including some from the Kingston and St. Croix areas left the Robic Tufts Nature Centre for the Wolfville Harbour to see what it offered. Up until early August, willets (local breeders), and short-billed dowitchers (fattening up for further migration) could easily be

spotted there daily and were now more conspicuous by their absence. However, we did find about 70 shorebirds, mostly semi-palmated sandpipers with a handful of semi-palmated plovers, flitting back and forth as the incoming tide quickly covered remaining 'islands' on the mud floor of the harbour. Returning to our cars we were impressed by the sight of an adult merlin being thoroughly harassed by a swallow over our heads - the merlin was obviously in no mood to pursue shorebirds...and retreated.

As we headed out towards Evangeline Beach driving between farm fields on the western side of Grand Pre, some of our group were lucky enough to see a belted kingfisher fly across our caravan of cars. We stopped at a black-bellied plover roost site (discovered the previous day) on a grass-sod field, and found 100 black-bellied plovers nervously standing in the field while more small flocks continued to arrive as local tidal flats become inundated with the incoming tide, bringing the total to double before we left. The plovers were in various stages of moult with only half a dozen still wearing their full distinctive mantle of breeding plumage.

We moved along to the shore of the Minas Basin. The 'high' tide being a 'neap' tide (a low high-tide), meant the birds would probably remain roosting on the Evangeline Beach so we were hopeful of good views. However, although we found a good-sized flock of shorebirds -

around 15,000, mostly semi-palmated sandpipers, a few black-bellied plovers and some semi-palmated plovers - they had settled at the west end of the beach and were easily disturbed. Several successful merlin nestings in the local area this year, particularly one just above the beach near cottages, have made the shorebirds more restless and nervous than usual, and just to remind us of that fact two merlins appeared through the wheeling mass of wings and retreated to the woods behind the panicked shorebirds; we could not see from our location whether the merlins had been carrying any prey.

With the low sun's appearance clear viewing of the birds became more difficult, so it was decided to change our location, to walk along the dyke from the east end of Grand

Pre (Long Island), hoping to get closer to the birds with little disturbance. As we walked along the dyke in the sunshine, heading for the beach, 30 black-bellied plovers flew over heading to the fields. The shorebirds remained a nervous concentration of 'peeps' just above the tide - any human approach made flocks of birds spring into the air, so we had to be content with long views through binoculars and spotting scope. Several white-rumped sandpipers were seen, along with about 400 semi-palmated plovers, but again it was disappointing not to see some of the larger birds: red knots, whimbrels, and short-billed dowitchers. However, as the field trip ended, the concensus was that this sight was still impressive.

NATURAL HISTORY ARTICLES

Are there American Chestnut Trees in Nova Scotia?

by Margaret Alliston
West Brooklyn, N.S.

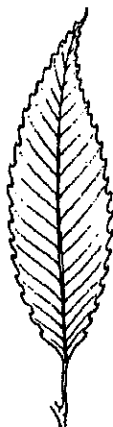
If you know of American chestnut trees in Nova Scotia, Dr. Greg Boland of the Canadian Chestnut Council would like to hear from you.

Until about 1900, the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) was a dominant tree in the dry forests of the northeastern and north-central United States and in the deciduous forest

region of Canada. The only one of the five North American species of chestnuts native to Canada, it was found here primarily in southern Ontario along the western end of Lake Ontario and the north shore of Lake Erie.

A mature American chestnut was a magnificent sight: up to 100 feet in height, with a wide spreading crown, and typically two to four feet in diameter (in *A Field Guide to Trees and Shrubs*, George A. Petrides cites an "exceptional maximum" diameter of 17 feet!). Although the tree grew in a variety of situations, it was most

often found in conjunction with other southern hardwoods on well-drained sands and gravels. The American chestnut has alternate, single, hairless, yellowish-green leaves, six to nine inches long by two inches wide, tapering to both ends; the veins off the midrib extend past the point of



Chestnut

the up-curved teeth giving the edge of the leaf a bristly look. There are no teeth on the leaf margins between the veins. The European Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), with which the American chestnut is sometimes confused, has leaves rounded at the base and hairy underneath. The Horsechestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), a large imported tree frequently grown as an ornamental in Nova Scotia, is easily distinguished from the American chestnut in leaf. The Horsechestnut has compound

leaves with from five to nine leaflets, each about the size of an American chestnut leaf, radiating from a single stem giving the whole leaf a fan or hand-like shape. Like that of the Horsechestnut, the fruit of the American chestnut is a spiny bur-like husk about two inches in diameter. The husk splits into four sections releasing one to five dull, smooth, brownish nuts flattened on at least one side. Nuts are even more difficult to find than you might expect because they are an epicurean delicacy for many species of birds, and squirrels and white-tailed deer.

Just after 1900 a fungus bark disease, believed to have been accidentally imported from Asia, became epidemic in American chestnuts so severely affecting them that by the mid-1920's they were eliminated as important forest trees. However, some roots still survive and produce sprouts that may live long enough to produce fruit. Now a successful tree typically reaches about 15 feet in height before the blight shatters the bark near its base, girdling and killing it. Seedlings often fare even worse; they are usually killed before they fruit.

For some years work has been conducted in both the U.S. and Canada to find a way to reintroduce the American chestnut to our forests either by cross-breeding American chestnuts with other blight-resistant chestnuts or by finding a strain of blight-resistant American chestnut that has developed naturally. To this end, scientists are attempting to locate

as many surviving American chestnut trees as possible. Although not known to have occurred in Nova Scotia in numbers, there are believed to have been some American chestnuts in our forests. It is also very possible that this species was planted as an ornamental by our forebears. Due to climatic limitations, they are most likely to be found along the South Shore to Yarmouth and in the Annapolis Basin area but it is possible that trees may have survived in other locations in suitable microclimates.

If you know of any living American chestnut tree, regardless of how poor its condition (even suckering old stumps), please send its exact location and some information about its condition to:

Dr. Greg Boland

Canadian Chestnut Council

Department of Environmental
Biology

University of Guelph

Guelph, Ontario

N1G 2W1

If you are really lucky and are able to collect nuts, Dr. Boland would appreciate receiving the nuts too. Please be sure to identify the source tree precisely.



Shorebird Watching in the Minas Basin

A Different Perspective - Revisited

by George Alliston
West Brooklyn, N.S.

As described in a previous Newsletter article (Vol. 17, No. 3, September 1990), Margaret and I often swim at a small beach on the Minas Basin, combining our swimming with shorebird watching. We find that shorebirds roosting along the beaches at high tide can be approached very closely from the water without becoming skittish. We can generally swim and crawl to within ten feet of the flock and lie there, head and shoulders out of the water, observing the birds.

On August 5, a beautiful sunny day, there were approximately 40,000-50,000 "peeps" (mostly semipalmated plovers) roosting on the rocky shore adjacent to "our" beach. We are used to seeing a few hundred to as many as a couple of thousand birds roosting at "our" beach but never before (or since) have we seen so many there.

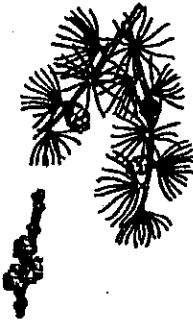
As usual we approached the beach carefully to avoid disturbing the roosting birds then entered the water a couple of hundred yards from them. We then swam to where the birds were, I as close as I could (within ten feet) and Margaret remaining a bit farther off, floating on her back, watching the large flock.

We had enjoyed watching and listening to the birds for about ten minutes when suddenly the flock rose as one, flew four passes directly over us, then flew off. They passed so close to us that we could feel the wind from their small wings on our faces. In fact, Margaret's toes, which were bobbing out of the water as she floated, were hit several times by the tips of the birds' wings!



The sandpipers' exodus was caused by an adult peregrine falcon stooping at the flock; however, the falcon was unsuccessful. The falcon then landed on the beach about 50 feet from me and remained there

for several minutes. It then took off and circled low over us four times, viewing us intently before it left the area.



Larch

This is definitely our kind of bird-watching -- relaxing and no binoculars required!

Black Knots and Witches' Brooms

by Nancy Nickerson
Port Williams, N.S.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'fungus'? If you said 'mushroom', you are probably in the majority of naturalists. On nature walks, mushrooms usually attract more attention than other kinds of fungi because they are relatively large, often brightly colored, and sometimes (but not always!!) edible. In fact, mushrooms and other 'macrofungi' make up only part of the vast fungal flora of Nova Scotia. Many other species have tiny fruiting bodies that are too small to be seen without the aid of a hand lens or a microscope. Some have no organized fruiting bodies at all. Among these 'microfungi' are many that are parasitic on plants. Their activities inside or on the surface of their hosts cause the different kinds of plant diseases - leaf spots, cankers, wilts, mildews etc. - familiar to home gardeners, farmers and foresters.

Some groups of plant-parasitic microfungi are difficult to identify in the field because they look alike and cause similar diseases on their hosts. I like to think of these as the fungal equivalents of the 'LBJ's' (little brown jobs) of the bird world! Identifying them usually requires a microscope, specialized training and access to scientific literature that is not available to most people. Nevertheless, field identification of

some species is not as daunting as you might think. Many of these fungi cause very distinctive disease symptoms that are unmistakable even at a distance. Most are host-specific, that is, they are found only on certain species of plants. An amateur armed with a hand lens and some knowledge of plant identification can learn to recognize many of the more common plant-parasitic microfungi, including the following.



Black Knot

The fungus *Apiosporina morbosa* causes black knot disease on cherries and plums. In the Annapolis Valley, black knot is especially common on wild black cherry (*Prunus serotina*). Diseased plants have rough, more or less elongate galls (knots) of all sizes on twigs and branches. The knots consist of a mixture of plant and fungal tissue. At maturity the surfaces of the knots are covered with tiny black fruiting bodies of the fungus. The knots are perennial and very conspicuous in the fall and winter when the trees are bare. In the spring, mature knots may develop an olive-green color due to the presence of spores of the fungus on the surface. The knots may also be colonized by other microfungi that produce a white or pinkish growth on the surface.

Another species of *Apiosporina*, *A. collinsii*, causes black witches' broom on serviceberries (*Amelan-*

chier species). This disease is more common on wild plants growing in woodlands than on landscape specimens. The fungus invades branches and causes buds in the leaf axils to develop into 'witches' brooms' consisting of many abnormally short, thick twigs. Some of the twigs may become S-shaped or otherwise deformed. In the spring, new foliage that emerges from the broom is stunted and yellowish. Later in the season the lower surfaces of the leaves become completely blackened by the tiny dark fruiting bodies of the fungus. The diseased leaves die and most are shed in the fall, but sometimes you can find a few still clinging to the tree in winter. The brooms themselves are perennial and quite conspicuous after leaf fall.

Pucciniastrum goeppertianum causes witches' broom rust of blueberries (*Vaccinium* species). Like many rust fungi, this species needs two hosts in order to complete its life cycle. The fungus invades vegetative buds of the blueberry plant and stimulates them to grow out and branch excessively, forming masses of thickened shoots (witches' brooms). The brooms are perennial and produce new shoots each year. At first, new stems on a broom are bright pink or yellowish, but as the season progresses they turn brown, becoming at first shiny and then dull, cracked and spongy. In spring, spores produced by the fungus on the surface of the broom are carried by the wind to balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), where they infect the young fir needles. In summer, spores of a

different kind are produced in small yellow pustules on the infected fir needles. These spores are carried back to blueberry plants where they cause the formation of new brooms, thus completing the life cycle.

Evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*) is sometimes severely affected by downy mildew, caused by *Peronospora arthuri*. The leaves of diseased plants are pale yellow or mottled yellow and green. Sometimes you can see fuzzy grayish-brown patches on the undersides of the leaves. These are the spore-bearing cells of the fungus. Another species of downy mildew fungus, *Peronospora farinosa*, causes similar symptoms on lamb's-quarters (*Chenopodium album*). These fungi are not related to the powdery mildews, which produce a superficial white growth on the leaves of many plants.

Species of the fungus *Exobasidium* produce unusual and (to me!) rather attractive symptoms on many plants in the blueberry family (*Ericaceae*). Rose bloom disease of cranberries (*Vaccinium macrocarpon* and *V. oxycoccus*), caused by *Exobasidium oxy-*

cocci, is a good example. The fungus attacks individual shoots of the current year's growth, causing the leaves and stems to become pink, greatly enlarged and succulent. If you have a good imagination these shoots look like small pink flowers, hence the name rose-bloom. Another species, *E. vaccinii*, causes conspicuous flower-bud galls on black huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*). The diseased flower buds are greatly enlarged and succulent. Initially they are pink or yellowish, but eventually they become covered by a velvety white 'bloom' consisting of the spore-bearing layer of the fungus.

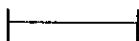
These are just a few examples of the hundreds of plant-parasitic microfungi that occur in Nova Scotia. Take a closer look at those less-than-perfect-looking plants you see on your next field trip, and see what you can find!

New Snowbird Recruits?

by Margaret Alliston
West Brooklyn, N.S.

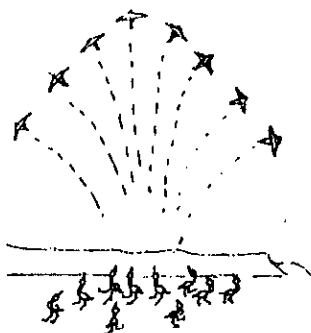
In the late afternoon of June 1, George and I drove far out onto the Wolfville dykes to watch the Snowbirds, the Canadian Forces acrobatic flying team, perform as part of the Wolfville Centennial celebrations. As usual, the Snowbirds put on a great show; it was quite exciting (and a little scary) to have them turning and forming up really low, directly over

Rose bloom



1 cm

us. But for me one of the highlights of the show was a group of ten willets standing in a swale about 100 feet away. Each time the Snow-birds roared over, the willets would all snap their heads around quickly to watch, then turn again as the Snow-birds roared back. In between Snow-bird passes, the willets were really excited, chattering and jumping around like a bunch of little children. What do you suppose the willets thought was happening?



Summer 1993 Weather Statistics

by Larry Bogan
Cambridge Station, N.S.

The summer of 1993 is over and it is time to see how we fared relative to the 30 year from 1951 to 1980.

The table summarizes the statistics as recorded at the Agricultural Research Station in Kentville.

Temperature: The summer was only slightly cooler than the average. The first three months of summer were all cooler than normal but June was colder by 1 full degree. September was warmer than normal by 1.2 degrees and compensated for the rest of the summer.

Rainfall: The summer got 90 per cent of its usual rainfall. Whereas the usual pattern is for August and September to have the most rainfall, this year August was the driest month and June was the rainiest.

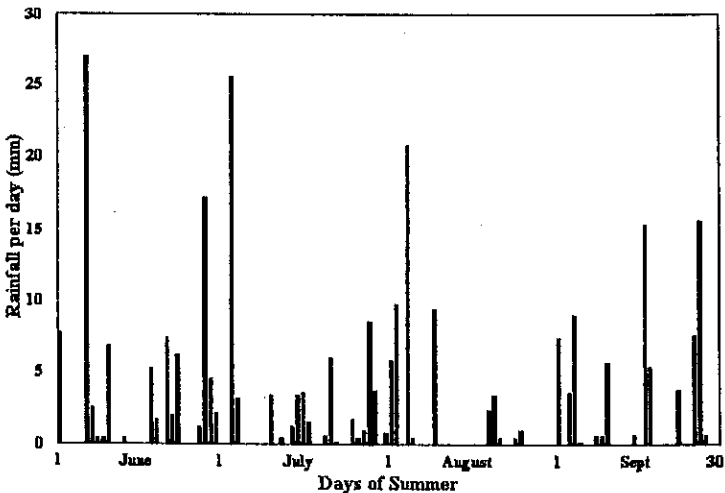
Sunshine Hours: The summer was slightly sunnier the norm but basically it was a typical summer except that the dry month of August had much 20 per cent more sunshine than usual.

The Distribution of rainfall is shown in the accompanying graph. It shows a good distribution throughout the summer except that the amount in August were low.

Weather Statistics - Summer 1993
 Recorded at the Kentville Agricultural Centre
 (30-year Averages 1951-1980 in parentheses)

Month	Mean Temp (C)	Growing degree-days > 10C	Rainfall mm	Bright Sunshine Hours
June	14.9 (15.9)	149. (178.)	93.2 (71.)	199. (209.)
July	18.4 (19.2)	260. (284.)	70.8 (70.)	234. (232.)
August	19.1 (19.8)	281. (262.)	53.8 (98.)	255. (213.)
September	15.5 (14.3)	167. (134.)	75.8 (86.)	160. (163.)
Total or Average	16.1 (16.5)	857. (858.)	294. (325.)	848. (817.)

Rainfall Summer 1993
 June, July, August, September



Tidbits of Natural History

TRIVIAL TIDBITS of Local Natural History

mid-May to
mid-September 1993

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

Skies & Tides

Sept. 12 - good shows of **aurora borealis** (northern lights) at both St. Croix and Avonport (BS, SW).

Sept. 18 - very high and very low **tides** in Minas basin, estimated to total 15.5 metres in amplitude (SW).

Fungi

Sept. 9 - "Mushrooms were abundant in Kings County this summer, much to the delight of **chanterelle** enthusiasts and other 'mycophiles'. Many species of fungi not seen for several years were common this year. The **boletes** (mushrooms with pores instead of gills) were especially well represented. During a two-week period in August, 25 species of boletes were found in the Kentville Ravine and Scots Bay areas. This represents about one-third of all bolete species known to occur in Nova Scotia - another example of biodiversity in our own backyards!" (NN).

Sept. 12 - a couple dozen **jack**

o'lantern mushrooms noticed along the Blue Beach Road at Avonport. At night these were seen to glow (**bioluminescence**) - visible to those with dark-adapted eyes - function of the glow is unknown (RB, SW).

Flowering Plants

June 23 - a "bumper-crop" of **yellow lady's-slipper orchids** in gypsum topography at Poplar Grove. At the same site, **ram's-head lady's-slippers** were still in bloom (JWW).

Date? - an **adder's mouth orchid** found with 2 leaves instead of the usual single leaf, on Brier Island (BLF).

Date? - **slender lady's-tresses orchids** in two locations are showing young leaves at the base of this year's flowering stalks (BLF).

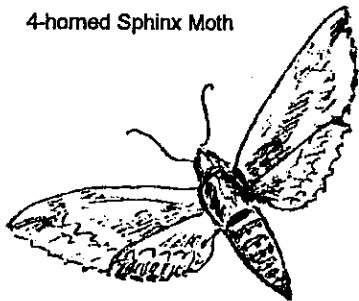
Early Sept. - **hobblebush berries** are proving to be very popular with birds north of Canning at Woodside. Blackburnian warblers were eating them (and chokecherries). Robins try but have poor success (not agile enough?). Flickers have eaten them for three years there. But on Sept. 5 a pileated woodpecker joined the feast (JH).

Sept. 9 - flickers were eating **chokecherries** at Lumsden Reservoir (BBY).

Insects

Sept. 6 - a **katydid** seen closely, resting on a Wolfville door-casing (GT).

4-horned Sphinx Moth



Sept.20 - a very large caterpillar of a 4-horned sphinx moth walked into the Odd Book store in Wolfville. When brought to the BNS meeting that night and placed on soil, it immediately burrowed under the surface in order to pupate (JT, JTi).

Fish

July 24 - an ocean sunfish, seen closely, basking at the surface about 110 km. west of Yarmouth (JSBo, DL,MO).

Amphibians

July 28 - lots of unidentified frogs, small and large, dead and alive, on the highway between Brooklyn and Upper Burlington, on a night of torrential rain (KTC).

Reptiles

June 28 - at least 45 painted turtles basking in market pond at Greenwich (JWW).

mid-Aug. - an adult male Blanding's turtle found near Montague, P.E.I. Now in custody of Tom Herman at Acadia University (DNR).

mid-Sept. - a wood turtle seen crossing a road near Brickton (sw. of Middleton) (near where TP found two a couple of years ago) (EM).

Tom Herman reports that another wood turtle, found badly car injured along the Musquodoboit River was rehabilitated and then released with a radio transmitter.

Mammals

May 23 - bats noted at Cheverie on the night of the "blackfly invasion", which improved thereafter (KTC).

May 25 - first bat of season seen in Wolfville back yard (BBT).

Sept. 6 - a bat flew into a Port Williams house (MT).

Sept. 18 - 6 coyotes howling on North Mountain (Ross Creek Road near Lookoff) (GC).



July 24 - about 250 white-sided dolphins and a huge finback whale seen near Yarmouth and Bar Harbour (JSBo, DL, MO).

3rd week of August - large numbers of harbour porpoises seen between Yarmouth and Bar Harbour (TBH).

late Aug. - harbour porpoises observed closely and repeatedly (and had small calves) while apparently feeding in a small area of Passamaquoddy Bay (MD).

**Contributors to
TRIVIAL TIDBITS**

RB - Roy Bishop
JSBo - Sherman Boates
GC - Gordon Callon
KTC - Karen & Ted Casselman
MD - Mike Dadswell
JH - John Harwood
TBH - Tom Herman
DL - Dave Lickley
EM - Erich Muntz
NN - Nancy Nickerson
MO - Mike O'Brien
TP - Terry Power
DNR - Dept. of Nat. Resources(N.S.)
BS - Bev Shanks
BBT - Brenda & Bill Thexton
GT - Gerry Trueman
JT - Jean Timpa
MT- Miriam Tams
JTi - Jim Tillotson
JWW - Jim Wolford
SW - Sherman Williams

BNS BIRD NEWS

June through August, 1993

by Richard Stern
Kentville, N.S.

Red-necked Grebe

BLF found one in full breeding plumage at Delaps Cove Aug.22. RBS had also seen a similar bird a week earlier on Brier Island.

Although a common winter visitor off our coasts, it is decidedly unusual to see this species in this plumage, and in August. They are basically western birds, whose breeding range just reaches eastwards into Quebec.

Pied-billed Grebe

JCT found one at New Minas Pond July 12.

Great Blue Heron

JCT counted 40+ at the roost on Boot Island July 24.



American Bittern

One was feeding unconcernedly out in the open at Harris's Pond, Canning 19 Aug.(RBS).

Wood Duck

BLF saw a female with 5 young at Methals Lake June 13. JCT found 3 young on Canard Pond 30 July - presumably local breeders.

Common Eider

Every year in July a flock of males seems to gather in the Minas Basin and fly down the Valley to St. Mary's Bay. JCT observed this on July 7 this year.

Hooded Merganser

BLF had a female with 10 young at Bishop's Pond June 12.

Sora

Both JCT and RBS had good views of a bird out in the open at Canard Pond in late July. Although it is not unusual to hear, or catch a glimpse of, this, our commonest rail, good views are unusual because of their retiring habits. They will, however, readily respond to tapes of their call.

Northern Goshawk

An imm. plumaged bird came flashing through JCT's back yard, while she and her family were sitting on the patio, on Aug. 23.

Osprey

The "platform nest" pair at Aylesford Lake successfully raised at least 2 young this Summer (RBS).

Broad-winged Hawk

Once again adult plumaged birds have been circling over the woods behind RBS's house in Kentville on and off all Summer. As yet there is no definite proof of breeding.

Merlin

As usual several were seen harrying shorebirds around the Minas Basin during August. A pair nested in downtown Wolfville and noisily raised 3 young (BLF et al), and other pairs, with possible nesting, were present in Canning and at Grand Pre. The local population of this dashing falcon seems to be thriving.

Shorebirds

Since shorebirds in general are

such a prominent feature of our general Fall avifauna I shall try and mention some highlights, rather than list every observers' sightings. Overall numbers are down this year, and aerial and ground surveys estimated a drop of 30%, from 300 to 200,000 in the Minas Basin (MAG). In general, the birds seemed more spread out than in former years. Numbers at Evangeline Beach seemed low, while numbers built up farther east, e.g. at Avonport Beach and Windsor Causeway. I would be interested if anyone can offer a good explanation for this, and to see whether it is going to be an ongoing trend. Also, possibly because of increasing use of the area for dry sod, there seem to have been fewer and smaller inland roosts at high tide at Grand Pre than usual. As a reminder, most of our July and early August shorebirds are adults, that have left their nesting areas in the north, and are fuelling up in our area before migrating on to points south. From mid-August on, there are many juveniles, often recognisable by their "snappier" less-worn plumage, and these have been left to fend for themselves after their parents have already left.

Killdeer were prominent as always, with e.g. 8-9 at Saxon St. Pond June 25-27 (JCT). They were accompanied by a breeding-plumaged **Stilt Sandpiper**.

Some 2-300 **Black-bellied Plover** were around various locations during mid to late Aug. (JCT).

1 **Whimbrel** was in the fields at Grand Pre Aug 22 (JCT). Only 2 or

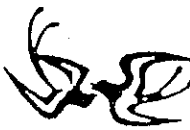
3 Hudsonian Godwits were seen - way down compared to a few years ago.

40+ **Short-billed Dowitchers** were at Windsor Causeway by July 16 (JCT), with 300+ there 4 days later. (Note for beginners! - Despite its name, this species has a very long bill. The long-billed dowitcher has a bill that is the same length, but can be told apart, with good close looks, in breeding and juvenile plumages, by the pattern of orange and streaks on the underparts, and the markings on the tertial and scapular feathers. It is extremely rare in our area).

30,000+ **Semipalmated Sandpipers** July 20 at the Windsor Cau-

seway (JCT) is not an unusual number, but is a rather unusual location compared to previous years. JCT observed approx. 30,000 in their more traditional location, Grand Pre, Aug. 13.

4 **Upland Sandpipers** were present for a few days in a field at the E. end of Grand Pre during late Aug (JCT et al). These are rare in our region, and there is only 1 breeding record for N.S., - on the Northumberland Shore last year, although there is another possible record outside Kentville a few years ago. These rather odd small-headed long-legged shorebirds prefer dry, grassy habitats and tend to run into long grass and hide when approached.



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Short-eared Owl

As will be documented elsewhere in more detail, the BNS survey found just one nest - on the Canard Dyke - it produced 3 young, and the family could be seen hunting in the area at dusk in August.

Common Nighthawk

AM has noticed frequent sightings around Coldbrook, hawking for insects on Summer evenings. The species seems to have generally declined in our area in recent years.

Pileated Woodpecker

AM and JCT had good sightings of this species this Summer. Although numerically rare, they are very noticeable and therefore well-

reported, and seem to be able to co-habit well with the human species.

Willow Flycatcher

SW first noticed the calls of this species in an old pasture at Avonport, on June 13. By the 24th he realised that the birds might be Willow, rather than Alder Flycatcher. On 25th he and WU attempted to record the birds, but with limited success, but realised that there were at least 3 birds calling. Over the next few days several observers saw, heard and photographed the birds, including some who had heard and seen Willow Flycatchers before, and were sure that that was the identification. Tapes were also played, and the birds

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sounded the same, and responded to them. The birds were present at least through July 6.

This species, *Empidonax traillii*, was only recognised as a separate species from the Alder Flycatcher, *Empidonax alnorum*, a few years ago. Prior to that it was thought there was one species, "Traill's Flycatcher", with 2 races - one with a "Fitz-bew" call that preferred dry, weedy fields and willows, poplars etc., and one with a "Free-bee-o" call that preferred alders and wetter habitats. Of course, the Alder is our common species, and there has been 1 previous confirmed occurrence of Willow in the province, amazingly with confirmed breeding (in 1980).

The 2 species are virtually inseparable in the field except by song and call (by ordinary mortals - I have a 4 page article by some expert birders describing the most subtle and obscure color and shade variations etc.). However, it may be of interest that Audubon himself described 2 separate species - one (the current Willow Flycatcher), with a specimen from Arkansas, named after his friend Dr. Traill of Edinburgh, and the other, from the Maritimes, he called the "Short-legged Pewit Flycatcher", the current Alder Flycatcher.

Kinglets

There were hundreds of both Golden and Ruby-crowned, at Blomidon Provincial Park, 19 Aug. (RBS).

Boreal Chickadee

Plentiful at Blomidon Provincial Park Aug.19 (RBS).

Veery

JCT heard 4 singing around Saxon St. pond July 21.

Gray Catbird

BLF felt they were more prominent than ever this Summer, and found 5 nests.

Northern Mockingbird

RP was constantly kept awake at night by a pair of these nocturnal songsters during July, in Minas Heights subdivision, and observed display and posturing by the birds. He tells me that since they left his back yard other people in New Minas have commented on their presence too. In latter years these southern visitors have been gradually establishing themselves in Nova Scotia, and are now not unusual summer and winter visitors.

Northern Wheatear

One of these rare vagrants was at Delaps Cove 29 August. They breed in Greenland and northern Labrador, but migrate eastwards to winter in northern Europe, where they join the local breeders, to become quite common in winter. AM noticed that it reacted to some overflying Nighthawks as if they were true hawks.

Black-throated Blue Warbler

6 were singing at Greenfield June 10 (JCT). - a high number for this rather uncommon but attractive bird.

Savannah Sparrow

As usual, a drive around the dirt roads of Grand Pre, and elsewhere in suitable habitat, in late Summer, produced sightings of huge numbers of this species (RBS).

Lincoln's Sparrow

Once again this species was present in the Methals Bog throughout the Summer, and presumably nested. (BLF).

Bobolink

JCT observed that total numbers seemed down, but that breeding success, with many young, was good. So hopefully that bodes well for next year.

Scarlet Tanager

As last year, a bright male was present on and off in and around RBS's yard in Kentville in late July. The species does not seem to have been present in its more reliable, and proven nesting spot behind the Nursing home in Kentville, for the last 2

summers, although this Spring several were observed around Kentville.

Pine Siskin

RBS has kept a feeder going (Kentville) all summer, and this species has been visiting throughout the season.

Contributors to Bird News

BLF Bernard Forsythe

MAG Merritt Gibson

AM Angus MacLean

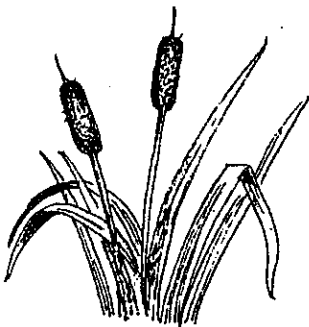
RP Rick Penney

RBS Richard Stern

JCT Judy Tufts

WU Walter Urban

SW Sherman Williams



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Sources for Local Natural History Information (compiled by Blomidon Naturalists Society)

<i>Information</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Office</i>	<i>Home</i>
Rocks & Fossils	Geol. Dept., Acadia Univ.	542-2201	
Fish	N.S. Dept. of Natural Resources	679-6091	
Flora - General	Ruth Newell	542-2201	542-2095
Flora - Fungi	Darryl Grund	542-2201	542-9214
	Nancy Nickerson	679-5333	542-9332
Flora - Lichens	Karen Casselman	424-7370	633-2837
Flora - Seaweeds	Darryl Grund	542-2201	542-9214
Flora - Mosses & Ferns	John Pickwell		681-8281
Birds - General	Bernard Forsythe		542-2427
	Richard Stern	678-4742	678-1975
	Gordon & Judy Tufts		542-7800
	Jim Wolford	542-2201	542-7650
	Jean Timpa		542-5678
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Birds - Falcons & Eagles	Peter Austin-Smith		542-2109
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	Jim Wolford	542-2201	542-7650
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	Jim Wolford	542-2201	542-7650
	Graham Daborn	542-2201	542-5373
	Michael Brylinsky	542-2201	582-7954
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& Archaeological Sites	James Legge		542-3530
Astronomy	Roy Bishop		542-3992
	Sherman Williams	542-3598	542-5104
	Larry Bogan		678-0446

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