



Blomidon Naturalists Society

Winter 1996 - Volume 23 Number 4

Blomidon Naturalists Society

"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 Newsletter* is published quarterly, in January, March, June, and October, by

The Blomidon Naturalists Society

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Printed in Canada. For subscription information see 1997 Membership fees form in the newsletter. Please notify us at the above address if you change your address.

The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a member of the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists, the Nova Scotia Trails Federation, the Brier Island Ocean Study (BIOS), and an Affiliated member of the Canadian Nature Federation.

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BNS WINTER - EARLY SPRING PROGRAMME, 1997

MONDAY EVENING MEETINGS

Unless otherwise noted, meetings are held on the third Monday of the month and start at 7:30 p.m. at Acadia University in Room 241 of the Beveridge Arts Centre. All meetings are open to the public and BNS members are encouraged to bring friends and neighbours.

20 January. JIM WOLFORD. Ever in search of interesting aspects of natural history, Jim recently explored the northern coasts and islands of the British Isles by sea. The words and pictures of Jim's *Celtic Quest* will expose us to a wealth of information about that rugged part of the world.

17 February. MEMBERS' NIGHT. Have you been hiding your natural history light under a bushel? This is the night to let it shine. Our annual *Members' Night* is held in Patterson Hall (Biology Dept.), room 308. Bring, show and tell. Display tables, screens and projectors, as well as TV/Video equipment will be available. Items of interest, pictures and slides, and artwork relating to natural history are welcomed. You don't have to tell if you don't want to. If you haven't anything to show, come anyway.

17 March. SHERMAN BLEAKNEY. Sherman's talk, *Beauty Fit For A Queen*, will tell us all about the wonderful world of sea slugs. Sherman's book, *Sea Slugs of the Atlantic Coast*, has recently been published.

21 April. PHIL TAYLOR. Ever been bitten by those beautiful horseflies? Come and hear their side of the story in Phil's *Are Horseflies Really That Bad?* Phil is a Research Chair in Wildlife Ecology at Acadia University.

19 May. GEORGE HISELER. *Archaeological Sites in Kings County.* George will tell us about his work, conducted over a number of years, at archaeological sites in Melanson, Grand Pré, Avonport, and along the Blomidon peninsula.

FIELD TRIPS

February 1 & 2. EAGLE DAYS in SHEFFIELD MILLS. While not a "regular" field trip, BNS helps organize the eagle program. Come and celebrate the eagles - a story of successful nature stewardship!

February 8. A NATURE WALK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. Karen Robertson and Rob Emerson will lead a walk through the ravine at the Kentville Research Station. Meet at the parking lot at the entrance to the Research Centre (Hwy 1) at 1 p.m. The walk will be finished by 3 p.m.

February 22. WINTER WOODLAND WALK. Sherman Williams and Merritt Gibson will lead a walk along Black River Lake to look for birds, signs of mammals, and practice identifying shrubs and trees in winter. Meet at Black River Lake Dam at 12:30 p.m., dress warmly, bring skis or snowshoes if snow conditions are favourable.

April 4. Sherman Williams and Larry Bogan will point out the marvels of the **SPRING SKY.** This is a prime time to see **Comet Hale-Bopp.** Meet at Stile Park, Wolfville at 8:30 p.m. Dress warmly, bring binoculars or telescopes, and a hot drink. Cloud date is the 5th - same time and place.

April. FROG HOP. Date depends on how advanced spring is, location depends on the frogs! Watch for announcement at March meeting

May 3. SPRING BIRDS - DUCKS and EARLY MIGRANTS. Judy Tufts will lead us about the shores and ponds of this area. Waterproof clothing and footwear is recommended. Meet at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre in Wolfville at 8 a.m. Bring lunch if you wish. Rain or shine.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

K I N G S / H A N T S REGIONAL WORKING GROUP GETS STARTED

The initial meeting of the Kings/Hants Regional Working Group (RWG) took place on October 22, 1996 in Wolfville. The meeting was organized by Nature Trust director Pam Matthews and attended by Tom Herman, Reg Newell, Brothers Islands donor Jack Herbin, Norm McGuinness, and George Alliston. The group has already identified a first project focusing on the Kentville Ravine old-growth forest. Anyone wanting to get involved with the Kings/Hants RWG should contact Pam Matthews [542-9632]. We look forward to

hearing more from the group. Reprinted from Natural Landscapes, the newsletter of the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, Fall 1996.

PHOTOGRAPHS WANTED

The next issue (Spring 1997) of the BNS newsletter will be the second part of the Blomidon Peninsula Special Issue. We would like to include a photograph for the cover. If you have one you'd like to see in print, please telephone me. Thanks. Susan Montonen (542-0437)

OTHER TRIPS AND TALKS -Halifax Field Naturalists February 9 - Winter Hike - John Stanton, of the

Notes from the Editor

Apparently, this is the winter issue of the BNS newsletter, but with the weather we have been having it is hard to know: spring? winter? autumn?

In this season's issue Jim Wolford poses a question about what if anything should be done about the merlins that have taken to living near, and

living off of, the chimney swifts at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre? Does anyone have any suggestions? We will print any ideas, or information about nesting swifts that people provide.

Thank you to all of the writers and illustrators who made this newsletter issue so amazing.

Susan Montonen - phone: 542-0437
smontone@ace.acadiau.ca

The deadline for the Spring newsletter is April 4

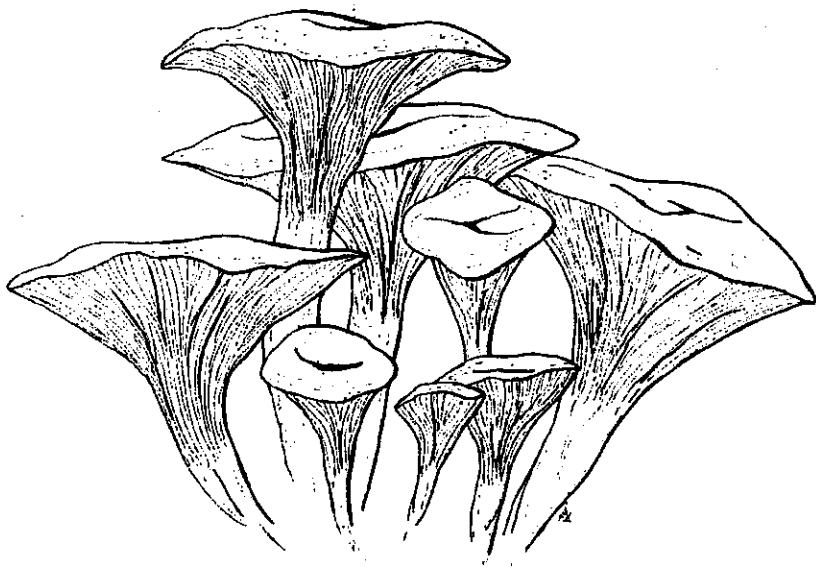
Hiking Society of Nova Scotia, will lead a winter hike and share tips on how to hike safely and comfortably during the winter months. Dress warmly, and bring lunch, something warm to drink, and extra socks. Location of this 2 to 4 hour hike will be determined by weather conditions. After February 1, contact Jennifer MacKelgan (883-9766) or John Stanton (454-4681).

March 22 - Cole Harbour - A member of the Cole Harbour Rural Heritage Society will guide the group around

the Cole Harbour area. A salt marsh, the site of proposed parkland, and possibly Cole Harbour beach will be visited. After March 10, contact Elizabeth Corser (434-0222) or Jennifer MacKelgan (883-9766).

April 3 - Museum of Natural History, 8 p.m. - Antarctica.

The April meeting has Jim Wolford discussing his two-week ecotour to Antarctica. Slides and a video highlight the icebergs, whales, penguins, and mountains of this exotic continent.



Chantarelles

SOCIETY BUSINESS AND NOTICES

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Roy Bishop

The Blomidon Naturalists Society, founded in March 1974, is the largest local natural history group in Atlantic Canada. We in the Wolfville area are fortunate to have such a vibrant natural history organization.

Here is a summary of our Society's regular monthly meetings during 1995/96:

Oct. 16 Underwater Photography in Rivers of the North Atlantic Coast Gilbert van Ryckevorsel, Nov. 20 Nature in Your Own Backyard Merritt Gibson, Dec. 11 River Habitat Restoration Melody Myers, Ian Spooner, Jan. 15 Kelp Beds-Forests in the Sea Tony Chapman, Feb. 19 Members Night, March 18 Frogs & Other Amphibians Nicole Nadorozny, April 15 The Cow Jumped Over the Moon Mary Lou Whitehorne, May 20 A Walker's Guide to Native Ferns John Pickwell, June 17 A Native Person's Appreciation of Nature Gloria Christmas, July 8 Cranes, their Biology & their Problems George Archibald, Sept. 16 Marijuana Brian Stones, Oct. 21 Banding Songbirds in California Robert Emerson,

In addition to the monthly meetings, more than a dozen field trips were held. A few of these were held with the Halifax Field Naturalists (§), the Nova Scotia Bird Society (*), or the South Shore Naturalists (~). Here are the field trips, with dates, topics, and leaders:

Jan. 27 Eagles§ Merritt Gibson, Feb. 17 Winter Walk Sherman Bleakney, Tom Herman, March 22/23 Night Sky y (clouded out) Roy Bishop, April 14 Ducks and early Migrants* Judy Tufts, April 26 Frog Hop Jeff Franklin, May 18 Cape Split Sherman Williams, June 15 Ferns, Flowers, Woods, Warblers George Alliston, Bernard Forsythe, John Pickwell, June 16 Photography Workshop, July 13 Dragonflies Tom Herman, Aug. 3 Shore Birds of Minas Basin Jim Wolford, Aug. 11 Summer Sky Roy Bishop, Sherman Williams, Larry Bogan, Aug. 17 Walk to Little River Falls Ruth Newell, Sept. 14 Birds, Birds, Birds* Richard Stern, Sept. 21 Potluck Picnic & More~

The BNS Board of Directors

held four meetings (Nov. 30, March 14, June 13, Sept. 12) in order to handle the business of the Society. All of these meetings were kindly hosted by Bill and Brenda Thexton at their home on Main Street. The directors for 1995-96 included (committee positions are also indicated):

President: Roy Bishop,
Vice-president: Larry Bogan (Conservation Com. chair.),
Secretary: Neil Cloghesy,
Treasurer: Harold Forsyth (Robie Tufts Nature Centre Com. chair., BNS representative on the Wolfville Waterfront Development Com),
Past-president: Tom Herman (Conservation Committee, Nominating Committee, BNS representative on the Kings County Economic Development Committee),
Directors-at-large: George Alliston (BNS representative on the FNSN, Conservation Com., Editorial Board), Sue Bissix, Lorna Hart (Conservation Com., Nominating Committee), John Harwood (Program Committee chair.), Randy Milton (Robie Tufts Young Naturalists Award Committee.).
Other members who served on Society committees include: Peter Austin-Smith (Conservation, Robie Tufts Nature Centre), Sherman Boates (Program, Robie Tufts Nature Centre), Lana

Churchill (Newsletter distribution, Robie Tufts Young Naturalists Award), Mark Elderkin (Editorial Board), Merritt Gibson (Editorial Board, "Nature Notes" for the Kentville Advertiser), Susan Montonen (Editor of the BNS Newsletter, Editorial Board chair.), Irene Moore (Robie Tufts Young Naturalists Award), Nancy Nickerson (Editorial Board), Terry Power (Editorial Board), Karin Robertson (Program), Phil Taylor (Editorial Board), Bill Thexton (Nominating), Brenda Thexton (Newsletter distribution), Judy Tufts (Newsletter distribution), Sherman Williams (Robie Tufts Young Naturalist Award Com. chair, Editorial Board, production and distribution of meeting notices), Jim Wolford (Conservation, Robie Tufts Nature Centre).

My thanks to all these individuals for their invaluable support! (To update this list for the 1996/97 year: George Alliston and John Harwood have stepped down as Directors; Merritt Gibson is a new Director and the new chairperson of the Program Committee.)

Among other highlights of the past year: The Robie Tufts Young Naturalists Award was presented to Louise de Mestral Bezanson and Mitchell Guilderson (November 1995).

This is the 12th year the award has been presented, and the 4th time it has been presented to two recipients.

The BNS employed a student, Monica Young, at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre during the summer. This is the second year Monica has held this position.

Larry Bogan set up a home page for the BNS on the world-wide-web:<http://ace.acadiau.ca/bns/home.htm>

Designated Conservation Organization: Members may recall that in November 1995 the BNS sent an application to the Nova Scotia Minister of Natural Resources to become a "designated conservation organization" under the Conservation Easements Act. This status would allow us to enter into legal agreements with other organizations for protecting parcels of land having special natural history value (e.g., An agreement may be possible with Nova Scotia Power for protecting the Gaspereau River ravine). Unfortunately progress has been slow. On December 14, 1995, the Minister of Natural Resources, Don Downe, informed us that "We are currently considering changes to the Conservation Easements Act which would require easements or cov-

enants to be in perpetuity only, without the option of shorter terms. Applications for designations as conservation organizations may be delayed pending this review." On September 16, 1996 I inquired concerning the status of our application. On December 19 the new Minister, Eleanor Norrie, replied: "Our departmental solicitor indicates she is in the process of preparing a Report and Recommendation to Executive Council for the designation of the Blomidon Naturalists Society. We expect the R&R will be reviewed by Executive Council in the New Year and we will be in further contact with you at that time."

At the 1996 annual meeting of the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists, the Blomidon Naturalists Society took on a larger role in this umbrella organization. Tom Herman is the new vice-president of the FNSN. Ruth Newell is the new Secretary. Jim Wolford continues as Treasurer for the Federation, and Larry Bogan is the new Member Representative-at-large. George Alliston continues as the BNS representative on the FNSN Board of Directors.

Finally. I regret to record the death during the past year of one of our Honorary Members: Ross Baker of Truro.

Ross and his friend Harry Brennan were the speakers at both our November 1980 meeting and our April 1995 meeting. Ross was an out-

standing naturalist and photographer. He and Harry Brennan gave memorable presentations.

TREASURER'S REPORT

by Harold Forsyth

We ended the year with a deficit spending of \$748 but had cash on hand of \$5279. No change in the dues structure is expected in the coming year. Special thanks goes out to the following who made donations to the society during the year: MacAulay Banks, Peter Austin-Smith,

Rick Whitman, Kathryn Fleiger, Curtis Chipman, Jack and Alice Hyslop, Edward Eagles, Owen and Janice Stevens, Mary Porter, E. Marie Peach, Barbara Graham-Stephen, Wade's Charitable Trust Foundation and Elizabeth Lewis.

Blomidon Naturalists Society Statements of Operations and Surplus

Year Ended August 31	1996	1995
Revenue		
Advertising	\$70	\$425
Books	863	1529
Donations	458	506
Federation dues in	235	210
Federation meeting	-	5,295
Grants: Career Summer Placement	2,000	2,000
GST rebate	78	203
Interest	9	28
Membership dues	2,399	2,733
Other	270	183
	<u>6,382</u>	<u>13,112</u>
Expenditures		
Administration	132	219
Awards and Meetings	587	946
Bad debts	-	35
Books	370	694

MY SUMMER WITH THE SWIFTS - PART II

by Monica Young, BNS summer employee at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre

I began work on June 24th. Most of the first week was spent cleaning up the nature centre, washing the panels, painting, and weeding. During the day, I worked on a variety of different tasks. From the information available about the swifts, and with a great deal of help from Acadia University's German department, I created a one-page German summary. We had a number of visitors from Europe and the summary was much appreciated.

There were three slide-presentations given in the evenings throughout the summer: Chimney Swifts and the Robie Tufts Nature Centre, The Whales of Nova Scotia, and Tides and Minas Basin Ecology. I researched and wrote talks to go with the slide shows. I made up posters to advertise the shows, and gave the tourist office a schedule of the times and topics of upcoming shows. This was important because I seemed to get larger crowds once the tourist office had a permanent schedule. The talks on the whales and the swifts received the best reception. There were from zero to twenty people attending the shows. People didn't seem to be as interested in the slide show on Tides and

Minas Basin Ecology. They liked the section about the shorebirds, but trying to tell them about the little creatures that live in the mud, without the proper props, seemed to bore them. I would suggest maybe just giving a slide show on the shorebirds and maybe one on eagles as well. It is easier to give a talk on charismatic megafauna!

I entered the remaining data on swifts and created a new graph, averaging the data in groups of five days. This gave a better overall picture of what is happening, and it seems that fewer swifts have been using the nature centre chimney as a roost site over the past few years. It would be interesting to have some statistical analysis done on the data to see if there are any statistically significant trends.

I also worked on creating some new information panels. I put the shorebird information on disk. We were hoping to get a more consolidated panel for the back wall of the centre, because the cardboard display that is there now keeps falling down. I didn't get any further with this as the graphics designer did not work out. I did some preliminary work on a panel concerning turtles, to

be displayed at Hennigar's pond. I was able to create a mock-up of the turtle panel, the size of one of the smaller panels at the nature centre. I also roughed-out a panel about the tides of the Minas Basin. I think it would be a good idea to continue creating new panels for the nature centre, as I had the impression that the local residents and other regulars are getting bored with the information panels that are there.

From looking through the guest book, I found that about 39% of the visitors were from Nova Scotia and about 13% were from Ontario, Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. About 20% of the visitors came from various states with the most from Massachusetts, Maine, Texas, and California, but there were also people from Florida, Nebraska, Arizona, Oregon, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

European visitors comprised about 5% with the most coming from Switzerland, but there were also visitors from Scotland, England, and Italy. Then there were some visitors from as far away as New Zealand, Bahamas, and South Africa. This is only a rough estimate of the people visiting the nature centre because many people did not sign the guest book.

I had a great time working for the BNS again this summer. I met lots of interesting people from all over the world. I really appreciated the opportunity to do it again. I would like to thank a few people who helped to make my job easier: Ruth Newell for taking the slide photographs for me, Lorna Hart for the use of her projector, Sabine Ernst and Uwe Wilhelm for their time helping correct the German translation, and of course, Harold Forsyth and Peter Austin-Smith for their help and guidance.

1996 WOLFVILLE CHIMNEY SWIFT AND MERLINS

by Jim Wolford, Wolfville
(written in November 1996)

Preface: In 1989, we had up to nearly 900 swifts in our Front Street chimney before it was converted into a Nature Centre, and there were pre-roosting

"shows" every evening from mid-May to mid-August. In late May of 1990 there was a die-off, of unknown but probably major magnitude, caused

by extended rainy and cold weather (another heavy die-off occurred in May of 1974). Our shows never recovered their former numbers, and, beginning in the early 1990s, the season for seeing impressively large numbers of swifts has become progressively shorter and shorter, this year being less than two weeks in spring.

Summary of 1996 Observations: Our first spring sighting occurred on May 9. All of the "action" in Wolfville was at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre. Numbers peaked at 180 on May 21, and 240 on May 30 and June 1. Then numbers fell rapidly to 20-40, except for 74 on June 21. We had between 30 and 60 birds (average 45-50) nightly until July 27, and 22 on Aug.1. On subsequent evenings up to 10 swifts were seen but fewer than five entered the chimney. There were several zeros in mid-August. Our last late-summer sighting was on Aug. 21.

Much later there were sightings on Oct. 18 (one in west Wolfville) and on Nov. 8 (two entered the RTNC chimney). In early August, someone in Wolfville? called the local tourist bureau about having numbers (80?) of swifts (roosting?) in a residential chimney. Does anyone out there know anything about

whom and where? HELP!

Merlins: One pair has nested successfully only a few blocks from the Nature Centre every year since 1992 (i.e., for five years now). Their presence in town has very probably changed the character of our nightly "shows" of pre-roosting swifts at RTNC. That is, instead of circling the area of the chimney at low altitude while loudly chattering, for five summers most of the birds have gathered and flown about at very high altitude, before the rather sudden descent to briefly circle the chimney and funnel into it. This behavioural change occurred simultaneously with our first sightings of merlins in Wolfville in the summer.

Sometimes when a merlin appears in the air while the swifts are gathering, the swifts form a tight bullet-shaped flock and summarily chase the merlin right out of sight. (On one evening a single aggressive swift was enough to drive a merlin away.) I've seen this several times over the years, but perhaps in the past few summers the merlins have adapted to this behaviour and become more cunning and adept at surprising the swifts.

Merlins will take a variety of birds as prey, but, like all raptors, they are opportunists and

will respond to local abundance and vulnerability. I suspect that this has happened gradually toward the pre-roosting swifts at dusk and especially toward the departing swifts in the morning.

The first witnessing of a merlin capturing a swift occurred at dusk on May 16, 1995, and the first early-morning predation on June 4, 1995. A couple of probable cases of early-morning hunting were seen in previous years.

In 1996, captures of swifts were seen on May 30 (afternoon), June 1 (both adult merlins took single exiting swifts in quick succession in mid a.m.), and July 4 (evening). I believe that swifts are much more vulnerable to predation when they are departing from the chimney; departures occur at quite variable times from near sunrise to noon, or even during the afternoon on rainy days.

Is any remedial action justifiable or possible?: We may well be seeing the progressive and imminent disappearance of a tradition, which is one that has been important to Wolfville and, of course, to the swifts. Our evidence that this problem is merlin-caused is circumstantial but, I believe, strong. I have no information on how often such lost tradi-

tions in migration become resurrected. Also, chimney swifts have apparently been declining in total numbers for a couple of decades, and I believe they are threatened now and in the future by forestry practices and by what is happening to chimneys -- i.e., large hollow trees for roosting or nesting are increasingly rare, big chimneys for roosting are being torn down and not replaced, and residential chimneys have liners that are not suitable for nesting.

The following thoughts are only my own, and my strong bias in such cases is to let Nature take its course. Human "improvements" on Nature are nearly always very selfish and frequently cause unforeseen problems that are worse than whatever we think needs mending. Also, of course, the merlins are natural, interesting, and very deserving of our respect (as are all components of Nature).

It could be easy for us to rationalize trying to discourage the merlins from staying in Wolfville during the swifts-season. Should we be considering, for example, harassing the birds wherever they are attempting to nest? We would have to actually find them early in their nesting activities and then remove their nesting platform (which is

nearly always built and used previously by some other kind of bird, such as crows). Then this action would have to be done again wherever the merlins relocate.

Such questions should be discussed now, during the winter, so that, should we decide that some action is desirable, we have some lead-time to investigate and apply for the necessary permits. The required permits might very well be difficult or impossible to obtain. (And we should be thankful that it's difficult to get a license for such meddling.)

Other Roosting Sites for Swifts:
MIDDLETON REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL continued in 1996 to have very good shows of roosting chimney swifts at dusk. I guesstimated 380 on May 23, 160 on June 20, and 280 on July 14. Also about 450 were counted in late July, 1995, and twice in August, 1994. (Perhaps ominously, on June 20, 1996, I also saw a merlin fly by the school's chimney.)

This Middleton site is located one block north from the Tim Horton's doughnuttery along Highway #1. I advise that viewers arrive there by the time of sunset (check a newspaper), take a lawn-chair and sit facing west-northwest, and stay until it's too dark to see

any more. Please let me know how many you "count"! And choose a nice evening, since dark or rainy weather is correlated with poor and early swifts-shows.

At BEAR RIVER, Gini Proulx watched about 250+ enter the chimney of the Oakdene School in early June, 1996, at dusk. Peter and Lorraine Hope occasionally observe roosting swifts at two sites east of Kejimikujik National Park: a chimney of an old N.S. Power Corp. plant at MCGOWAN LAKE, and the north chimney of the Calvary Baptist Church in SOUTH BROOKFIELD.

Recent counts were of 250 in early July, 1995, at McGowan Lake, and 220 on Aug. 2, 1996, at South Brookfield.

Other roosting sites that are hopefully still current include the Temperance Street School in NEW GLASGOW, a free-standing chimney of a former foundry in OXFORD (at Duke and Waverley Streets), perhaps the Science Building on the St. Francis Xavier University campus in ANTIGONISH, but NOT at ANNAPOLIS any more -- that chimney adjacent to the Legion Social Hall, which used to host 500 or more swifts in season, was torn down in the winter of 1991-92 before anyone noticed! The latter example is just one way in which chimney swifts are threatened in the future. Are

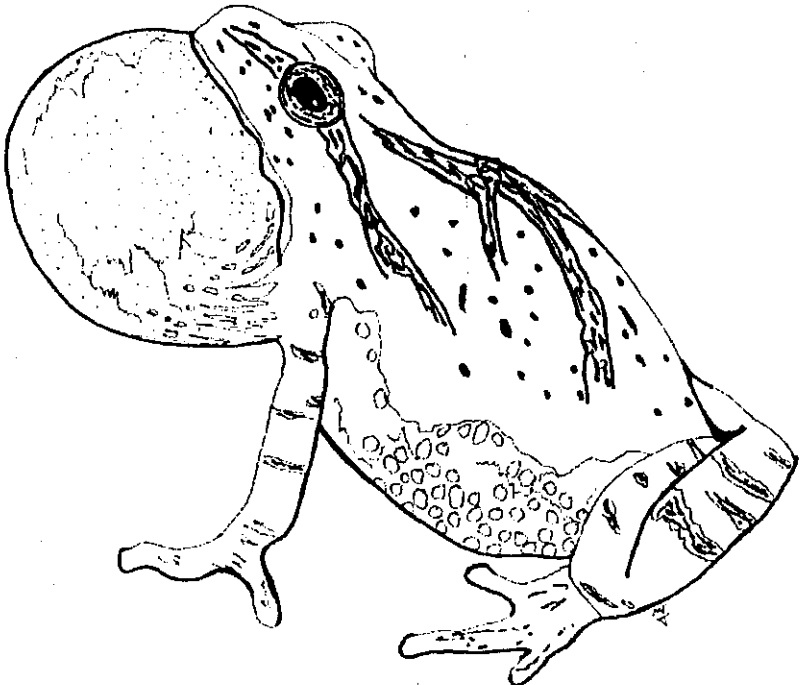
there also roosting sites at Parrsboro? Saulnierville? Where else?

What about nesting swifts?: We continue to have very little information for Nova Scotia (including Wolfville). At East Dalhousie, one pair has again nested in a hayloft of a barn in both 1995 and 1996 (Greta and Errol Crossland). And at Black River Lake, in a flooded hollow tree-stump that has been used in earlier years, a very late nest still held two young, with two more young out of the nest on the inside walls of the stump, on August

17, 1996 (Bernard Forsythe).

If any readers have information/sightings of nesting or roosting swifts anywhere in the Maritimes, please let me know. Thanks in advance. (When I made a similar request in July, 1990, in the N.S. Bird Society newsletter, I only received one response, from Brian Dalzell, with some detailed observations from both Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.)

Jim Wolford Site 1, Comp. 61, RR#3 Wolfville, N.S. BOP-1X0 542-7650



NATURAL HISTORY NEWS

COMET HALE-BOPP

by Roy Bishop

On page 12 of the Autumn 1995 BNS Newsletter I wrote:

"A few times each century a bright comet appears in the night sky. The last "Great Comet" with a spectacular flowing tail was Comet West which decorated the pre-dawn sky for a few weeks in 1976. We are due --- indeed, overdue --- for another Great Comet!"

Barely three months later Comet Hyakutake appeared and put on a dazzling show during the first week of spring 1996. Now, a year later, we may have a second Great Comet! Such are the statistics for the occurrence of rare events.

As 1997 begins, Comet Hale-Bopp is hard to see, low in the eastern dawn sky. During January and February it moves slowly to the left, into the northeast dawn sky, skirting along the southern side of the Milky Way. During March, Hale-Bopp lies low in both the northeast morning sky and the northwest evening sky. Through April, Hale-Bopp lies low in the northwest evening sky.

In January look for Hale-Bopp before January 21 low in the east about 6:15 am (use binoculars). In February, moonlight does not interfere from the 5th through the 19th, and Hale-Bopp should be visible to the unaided eye in the east about 5:40 am.

The best time to see the comet is the moonless period from March 26 through April 9 when Hale-Bopp, then at its brightest, will be conveniently placed in the northwestern sky as evening twilight ends (about 8:15 pm AST). Moonlight will interfere from April 10th through the 23rd. Hale-Bopp vanishes into the evening twilight by the second week of May.

Will Hale-Bopp equal or exceed Hyakutake in spectacle? Is all the media hype about Hale-Bopp accurate? We will know in a couple of months. Hale-Bopp's performance a year and a half ago when it was still beyond Jupiter indicated that it is intrinsically a very large comet, possibly 1000 times the mass of Hyakutake! However, last autumn it was not brightening as rapidly as had been predicted, being barely a naked-eye object at that time. Also, when it is at its best, Hale-Bopp will be 13

times further away from us than was Comet Hyakutake on that magical night of March 24/25, 1996. This large distance is no fault of Comet Hale-Bopp; it just happens that Earth is at the wrong point in its orbit for a ring-side seat. To have a good view of any bright comet, you must do four things:

- (1) If at all possible, choose a night with a moonless, transparent sky. Moonlight or haze will severely degrade your view of a comet.
- (2) You must get away from the light pollution of civilization. The baleful bubble of scattered light over Wolfville and New Minas hides the

universe. Get out of town, away out in the country, and stay away from car lights and farm yard lights. (Now you know why I live near Horton Bluff)!

(3) Allow your eyes at least 15 minutes to dark-adapt. Retinas bleached by a TV screen or flashlight give a dim view of the night sky.

(4) Use binoculars.

If you missed Hyakutake, or did not see it according to these four criteria, you owe it to yourself to have a good view of Hale-Bopp. It could be the last bright comet in your lifetime.

BALD EAGLE NEST ON MAN-MADE SITE

by Bernard Forsyth

Approaching the white pine (*Pinus strobus*) on March 19, 1996 I could see grass hanging down from our nest platform high in its branches and freshly broken sticks that had been dropped to the ground below. Hurrying out into the adjacent open pasture I looked up in amazement, for on top of our platform was a huge nest from which an adult Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) flew. As the season progressed, two young eagles could be seen over the nest edge and they fledged successfully in

late July.

In the early 1970s, Cyril Coldwell began a winter feeding project for eagles near his home in Gaspereau, Kings County, Nova Scotia. As eagle numbers increased other farmers began to put out food. In the mid-1970s Cyril had his Acadia University students construct a platform of boards and chicken wire in a large white pine on the edge of his pasture on the hill behind his house, but it was never used. In recent winters up to 400

Bald Eagles have overwintered in eastern Kings County, and in October 1992 Cyril asked me to repair the old nest platform. Upon climbing the pine tree, I found that surrounding trees made it no longer suitable for an eagle nest. We decided to move to another white pine nearby and build a new platform. I climbed up to the highest strong branch, over 16m from the ground. Looking around, the view was overwhelming. To the east and north across the pasture was the Gaspereau River with Wolfville Ridge beyond, and on the south and west I was high enough to look across the top of a large mixed growth forested area. This was a perfect site for an eagle nest. With a hand saw I cut away the branches on one side of the trunk to make an unobstructed approach for eagles above the strong branch we chose. Several poles about 2.5m long were hauled up to the site with a rope and nailed to the trunk to make a rough platform approximately two metres square. Several pine branches were worked into the platform but many cracks between the poles were left open. No boards or wire were used nor did we attempt to build a nest on the platform. The plan was to expose one side of the tree top over a strong platform for a pair of eagles to construct their own nest. Although eagles

were often in the area, no nesting activity was noted until my visit in March 1996.

Reports of Bald Eagles accepting artificial nest sites are rare. A few cases of Golden Eagles taking over Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) nests built on man-made structures have been documented. Most of the reported artificial eagle nests have been built to house young eagles fallen from storm damaged natural nests. A structure placed in a territory formerly used by eagles has also been taken over by a pair of eagles (Danstan and Borth 1970, Postupalsky 1979). In Cape Breton, N.S., heavy machinery was used to cut the top off a pine tree containing an old eagle nest and fastened to another tree in 1991 to make way for a power line. Eagles nested on the new site in 1996 (Harris 1996). There were no records of eagles nesting close to Wolfville, N.S. until about 1990. Counting the new nest on our platform, there are now four Bald Eagle pairs nesting within four kilometres of Wolfville. The other three nests are on natural sites in white pines. In many areas where eagles might nest, suitable trees are not available.

Our success shows that providing a simple platform on the exposed side of a treetop above the canopy may be accepted as

NORTH AMERICAN MIGRATION COUNT IN N.S. - SEPT. 21, 1996

by Judy Tufts, N.S. Coordinator for NAMC

Strong gusty sea winds plagued many, isolated showers affected others, and temperatures ranged from 4-14 degrees Celsius under partially cloudy skies, as participants took part in the Sept. 11, 1996 NAM Count in N.S. Thirteen counties participated in this count with Cape Breton, Cumberland, Guysborough, Lunenburg, and Victoria not reporting results. However, a fine effort by those of you out in the field, or around feeders, came up with a final tally of 187 species for a total of 59,480 birds - most commendable. One hundred and twenty parties took part with 214 observers - including 59 feederwatchers at 53 feeder stations - 3200 kms were covered by foot, car or bike; 522 hours were involved in observations (10.5 hours owl-ing and 125 hours at feeders).

Once again some of the more exotic members of the heron family were found lingering around the province with a Great Egret on Cape Sable Island, Little Blue Heron at Chezzetcook, Snowy Egret on Seal Island, and Black-crown Night-Herons on Bon Portage (BP) (4) and Seal Islands (1). Large waterfowl build-ups

were registered in Pictou harbour (2050 Greater Scaup), and along the eastern shore areas (1414 American Black Duck, 614 Green-winged Teal). Kings County added 715 American Black Ducks and 205 Green-winged Teal, and Hants-east had 395 American Black Ducks and 152 Mallards!

As expected the shorebirds - 28 species - dominated beaches along the eastern shore and around the Minas Basin. Black-bellied Plovers (218) and Semi-palmated Plovers (270) gathered around the Grand Pré area while good numbers were also seen in Hants and Halifax counties. Only 15 of the more than 100 American Golden Plovers seen earlier in the week showed up on Grand Pré for the count. A Marbled Godwit showed up again on Cape Sable Island for the second year in a row and a lonely Purple Sandpiper was discovered along the Fundy shore! Harris' pond in Canning proved once again to be a valuable stopover for the Yellowlegs species with 62 Greater and four Lesser seen, in the company of eight Common Snipe. Pictou birders found their harbour very active with 1675

Double-crested Cormorants, Bonaparte's (997) and Ring-billed (628) gulls, plus Common Terns (104). Other interesting observations around the province that day included: Twenty Pied-billed Grebes in their annual fall migration scattered through the province. Twelve of the 19 recorded Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were found in Hants-east, also 13 Common Nighthawks. Four saw-whet owls were spotted in the early hours in Antigonish County. A Marsh Wren unexpectedly flushed near Gaspereau on South Mountain, while three Winter Wrens appeared in Hants County, and Eva Urban had one Bohemian Waxwing among a flock of Cedars coming to her garden in Avonport. Twenty-three species of warblers were tallied with the most notable being one Golden-winged on BP, a Prairie on Seal Island. Yellow-rumped/Myrtle Warblers (465) led the way followed by Common Yellowthroats (152), and a large "wave" of Blackpolls was discovered in Halifax Co.. Of the more unusual sightings was one of a Wilson's Storm-petrel fighting strong winds to remain airborne in Scott's Bay and a Lark Sparrow in the Donkin area of Cape Breton. A single Cooper's Hawk was spotted on both Seal and BP islands

(maybe "island hopping"?)

The SIXTH annual North American Migration Count year of operation gets underway with the Spring count on Saturday, 10 MAY 1997. Those wishing to participate in this migratory bird project are asked to contact their local county coordinator, area representative, or me, the provincial coordinator, Judy Tufts (1-902-542-7800) - PO Box 1313, Wolfville, BOP 1X0

This is the NAMC schedule for the next three years:

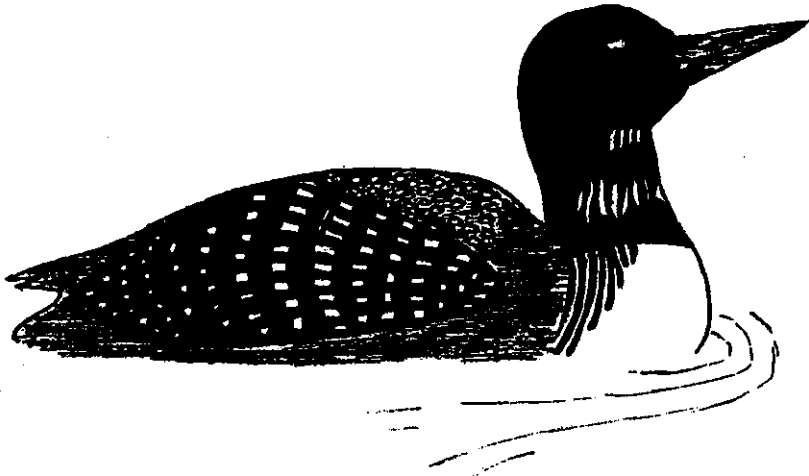
Spring	Fall
10 May 1997	20 Sept 1997
9 May 1998	19 Sept 1998
8 May 1999	18 Sept 1999

However, I regret to say there will NOT be a Fall count in 1997 in N.S., as I am unable to spare the time to coordinate both the provincial Fall counts as well as the Spring counts. Should anyone be interested in handling the Fall counts please contact me. Judy Tufts - N.S. Coordinator for NAMC

Species	Total
Red-throated Loon	1
Common Loon	35
Pied-Billed Grebe	20
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	1
Northern Gannet	150
Great Cormorant	13

Double Crested Cormorant	2280	Spotted Sandpiper	25
American Bittern	2	Whimbrel	6
Great Blue Heron	269	Ruddy Turnstone	27
Snowy Egret	1	Red Knot	6
Little Blue Heron	1	Sanderling	310
Black Crowned Night Heron	5	Semipalmated Sandpiper	447
Canada Goose	1021	Least Sandpiper	66
Wood Duck	35	White-rumped Sandpiper	15
Green-winged Teal	882	Pectoral Sandpiper	35
American Black Duck	2753	Purple Sandpiper	1
Mallard	228	Dunlin	33
Blue-winged Teal	276	Peep sp. *	303
American Wigeon	8	Stilt Sandpiper	2
Ring-necked Duck	80	Ruff/Reeve	1
Greater Scaup	2050	Short-billed Dowitcher	17
Common Eider	605	Common Snipe	9
Black Scoter	2	American Woodcock	6
Surf Scoter	7	Common Black-headed Gull	21
White-winged Scoter	16	Bonaparte's Gull	1139
Hooded Merganser	5	Ring-Billed Gull	1198
Common Merganser	127	Herring Gull	13
Red-Breasted Merganser	2	Iceland Gull	23
Turkey Vulture	1	Greater Black-backed Gull	1
Osprey	15	Gull sp. *	825
Bald Eagle adult	69	Common Tern	112
Bald Eagle imm *	32	Arctic Tern	3
Northern Harrier	54	Sterna sp. *	22
Sharp-shinned Hawk	41	Rock Dove	537
Cooper's Hawk	2	Mourning Dove	524
Northern Goshawk	4	Black-billed Cuckoo	2
Broad-winged Hawk	2	Great Horned Owl	3
Red-tailed Hawk	42	Barred Owl	9
Buteo sp. *	1	Northern Saw-whet Owl	4
American Kestrel	65	Common Nighthawk	15
Merlin	56	Chimney Swift	1
Peregrine Falcon	6	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	19
Ring-necked Pheasant	154	Belted Kingfisher	69
Spruce Grouse	1	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2
Ruffed Grouse	39	Downy Woodpecker	44
Virginia Rail	1	Hairy Woodpecker	35
Black-Bellied Plover	503	Black-backed Woodpecker	1
American Golden Plover	31	Yellow-shafted Flicker	291
Semipalmated Plover	563	Pileated Woodpecker	28
Killdeer	32	Olive-sided Flycatcher	1
Greater Yellowlegs	239	Eastern Wood Pewee	1
Lesser Yellowlegs	55	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	1
Solitary Sandpiper	1	Empidonax sp. *	2
Willet	5	Eastern Phoebe	1

Tree Swallow	8	Eastern Palm *	7
Barn Swallow	11	Western Palm *	5
Gray Jay	49	Bay-breasted Warbler	2
Blue Jay	1173	Blackpoll Warbler	125
American Crow	2203	Black & White Warbler	12
Common Raven	429	American Redstart	14
Black-capped Chickadee	956	Ovenbird	2
Boreal Chickadee	113	Northern Waterthrush	2
Red-breasted Nthtch	146	Mourning Warbler	8
White-breasted Nthtch	30	Common Yellowthroat	152
Brown Creeper	8	Wilson's Warbler	2
House Wren	1	Canada Warbler	2
Winter Wren	6	Scarlet Tanager	1
Marsh Wren	2	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	8
Wren sp. *	0	Indigo Bunting	4
Golden-crowned Kinglet	132	American Tree Sparrow	5
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	112	Chipping Sparrow	83
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	2	Lark Sparrow	1
Veery	2	Savannah Sparrow	224
Swainson's Thrush	3	Sharp-tailed Sparrow	1
Hermit Thrush	26	Fox Sparrow	2
American Robin	594	Song Sparrow	608
Gray Catbird	4	Lincoln's Sparrow.	7
Northern Mockingbird	2	Swamp Sparrow	66
Brown Thrasher	1	White-throated Sparrow	190
American Pipit	4	White-crowned Sparrow	13
Bohemian Waxwing	1	Dark-eyed Junco	677
Cedar Waxwing	500	Bobolink	12
European Starling	12299	Red-winged Blackbird	209
Solitary Vireo	48	Rusty Blackbird	70
Warbling Vireo	1	Common Grackle	1791
Philadelphia Vireo	1	Brown-headed Cowbird	189
Red-eyed Vireo	30	Baltimore Oriole	24
Vireo sp. *	2	Pine Grosbeak	49
Golden-winged Warb.	1	Purple Finch	413
Tennessee Warbler	7	Red Crossbill	12
Nashville Warbler	17	White-winged Crossbill	6
Northern Parula	5	Pine Siskin	291
Yellow Warbler	3	American Goldfinch	1116
Chestnut-sided Warbler	5	Evening Grosbeak	92
Magnolia Warbler	25	House Sparrow	459
Black-throated Blue Warbler	4	Buff-Breasted Sandpiper	3
Myrtle Warbler	465	Baird's Sandpiper	3
Black-throated GreenWarbler	50	Northern Wheatear	1
Blackbrnian Warbler	13	Marbled Godwit	1
Prairie Warbler	1	Shrike sp *	1
Palm Warbler	70		



WOLFVILLE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

by Angus MacLean

This was the 97th Christmas Bird Count in North America and the 44th consecutive Wolfville Count. Initially, on December 25, 1900, 27 observers participated on 25 different Christmas Bird Counts. Since those first years, the number of counts have so grown in number and scope that, of course, not all counts can be held on Christmas, so there is an official count period from mid-December to early January.

The period leading up to our Count Day, the 22nd, saw abnormally mild temperatures up to a couple of days before, but colder weather froze the ponds, forcing out a number

of waterfowl species. These include Eurasian and American Wigeon and Gadwall, all seen in the Count Period and species which would have been new to our Count. In fact seven additional species were seen in the Count Period, likely a record. One unusual record was a Dusky Flycatcher, present since November 24 (or earlier), and completely off course from its breeding range in the Rockies to its wintering grounds in southern Mexico. Another rarity, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, was recorded for the third time!

On Count Day temperature ranged from -3C to +4C with partly sunny conditions and

light winds. Participants included 53 observers in 25-28 field parties and another 75 at 62 feeders. Total party-hours was slightly down from last year's effort, but both kilometres by car and on foot were up considerably.

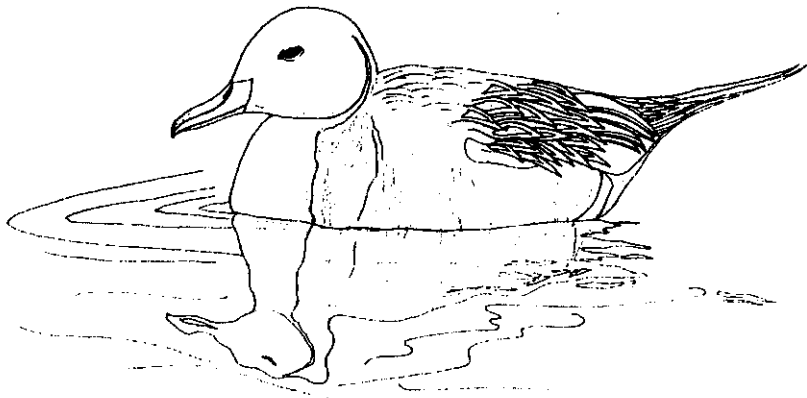
The total of 77 species was expected considering the preceding mild weather, and with the seven Count Period birds constituted the highest total ever recorded. The total number seen was 88,534, close to our provincial record of 92,412 seen in 1992. There were five species new to the count: Blue-winged Teal, American Coot, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Razorbill and Rufous-sided Towhee. This brought the total species seen since the Count's inception to 145. There were low numbers of winter finches which was typical across most of the Maritimes, and obviously due to the mild temperatures and abundant food supply farther north. There was only one Snow Bunting and one Bohemian Waxwing, lost souls separated from their flocks, but normally found here in larger numbers. Boreal Chickadees with a total of 40, set a new all-time high but were found through farmlands, migrating from their normal coniferous woodlands. Conversely, Red-breasted Nuthatch num-

bers were quite low, perhaps indicating that most remain farther north. Although a Red-winged Blackbird was seen only in Count Week, several flocks of 50-75 were noted later, indicating birds migrating south from more northerly locales. Herring Gull numbers were much lower than in recent years, perhaps because of the Count being held on a Sunday when the Kentville landfill site is closed. The gulls may have moved outside the Count circle since only 230 were counted in that area.

The feeder-watchers contributed 35 species with the most interesting being the Rufous-sided Towhee at Tom Regan's in Canard. His feeder also yielded a Baltimore Oriole. Eva Urban's feeders at Avonport were the most productive with 20 species. In contrast the Wrights at North Alton had only two Black-capped Chickadees visit all day but were partially compensated by their regular flying squirrel. The post-count gathering at Acadia was well attended as usual. The chowder, chili and desserts were greatly enjoyed by all. Thanks go to Judy Tufts, Lorna Hart and to the others who contributed to the event. Special thanks to the field observers for their effort and to all of those who checked

Feeder-watchers: Agar Adamson; George and Margaret Alliston; Peter Austin-Smith; Patricia Bernier; Ron and Joanne Bezanson; Diana Bishop; Sherman Boates; Larry Bogan; Soren Bondrup-Nielsen; Carol Buckley; Al Callaghan; Curtis Chipman; Joe and Clifford; John Cline; Brenda Coldwell; Sandy Connelly; Ed Connolly; Chris and Susan Cox; Debbie and Jim Daigle; Andy, Gail and Pat Davis; Ed and Ev Eagles; Betty and Joan Eaton; Mark and Paul Elderkin; Wendy Elliott; Fred, George, George F. and Harold Forsyth; Bernard Forsythe; Jamie and Merritt Gibson; Terri Hall; Ed and Robie Hancock; Eileen and Sharon Harris; Lorna Hart; John & Avril Harwood; Michael Hawk-

swood; Blanche Healy; Toby and Tom Herman; Maxine Hill; Bob Horne; Isobel, John and Winnie Horton; J.P. Huang; Douglas and Shirley Jackson; Ian Jonsen; Pat Kelly; Sandy Kempton; Jeanne Leung; Janet McClain; Angus and Stella MacLean; Ron Margeson; Shirley Marston; Bill and Pat Martell; Jessie Martin; Bernard and Eleanor Mason; Sheila McCurdy; Melissa and Rosaleen McDonald; Pat McLeod; Randy Milton; Terry Murphy; Edna Mutch; Gary Ness; Andy Nette; Nancy Nickerson; Mike O'Brien; Terry Pearson; Mary Pratt; Tom Regan; Ladny Richmond; Stan Riggs; Gordon Robart; Marg Russell; Barry Sabean; Gladys and Katherine Saltzman; Meg Scheid; Jack and Ruth Scott; Mabel Sheffield;



Ada Smith; Richard Stern;
George and Maeann Stevens;
Miriam Tams; Phil Taylor;
Bill and Brenda Thexton;
Dianne Thorpe; Jean Timpa;
David Tracey; Gerry Trueman;
Gordon and Judy Tufts;

Deanna and Eva Urban; Gertrude Waseem; Bob, Maggie and Sherman Williams; Jim Wolford; Frank Woolaver; Don, Irene and Jeni Wright; Barry, Betty and Chris Yoell.

BNS LATE FALL - EARLY WINTER BIRD SIGHTINGS

by Richard Stern

Report sightings to Richard by phone 678-1975 or by e-mail rstern@fox.nstn.ca

November is a great month for birding, as more birds are starting to come to feeders, winter visitors such as unusual Gulls and sea-ducks are starting to show up, and it's prime time for rarities from the west and south. And in December birders are out and about doing Xmas counts and finding interesting birds too. This season the mild weather persisted to the end of the year, allowing ponds to stay open and good birds to stay around. There were some remarkable finds, including one bird that has been observed in more detail by more people than almost any other I can think of recently, has stayed remarkably cooperative, and is probably a first for the province and second record for Eastern North America! I have not included Xmas Bird Count reports, as they'll be reported separately; So here's this Fall and early Winter's selection:--

RED-THROATED LOON -- SLH found four off Margaretsville Nov.8 and JWW saw one off Evangeline Beach Dec.10.

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL - ETS found a freshly dead specimen on the ground in woods in Kentville in early Oct. Presumably this had been a nocturnally migrating bird (possibly from Bon Portage ?) that had got off its beaten track and "crashed".

CATTLE EGRET - GWT found one in the Starr's Point area, while hunting, on 5 Nov. This is an uncommon visitor, although there are now several records. The range of this species is expanding in all directions, so we can expect to see them more frequently in the future.

SWAN SP.-- HUF saw four flying NE over Canning dur-

ing the 3rd week in Oct. - Likely Tundra swans, these are occasional visitors to the province from points farther north and west.

CANADA GOOSE -- 50 were at Windsor Causeway Oct. 8 (BBT, JT), with numbers building to 450 by Nov. 20 (JWW), and several hundred stayed around the mouth of the Canard and Cornwallis rivers the rest of the season.

SNOW GOOSE -- DT saw two in with a flock of **CANADA GEESE** at Delhaven, Oct. 28.

DUCKS -- **GREEN-WINGED TEAL** numbers were building up by early Oct., e.g. 25 eating mud (presumably containing live food) at the Windsor Causeway Sept. 17 (JWW), 50+ at Canard Pond, and 75+ in a farm pond at Avonport Oct. 8 (BBT, JT). A few were still around on open water after Xmas. There were three **EURASIAN WIGEON** at the Saxon St. pond in mid-Dec. (JWW etc.). These are rare but regular winter visitors to Eastern Canada, with the occasional one found in the Halifax area, but not previously recorded in ours. Three at once is unprecedented! They were joined for a while by a **GADWALL**. Single **NORTHERN PINTAILS**

were seen at Canard Pond and on the Cornwallis River. An early **COMMON GOLD-ENEYE** was on Canard Pond, with some **RING-NECKED DUCKS** (30) Oct.5 **GREATER SCAUP** were at Port Williams Sewage Pond on 5-11 Nov. (JWW). Several of the local ponds held small numbers of **HOODED MERGANSERS** around the same time (RBS), and 12 were at the Canning Aboiteau Nov. 11 (BBT). **MAG** counted a total of 34 in the Canning area on 6 Nov. 45 male **COMMON EIDER**, many still molting, were off Evangeline Beach Oct. 10 (JWW). A female **CANVASBACK**, a species not previously recorded in the county and a rare visitor to the province, was at the New Minas Sewage Pond 29 and 30 Nov. with over 50 **MALLARD** (RBS), and remained around intermittently. Margaretsville is about the only reliable spot in our area for the beautiful and rare **HARLEQUIN DUCK**, and there were three males there Nov.8 (SLH) and one still there Jan.5 (RBS).

TURKEY VULTURE -- Between two and five have been present at PR's farm near Woodville between mid-Oct. and at least 6 Nov.

NORTHERN HARRIER --

As usual, a few were noted in the early part of the season, before snow cover on the fields obliterated their ability to easily feed.

RED-TAILED HAWK --

The by now annual partial albino was back in its usual woodlot at Sheffield Mills by the last few days of Oct. (JWW etc.), for the 8th successive winter. There seemed to be more than ever in the area in general by mid-Dec.

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK

-- A light-phase bird was along the Canard River near Port Williams Nov. 6 (JWW). Others subsequently appeared in their usual locations, e.g. Grand Pré.

PEREGRINE FALCON --

One chased shorebirds at Evangeline Beach Nov. 10 (JWW), and another (? the same) was chasing Rock doves, just like in the big cities, but this one was in Port Williams, Oct. 11 (BBT).

GRAY PARTRIDGE -- Two of this increasingly rare species were seen in a stubble field at Sheffield Mills Nov. 2 (BBT), and one was coming to feeder near Port Williams till mid-Dec. (JWW). A more sizable flock, of 12, was at Starr's Point Dec. 16 (CC).

RUFFED GROUSE -- SW,

on Dec. 1, writes from Avonport, ".....last evening I heard, in the wooded area near my house on the Lighthouse road, what clearly sounded like a ruffed grouse drumming....two different times. I waited to hear it a third time; when nothing was heard after a few minutes, I started to walk towards where I had heard it. I had not gone far when I was startled by two grouse flushed from part way up in a spruce tree. This was at dusk. I was a bit sorry that I had disturbed them from their evening roost. Have any of you heard of such a thing....ruffed grouse drumming in November?

AMERICAN COOT -- One was on the Port Williams Sewage Pond in early Nov. (GF) and one was on the New Minas Sewage Pond most of Dec. (sev. obs.).

SHOREBIRDS - There were 150-200 **DUNLIN** at Evangeline Beach Oct. 10 (JWW), with smaller numbers of **SANDERLING** and **SEMIPALMATED SAND-PIPERS**: BBT found 14 **GREATER YELLOWLEGS** in marsh grass around Wolfville Oct. 26. JCT saw nine **HUDSONIAN GOD-WITS** at Grand Pré 23 Oct., while searching for the Wheatear. There were several **SANDERLING** and **DUN-**

LIN, and a **PECTORAL SANDPIPER** there a few days later (RBS, AAM). Five **COMMON SNIPE** were in the area of a farm pond at Avonport Oct. 8 (BBT, JT). About 30 **PURPLE SAND-PIPERS** were at Morden 5 Jan. (RBS).

GULLS -- The first **ICE-LAND GULL** in our area this fall was at Wolfville Sewage Pond, Nov. 12 (BBT), and thereafter small numbers were as usual regular in the area. There was an adult **LESSER BLACK-BACKED** at the New Minas Sewage Pond 5 Dec., and seen again intermittently after that. This is a European species that is fast invading North America, with more and more widespread and frequent sightings. The first for our area were just 2 - 3 years ago. RBS watched a **juvenile-plumaged BLACK-LEGGED KIT-TIWAKE** heading east up the Bay of Fundy off Hall's Harbor, 8 Nov. The usual hordes of **HERRING** and **GREATER BLACK-BACKED GULLS**, and lesser numbers of **RING-BILLED GULLS** seemed much as usual.

SNOWY OWL -- PK saw one along the Windsor Causeway Nov. 23, and RE had one perch on the roof of her barn, in Lower Canard,

13 Dec. Possibly the same one was seen a few days later by E & WG.

CHIMNEY SWIFT-- PE saw a Swift (? Chimney) on 21 Oct. over the pond behind his orchard, west end of Wolfville, and PT and SM saw two flying into the Robie Tufts Nature Centre chimney in Wolfville on the extremely late date of Nov. 8, when they should have been in Peru!

RED-BELLIED WOOD-PECKER -- One was around SC's feeder in Kentville in early Nov., same as in 1995. It (?) was seen entering and exiting a hole in a nearby dead elm on 18 Nov. I wonder if it has returned, or if it has been using the area as a roost all summer unbeknownst to local birders.

"EMPIDONAX" FLY-CATCHER -- First discovered by BLF and HF towards the end of November in an overgrown orchard near Port Williams, this bird remained around for almost 2 months, including Xmas count day, and was cooperative enough to be seen by many birders from far and near who came to see it. It has been seen, described, videotaped and photographed by many birders, from far and near. Several people now feel that this member of a notori-

ously difficult to ID group is Eastern Canada's first **DUSKY FLYCATCHER**, a species normally found in the west of the continent, and which should have been in tropical central America by now. Several experts familiar with this difficult group have carefully described it, and have noted the long, uniformly thin bill with a darker tip, the prominent eye-ring, the pale lores, the off-white wing bars, the long tail with pale outer webs on the outer rectrices, the manner of its tail flicking, and the frequent "whit" calls, and are convinced enough to write it up as this species for the records.

BOREAL CHICKADEE - RBS, AAM saw two flying around in the low bushed and long grass at the east end of Grand Pré 25 Oct., miles from the nearest appropriate habitat. Several people commented that they seem particularly common this year.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR -- JB found one on the Wolfville Dyke, close to where one stayed around for several days a few years ago, 22 Oct.

AMERICAN ROBIN -- There were still 75+ in the Kentville Research Stn. Jan. 4 (RBS).

GRAY CATBIRD -- One straggler was still present, eating berries, at Avonport, on the late date of Nov. 19 (EU, SW).

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD -- Two were around the motel at Grand Pré Oct. 25 (JWW), and BBT had one around their yard in late Oct. They also found one (? the same) at Grand Pré, not too far away, Oct. 30. On the same day, GT also had one near her property in Wolfville. One was also present at Grand Pré Jan. 4 (PAM, JWW).

BROWN THRASHER -- One was in Melvern for over a week at Ann Aikman's residence. (PG)

BOHEMIAN WAXWING -- "The earliest flock ever" of five, was in MAG's yard in Canning Nov. 5.

WARBLERS -- BLF and HF found an **ORANGE-CROWNED** in the "Flycatcher orchard" (see above) near Port Williams 24 Nov., in the same location as a few years ago, with Chickadees, and also a **PALM WARBLER** of the dull, western race. It (the Orange-crowned) stayed around, and was then joined by a second bird, with rather brighter plumage. Both

remained very co-operative until at least Xmas, and were seen by all the Dusky fly-catcher hunters. One was still present Jan.5. Both of these are rare fall/winter visitors, but amongst the warblers most likely to be seen at this time of year. A more unexpected one, a **NASHVILLE**, was seen on 3 Dec. by PT in the pines along the railway at Greenwich. A **YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT** - another annual but rare late fall and early winter visitor, was found characteristically skulking in thick bushes along the old railway tracks in Kentville, 8 Nov. (RBS). A **COMMON YEL-LOWTHROAT** was seen briefly on Nov. 28 and 30 at a sunflower feeder in Wolfville (BBT).

NORTHERN CARDINAL -- One was seen around Sterling's Pond, Greenwich, in mid-Oct., and a male has been visiting GF Snr's feeder in Greenwich so far all fall. A female was around JB's yard, by the Wolfville Dyke, 2 Nov. (RBS). One has also stayed in the Pereau area since mid- Nov. (MAG), and a "Christmas card" bird was present on Christmas day in Wolfville (MW).

RUFOUS-SIDED TOWHEE -- One of these rarer winter vagrants visited a feeder in

Lower Canard late Dec., as did a **BALTIMORE ORI-OLE** (*fide* JWW). Another of the latter was being seen in Middleton in late Dec. (BPG).

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW -- One was visiting PCS's feeder in Wolfville from Nov. 7 - Dec. 25.

INDIGO BUNTING -- BBT et al saw an immature/female in Avonport Nov. 6-8.

SNOW BUNTING -- The only sizable flock noted was of 50-75 near Blueberry Acres, Nov. 11 (BBT).

LAPLAND LONGSPUR -- At least 30 were on the Grand Pré dyke, with some Horned larks, Jan.7 (JWW).

RUSTY BLACKBIRD -- Around in the right habitat in summer, but not very often seen, five, presumably migrants, were seen in Avonport by BBT and JT Oct.8.

RED-WINGED BLACK-BIRD -- 50+ were around a hedge in Lower Canard Dec. 29 (RBS).

COMMON GRACKLE -- A few usually stay over winter, and one was at a Sutton Rd. feeder on Dec. 19 (MR) and two were in Avonport Dec.22 (EU).

MEADOWLARK -- One of these rare visitors was being seen around the feeders in North Grand Pré at the end of Dec. (BBT etc.). Both Eastern and Western have been seen as winter vagrants in the Maritimes in the past.

DICKCISSEL-- One was visiting a feeder along Wolfville Ridge for a while in mid-Dec. Apparently this has been a good season for this Midwestern seed-eater around the province.

EVENING GROSBEAK -- This has definitely not been a good winter for this species, as yet. The only flocks reported were of just 6-8 birds, on Nov. 16, in Wolfville (JT), and 42 briefly at EU's Avonport feeders Jan.5.

HOUSE SPARROW -- An all white bird, but with a black eye, and therefore not a true albino, visited EU's feeder during Oct. and early Nov.

JB Joan Bromley
 CC Chris Cox
 SC Sandy Connelly
 RE Robin Eaton
 PE Paul Elderkin
 GF George Forsyth
 HF Harold Forsyth
 HUF Hugh Fairn
 E&WG Elizabeth and Wilma Gibson
 MAG Merritt Gibson
 BPG Barb and Pat Giffen
 PK Pat Kelly
 AAM Angus MacLean
 PM Pam Martin
 SM Susan Montonen
 PR Paul Ritchie
 MR Marg. Russell
 PCS Peter Smith
 ETS Elizabeth Stern
 RBS Richard Stern
 PT Phil Taylor
 JT Jean Timpa
 DT Dan Toews
 GT Gerry Trueman
 GWT Gordon Tufts
 JCT Judy Tufts
 BBT Bill/ Brenda Thexton
 EU Eva Urban
 MW Muhammed Wasseem
 SW Sherman Williams
 JWW Jim Wolford

TRIVIAL TIDBITS

OF LOCAL NATURAL HISTORY

selected and compiled by Jim Wolford,
 Site 1, Comp. 61, RR3, Wolfville, NS. BOP 1X0

These reports are mostly from early October 1996 to early January 1997.

Many thanks go to Stan Riggs, Pat Martell, Sheila Hulford, Susan Montonen & Phil Taylor, and especially to

Brenda Thexton for their written reports. To all you readers out there, we need your input, i.e., whatever observations or absences that **you** consider significant! Please send them or bring them in, via mail or meetings or whatever -- what won't work is e-mail, whatever that is!

And please remember that each observation should be on a **separate, small piece of paper**. Include what, when, where, how many?, etc., and who (and your phone number, if I don't know you -- on this latter point, when in doubt, guess that I **don't** know you by name).

SKIES

Oct. 8 - **Sun-dogs**: single bright spots to left and right of the Sun, plus a horizontal bright bar-shaped patch above the Sun, plus a hint of a circular **halo** (JW, SW).

Nov. 23 - more **Sun-dogs**: in late afternoon, a bright and colourful patch of light plus a vertical bit of a **halo** to the right of the Sun (AB, PAM, JW).

According to Annie Bird's World Book Encyclopedia:

"a Sun-dog is a fragment of a rainbow or a 'parhelion' which is a bright circular spot on a solar halo, sometimes seen on either side of the Sun and level with it ..., a mock

Sun or Sun-dog" (The Advertiser, Nov. 29, 1996).

Dec. 24 - full **Moon**, seen through haze at Tremont, the last full Moon on Christmas Eve until well into next century (SH).

WEATHER

Jan. 4/97 - in the Somerset area, a ground-hugging fog was moving as a wavy ribbon-like narrow blanket along the ground over open or plowed fields -- the movement reminded us of a very slow-motion aurora borealis (PAM, JW).

FUNGI

Sept. 24 - lots of sulfur shelf or **chicken mushroom** on a tree-trunk and roots, at Grafton Lake, Kejimikujik National Park (RRN).

Oct. 1 - great quantities of **coral hedgehog** (*Hericium coralloides*) on many trees, in Kejimikujik National Park (SH).

Oct. 10 - several **netted stinkhorns**, in various stages of growth, on a lawn near a cut tree-stump, in Wolfville (JW).

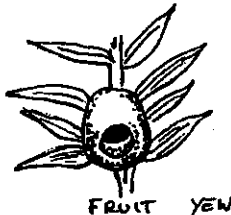
Oct. 29&30 - two more fresh and stinky **netted stinkhorns** on each date, in the same place as on Oct. 10 -- on one of these days, attracted flies

needed only three hours or less to completely remove the slimy spore-masses (JW).

Dec. 29 - one greenish-brown puffball, 5 cm. in diameter, on a lawn at Tremont, "puffed" a great many spores when squeezed.

VASCULAR PLANTS

Nov. 14&21 - several starlings eating the "berries" of a planted yew bush in Wolfville --since yew is a conifer and not a flowering plant, the "berries" are really naked "cones" containing seeds that are poisonous to humans -- in early January/97, pine grosbeaks were eating yew "berries" in another part of Wolfville (JW).



FRUIT YEW



FEMALE FLOWER

Oct. 1 - fruits of American chestnut (small tree north of Acadia University library) opening and shedding seeds (JW).

Oct. 1 - in Kejimikujik National Park, beechdrops in bloom throughout the woods, and tall white lettuce or rattlesnake-root also seen (SH).

Nov. 8 - common dandelion seen on a roadside at Margaretsville (SH).

Nov. 8 - hawkweed sp. seen on a roadside at Torbrook Mines (SH).

Dec. 22 - one flower of trailing arbutus or mayflower found off railroad tracks east of New Minas (SM, PT).

INSECTS

Nov. 6 - one adult caddisfly at a light at night at Grand Pre (JW).

Dec. 27 - oodles of adult seaweed flies active as well as basking on rocks and washed-up seaweeds in a sunny and wind-sheltered spot among shore rocks, on Brier Island, on a very cold and windy afternoon (JW).

Dec. 23,24,29 - adult midges active in Wolfville (good news for that vagrant flycatcher west of Port Williams) (JT).

Nov. 6,10,19 - winter moths active and abundant at Grand

Pre and at east Wolfville, but much less common at one other location in Wolfville (BBT, JW).

Nov. 8-9 - small pretty day-flying moths, very probably some species of *sallow* (genus *Eupsilia*) noted on very warm days on flowers in a Wolfville garden and along a dyke at Wolfville -- front wings chestnut with a silver spot on each, hind wings grayish with whitish rear borders -- probably they emerge as adults in fall, overwinter as adults, then lay eggs in spring and die (JT).

AMPHIBIANS

Dec. 18 - a **spring peeper** calling in early morning, after two previous warm and rainy days, at Gaspereau (SM, PT).

MAMMALS

early Nov. to mid Dec. - several dead **star-nosed moles** found on strolls around property at Canning -- not unusual to find 2-3 on a single walk -- but are moles vulnerable to cats? or because of heavy rainfall received through the fall (causing flooding of their burrows)? (MG).

Oct. 1 - ten different **porcupines** seen along roadsides (grazing) in Kejimikujik National Park (SH).

Dec. 11 - two **muskrats** seen swimming in the creek below Prescott House on Starr's Point Road (PM).

Oct. 6 - a black-coloured **mink** encountered on a bicycle path in Kejimikujik National Park --the mink approached and climbed over bikes lying on the path, and it grabbed and tried to steal a biking helmet with its mouth (DMT et al).

Nov. 7 - a **mink** was seen playing around the back of one of the cars in the parking lot behind the Kentville Law Courts -- it was jumping on and off the undercarriage of the car for about a half-hour, until it headed for the river (SR).

Nov. 7 - a freshly road-killed **skunk** at Greenwich (JW).

Dec. 28 - strong smell of **skunk** experienced in Wolfville (DGT).

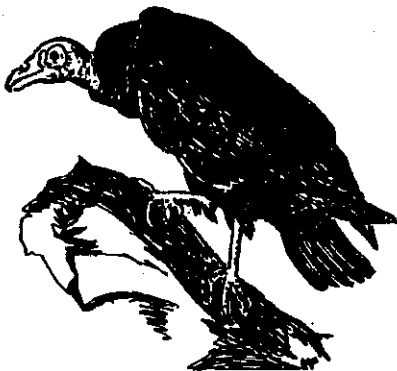


Dec. 9 - an unusually **unafraid raccoon** was found in a yard at Starr's Point -- it did not run from someone trying to chase it away; rather; it approached that person, and it also aggressively approached another person nearby; N.S. Department of Natural Resources was called, the raccoon was live-trapped, and it was diagnosed as having **distemper (canine?)** and was destroyed (DJD).

Dec. 21 - another **raccoon with distemper**, this time in the terminal stages of the disease (very tame and showing muscle spasms) was found at Staff's Point and had to be killed (DJD).

Nov. 8 - a **red fox** seen crossing River Road at Slater Road, Gaspereau (SM, PT).

Nov. 7 - a **coyote** ran across Belcher Street at the Port Williams School (SM, PT).



Dec. 19/20 - a **coyote** seen in the eagle-feeding field east of Fuller's red barn at Pereau (BKH).

Dec. 21 - a **coyote** seen in the Pereau area (GP).

Jan. 3/97 - possible **coyote** tracks seen in snow in an orchard west of Grandview Drive in Wolfville (DGT).

Dec. - nine feeding **turkey vultures** at a nearly intact carcass of a small **pilot whale**, about 3.5 metres long, on the shore near Western Light on Brier Island (JG, MG) -- carcass still attracting vultures there on Dec. 27 (CH, JW).

late Dec. - fishermen are still reporting some **humpback and finback whales** in the Bay of Fundy off Brier Island -- these are quite late seasonally, and the water temperature is still fairly warm (fide CH).

Nov. 10 - a surprise in a residential driveway in early morning was a **white-tailed deer**, a doe (BBT).

Dec. 14 - a buck **white-tailed deer** seen running through an open field, bounding across highway 201, and disappearing into woods (near Greenwood?) (SH).

TRIVIA CONTRIBUTORS

AB - Annie Bird

RB - Roy Bishop

DJD - Debbie & Jim Daigle
 JG - Jamie Gibson
 MG - Merritt Gibson
 BKH - Bob & Ken Horne
 CH - Carl Haycock
 SH - Sheila Hulford
 PM - Pat Martell
 PAM - Patricia Martin
 SM - Susan Montonen
 RRN - Ruth & Reg Newell

GP - George Pickett
 SR - Stan Riggs
 BBT - Brenda & Bill Thexton
 DGT - Dianne & Gordon Thorpe
 DMT - David & Matthew Thexton
 JT - Jean Timpa
 PT - Phil Taylor
 JW - Jim Wolford
 SW - Sherman Williams

AUTUMN WEATHER STATISTICS

September 1996 - December 1996

by Larry Bogan

Below is a summary of the monthly averages of the weather we had during the Fall last year. Autumn, astronomically, is from September 22 to December 21, so the period actually takes in the end of summer

1996. I have included average wind speeds this issue for interest. As usual, I compared the averages for the month with the averages for the month over a 35 year period from 1961 to 1995. It was a very interesting period.

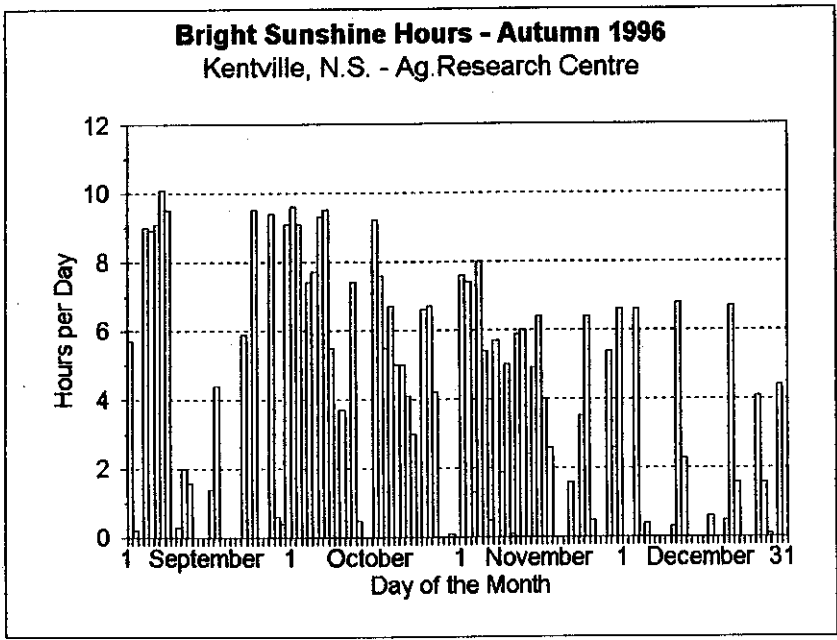
Monthly Averages of Weather Statistics for Kentville Agriculture Research Centre Autumn 1996

	Mean Temperature (°C)	Snowfall (cm)	Rainfall (mm)	Sunshine (hours)	Wind Speed (km/h)
Sept. 1996	14.9	0	261	97	8.7
35 year mean	14.3	0	86	178	8.1
Oct. 1996	8.0	0	96	133	9.1
35 year mean	9.3	0	90	116	9.4
Nov. 1996	2.8	0	92	102	10.2
35 year mean	3.8	6	146	73	10.7
Dec. 1996	1.5	0	123	36	11.0
35 year mean	-1.9	54	78	61	9.6
Total	6.8	0	572	368	
35 year mean	6.3	60	400	428	

The most dramatic aspect of this period was the rainfall and cloudiness. September and December were the rainy months. September had three times !!! its normal rainfall while December was over by 43%. It should be noted that the December's precipitation is, on average, 129 mm when snowfall is included. So really December had a normal precipitation, it's just that there was no snow. November was the 'dry' month of the period with only 2/3 of its normal rainfall. If September's heavy rains are excluded from the period, the Autumn was normal in rainfall and actually below average in precipitation. Another aspect of the rainfall is that much of the rain fell in heavy showers.

During the period there were 6 days with rainfall over 40 mm and four of them occurred in September. There were five days with rainfall between 20 and 40 mm. If you add up all the rainfall from these its equals 432 mm or 3/4 of all the rainfall in 11 days.

With rain comes cloudiness and that is reflected in the graph of Bright Sunshine Hours for the period. In September the middle of the month had little sunshine and the month as a whole ended with only 55% the normal bright sunshine. Compare October, which was a normal month in sunshine hours. November and December are usually the 'darkest' months of the year due to clouds. In



1996 November was delightfully sunny but December was dismally cloudier than normal. Look at the graph and you will see that December had only three days with more than six hours of bright sunshine and only three more days with more than two hours of bright sunshine!!! The whole season, September through December ended with 86% of the normal sunshine.

Finally, let's consider the temperature for the autumn season. Overall it was 0.5 degree above average but the most extreme month, temperature-wise, was December which was an extreme 3.4 C above normal!!

October and November were cooler than normal but their sunnier days compensated for this fact. Certainly, I burned less wood this year because of all the solar heating available in October and November.

All during the autumn, the maritimes was being hit by low pressure systems streaming along the jet stream which spent much of the time over us. This gave us the excessive rain, cloud and warmer temperatures. December was so warm and free of snow, that the birds were still dispersed and difficult to count, as a result, the Christmas Bird Counts had fewer birds this year.

WHAT'S IN THE SKY?

by Roy Bishop

New Moon: Feb 7, March 8,
April 7

Full Moon: Jan 23, Feb 22,
March 24, April 22

Spring: Begins on Thur,
March 20 at 9:55 a.m. (AST)

Large Tides

The New Moon or the Full Moon produces spring tides because the tides raised by the Moon and those raised by the Sun are then in step. The New Moon of Friday February 7 coincides with the Moon being at its closest point to

Earth (perigee) in its monthly orbit, resulting in perigean spring tides. Moreover, this is the closest perigee of 1997, so the tides will be higher than at most perigees. Also, Earth just passed its closest point to the Sun in early January, resulting in perihelion tides. Thus during the second weekend of February (the tides peak a day or two after the astronomical factors are optimum) we shall have perihelion perigean spring tides! If there is a low pressure sys-

tem (allowing sea level to rise) plus a strong south wind (driving water up the Bay of Fundy), the Minas Basin area will have not just unusually high tides, but exceptionally high tides! It will be an interesting weekend.

Mars approaches

At intervals of about 26 months Earth laps Mars as the two planets orbit the Sun. At such times, for a few weeks, we are close to Mars and that orange planet shines brightly in our night sky. March 1997 is such a time, with Mars being closest to us on the 20th, the beginning of spring for our Northern Hemisphere. During March, Mars rises in the east as evening twilight falls and is high in the south by midnight. From January through June it will be interesting to watch Mars trace a loop against the background stars as our motion makes Mars appear to move backward (westward). This "retrograde motion" was not understood until 1543 when Copernicus proposed a Sun-centred solar system. Even though Mars will be close to Earth, it is a small planet. Thus to see the Martian polar cap (the north cap is tilted toward Earth this winter) and other surface features, very steady air and a high-quality telescope are essential.

An Eclipse

During March there are actually two eclipses: a total eclipse of the Sun on March 9 visible from Siberia, and a deep partial eclipse of the Moon on the night of March 23/24 visible from Nova Scotia. This partial lunar eclipse will not be as spectacular as the total lunar eclipse of last September 26, but it will be well worth watching.

The Moon begins to enter Earth's umbral shadow at 10:57 pm Sunday evening. If you only take one peek at this eclipse, the best time to look is at 00:39 am on Monday morning, March 24 (i.e. stay up late Sunday night). At this point only a narrow slice of the Moon will remain in direct sunlight. Also, dark-adapt for 10 minutes before going outside, and don't forget your binoculars. Mars will be shining brightly to the upper right of the Moon. Let's hope for a clear sky! Incidentally, David Levy, Acadia graduate and discoverer of 21 comets, is to be married on March 23. He and his fiancée selected this date because of the eclipse, and the wedding celebrations will include viewing the eclipse --- which happens in mid-evening in Tucson, Arizona, the location of the wedding.

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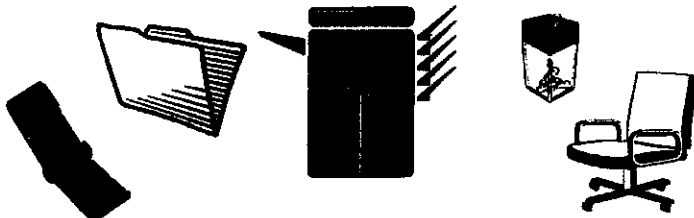
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(compiled by Blomidon Naturalists Society)

Information	Source	Office	Home
Rocks & Fossils	Geology Dept. Acadia U.	542-2201	
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Flora - General Fungi	Ruth Newell	542-2201	542-2095
	Darryl Grund	542-2201	542-9214
	Nancy Nickerson	679-5333	542-9332
	Lichens	Karen Casselman	424-7370
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	James Legge		542-3530
Astronomy	Roy Bishop		542-3992
	Sherman Williams	542-3598	542-5104
	Larry Bogan		678-0446

January 1997						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20 - BNS Meeting - 730	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

February 1997						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 Eagle Days
2 Eagle Days	3	4	5	6	7	8 - Walk - Young People
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17 - BNS Meeting - 730	18	19	20	21	22 - Winter Woodland Walk
23	24	25	26	27	28	

March 1997						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8 -
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17 - BNS Meeting - 730	18	19	20	21	22
23/30 23rd Eclipse	24/31	25	26	27	28	29

