



# Blomidon Naturalists Society

Winter 1997 - Volume 24 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 March, June, October and December by  
The Blomidon Naturalists Society  
P.O. Box 127  
Wolfville, NS, B0P 1X0

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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.

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

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## BNS WINTER PROGRAMME, 1998

### 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 244 of the Beveridge Arts Centre. All meetings are open to the public and BNS members are encouraged to bring friends and neighbours.

**Jan. 19 RICHARD STERN. Birding in Manitoba.** Richard will tell us about his birding trip last summer to both southern Manitoba and Churchill. Great slides! **Room 241, BAC.**

**Feb. 16 MEMBERS' NIGHT.** This is the night to tell others about your special interests in natural history. Our annual **Members' Night** is held in **Patterson Hall (Biology Dept.), room 308.** Display tables, screens and projectors, and TV/Video equipment will be available. Experiences, collections, pictures and slides, and artwork relating to natural history are welcomed. If you do not have anything to show or tell, come anyway and enjoy the interests of other members.

**March 16 ANDREW HEBDA and COWAN EWING. The Natural History of Isle Haute.** Andrew and Cowan are staff members at the Nova Scotia Museum. Last summer they led a field trip to Isle Haute and will tell us about that trip. **Room 241, BAC.**

**April 20 MARTY LEONARD. Parent-offspring Interactions of Tree Swallows.** Marty is a professor of biology at Dalhousie University. Much of her work with tree swallows has been conducted in the Annapolis Valley.

**May 18 CHRIS HARVEY-CLARK.** Underwater Natural History of the North Atlantic. Chris is a veterinarian with the Biology Dept. at Dalhousie University. His special interests are diving and underwater photography. Chris has recently published a book entitled **EASTERN TIDEPPOOL & REEF: North-Central Atlantic Marinelife Guide.** Come hear about his underwater adventures, outstanding photographs!

### FIELD TRIPS

**Feb. 14 Kings County Eagles.** A bus trip with the Halifax Field Naturalists to watch eagles in the Sheffield Mills - Kingsport area, returning to Patterson Hall for lunch and to view videos of local eagles. Meet at Robie Tufts Nature Centre, Wolfville, at 10 a.m., bring lunch. A contribution to help pay for the bus will be appreciated. Leaders: Jim Wolford and Merritt Gibson. Storm date: Feb. 15.

**April 26 A Birders Pond Hop.** A joint trip with the Nova Scotia Bird Society, to look for birds that visit local ponds. Meet at Robie Tufts Nature Centre, Wolfville, at 10 a.m., bring lunch. Leader: Jim Wolford.

### Notes from the Editor

It will be a few months until the birds of spring start returning, but this issue of the BNS Newsletter is full of birds. From the cover illustration by Keshena Eaton through to the usual Bird Report from Richard Stern is added the results from the Christmas Counts for Wolfville, Kingston, West Hants, and Brier Island that show that many birds do stay around here in the winter, albeit quietly. Joe Nocera of Acadia University provides an informative report on the status of Common Loons in Nova Scotia, specifically in Kejimikujik National Park, and the effect that mercury levels may be having on the local loon population.

Thank you to all the contributors to the winter, volume 24 number 4 newsletter. Illustrators, Mary Pratt and Joanna Duy; columnists, Larry Bogan, Roy Bishop, Jim Wolford, and Richard Stern; advertising, Lorna Hart and Mike McCall; production Phil Taylor; and special feature (and illustration) Joseph Nocera.

**1998 Membership Fees are due NOW!**

Susan Montonen  
542-0437  
Susan.Montonen@acadiu.ca

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### North American Migration Count — SPRING 9 MAY 1998

The SEVENTH annual North American Migration Count year of operation gets underway with the Spring count on Saturday, 9 May 1998. Those wishing to participate in this migratory bird project are asked to **mark it on their calendar now**. If a Fall 1998 NAMCount takes place, it will be held on 19 September 1998.

Contact your local county coordinator, area representative, or me, for more information if needed. Judy Tufts (1-902-542-7800) N.S. Coordinator for NAMC.

## SOCIETY BUSINESS AND NOTICES

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 1996/97

by Roy Bishop

The Blomidon Naturalists Society, founded in March 1974, is the largest local natural history group in Atlantic Canada. It has been my privilege to serve as the Society's 10th (8th?) president during the past three years. For the record, the presidents have been: Sherman Williams (1974-75), Cyril Coldwell (75-76), Larry Bogan (76-79), Peter Austin-Smith (79-82), Richard Stern (82-85), Jim Wolford (85-87), Sherman Williams (87-89), Peter Austin-Smith (89-90), Tom Herman (90-94), Roy Bishop (94-97), Randy Milton (97- ).

#### *BNS meetings during 1996/97 (dates, topics, speakers):*

- Oct. 21 Banding Songbirds (Robert Emerson)
- Nov. 18 Lichens in Relation to Human Activity (David Richardson)
- Dec. 16 Natural History of Alberta (Branimer Gjetvaj)
- Jan. 20 Celtic Quest (Jim Wolford)
- Feb. 17 Members Night.
- Mar. 17 Beauty Fit For a Queen (Sherman Bleakney)
- April 21 Are Horseflies Really That Bad? (Phil Taylor)
- May 19 Archeological Sites in Kings County (George Hiseler)
- June 16 Day of the Mastodon (Frank Thomas)
- Sept. 15 Bats (Brock Fenton)
- Oct. 20 What To Do With Sable Island (Tony Lock)

#### *Field trips since October 1996 (dates, topics, leaders):*

- Feb. 1-2 Eagle Days (Sheffield Mills)
- Feb. 8 Nature Walk for Young People (Karin Robertson, Rob Emerson)
- Feb. 22 Winter Woodland Walk (Sherman Williams, Merritt Gibson)
- April 4 Night Sky, Comet Hale-Bopp (Larry Bogan, Sherman Williams)
- April 27 Spring Birds (Richard Stern)
- May 3 Ducks and Early Migrants (Judy Tufts)

- May 9 Frog Hop (Jeff Franklin)
- May 25 Nature Walk, Blomidon Park (Jim Wolford)
- July 19 Neary Pines (George Forsyth)
- July 26 Pond Life (Jim Wolford)
- Aug. 2 Shore Birds (Judy Tufts)
- Aug. 4 Middleton Swifts (rained out) (Jim Wolford)
- Aug. 12 Summer Sky (Larry Bogan)
- Aug. 18 Blomidon Mud (Sherman Boates)
- Aug. 20 Tidal Bores (Roy Bishop)
- Sept. 13 Horton Fossils (Sherman Williams)
- Sept. 27 Mushroom Walk (Twila Robar-DeCoste)
- Oct. 12 Pond Life (Jim Wolford)

The BNS Board of Directors held four meetings (on Dec. 5, March 13, June 12, Sept. 11). These meetings were hosted by Bill and Brenda Thexton at their home on Main Street.

The directors for 1996/97 were (committee positions also indicated):

President: Roy Bishop; Vice-President: Larry Bogan (Conservation chair); Secretary: Neil Cloghesy (Newsletter Advertising); Treasurer: Harold Forsyth (Robie Tufts Nature Centre chair, BNS representative on Wolfville Waterfront Development committee); Past President: Tom Herman (Conservation, Nominating, BNS rep. on Kings County Economic Development committee); Sue Bissix (Director-at-large); Merritt Gibson (Director-at-large, Program chair, Editorial Board, "Nature Notes" for the Advertiser); Lorna Hart (Conservation, Newsletter advertising); Randy Milton (Robie Tufts Young Naturalists Award).

Other members who served the Society include: George Alliston (BNS representative on the FNSN, Conservation, Editorial Board), Peter Austin-Smith (Conservation, Nominating, Robie Tufts Nature Centre), Sherman Boates (Program, Robie Tufts Nature Centre), Lana Churchill (Newsletter distribution, Robie Tufts Young Naturalists Award), Mark Elderkin (Editorial Board), Angus MacLean (Christmas Bird Count), 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 (Production of the Newsletter), Bill Thexton (Nominating), Brenda Thexton (Newsletter distribution), Judy Tufts (Newsletter distribution, Provincial Coordinator of the North American Migration Count), Sherman Williams (Robie Tufts Young Naturalists Award 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 these lists for the 1997/98 year: Randy Milton is the new President. Phil Taylor is the new Vice-President. Tom Herman and Stan Riggs are new Directors.

1997 saw the appearance of four significant items by the Society:

(1) a BNS brochure (a 3-fold sheet of blue paper). Copies of the brochure are available from either Harold Forsyth (Treasurer) or Neil

Cloghesy (Secretary).

(2) a BNS crest (cloth, suitable for sewing on a jacket or hat). 200 crests were made and they sell for \$5. The crest design is the BNS logo which was created by Lynn (Dixon) Coldwell in 1980. Thanks to Judy Tufts for urging us to produce a crest and for the choice of colours used in it.

(3) a 1998 BNS Natural History Calendar, with colour photographs by members and unique natural history and related historical information on the Wolfville area. Special thanks to Merritt Gibson and his committee for making this a reality, and to Curtis Chipman (Wolfville), Arthur Irving (Saint John), and Scotia Investments Ltd. (Hantsport) for sponsoring the calendar. 1500 calendars were produced and they sell for \$15. The next few months will determine whether or not the calendar will be a financial success.

(4) an Endowment Fund was established.

Among other highlights:

Once again, the BNS employed a student at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre for 10 weeks during the summer. Danielle Albert, an Acadia biology student from Charlottetown, was the successful applicant. Danielle did a first-rate job, including the preparation of two new display panels, one on turtles and one on tides. Special thanks to the Biology Department at Acadia for providing workspace for Danielle, and to our treasurer Harold Forsyth for obtaining the funding for Danielle's position.

The Robie Tufts Young Naturalists Award was presented to Justin Bishop of Baxter's Harbour (January 1997). This is the 13th year the award has been presented.

A spotting Telescope was donated to the Society at its June meeting by Angus and Margaret Weeks of Kingston in memory of Hilda Weeks.

Designated Conservation Organization: Our application for this designation was finally approved by the Provincial Government on April 8, 1997. This status allows the BNS to enter into legal agreements with other organizations for protecting parcels of land having special natural history value. For example, Nova Scotia Power has indicated an interest in entering into an agreement with the BNS for protecting the Gaspereau River ravine. However, the cost of a survey of the property appears to have put the matter on hold for the present.

At the 1997 annual meeting of the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists, the Blomidon Naturalists Society took on an even larger role in this umbrella organization. Tom Herman is now President of the Federation,

Terry Power is Vice-President, and Larry Bogan is Treasurer. George Alliston continues as the BNS representative on the Federation Board of Directors.

Sherman Bleakney (who was the speaker at our first meeting on March 26, 1974 and again on March 17, 1997) published his book: *Sea Slugs of Atlantic Canada and the Gulf of Maine*.

Finally, I regret to record the death of Rachel Erskine (in Sackville NB, on 30 October 1997, in her 94th year). Rachel was a founding member of the BNS, had been an Honorary Member since 1983, and was a good friend of many in the Wolfville area, where she resided from 1936 to 1987. Our Society's book *A Natural History of Kings County* is dedicated to Rachel and her husband John, who died in 1981. In my file is a Christmas card Rachel sent to the BNS two years ago. It seems fitting to end this report with her December 1995 note to the Society:

"Merry Christmas & Happy New Year to Blomidon Naturalists & to any of my many friends who may attend your December meeting, & to wish success to the Bird Count at Christmas. Good to hear the Society is so active in many fields. It was such an interest to us both. Greetings, Rachel Erskine"

### Treasurer's Report 1996/97 Harold Forsyth

We ended the year with a cash balance of \$3550 plus assets of \$5755. We had a deficit spending of \$1839 partly due to projects done at the Nature Centre. This has been supported with fund raising and we are currently selling a Natural History calendar to support future projects. Special thanks go out to those who made donations to the Society during the year: Paula & Doug Ells, Vivian Sinclair, Curtis Chipman, David Jones, Jack & Alice Hyslop, Rick & Janet Whitman, Gert Arkensteijn, Don Lightfoot, Kathryn Fleiger, Ruth & King Butler, Isabel Horton, Celia Corcoran, Edward & Evlyn Eagles, Charles R. K. Allen and Owen & Janice Stephens.

#### Blomidon Naturalists Society Statements of Operations and Surplus

<u>Year Ended August 31</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1996</u>
<b>Revenue</b>		
Advertising	\$220	\$70
Books	706	863
Crests	230	0
Donations	416	458
Federation dues in	245	235
Grants: Career Summer Placement	2,140	2,000



GST rebate	158	78
Interest	328	9
Membership dues	2,814	2,399
Other	<u>27</u>	<u>270</u>
	\$7,284	\$6,382
<b>Expenditures</b>		
Administration	85	132
Awards and Meetings	201	587
Bad Debts	70	0
Books	335	370
Crests	128	0
Eagle Project	570	0
Federation dues out	255	230
Federation meeting	0	99
Memberships	140	240
Nature Centre	1,538	383
Newsletter	2,898	2,134
Other	97	304
Wages and benefits	<u>2,806</u>	<u>2,651</u>
	\$9,123	\$7,130
Excess of expenditures over revenue	<u>\$(1,839)</u>	<u>\$(748)</u>
Surplus, beginning of year	\$11,144	\$11,892
Excess of expenditures over revenue	<u>(1,839)</u>	<u>(748)</u>
Surplus, end of year	\$9,305	\$11,144
<b>Balance Sheet. August 31</b>	1997	1996
<b>Assets</b>		
<b>Current</b>		
Cash	\$305	\$279
Term Deposit (1)	3,000	5,000
Accounts receivable	372	349
Inventory of books at cost	5,327	5,662
Inventory of crests at cost	<u>428</u>	<u>0</u>
	\$9,432	\$11,290
<b>Liabilities</b>		
<b>Current</b>		
Payables and accruals	\$127	\$146
<b>Equity</b>		
Surplus	<u>9,305</u>	<u>11,144</u>
	\$9,432	\$11,290

(1) Term Deposit - Royal Bank 1 year redeemable @ 2.75%

## **DIRECTORS OF THE BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY FOR THE YEAR 1997-98**

President — Randy Milton 542-1761  
Vice-President — Phil Taylor 542-0437  
Past-President — Roy Bishop 542-3992  
Secretary — Neil Cloghesy 542-4525  
Treasurer — Harold Forsyth 542-5983  
Directors at Large —  
Sue Bissix 542-9138  
Merritt Gibson 582-7569  
Lorna Hart 542-4470  
Tom Herman 678-0383  
Stan Riggs 679-9746

### **Robie Tufts Nature Centre: MY SUMMER WITH THE BLOMIDON NATURALISTS SOCIETY by Danielle Albert, BNS Summer employee**

The most important thing about this job was that it was a great learning experience. I think all the members of BNS should give themselves a hand for doing something that means a lot and helps a lot: hiring a student. I could never have learnt so much in so little time working at any other summer job!

The first of my ten weeks was spent at the Acadia University biology department, in Patterson Hall, reading everything I could find on chimney swifts and the BNS. At the end of that week I felt confident enough to face the public and watch the birds, but I was doubtful there'd be a crowd. How wrong I was!

During the weeks I worked, I met people from Italy, Germany, Holland, England, India, Dubai, Australia, Mexico, the States, and all across Canada.

I had a lot of odd jobs such as painting and cleaning up. However, my larger jobs included working on new panels, planning and giving "Wharf Walks", and in the last week, giving field trips with Lorna Hart to see the shorebirds. New panels include shorebirds, tide, and turtle information. All three are now up at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre. I offered wharf walks Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 2:00 pm. Mainly I explained the tides in simple terms (bathtub effect) and the shorebirds (there were almost always willetts in sight) and advertised the nightly performance put on by the chimney swifts. I also pointed out different species of plants.

Thanks to Jim Wolford who taught me the names of many plants along my "Wharf Walk" and showed me the best places to see shorebirds. Thanks to Harold Forsyth. And to Roy Bishop for

his work on the tide panel. Also to Lorna Hart who helped with shorebird field trips. And a big thanks to Peter Austin-Smith who

spent lots of his free time making sure all of my projects ran smoothly.

## **BNS FIELD TRIP REPORTS**

### **SHOREBIRDS (AUGUST 2, 1997) by Judy Tufts, trip leader**

A promising start to a warm summer day's outing, began around 11 a.m. as sixteen of us visiting Wolfville harbour found the mud-flats alive with about 500 'peeps' – mostly Semi-palmated Sandpipers and a handful of Least – scurrying around ahead of the rising tide, intent on every morsel the mud would yield. There were 70 Short-billed Dowitchers busy along the edge of the water with their more deliberate 'sewing-machine' motion deep-probing the mud, and many of the resident Willets with their young families. A single Chimney Swift circled overhead calling – possibly one that had roosted overnight in the local Front St. chimney?

By the time everyone had reached our second stop, the Windsor Causeway (Tourist Bureau), Meg and Pat, the first to arrive, had already spotted four Hudsonian Godwits (lifers for the two young women) among the myriad of shorebirds on the mudflats by the Causeway – more 'peeps', Short-billed Dowitchers, Willets, and a few Black-bellied Plovers scattered through the marsh grasses. We watched as the tide advanced over the flats, then flooded the area causing the shorebirds to rise in the air gath-

ering in sizable flocks as their feeding ground disappeared literally under their feet, leaving only a choice of remaining airborne or finding a roosting place until the tide dropped once more. Now it was time for us to have 'our' lunch.

The west end of the Causeway, where there are piles of rocks along the dykes, offers excellent roosting areas for these shorebirds. We transferred to this location, after enjoying lunch by the willows which lean so elegantly over the Tourist Bureau's pond, to see many of these small sandpipers dropping down in hundreds to settle on the dyke-rocks, and blending in so well with the background that one had to watch them with optics to really appreciate the mass of bodies huddled on those rocks. Soon the dowitchers joined them, swelling the numbers in the roosting assembly with a little shuffling here and a little jostling there.

Many more sandpiper flocks wheeled back and forth over the Causeway marsh, rippling through the air like fluid silver one minute, dark ribbons the next, the air filling with motion and the 'rustling' sound of wings overhead. An

impressive sight indeed! A rough estimate of the shorebirds at the Causeway, besides the godwits and Black-bellied Plovers: at least 300 Short-billed Dowitchers, 20,000 Semi-palmated sandpipers, and a few Least sandpipers. In the distance beyond the mouth of the Avon River across the low hills to the north-west, we became aware of what appeared to be clouds of smoke rising and falling as if a very large fire was burning in that direction. It took only a second or two to realize these 'clouds' were more shorebirds; 10s of 1000s of shorebirds, flocks twisting and turning in unison out over Minas Basin, awaiting the tide to drop so they could resume feeding.

It was mid-afternoon as we headed next to Penney's Beach, Avonport - somehow we lost a car along the way. The Great Egret seen in the

marsh beside Penney's Beach by the leader the previous day failed to put in an appearance much to the disappointment of our group. The beach itself offered nothing more than 8 Semi-palmated Plovers with a rapidly falling tide. Some of our group elected to end their birding trip here while the rest headed for Evangeline Beach, at the east end of Long Island, Grand Pré. Unfortunately, due to the hour, the tide had already receded with shorebirds widely dispersed along the well-exposed beach. As we watched, more small flocks continued to stream past us from the direction of the Avon River and spread out along the shoreline to feed - too far for easy binocular viewing so it was decided to 'call it a day'. The shorebirds once again had put on quite a performance for everyone - a reward in itself.

### **POND LIFE (October 12, 1997) by Jim Wolford, Wolfville**

Two pitches and two strikes! Dare we try another pitch? I blamed others for choosing a date during Mud Creek Days in August, but I'll share the blame for then choosing Thanksgiving Sunday! Try again in spring or early summer?

On a nice, partly sunny day, four participants accompanied me back out to the Kentville Agricultural Research Station's lily pond (and two more curious people joined us there). We very quickly discovered (I should have scouted this before our day) that the pond was absolutely full of filamentous green algae, so that it was very

difficult to see much in my dip-netted samples of the water. Also the very abundant floating lily-pads had their upper surfaces covered with zillions of aphids (including a few winged ones). Underneath the lily leaves were lots of pouch snails (*Physa*) and smaller numbers of *Gyraulus* snails.

At the sunny west end of the pond, we noticed lots of activity from several small skimmer dragonflies. The males had bright red abdomens, while the females were a duller red. We saw several pairs "in tandem", which is either a pre-mating or

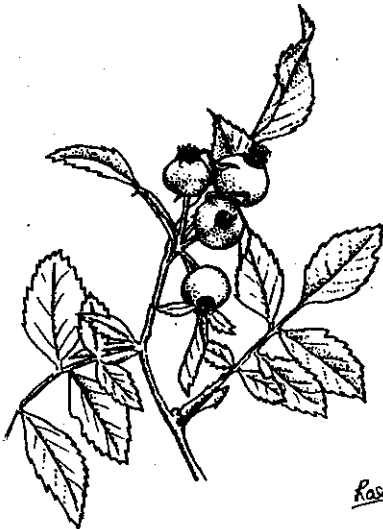
post-mating position in which the male's hind end is locked onto the female just behind her head. Also there were several separate males looking for partners. We very closely observed a few of the coupled females **ovipositing** (laying eggs) by dipping their hind ends into the shallow water by the shore -- males stay attached in order to ensure that the eggs laid are not fertilized by another male (ask Tom Herman for details). One of these pairs was laying eggs just a few inches from a **leopard frog** (which was apparently not hungry!).

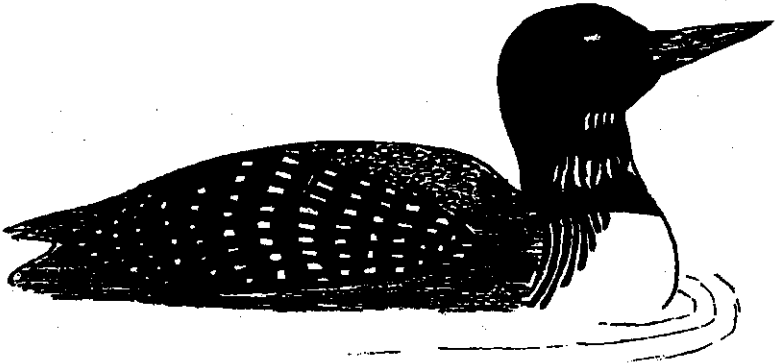
Organisms seen in the algae-soup water included the following: lots of submerged **bladderwort** with the bladders plentiful on the divided leaves -- the bladders are for catching **tiny swimming plants or animals**, which were abundant but much too small to identify; small amphipod "shrimps"; "water fleas" (relatives

of *Daphnia*); seed shrimps (ostracods); a small water mite; a few small nymphs/larvae of mayflies, dragonflies, & damselflies; water boatmen adults & a baby; an adult backswimmer; fly larvae included midges, a phantom-midge, and several eel-like no-see-ums; one larval caddisfly with no case to live in (common in streams, much less so in ponds); and a "controversial" very small beetle with spots (not seen by me).

Since we hadn't seen much, and it was still early, I suggested a stop at the Port Williams skating pond on Belcher Street, where we first spotted several domestic ducks and a few wild? mallards. The water was silty and contained not much visible life: a mayfly nymph, a damselfly nymph, adult water boatmen (a different kind from those at Kentville), several crawling water beetles, several "bloodworms" (red larvae of midges), small *Gyraulus* snails, and a small leech (not a "bloodsucker"!).

The last two items above hadn't been noticed when the water was in the enamel pans. But when the water was dumped, clinging to the pan's surface were the small snails and the leech -- this is a good way to look for them.





## NATURAL HISTORY NEWS

### MONITORING COMMON LOONS IN NOVA SCOTIA - ATTEMPTS TO KEEP A SILENT DANGER AT BAY

by Joseph J. Nocera

Atlantic Cooperative Wildlife Ecology Research Network  
Acadia University Department of Biology

Nova Scotia is graced with innumerable lakes of infinite sizes and shapes. The majority of our larger lakes (particularly those over 40 hectares) are home to some of Canada's most endeared residents, Common Loons. In our province, the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) is a fairly common summer resident, often arriving to breed immediately after the lake ice breaks, and leaving in early autumn. Scattered non-breeding Common Loons (typically sub-adults) are found on saltwater even throughout the breeding season. I have seen these summering birds as close as my front porch in Delhaven foraging at the mouth of Irving Brook during high tide. Wintering loons can be seen off the coast, thus assuring us of year round "looning". As well, the congeneric Red-throated Loon (*G. stellata*) can sometimes be found visiting during peak migration periods in the early spring and late fall; a few are seen with annual regularity in Minas Basin from Kingsport. There have been a few rare reports of Pacific Loons (*G. pacifica*) sighted in our province over the past century. No reliable documentation exists of Arctic (*G. arctica*) or Yellow-billed Loons (*G. adamsii*) ever visiting Nova Scotia.

Common Loons enjoy a holarctic distribution that includes the Maritimes. They are a long-lived fish-eating species that has relatively few (if any) young each year (usually one chick survives of the average 2-egg clutch). Breeding lakes of choice are oligotrophic, relatively free from predators and human disturbance, have an adequate food resource and nesting area (preferably islands with overhanging grass or brush). Nests are usually a bowl-shaped depression on the shoreline, made of mud and available aquatic vegetation. Nesting in our province is typically underway by the last week of May or first week of June. Chicks

hatch approximately 28 days after incubation (carried out by both the male and female) begins. Downy young ride on their parents back for the first 12 to 16 days. This provides the chicks with a way to save energy, conserve heat, and avoid underwater predators (such as snapping turtles).

In Nova Scotia, the primary loon prey is yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*). These perch are ubiquitous in our watersheds and numerous. Their escape tactics of sharp turns and angles make them a prime target for feeding loons, who are more adept at twist-and-turn chases than at linear speed contests that species like many trout employ.

That loon pairs are found on almost any fair size lake in the province might lead one to the assumption that their population here is secure. However, that assumption might be too gratuitous. Research conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service since 1988 has shown that loons in the Kejimikujik National Park area (at the trisect of Queens, Annapolis and Digby counties) have peculiarly low reproductive success (0.28 chicks per residential pair from 1988 to 1996). This is comparatively low, as for example, in order for Arctic Loon populations to remain stable, productivity must be between 0.45 - 0.50. Loons are a long-lived species, so the effects of low productivity on a population may not be seen for many years. With a productivity of 0.28 chicks, Kejimikujik may be acting as a sink for Common Loon reproduction. This is counter intuitive as Kejimikujik contains many choice lakes that fit the requirements mentioned above. Thus, the reason for poor reproductive success in that area has yet to be explained.

The idea of "you are what you eat" would suggest that loons consistently consuming fish would reflect the biotic and abiotic makeup of their foraging territories. Loons are at one of the top seats in the freshwater food web, which makes them susceptible to perturbations further down. This wouldn't intuitively seem like a problem in our mostly pristine wilderness lakes, especially in protected areas like our national and provincial parks.

However, further research conducted by the Canadian Wildlife Service since 1995 has found that loons in our province (particularly in the area of Kejimikujik) have the highest levels of blood mercury of any tested population in North America! In contrast, blood mercury levels of loons in southern New Brunswick (the Lepreau watershed for example) have been found, on average, to be less than half that of loons in Kejimikujik. Also, productivity there is higher than in Kejimikujik.

Mercury is a known neurotoxin, made famous by the plight of the Mad Hatter in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Exposure to the toxin in lab experiments has shown that mercury can have effects ranging from subtle behavioral changes to death. A study conducted in the Sudbury

region of Ontario during the late 80's found that loons with high blood mercury exhibited lower nest attentiveness. These birds were in direct contact with point-source mercury contamination from the effluent of a chlor-alkali plant upstream. Laboratory studies of mercury-contaminated birds show lower nest site fidelity and aberrant breeding behavior that can result in either reduced productivity or lack of a nesting attempt.

The investigation of mercury levels in maritime loons has continued since the discovery of alarming loon blood contamination and is ongoing. Results show that loons in neighboring New Brunswick have less than half the blood mercury levels of Nova Scotian loons. This discovery hints at a potential source of our mercury contamination. A recent publication by a network of North American loon biologists shows an increase in blood mercury levels from west to east, correlating with the predominant wind patterns blowing from the industrial mid-west United States and southern Ontario. These findings point towards atmospheric deposition as the primary culprit of mercury contamination of our aquatic biota as no point sources (such as in the Sudbury, Ontario study) are found upstream of Kejimikujik. More work, however, needs to be done to elucidate the primary sources, especially those affecting Nova Scotia. Additionally, the first stage towards defining the problem is to assess whether the mercury in Nova Scotia loons is at a sub-lethal level high enough to impair reproduction and/or behavior.

In 1996, a collaborative effort between CWS-Atlantic Region (through wildlife toxicologist, Neil Burgess) and the Atlantic Cooperative Wildlife Ecology Research Network of Acadia University (headed by Dr. Phil Taylor) was initiated to answer some of those questions. To that effect, I have just completed the field work of a two-year graduate study (under Dr. Taylor's tutelage) examining the behavior of loons in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. My compatriots at CWS have done the same in addressing reproductive effects. Results are slowly coming in now and we hope to have the complete puzzle put together by the coming spring. Early results, however, show that behavior is being altered as mercury exposure increases, particularly the behavioral patterns of very young chicks. The energetic balancing act, that all animals face daily, is being disrupted in downy chicks as mercury in their blood and in their prey increases. This change in behavior implies that our populations may be incurring a distinct health threat from mercury at a crucial period in their development. What other species are at risk from mercury contamination in Nova Scotia? It is still too early to tell. Intuitively, top-end predators are likely candidates, and new projects have recently been started that are examining similar questions, in species such as Bald Eagles, mink and otter.

This is not to say that alarm bells are now ringing in a loon Armageddon for Nova Scotia. Our research is occurring well in advance of any



extensive population effects and therefore will allow plenty of time to attempt to make necessary changes. Too often this is not the case – research and conservation measures typically begin after a problem has grown into a crisis (examples abound such as the Piping Plover, Harlequin Duck and Leatherback Turtle). This conundrum has plagued scientists for decades and we hope that research such as ours (at the infant stage of a potential problem) becomes the norm rather than remain the exception. In the meantime, we should still admire the loons in our province while remaining cautiously optimistic that our loon population is not in any immediate trouble. As well, remain secure in the fact that research such as this is occurring early enough in the game to head-off the point of no return. The laughter of loons on our northern lakes is not yet stilled. Enjoy.

## MORE NAME-CHANGES FOR BIRDS!

by Jim Wolford

In the Nov.-Dec. 1997 issue of Bird Watcher's Digest, another Supplement to the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) Checklist of North American Birds was announced. You can see the details of this on pages 542-552 in the July 1997 issue of The Auk (which can be found in the Acadia University Library).

Here I'll summarize the changes for two former species, each of which has been split into two or three "new" species. Isn't this fun?!

For the **marbled murrelet**, no name-change is necessary for those on the West Coast (where this seabird nests on high mossy branches of rain-forest conifers), but the Asiatic population is now called the **long-billed murrelet**. This is important to us easterners, because the few inland records to date in New England and Florida were of the Asiatic birds.

The **solitary vireo** now becomes three new species. Our form,

breeding across Canada and throughout the East is now known as the **blue-headed vireo** (which happens to be our old name for it – more fun!). Those of the Great Plains are **plumbeous vireos**, while birds in the West Coast mountains are **Cassin's vireos**.

In addition to many changes (mostly splits) in Central American birds, there are some interesting changes in relationships of groups. For example, New World vultures, no longer considered closely related to the hawks, will follow the storks in the new AOU Checklist, due this winter. Also shrikes, corvids (jays and crows), and vireos are now recognized as being closely related, and they will follow the swallows in the list.

P.S. Related to the name-changes listed in our last Newsletter, check out last month's issue of Equinox magazine (Nov./97), pp. 56-65, "Canada's Newest Bird Revealed" or "Phantom of Fog Forest" by Harry Thurston, concerning the poorly known **Bicknell's thrush**.

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

### WOLVILLE, 21 DECEMBER 1997

This was the 98th Christmas Bird Count in North America and the 45th 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. There are about 1700 official individual counts and over 45,000 observers take part. Of course there are also many "unofficial" ones throughout all the states and provinces. In early November we had our first snow and unusually some of this snow is still with us. Water bodies froze early forcing some waterfowl to migrate earlier than normal. These two factors had a decided effect on the Count numbers as for example there were no warblers recorded for the first time in years. Never-the-less sparrows made a good showing being almost identical to last year's numbers. On Count Day temperatures ranged from -10C to -4C with sunny conditions particularly in the forenoon and light winds all day. Participants included 50 observers in 25-27 field parties and another 62 at 51 feeders. In terms of party hours and distance travelled the effort by field observers was similar to last year. The total of 73 species was average for this Count in recent years. The total number seen was 73665, well short of our provincial record of 92,412 seen in

1992. There was one species new to the Count, an adult Peregrine Falcon seen at Habitant. This brought the total species seen since the Count's inception to 146. Two other great finds were 1) a Hermit Thrush, seen by Phil Taylor, as it has only been recorded once before on the Wolfville Count, and 2) two Black-backed Woodpeckers, found by Bernard Forsythe, which has also been recorded only once before. However the rarest species were found just after the Count Period, both near the Wolfville sewage ponds where Bernard Forsythe turned up a LeConte's Sparrow and Richard Stern a Seaside Sparrow. Both were undoubtedly there on Count Day but because of their furtive nature, searchers would have been unusually lucky to locate them. Inexplicably in spite of the snow cover Northern Flicker even increased over last year's record of 34, to a new high of 48. Fox Sparrows are seldom found this late so three at feeders, equaling the all-time high, was a good find. In contrast to the 1996 Count, irruptive species were in good to high numbers and I understand this is typical across North America. Notable were 999 Common Redpoll and 2107 Bohemian Waxwing, the latter easily outdoing the previous high of 477. In fact Cedar Waxwings almost doubled their previous high, with 385 vs. 194. Similar to last year, Herring Gull numbers were lower than normal. However around 4 p.m. approaching high

tide, there were huge numbers of gulls over the Minas Basin which made our count of 12,000+ look a bit small.

The feeder-watchers contributed 39 species with the aforementioned Fox Sparrows and a Baltimore Oriole being the most interesting. Eva Urban's at Avonport was the most productive with 26 species (not all at the feeders). The Yellow-headed Blackbird which had been present in Avonport and Gaspereau for over a month appeared at Urbans feeder on December 20, just before Count Day. The post-count gathering at Acadia was well attended as usual. The chowder, chili and desserts were greatly enjoyed by all. Thanks go to Brenda Thexton, Judy Tufts, Lorna Hart and to the others who contributed to the event. Special thanks to the field observers for their efforts and to all of those who checked their feeder that day. I would also like to thank Jim Wolford and Mike McCall for coordinating and compiling the efforts of the feeder-watchers and to my wife, Stella, for checking the data.

### Species List

Great Blue Heron 6; Canada Goose 453; Black Duck 956; Mallard 116; Greater Scaup 2; Surf Scoter 1; White-winged Scoter 6; Scoter (sp.) 60; Common Goldeneye 10; Common Merganser 5; Bald Eagle 495 (adult 243, immature 164, unknown 88); Northern Harrier 4; Sharp-shinned Hawk 8; Goshawk 2; Red-tailed Hawk 143; Rough-legged Hawk 10; Merlin 4; Peregrine Falcon 1;

Ring-necked Pheasant 282; Ruffed Grouse 11; Ring-billed Gull 131; Herring Gull 12613; Iceland Gull 5; Great Black-backed Gull 2498; Rock Dove 1290; Mourning Dove 1024; Banded Owl 1; Short-eared Owl 7; Owl (sp.) 1; Belted Kingfisher 1; Downy Woodpecker 77; Hairy Woodpecker 48; Northern Flicker 48; Pileated Woodpecker 5; Black-backed Woodpecker 2; Horned Lark 74; Blue Jay 1065; American Crow 14706; Common Raven 404; Black-capped Chickadee 871; Boreal Chickadee 10; Red-breasted Nuthatch 120; White-breasted Nuthatch 18; Brown Creeper 8; Golden-crowned Kinglet 64; American Robin 482; Northern Mockingbird 6; Hermit Thrush 1; Bohemian Waxwing 2107; Cedar Waxwing 385; European Starling 26668; Northern Cardinal 2; American Tree Sparrow 202; Chipping Sparrow 5; Savannah Sparrow 41; Song Sparrow 185; Fox Sparrow 3; Sharp-tailed Sparrow 1; Swamp Sparrow 5; White-throated Sparrow 36; Dark-eyed Junco 1608; Lapland Longspur 1; Snow Bunting 547; Common Grackle 2; Brown-headed Cowbird 15; Northern Oriole 1; Pine Grosbeak 249; Purple Finch 48; Red Crossbill 1; White-winged Crossbill 73; Common Redpoll 999; Pine Siskin 212; American Goldfinch 963; Evening Grosbeak 290; House Sparrow 711. Total number of species 73; Total number of individuals 73665

Other species seen in Count Week.... Yellow-headed Blackbird

Field Observers and Feeder-

watchers Agar Adamson; Margaret Alliston; Jim Amos; Patricia Bernier; Diana Bishop; Sherman Boates; Larry Bogan; Mike Boudreau; Carol Buckley; Sandy Connelly; Susan Cox; Peggy Crawford-Kellock; Debbie and Jim Daigle; Gail and Pat Davis; Ed and Ev Eagles; Joan Eaton; Mark and Paul Elderkin; Bob Flecknell; George and Harold Forsyth; Bernard Forsythe; Jamie, Glenys and Merritt Gibson; Ed Hancock; Lorna Hart; Blanche Healy; Tom Herman; Maxine Hill; Dennis Hipburn; Blair Hodgman; Bob Horne; Isobel, John and Winnie Horton; Nicole Humble; Douglas and Shirley Jackson; Mark Johnston; Ian Jonsen; Ann and Jerry Karttunen; Pat Kelly; Sandy Kempton; Angus and Stella MacLean; Shirley Marston; Bill and Pat Martell; Jessie Martin; Bernard and Eleanor Mason;

Sheila McCurdy; Pat McLeod; Randy and Terri Milton; Susan Montonen; Barney Morison; Edna Mutch; Gary Ness; Nancy and Pam Nickerson; Joe Nocera; Mike O'Brien; Ian Paterson; Linda and Terry Pearson; Mary Pratt; Tom Regan; Stan Riggs; Gordon Robart; Benita Rogers; Marg Russell; Barry Sabean; Meg Scheid; Kathy Schaffner; Jack and Ruth Scott; Mabel Sheffield; Ed Shynal; Peter Smith; Richard Stern; George and Maeann Stevens; Merriam Sullivan; Hugh Swandell; Meredith Sweeney; Phil Taylor; Bill and Brenda Thexton; Dianne Thorpe; Jean Timpa; Chris Toplack; David Tracey; Gerry Trueman; Gordon Tufts; Deanna and Eva Urban; Gertrude Waseem; Heather Watts; Sherman Williams; Jim Wolford; Frank Woolaver; Jeni Wright; Barry and Betty Yoell.

### KINGSTON, DECEMBER 31, 1997

Common Loon 4, Horned Grebe 1, American Black Duck 12, Common Eider 11, Oldsquaw 12, White-winged Scoter 4, Surf Scoter 2, Red-breasted Merganser 7, Bald Eagle 2, Northern Harrier 1, Sharp-shinned Hawk 8, Northern Goshawk 1, Broad-winged Hawk 1, Red-tailed Hawk 23, Ring-necked Pheasant 69, Ruffed Grouse 15, Spruce Grouse 1, Purple Sandpiper 20, Herring Gull 54, Great Black-backed Gull 6, Mourning Dove 601, Rock Dove 435, Great Horned Owl 2, Pileated Woodpecker 5, Northern Flicker 4, Downy Woodpecker 53, Hairy Woodpecker 34, Red-bellied Woodpecker 1, Blue Jay 537, Gray Jay 2, American Crow 2666, Common Raven 68,

Black-capped Chickadee 462, White-breasted Nuthatch 35, Red-breasted Nuthatch 106, Golden-crowned Kinglet 32, American Robin 16, Bohemian Waxwing 953, European Starling 2108, American Tree Sparrow 24, Dark-eyed Junco 715, Common Grackle 5, Brown-headed Cowbird 21, American Goldfinch 302, Evening Grosbeak 149, Song Sparrow 13, White-throated Sparrow 6, Snow Bunting 16, Pine Grosbeak 16, Common Redpoll 154, Pine Siskin 13, White-winged Crossbill 63, Horned Lark 1, Red Crossbill 27, Purple Finch 6, Rusty Blackbird 1, House Sparrow 228. Total Individuals: 10,134, Total Species: .

## WEST HANTS, DECEMBER 27, 1997.

We had 14 parties of 32 people, many of whom stayed for a fabulous potluck supper at Beth and Frank Woolaver's. It was clear and sunny for much of the day, although in the afternoon, it became quite cloudy and dark. One of the highlights of the day was the possible sighting of a red-shouldered hawk! We have taken a photograph and will verify it in the near future.

Red-throated Loon 1, Common Loon 4, Great Blue Heron 1, Canada Goose 19, American Black Duck 1361, Mallard 4, Common Goldeneye 9, Common Merganser 49, Bald Eagle 42, Northern Harrier 3, Sharp-shinned Hawk 4, Red-tailed Hawk 31, Rough-legged Hawk 1, American Kestrel 1, Merlin 2, Ring-necked Pheasant 94, Ruffed Grouse 8, Purple Sandpiper 12, Common Snipe 1, Ring-billed Gull 50, Herring Gull 1615, Iceland Gull 2, Great Black-backed Gull 269, Rock Dove 588, Mourning Dove

512, Barred Owl 1, Downy Woodpecker 29, Hairy Woodpecker 8, Northern Flicker 13, Pileated Woodpecker 16, Gray Jay 12, Blue Jay 511, American Crow 1899, Common Raven 122, Black-capped Chickadee 70, Boreal Chickadee 19, Red-breasted Nuthatch 37, White-breasted Nuthatch 3, Brown Creeper 11, Golden-crowned Kinglet 80, American Robin 138, Bohemian Waxwing 1382, Cedar Waxwing 243, Northern Shrike 2, European Starling 3484, American Tree Sparrow 101, Song Sparrow 10, White-throated Sparrow 2, Dark-eyed Junco 157, Snow Bunting 100, Red-winged Blackbird 2, Brown-headed Cowbird 6, Pine Grosbeak 51, Purple Finch 19, House Finch 1, White-winged Crossbill 33, Common Redpoll 751, Pine Siskin 22, American Goldfinch 329, Evening Grosbeak 439, House Sparrow 399. Total species 61; Total individuals 15093.

## 25TH ANNIVERSARY BRIER ISLAND COUNT

23 December 1997, 0730-1630 AST

-5 to -3C, wind SE 15-25kph; 12 observers in 6 parties; 28.5 party hours: 20.5 on foot, 2 by car and 6.5 by boat; 77.5 party km: 21.5 on foot, 24 by car and 32 by boat

Common Loon - 33, Horned Grebe - 2, Red-necked Grebe - 17, Northern Gannet - 35\*, Great Cormorant - 142, Double-crested Cormorant - 4\*, Great Blue Heron - 2, Brant - 19, Canada Goose - 5, Green-winged Teal - 1, Black Duck - 40, Mallard - 2,

Greater Scaup - 1, Common Eider - 273, Oldsquaw - 96, Surf Scoter - 1, White-winged Scoter - 15, Common Goldeneye - 140, Common Merganser - 1, Red-breasted Merganser - 50, Turkey Vulture - 4, Northern Harrier - 1, Sharp-shinned Hawk - 2, BROAD-WINGED HAWK - 1, Red-tailed Hawk - 2, Rough-legged Hawk - 1, Ring-necked Pheasant - 5, Purple Sandpiper - 271, AMERICAN WOODCOCK - 1, Black-headed Gull - 1, Bonaparte Gull - 1, Herring Gull - 698, Iceland Gull - 22, Glaucous

Gull - 1, Great Black-backed Gull - 266, Black-legged Kittiwake - 146, Thick-billed Murre -40, **Razorbill** - 378\*, Black Guillemot - 66, Alcid sp. - 4, Rock Dove - 4, Mourning Dove - 14, Snowy Owl - 1, Horned Lark - 12, Blue Jay - 17, American Crow - 86, Common Raven - 28, Black-capped Chickadee - 15, Boreal Chickadee - 3, Golden-crowned Kinglet - 13, American Robin - 6, American Pipit - 1, Bohemian Waxwing - 26, Starling - 41, Tree Sparrow - 4, Song Sparrow - 3, Swamp Sparrow - 1, Dark-eyed Junco - 2, Lapland

Longspur - 1, Snow Bunting - 51, Red-winged Blackbird - 2, Common Grackle - 8, Pine Grosbeak - 51, White-winged Crossbill - 32, Common Redpoll - 138, American Goldfinch - 14, Evening Grosbeak - 2,  
**Total: 66 spp., 3366 individuals**

Participants: Martine Dufresne, Carl Haycock, Peter Hope, Len MacDonald, Blake Maybank, Ian McLaren, Anne Mills, Eric Mills, Richard Stern, Jim Taylor, Angela Thibodeau, Jim Wolford.

Eric Mills - Compiler

### **BNS BIRD REPORT FALL 1997 (1 Sept - 1 Dec )**

by Richárd Stern

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**AMERICAN COOT** -- Over most of North America one of the most abundant water-birds, but still a rarity in our region, right on the edge of its range, BBT found one on October 6 at the Wolfville sewage pond.

**COMMON MOORHEN** -- Belying their name in our region, the first one in our area since 1913 (a juvenile) was seen on the Habitant River in MAG's backyard over the Thanksgiving weekend and subsequently.

**SHOREBIRDS** -- By early September, the main flight of migrating "peeps" had already passed through our region, but the larger shorebirds wandering through later at a more leisurely pace still provided much interest. In the first week of September

BBT saw both **BUFF-BREASTED** and **UPLAND SANDPIPERS** in the fields at the east end of Grand Pré. Smaller numbers of **BLACK-BELLIED PLOVERS** and **GREATER YELLOWLEGS** lingered as expected till well into October. AAM visited Belle-Isle Marsh on October 19, and found quite a variety - "The pond that the shorebirds were in, is to the right (west) as you drive down the road leading south and is about a 10 min. walk from the gate. Species seen: 15 **GREATER YELLOWLEGS**, 6-8 **LESSER YELLOWLEGS**, 18 **SEMI-PALMATED PLOVER**, 4 **BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER**, 15 **COMMON SNIPE**, 4 **PECTORAL SANDPIPERS**, 2 **DUNLIN**, 15 **SEMPALMATED SANDPIPERS**." An

atypical shorebird visiting IR's lawn to feed in New Ross in late October was an **AMERICAN WOODCOCK**, which had been doing the same thing last year.

**GULLS** -- BLF found an adult **LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL** in the Stile Ridge Park 8 November. Another was at the Kentville dump November 29 (RBS). This European visitor is slowly colonising North America, and several have been sighted in our area in recent years.

**BELTED KINGFISHER** -- Rather unusual in late Fall, one was at the White Rock dam 16 November (PDT).

**WOODPECKERS** -- Now an annual occurrence in small numbers in our area, **RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** appeared in Kingston in late October (PBG).

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** -- As a result of a request on the NatureNS Internet e-mail line, people have been keeping track of the last sighting of this species. The last one mentioned in our area this Summer was September 28 (AAM).

**OWLS** -- A **GREAT HORNED OWL** was present in the woods behind Evergreen Nursing Home, Kentville 5 October (RBS). This is one of our least common owls these days, although that particular spot has long been a home to this species (? the same bird). **BARRED OWLS** have, as usual, appeared in woods behind RBS's house in Kentville and BLF's specialised feeder in Wolfville in

mid-October.

**CHICKADEES, NUTHATCHES ETC.** -- As expected, roaming feeding flocks of **BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES** and **RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES** often mixed with **YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS** seemed common in the woods from about mid- September on. A rare **HOUSE WREN** appeared by HF's pond in Greenwich on 11 November, one of the local "hotspots".

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** -- BLF found just one, at Sunken Lake. This seems to have been a traditional area recently, and perhaps there is a family faithful to a local site. In the last 2-3 years, local numbers of this rare species seem to have dwindled again.

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** -- Becoming more regular all the time in our area, two were in one of their well-frequented spots, behind the curling rink in Kentville on 19 October (RBS).

**CEDAR WAXWINGS** -- RBS saw about 20 feeding on berries in the Kentville Research Station in the snowstorm on November 22.

**MIGRATING PASSERINES** -- As a typical example of one of the more spotty better mornings this fall in our local woods, or more specifically along our abandoned railway tracks, AAM wrote, on 19th September, "This morning at Palmetter Woods, Kentville, there was a heavy migration of warblers and other species. The birds were

extremely active and were less interested in eating than in chasing each other and flying back and forth. Species seen were: about 25 each of **PARULA** and **MAGNOLIA** Warblers, perhaps 30-35 **YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS**, one **CHESTNUT-SIDED**, one **NASHVILLE**, one **ORANGE-CROWNED** and a few **COMMON YEL-LOWTHROATS**, two **SOLITARY VIREOS** (1 singing), one **VEERY**, many **WHITE-THROATED**, a few **SONG** and one **SWAMP SPARROW**; large flocks of **CEDAR WAXWINGS**, **ROBINS** and **PINE SISKINS**; a few **PURPLE FINCHES** and **GOLDFINCHES**, three **CAT-BIRDS**, numerous **BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES** and **RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES** (the latter have been in migration for the past 7-10 days)." On the evening of 3 October there were four **HERMIT THRUSHES** there and an adult **NORTHERN GOSHAWK** whizzed through the shrubbery, probably after them (RBS). Probably the same Goshawk was seen a week later by AAM in the same spot doing the same thing.

MMc also noted a good migration on September 7th, with "near my house at Halls Harbour, masses of migrating warblers, including: **AMERICAN REDSTART**, **BLACK-THROATED GREEN**, **MAGNOLIA**, **CANADA**, and **BAY -BREASTED**. Many **RED - BREASTED NUTHATCHES** heard, but not seen. This performance with

slightly fewer birds was repeated September 18th.

**SPARROWS** -- Sparrow migration seemed in full swing by Thanksgiving, and any visit to weedy or shrubby areas in our area seemed to produce numbers of **SONG**, **SAVANNAH**, or **WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS**, and at times **SWAMP** or **CHIPPING** were also evident. The first Fall **FOX SPARROW** was at AAM's feeder 18 November. A **FIELD SPARROW** as in the field behind HF's 11 November - perhaps the same one that stayed for the Xmas count 3 years ago?

**YELLOW - HEADED BLACKBIRD** -- A nice example of this prairie breeder which is an occasional rarity in these parts appeared at EU's feeder in Avonport in late November.

**FINCHES** -- MU wrote on 22 October "the last month or so we have had a large number of crossbills around (50-60 +) feeding on the pine cones which are so abundant this year. We have seen a dozen or so **RED CROSS-BILLS** (male and female) at any one time, come to our birdbath for water. You can hear them singing and chirping most any time of the day. This morning we saw 8 **WHITE-WINGED CROSS-BILLS** at the birdbath as well as a few Red Crossbills. " Several people have also noticed small flocks of **WHITE-WINGED** flying around, and MU (again) had about 500 of them in his white pines at the end of October!



It looks all set to be the first good winter for several years for another irruptive species - the **COMMON REDPOLL**. Several observers have reported seeing large (sev. hundred) flocks in late November. Look for any paler ones with an unstreaked rump and a more "squashed in" face - the much rarer **HOARY REDPOLL**.

HF Harold Forsyth

MAG	Merritt Gibson
PBG	Pat and Barbara Giffin
AAM	Angus MacLean
MMc	Mike McCall
SR	Stan Riggs
RBS	Richard Stern
PDT	Phil Taylor
BBT	Brenda and Bill Thexton
JCT	Judy Tufts
ShW	Sherman Williams
EU	Eva Urban
IR	Ian Ross
MU	Malcolm Uhlman

### TRIVIAL TIDBITS OF LOCAL NATURAL HISTORY

selected and compiled by Jim Wolford, Site 1, Comp. 61, RR3, Wolfville, NS, B0P 1X0  
542-7650

#### late August to late November 1997

You've noticed in past columns my inclusions of "flattened fauna", *i.e.*, animals that have been road-killed. I'd rather display sightings of living mammals, but these unesthetic casualties do provide indices of abundance for skunks, raccoons, etc.

I'd also like to say something brief about common names (vs. those awful but very useful Latinized "scientific names"). For most of these I try to follow certain books, like Flora of Nova Scotia or various Peterson and/or Audubon field guides (or Newcomb's Wildflower Guide for plants). Because common names are so different from book to book and place to place, the Latinized names, *e.g.*, *Homo sapiens*, are very important for all of us in order to tell whether two different written descriptions are for the same organism!

When using any field guide for **tentative** identification, remember that most guides or lists contain very incomplete numbers of examples, so that if possible you should always take your tentative diagnosis (and specimen or photo) to an expert or to an up-to-date regional guide or list.

This is part of the reason why the BNS Newsletter usually contains a list of "experts" (some really are!) on various parts of our natural world.

#### SKIES, WEATHER

?? - a "**green flash**" was seen just before Sunrise -- only professional photographers (and keen birders) are up and about then -- this phenomenon is much more common in evening)(JH).

Oct. - our **drought**, continued after the very dry summer, was

very bad in the Kentville Ravine, with very little water in the stream (JP).

Oct. 18-19 - "the Moon put out the eye (Aldebaran) of the Bull (Taurus)" overnight and the next morning -- the waning gibbous Moon occulted or eclipsed the star Aldebaran (NH,SW).

## FUNGI



FIELD MUSHROOM  
(*AGARICUS CAMPESTRIS*)

Sept. 4 - a possibly "new" (unnamed/undescribed) species of **brittle-gill** mushroom (*Russula*), related to *R. mariae*, with reddish-purple cap, rosy-red brittle stalk, and white gills, on a lawn under trees on Wolfville's Acadia St. (JW,DG).

Sept. 9 - a strangely pink-capped form of the common **field mushroom** (*Agaricus campestris*) found along a Wolfville street (JT,DG).

Nov. 3 - **irregular earth tongues** (*Neolecta irregularis*) common on woods road near Black River Lake (JW).

## PLANTS

Sept. 3 - **Japanese knotweed** (alias "bamboo") abundant and in bloom in Wolfville (JW).

Oct. 3 - **witch-hazel** in bloom adjacent to Acadia Biology's greenhouse (JW).

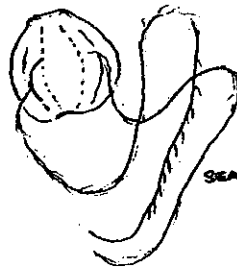
Oct. 6 - lots of bristly fruits, many opened or opening & showing their seeds, mostly up in the canopy, of a planted 5-metre **American chestnut** tree on Acadia University campus (JW).

Oct. 13 - several **witch-hazel** shrubs in bloom along the Gaspeau River west of White Rock (PM,JW).

Oct. 19 - **mayweed** (daisy-like *Matricaria maritima*) still in bloom along Wolfville-to-Grand Pré dyke (JW).

## INVERTEBRATES

Sept. 14 -  $11+5+1=17$  **baitworm- or bloodworm-diggers** on mud-flats from Avonport Beach to lighthouse on Horton Bluff at low tide -- they get 11 cents per bloodworm (exported to U.S. Eastern Seaboard for bait for sport-fishing or commercial long-lining?) -- two interviewed diggers estimate there have been about 30 total diggers locally this summer (JW,SW,BNS).



SEA GOOSEBERRIES

Oct.? - lots of probable **sea gooseberries or comb-jellies**

(*Pleurobrachia*) seen stranded on a beach at Baccaro (east of Cape Sable Island) (BF).

mid Oct. - "bucketsful" of **millipedes** reported at Avonport (SW).

### **INSECTS - aphids, cicadas, etc.**

Sept. 15 - an **annual or dog-day cicada** still calling on Acadia University campus (JW).

### **INSECTS - beetles**

Sept. 2 - 3 + 3 adult **7-spotted and southern ladybird beetles** (both alien species) on **sow thistles** heavily infested with **aphids** at Grand Pré -- also **pupae & pupating larvae** of the beetles common -- on another patch of sow thistles 3 km. sw., 2 more adult **7-spotted ladybirds** (JW).

Sept. 13 - two spotted forms of the **southern or 19-spotted lady beetle** found along the beach at Avonport (BNS, HF, JW).

Sept. 23 - an adult **7-spotted lady beetle** found on my coat while walking in Blomidon Prov. Park (JW).

Oct. 16 - a small adult **2-spotted lady beetle** (a native species) landed on me while I was gawking at fall colours at Woodside (JW).

Oct. 17 to 21 - several sightings of 5 or more **southern lady beetles** both inside and on outside of a house in east Wolfville (BBT).

Oct. 19 - **southern lady beetles** were "filling the skies over West

Brooklyn Mountain -- was it a mass hatching or some such thing?" (on a beautiful fall day)(MB).

Oct. 24 - a large adult **southern lady beetle** (the 19-spotted form) roosting on a very cold day, on top of a panel at our Robie Tufts Nature Centre in Wolfville (JW).

Nov. 1 - eight adult **southern lady beetles** (most heavily spotted, some faintly spotted, one nearly unspotted) on a house at Grand Pré (PM, JW).

Nov. 1 - several dozens of **pupae** and one **larva**, of unidentified **lady beetles** (probably **southern**), on the base and main trunks of a residential birch tree in Wolfville -- a few **aphids** also seen on the bark -- and single adult **southern lady beetles** on the tree and the adjacent house (SA, JW).

Nov. 3 - at least 25 **southern** and 3 **two-spotted lady beetles** (the latter is a native species) seen on the outside of a white shed at the Kentville Agric. Research Station. (DR).

Nov. 5 - an adult **southern? lady beetle** seen **emerging from a pupa**, on a birch trunk in Wolfville (SA).

Nov. 6 -- I revisited the above birch and adjacent house -- the tree and house harboured 2+1 adult **southern lady beetles**, but they were very dark, with their black spots large and partly joined together, resulting in a much **darker-than-usual** appearance

(see the 3 morphs on the Canadian Nature Federation's pamphlet) -- also on the tree was a brand new & wet adult (coloured yellow with just hints of spots), as well as several empty "hatched" pupal cases -- also several large aphids, both winged and non-winged, still present on the tree (JW).

Nov. 7 - one southern lady beetle found at Starr's Point, on a garden trellis adjacent to a *Euonymus* bush with orange and white fruits (PBM).

Nov. 10 - eight adult southern lady beetles on a house at Grand Pré (not clustered except for one pair) (PM,JW).

Nov. 11 - on the birch tree mentioned above for Nov. 1 & 5, two larvae of lady beetles (southern?), one in the process of pupating (JW).

Nov. 22 - a single southern lady beetle found inside a house on the Wolfville Ridge (JGT).

Nov. 30 - an adult 7-spotted lady beetle found actively moving about in a house at Grand Pré (sunny day) (PM,JW).

## INSECTS - butterflies & moths

Sept. 13 - a large beautiful caterpillar of the black swallowtail butterfly found on Queen-Anne's-lace in a Wolfville garden (BBT,JW).

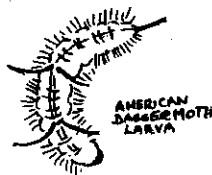
Sept. - in my previous Trivia column, I spoke too soon in late August that there were probably two generations of monarchs on

common milkweeds at Port Williams and New Minas -- I found no evidence of a second generation -- I wonder if this is related to our drought? (JW).

Sept. 25 - a beautiful adult male monarch seen very closely at our Robie Tufts Nature Centre in Wolfville -- it was sipping nectar from dandelions, and was on its long way to Mexico (mountains west of Mexico City)! (JW).

Oct. 4 - an adult monarch seen on Brier Island (probably more present, but weather wasn't conducive for seeing more)(JW).

Oct. 4-5 - good numbers of monarchs on Bon Portage Island, and sharp-shinned hawks were seen diving at some in the air (for fun?) (PJAS).



Sept. 25 - a large, light yellow, woolly caterpillar with several black "pencils" of long hairs, very probably of an American dagger moth, found on a sidewalk at Acadia University, probably looking for a place to pupate (for overwintering) (IP,JW).

Oct. 31 & Nov. 2 - several winged male winter moths at each of two locales in Wolfville (BBT,JW).

## INSECTS - flies (Diptera)

Sept. 13 - a few adults of large lawn-raised **crane flies** (from "leatherjacket" larvae) in Wolfville and Grand Pré (JW).

all of Aug. into Sept. - **zillions of flies (house?)** again (as in 1992) at Grand Pré -- is this manure-and/or weather-related? (PM,JW, et al. ).

## INSECTS - wasps, bees, ants

Sept. 11 - an adult **pigeon horn-tail** (a large sawfly) found dying at Coldbrook (TSR). The adult's abdomen is colourfully banded with yellow and black, mimicking the pattern seen in stinging insects like yellowjackets. Its larva is a wood-borer and is the prey of the giant ichneumon "fly" (a solitary wasp), which locates infested wood with its antennae and then inserts an egg in the larval tunnel with its very long ovipositor (JW).

Oct. 26 - a large **bumblebee** (almost certainly an overwintering **queen**), found 6-8 cm. below the surface in a garden on Wolfville Ridge, during planting of bulbs -- it began vibrating its wings when uncovered (this shivering is a mechanism for warming up to become active) (JGT,DR).

## FISHES

summer - two observers noticed **gulls** hunting and catching **American sand lances** in a very interesting & effective way in Mahone Bay -- as the tide ebbs, the fishes bury themselves in lower intertidal sand -- the gulls

"dance" with their feet, stamping the sand, working their way toward the low-tide line, and capture the sand lances as they leave the sand (MD,LM).

summer - one whale-watching company reports at least a few sightings of those big weird vagrants from the South, **ocean sunfish** (*Mola mola*), off Brier Island in the Bay of Fundy (BI-WSC). Perhaps not coincidentally, Tom Herman reports a couple of sightings, of an adult and a dead juvenile, of **ocean sunfish** on Canada's West Coast in August. Also, this may well be a year of **El Niño**, which often results in sightings of southern animals in the North, along with very warm water temperatures (TH).

## HERPTILES

early Dec. - a 15-cm. **yellow-spotted salamander** found in a basement at Centreville (DF).

Dec. 13 - a **yellow-spotted salamander** (smallish adult or subadult -- 12-15 cm. long) crawling very slowly on a cold day, at 10 a.m., just outside a house along road to White Rock, just north of White Rock power house (GG,IP).

Aug. 29 - a **leatherback sea turtle** seen by a whale-watching boat off Brier Island -- the first seen by them since 1994 (BI-WSC).

Nov. 4 - a **leatherback sea turtle** found stranded at Queensland (St. Margaret's Bay) (too decomposed for an autopsy) (MJ,HCH).

## MAMMALS

Sept. 6 - at Blomidon, at 730 p.m. a **little brown bat** had crawled through a small hole in a screen and got trapped between the screen and window -- it seemed fairly calm and was observed preening at very close range (eyeball to eyeball), before being successfully released without handling it (AW).

Sept. 9 - a very busy **chipmunk** gathering food (sunflower seeds etc.), filling its cheek-pouches, & storing food in at least two different places (at least one underground), in a yard at Avonport (several repetitions seen in an hour) (DU,EU,JW).

Oct. 13 - the above **chipmunk** was still active at Avonport (EU).

Sept. 23 - a large **Norway or brown rat** at Greenwich, a **porcupine** south of Lower Blomidon, and a **muskrat** at Canard Acres (Canard Valley) -- all road-kills (JW).

early Oct. - in Kentville, a **blue jay** jumping on the ground was noticed; it was jumping on a large **mouse or vole or shrew**; the mammal got away once, but the jay caught it, jumped on it, jabbed it with its beak to maim or kill it, and eventually fed on it (GB).

mid Nov. - several **deer mice** (a family?) were found inside a house in Wolfville --- this is notable, because the deer mouse has been found to carry the very dangerous **hantavirus**, which has killed people in widespread areas

of North America -- it hasn't yet been found in Nova Scotia, but everyone should look up the deer mouse in a field guide to mammals, and then be very careful about handling them -- one can't be too careful (BBT,JW).

Aug. 28 - a freshly road-killed **skunk** on Wolfville's Ridge Road (JW).

Sept. 1-2 - more road-killed **skunks** at Greenwich & Kentville (JW).

Sept. 6 - a freshly road-killed **skunk** near Grand Pré (JW).

Sept. 23 - lots of damage to big lawn by **skunks** (hunting grubs?) in Blomidon Provincial Park (damage began 3-4 weeks previously, according to Park personnel) (JW).

Sept. 23-25 - road-killed **skunks** at Blomidon (1) and Horton High School (2) (JW).

Oct. 1-2 - more fresh road-killed **skunks** at Grand Pré, Windsor, & Coldbrook (JW).

Sept. 7 - a young **mink** seen along Eel Weir Road in Kejimikujik Nat. Park -- it ran along the road for



DEER MICE

over 300 m., and was eating caterpillars that were falling from the trees (PBM).

Sept. 24 - at least **5 raccoons** at JW's bird-feeders in Wolfville after dark (GG,IP).

October - two or more **raccoons** are being fed nightly in New Minas (and have been for a long time) (AWi).

Aug. 27 - a car was wrecked in road-killing a **black bear** near Kentville (HDN).

Sept. 6 - a possible **COUGAR** sighting at Mount Denson! -- in early morning, a probable large cat, with a black head & back of neck, grayish-brown body & tail, total length two-and-a-half times that of domestic cat, tail very long & cylindrical & short-haired (like body), legs fairly long, walked (no hurry) with a cat-like swagger & with shoulder-blades moving up and down (CP,PV).

Oct. 4 - **17 harbour seals** seen along n. coast of Brier Island, and 4 of these were cavorting in the water, rolling & splashing & even breaching like dolphins -- also **3 gray seals** were present (PM,JW).

early Nov. - on the west side of the Canso Causeway, a **wildlife spectacle** was witnessed -- it involved hundreds of **white-sided dolphins, gray seals, bald eagles and diving gannets** -- there was a big concentration of schooling fishes, perhaps driven inshore by the dolphins and seals? -- also there were numbers of **dead gulls** along the Causeway road probably

a result of the previous foggy night (SM,PT).

Oct. 5 - **3 harbour porpoises** seen in Minas Basin, just n. of Wolfville's sewage ponds (BBT).

Nov. 30 - **3 harbour porpoises** seen moving very rapidly (almost "porpoising") in Mahone Bay (MD).

Dec. 8 to 11 - about **50 pilot whales or potheads** were seen inside Sydney Harbour, and then went safely back out to sea -- it was guessed that they perhaps had been chasing herring (?) - thus ended a threat of a mass stranding (as pilot whales sometimes do)(JC,HCH).

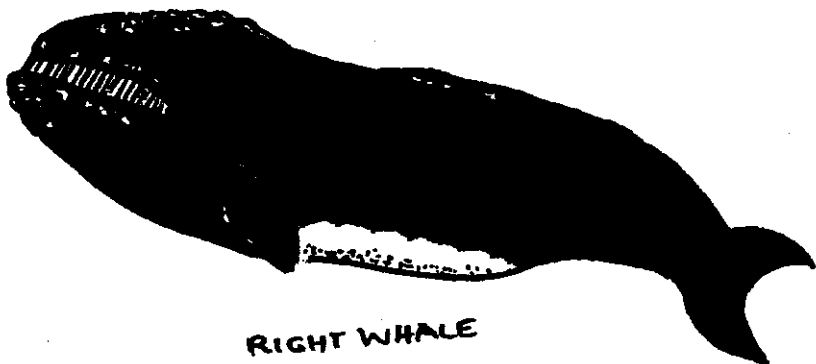
Aug. 31 - **three humpback whales**, unusual in the Bay of Fundy along with other fish-eating whales for the past three summers, were feeding apparently on fish (herring?), using the bubble-cloud technique, accompanied by a couple hundred excited and profitting shearwaters, the whole show viewed well on an absolutely calm, sunny day -- also several groups of **harbour porpoises** and one **minke whale** seen (PM,JW).

Sept. 11 - about **20-30 northern right whales** (perhaps 10% of the total Atlantic population!) observed well in one area south of Grand Manan Island, along with several tuna boats and a tuna-spotting plane -- in the past 3 summers, up to **200 right whales** (of the world's total of 295-310 or so) have been spotted in the Bay of Fundy -- but during those same summers, fish-eating kinds of

whales have been scarce (TH,JW, *et al.*).

Sept. 12 - the same fisher who spotted the dead **n. right whale** off Grand Manan on Aug. 19 (a casualty of a ship-collision), found another **right whale** in trouble offshore from Digby Neck -- this one, a 7- or 8-year-old male, known from photo-identification and nicknamed **Orphan Andy**, had long lengths of heavy fishing rope entangled in its mouth's baleen and trailing -- researchers responded quickly, cut substantial lengths of the rope away, and then attached two transmitters so that the whale could be tracked and hopefully later fully released from its burden -- 3 days later it had moved about 100 km., was south of Yarmouth, and was moving fairly quickly, so the prognosis may not be too bad (NEA,CBC,HCH,HDN,ATV). (I found out later that **another** right whale had been found entangled in fishing gear off Cape Cod, but this victim was helped by whale-rescuer-scientists from Provincetown, Mass.(JW).)

Sept. 19 - another **n. right whale** in trouble spotted in the Bay of Fundy -- this one has ropes wound around its flippers and flukes (and body?) and appears to be quite unhealthy -- it's thin, with a prominent dorsal ridge, a hump behind its blowhole, and noticeable sores from the ropes -- for both Orphan Andy and this whale, there's concern about effects on their feeding, especially for this one, since the encumbered flippers are important in sharp turns (similar to those in mowing a lawn) (same media as above). (A total of 5 right whales were found entangled this summer, and new entanglement scars have been seen on other individuals -- but nobody knows where they are getting fouled by the fishing gear. Also see my last Trivia column concerning an Aug. 19 finding of a dead subadult female right whale off Grand Manan Island; an autopsy showed it had very probably had a collision with a ship.) late Sept. - a newspaper article quoted Scott Kraus concerning reproduction of **n. right**





**whales** -- they're increasing at a very slow 2% per year, vs. 6-7% for right whales of the Southern Hemisphere -- the interval between successive births has increased from 3 years to 4 years -- the latter may be related to lots of older mothers, or perhaps to accumulating pollution, or both (not understood) (HCH).

Oct. 1 - another media article quoted Deborah Tobin concerning the need for a **Canadian recovery plan** for the endangered **n. right whales** -- of 41 recorded deaths over the past 20 years, the causes of 18 could be determined 16 from ship-collisions and only 2 from fishing gear (HCH).

Oct. 21 - researchers and government officials from Canada and the U.S. met in Halifax and discussed **recovery measures** needed for **n. right whales**. The meeting involved East Coast Ecosystems, New England Aquarium, World Wildlife Fund, Canada's Dept. of Fisheries & Oceans, and Can. Coast Guard -- the latter is crucial because of the importance of shipping lanes -- there is now a commitment to come up with a **recovery plan** over the next several months (HCH, TGM).

Aug. 23 - a doe and a half-grown fawn **white-tailed deer** ran through a residential garden at 1015 a.m. in east Wolfville (BBT).

Oct. 4 - a doe & fawn **white-tailed deer** were seen in mid

afternoon in a hay-field near the Hants/Kings border (BBT, JT).

## CONTRIBUTORS

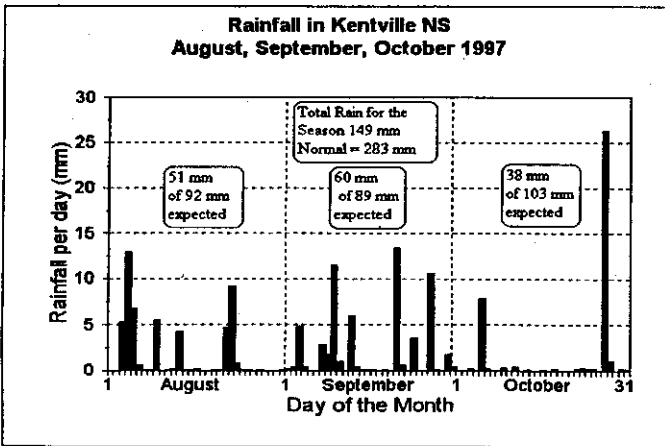
NEA - New England Aquarium  
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GB - Gary Boates  
MB - Matt Buntain  
BIWSC - Brier Is. Whale & Seabird Cruises  
CBC - CBC Radio & TV News  
JC - Jerry Conway  
NC - Neil Cloghesy  
MD - Mike Dadswell  
BF - Bernard Forsythe  
DF - David Frail  
HF - Harold Forsyth  
GG - Glenys Gibson  
DG - Darryl Grund  
HCH - Halifax Chronicle-Herald  
JH - John Horton  
NH - *Natural History* mag.  
TH - Tom Herman  
MJ - Mike James  
LM - Lieneke Marshall  
PBM - Pat & Bill Martell  
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TGM - The Globe & Mail  
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AWi - Al Wills  
JW - Jim Wolford  
SW - Sherman Williams

Here's a bad-luck story from an anonymous person who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. This morning, while this fellow was driving near Grand Pré, a bald eagle flew over the road with a chicken carcass in its talons. The eagle dropped the chicken, hopefully accidentally, and it broke this fellow's windshield! (The carcass was frozen, on this very cold morning.) (No human injuries were reported, thankfully). (told to J. Wolford).

**WEATHER STATISTICS LATE-SUMMER - EARLY-AUTUMN 1997**  
**by Larry Bogan**

In this issue, I am going to let the graphs tell the story of this autumn's weather. Rainfall and bright sunshine hours were the most unusual for the period, so I have created plots of that data. I have put the summaries for the months on those graphs.

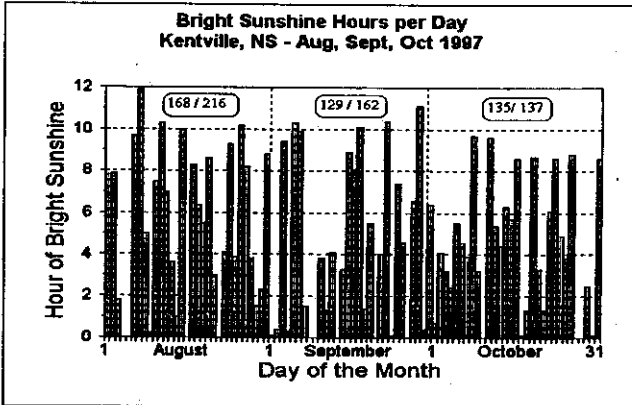
*Rainfall:* We have had a very dry late-summer. Total Rainfall was only about half of what we expect historically (149 mm rather than 283 mm). When you consider that June and July had below normal rainfall,



we have had a five-month period (the most active part of the growing season) with 53% of the usual precipitation. I wonder what mother nature will provide this winter to make up for the shortfall?

*Bright Sunshine Hours:* At the top of the graph of Bright Sunshine

hours, the ratio of 1997 hours for the month is shown compared to that for the average of the last 35 years. You will notice that all three months had less sun than usual. The whole period has 84% of the sunshine expected. We had very few periods with several bright sunny days in succession. We would get one bright day, then a few days of



cloud which would go through quickly to give another short sunny period. This lasted the whole period of August through October as can be seen on the graph with the many ups and downs of sunshine.

*Temperature:* There is not much to say about the temperature for the period since we had normal temperatures. August and October were a fraction of a degree Celsius cooler than normal while September was average.

**WHAT'S IN THE SKY?**  
by Roy Bishop

*New Moon:* Dec. 29, Jan. 28, Feb. 26 (see below), Mar. 27; *Full Moon:* Dec. 13, Jan. 12, Feb. 11, Mar. 13; *Winter:* Began on Sunday, December 21 at 4:07 pm (AST).

**A Partial Solar Eclipse**  
Usually, the New Moon is not visible since it does not pass directly in front of the Sun. On Thursday, February 26, however, the alignment of Earth, Moon and Sun is exact. On that day the lunar shadow strikes Earth, and a total solar eclipse will occur along a narrow path that begins in the

mid-Pacific and sweeps eastward, crossing parts of Colombia, Venezuela, and the Caribbean. Thousands of people have booked trips to the Caribbean in order to stand in the path of totality on February 26.

From about 1:50 pm until 3:20 pm on February 26, Nova Scotia



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lies within the region of partial eclipse, with a maximum of about 13% of the Sun's area (23% of its diameter) being covered by the Moon at 2:35 pm that afternoon. Assuming clear skies, the eclipse can be seen if one knows what to do -- and what not to do!

NEVER LOOK AT THE DAZZLING SURFACE OF THE SUN, either directly with the unaided eyes, or through binoculars or a telescope. To do so one risks permanent partial blindness, and this can occur almost instantly in the case of telescopic viewing. Viewing our Sun is just as dangerous on any clear day, but at the time of an eclipse people have a reason to want to look at it - and often resort to dangerous methods. A direct view of the Sun is safe only if a suitable filter is used in a proper manner. In the case of binoculars or a telescope, the filter must be one that attaches securely to the front end of the instrument, never one that attaches to the eyepiece end (the heat developed near the eyepiece can shatter such a filter).

Filters specifically designed for solar viewing include aluminized mylar, and glass filters plated with a slightly-transparent, metallic film. Such filters may be purchased at telescope supply stores (of which there are none in Atlantic Canada). For direct viewing (not using binoculars or a telescope) shade #14 (no other shade) rectangular welder's glass may be used, and may be purchased for a few dollars at welding supply shops. All of these are commercial items and cannot be duplicated



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with ordinary household items. For example, layers of photographic colour film, coloured glass, stacked sunglasses, crossed polarizers, smoked glass, or photographic neutral density filters must never be used. Although one may devise a combination which dims the visible sunlight to a comfortable level, such a filter may be quite transparent in the infrared part of the solar spectrum, and this invisible radiation will damage the retina of the observer's eye.

One of the simplest and safest ways to observe the partial phases of a solar eclipse is the relatively unknown technique of "pinhole mirror projection". Take a small pocket mirror and, with masking tape, cover all but a small section of the mirror's surface. The shape and size of the small opening is not critical, but a square about 6 millimetres on a side works well. Prop the mirror up on a sunny window sill (a lump of modeling clay makes a good, adjustable mount) and orient the mirror so the reflected sunlight shines on the ceiling or a wall of the room - but not directly into anyone's eyes! The spot of light on the viewing surface will be a "pinhole image" of the solar disk. The greater the projection distance, the larger, but dimmer, will be the Sun's image. The size of the mirror aperture should be adjusted for the best compromise between image brightness and image sharpness. With this remarkably simple arrangement, the progress of a solar eclipse can be viewed in complete safety by a group of people in a darkened room.

A sharper and brighter image of the solar disk may be projected onto a white viewing screen placed 30 or 40 cm behind the eyepiece of binoculars or a small telescope (the telescope aperture should be stopped down to about 50 mm in order to limit the intensity of sunlight passing through the instrument, and the viewing screen should be shielded from direct sunlight). However, one must not look through the instrument when aiming it, and, especially if children are present, a physical barrier should be used to prevent anyone from attempting to look into the eyepiece. If the telescope has a finderscope it should be either covered or removed.

### Planets

During December, in the early evening (about 6 pm), seven planets are spread across the southwestern sky. Two of these, Uranus and Neptune, cannot be seen without binoculars or a tele-

scope, and one must use a finder chart to locate them. The other five, however, are easy to see with the naked eye -- Saturn, Jupiter, Venus, Mars, and Earth

Saturn is high in the south in early evening. Jupiter is to the lower right of Saturn and shines more brightly than Saturn. Venus lies even further to the lower right and is the brightest of all three planets. Mars lies near Venus, but is much dimmer. During December Mars moves to the left, passing just below Venus on the evenings of December 20, 21 and 22. Earth is the large planet hiding the half of the sky below your feet.

In steadily-held, good binoculars, Saturn may appear slightly oblong. A small telescope will reveal the cause of this odd shape: Saturn's spectacular rings, the south side of which is now tilted about 10 degrees toward Earth. Jupiter shows a disk, plus two, three, or all four of its large satel-



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lites, like stars lined up close to Jupiter. Venus will appear as a very bright, tiny crescent. Mars is too far away and too small to show a disk in binoculars.

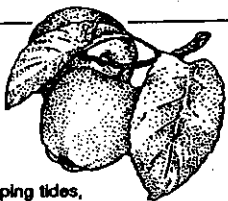
As you look at these planets, keep in mind that the space probe "Galileo" is currently orbiting around Jupiter; "Global Surveyor" is orbiting around Mars; and "Cassini" is en route to Saturn with an expected arrival in July 2004. The space age began 40 years ago last October 4. If you are over 40 years of age, you have lived through an age of exploration unique in human history.

Enjoy this planetary display in December, for the rest of the winter and next spring are

planet-poor! Venus vanishes from the evening sky after the New Year when it passes between us and the Sun (on January 16) to reappear in the morning sky during February and March. Jupiter vanishes into the evening twilight by late January as we leave it behind on the far side of the Sun. Similarly, by March Saturn and Mars also will have disappeared into the evening twilight.

### Stars

The Minas Astronomy Group (MAG) meets monthly on the second Saturday at seven (SSS) on the second floor of Huggins Science Hall at Acadia. Like those of the Blomidon Naturalists Society, MAG meetings are open to anyone, and MAG members are of all ages and backgrounds. The next MAG meeting is on December 13, and the topic for the evening will be stars, specifically the bright stars of the winter sky, the Orion region of the heavens. Three different speakers, all amateurs, will describe what can be seen on frosty, clear nights with the unaided eye, binoculars, and telescopes. Everyone is welcome! Remember MAG/SSS!



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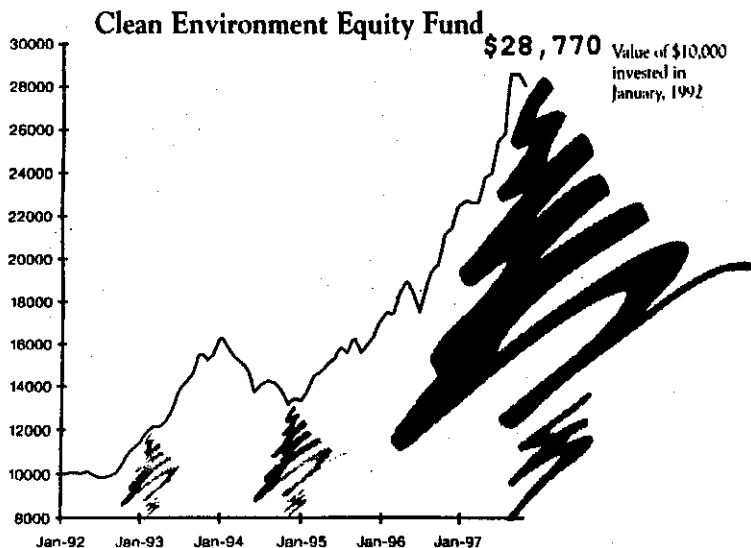
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# Blomidon Naturalists Society

## 1998 Membership Fees

Each member receives four issues yearly of the BNS Newsletter. The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a registered charity. Receipts for income tax purposes will be issued for all donations. The membership fee itself is not tax-deductible. Members may also join the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists through the BNS and will receive their quarterly newsletter; the membership is not tax-deductible.

Please enclose a cheque or money order payable to "Blomidon Naturalists Society" and forward to:

Harold Forsyth  
RR #2, Wolfville, NS. BOP 1X0

Number	Membership Classification	Price	Total
_____	Individual Adult	\$15.00	\$ _____
_____	Family	\$18.00	\$ _____
_____	Individual Junior (under 16 years)	\$1.00	\$ _____
_____	Federation of NS Naturalists Membership	\$5.00	\$ _____
	Tax-deductible donation		\$ _____
		Total	\$ _____

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of membership      Individual Adult      
    Individual Junior      
    Family                          (Number of people)

Join the Federation of NS Naturalists?    Yes       No   
 Is this a gift subscription?                Yes       No

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

Information	Source	Office	Home	
Rocks & Fossils	Geology Dept. Acadia U.	542-2201		
Fish	NS Dept. of Natural Resources	679-6091		
Flora - General Fungi	Ruth Newell	585-1355	542-2095	
	Darryl Grund	585-1252	542-9214	
	Nancy Nickerson	679-5333	542-9332	
	Lichens	Karen Casselman	424-7370	633-2837
	Seaweeds	Darryl Grund	585-1252	542-9214
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	585-1684	542-7650	
	Jean Timpa		542-5678	
Hawks & Owls	Bernard Forsythe		542-2427	
Falcons & Eagles	Peter Austin-Smith		542-2109	
Mammals	Tom Herman	585-1469	678-0383	
Amphibians & Reptiles	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604	
	Jim Wolford	585-1684	542-7650	
Seashore & Marine Life	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604	
	Jim Wolford	585-1684	542-7650	
	Michael Brylinsky	585-1509	582-7954	
Indian Prehistory & Archeology	Ellis Gertridge		542-2816	
	James Legge		542-3530	
Astronomy	Roy Bishop		542-3992	
	Sherman Williams	542-3598	542-5104	
	Larry Bogan		678-0446	

January 1998						
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 Meeting	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

February 1998						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14 Field Trip
15	16 Member's night	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

March 1998						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16 Meeting	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

NATURAL HISTORY CALENDAR

1998



Contact Merritt Gibson, 582-7569, to purchase a calendar.