

Blomidon Naturalists Society

Fall 1999 - Volume 26 Number 3

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).*

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BNS AUTUMN PROGRAMME, 1999

MONDAY EVENING MEETINGS

All meetings will be held in Room 221, Elliot Hall, Acadia University.
Meetings begin at 730 pm.

Oct. 18. Sherman Bleakeny. History and Natural History of the Local Dykelands. Sherman has compiled photographs, anecdotes and fascinating pieces of history and natural history which he will weave together to give us an interesting and educational night.

Nov. 15. Graham Daborn.. New Zealand Cocktail. Graham spent 1997-1998 in New Zealand working on community based environmental management. He will tell us about the state of the New Zealand environment. Illustrated.

Dec. 13 (Note Date!). Dave Shutler. A Year in the Reproductive Life of the Tree Swallow. Dave works on how parasites effect the reproductive ecology of birds. He has worked with Tree Swallows in Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia, and shoots golf in the 80s. Illustrated.

Jan. 17. Jim Wolford. Good Gnus – Bad Gnus. A Serengeti Safari Ecotour (?) in East Africa. Jim visited Northern Tanzania and Kenya last July and will kick off our Millennium year with a report of his trip.

BIRDING EVENT FOR ALL!

Nova Scotia Nature Trust first annual "Counting for Conservation" Birdathon

Date: Oct 2nd (rain-date Oct 3rd)

All levels of birders are welcome to participate in the birdathon, experts and novices alike—even backyard birders. It will be a fun day of birding and sharing, with awards including special prizes for the individuals or teams spotting the greatest number of species and raising the most funds.

For those too shy about asking for pledges, you are welcome to make a donation instead. Alternatively, you may wish to participate by helping out a team of novice birders instead of being an official participant yourself.

An East Coast Eclipse Experience by Roy Bishop

On a scale of 1 to 10, total solar eclipses rate a 10. Yet fewer than one person in a hundred has seen the Moon silhouetted against the ghostly light of the solar corona. At any one place a total eclipse of the Sun occurs, on average, once every 375 years. Even then, Murphy's law says that the day will be cloudy!

In the past 30 years I have witnessed three central solar eclipses from Nova Scotia, two total and one annular, all in a clear sky. In that period no other region of Canada or the United States has been so favoured by celestial dynamics. The prospect of yet another "Nova Scotia" eclipse, that of 1999 August 11, was too much to resist. However, the track of totality would be off the coast, so I knew that if I remained on land the chance of seeing totality would be zero.

The North Atlantic is well-known for cloud and fog. According to The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada's Observer's Handbook, mean August cloud cover near the beginning of the 1999 eclipse track was 70%. Eastward along the track, in England and western Europe, weather prospects were somewhat better. Farther east clear skies were almost guaranteed, but the hot deserts of Turkey, Iraq and Iran were not appealing. Also, I wanted to remain near Nova Scotia, my home province, which had given me clear skies for the three earlier eclipses.

Ship of Fools

Of the thousands of North Americans who travelled to see the August 1999 eclipse, fewer than 100 chose to see it near Nova Scotia. Only one cruise ship, the Regal Empress out of New York, headed into this region. The voyage was a regular two-week circumnavigation of Newfoundland, but on the urging of NorthStar Expeditions of Atlanta, Georgia, the itinerary had been altered to include the eclipse. My old friend David Levy, one of the featured speakers on the cruise, had told me about the trip.

Remarkably, the Regal Empress was the ship that pioneered the concept of eclipse cruises almost 30 years ago. Then known as the Olympia, this ship was in the Atlantic on the centreline of the July 10, 1972 eclipse.

Of the 670 passengers on board in August 1999, only 95 were members of the NorthStar Expeditions group which had come specifically to see the eclipse. Of these, only 6 were from Canada: myself, my wife Gertrude, and two other couples. Not only had we but a 30% chance of mostly clear skies, but with the Sun less than 5 degrees above the sea we needed clear skies right down to the horizon. The likelihood of this was perhaps 10%.

Many who heard about this eclipse cruise shook their heads. According to Joe Rao, the meteorologist on board: "Most veteran eclipse chasers branded the Regal Empress as a "ship of fools"." Yet from my sailing experience, I knew that skies could be superb on the Atlantic, blue right to the horizon, particularly in August.

When I told David that I had decided to join him, he remarked: "Now I know we are going to see the eclipse!" I tried to point out that three successful Nova Scotia eclipses does not guarantee a fourth, but he would hear none of it.

U-Turn

Our first stop after leaving New York was Halifax, the city I had left two days before (The ship was not allowed to embark passengers in a foreign port). Late that afternoon we left Halifax with only two hours to spare to reach the eclipse centreline at dawn the next day, August 11.

As the Atlantic opened before us, the Regal Empress began to turn, and it continued to turn until it was heading back into Halifax! What was going on? Had the ship broken down? The passengers were restless. Eventually a motor launch sped out to meet us with two people who had missed the boat. Half of our two-hour time cushion had evaporated!

As daylight faded, the ship's thundering diesel engines drove it at full speed southeastward into the gathering night.

Fiddling for an Eclipse

The beginning of morning twilight found me near the bridge of the ship. A bank of cloud covered much of the eastern sky; however, the clouds were moving, sliding eastward, uncovering more and more of the constellation Orion.

By sunrise the ship had spent over an hour maneuvering to place

the Sun in a region of sky that was . . . transparent right down to the horizon! At this point Captain Peter Schaab, a giant of a man with a voice like Arnold Schwarzenegger, told Joe Rao: "I have fiddled . . . and I have fiddled . . . and I have fiddled. And I will fiddle no more." With that he turned the Regal Empress broadside to the rising Sun and stopped the engines.

We were at latitude 42*10' north, longitude 60*39' west, 350 km southeast of Halifax, and 11 km south of the centreline of the 65 km-wide track of totality.

A Necklace of Rubies

Resembling a brilliant scimitar, the partially-eclipsed Sun rose out of the sea at 6:06 a.m. The air was so transparent that dense solar filters were needed immediately. Over the next 24 minutes Earth's rotation slowly swung the sea away from the shrinking crescent, shadows sharpened, and the remaining sunlight took on a strange brownish-cast.

In the final minute before totality, the light level plummeted and the wire-like solar crescent shrank to a brilliant diamond mounted on the side of a circular corona. The diamond cast a path of reflected light across the waves of the sea, from the horizon to the ship. Within seconds the carat-size of the diamond collapsed to zero, and the diamond ring metamorphosed into an ethereal circular ruby necklace. The necklace was mounted on a black velvet centre, and surrounded by the ghostly white satin of the solar corona. A dozen, bright, pinkish-red solar prominences made up the rubies.

Beyond the ship the scene was pristine and primitive. There was no sign of civilization - no buildings, no power lines, no ships, no cars, no people with their telescopes and cameras - just an exquisite piece of celestial jewelery suspended in an indigo twilight sky less than 4 degrees above the waves of the open sea. With the Sun active enough to have many prominences around its limb, with totality short enough to allow all these prominences simultaneously to extend beyond the Moon, with this ruby necklace hovering low over the empty sea, and with the Moon illusion increasing the apparent size of the apparition, this was the most beautiful of the six total solar eclipses I have witnessed. On the scale of 1 to 10, I gave it an eleven.

Barely forty-eight seconds later the ruby necklace transformed back into a diamond ring. In another few seconds the diamond became too bright to view, the spell evaporated, and an expanding solar crescent brought the return of the day.

We had seen the great "pan-European" eclipse from Maritime Canada, and we had seen it first!

Triply Lucky

Late that evening on our way toward St. John's, Newfoundland, Gertrude felt an odd vibration in the ship. When I awoke the next morning my GPS receiver indicated that we were 70 nautical miles short of where we should have been and our speed was 10 knots instead of the usual 17. A glance over the stern revealed that only one of the two propellers was operating. We had lost an engine! Had this occurred one day sooner, we never would have reached the eclipse track. Twelve hours work by the ship's engineers repaired the engine, but it was another four days before the ship caught up with its original schedule.

Despite tardy passengers, dismal weather prospects, and now a broken engine, we had seen the eclipse.

More Celestial Sights

In St. John's the next evening, an invitation from the local Centre of The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada resulted in a midnight bus trip to Butterpot Provincial Park southwest of the city. The annual Perseid meteor shower was at its peak and the park provided a dark-sky site for viewing. While meteors streaked across the sky I overheard David Levy mutter in the darkness, "I came all the way from the lousy skies of Arizona to see the Perseids in the clear dark skies of Newfoundland."

Four evenings later we were off the west coast of Newfoundland. The day had been rainy, but by sunset the sky cleared and as twilight faded an auroral arc appeared in the northwest. A short time later, and to the delighted shrieks of a cluster of observers on the dark fore-deck, the arc brightened and fragmented into a series of green rays and red-fringed curtains, slowly swirling below Ursa Major. Beneath the curtains the sea glowed brightly all the way to the horizon with the eerie fluorescent green of reflected auroral light.

Another highlight of the trip was the fabled "green flash". In the

case of the setting Sun, in the second or two before the Sun is hidden by the sea, a combination of refraction and selective absorption turns the last sliver of the solar disk a bright green. During the cruise I saw the green flash at three sunsets and at one sunrise. A nice feature of a dawn green flash is that there is no danger of dazzling your eyes by looking at the Sun before the green flash, but you must be looking at the right place at the right time! One evening, using large binoculars, I watched the last vestige of the crescent Moon turn green as it vanished below the sea.

A spectacular eclipse, a strong meteor shower, a classic aurora, green flashes and good company made the August 1999 cruise of the Regal Empress a once-in-a-lifetime astronomical experience. Icebergs, lightning bolts, whales and seabirds added to the memories. The trip was one of those magical things in life that just happens. Unfortunately poor weather prospects had deterred many others from joining us. One-third of the ship's cabins were vacant.

Natural History of the Aleutian Islands Jim Wolford

On Friday evening, Sept. 17/99, Dr. Ian Jones addressed a special combined meeting of our Blomidon Naturalists Society and the Nova Scotia Bird Society. He's in the Biology Dept. of Memorial University and holds one chair of the Atlantic Cooperative Wildlife Ecology Research Network (ACWERN). Earlier that day he spoke to Acadia's Biology Seminar on natural vs. sexual selection in seabirds (auklets) of the Aleutian Islands. Tonight he talked generally about the Aleutians and specifically about the island of Buldir, where he's been doing research for many years. His slides, of all aspects of nature, were really outstanding -- when the weather allowed, he really took advantage!

The Aleutians; parts of Alaska, are much farther south than most people realize -- about 53 degrees north (same as Edmonton, Alberta). This long chain or archipelago stretches from Alaska toward Siberia, and Buldir is somewhere in the middle. The volcanic origins are apparent, when weather allows the sight of volcanic peaks (some active). These islands have never been connected to the continents nor to land-bridges in the past. The

Bering Sea is to the north, the Pacific to the south.

The islands are administered as the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (but see below) by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) via a large research boat that apparently goes nowhere else and helps researchers get to or from their sites. Landings are difficult and dangerous. The Aleutians are characterized by fairly uniform temperatures, high winds, heavy rainfall, and persistent fogpractically devoid of trees but are covered with a luxuriant growth of grasses, sedges, and many (other) flowering plants..... By regulating the numbers of wildlife (notably sea otters and seals), the refuge has eliminated the threat of starvation to the native Aleuts, who have always lived by fishing and hunting. The raising of blue (arctic) foxes has furnished employment for many. (Encycl. Brittanica, 1994).

Decades ago, the USFWS decided, in its infinite wisdom, to help out the struggling Aleuts by introducing arctic foxes onto many of the islands. This was disastrous to the native wildlife, especially the abundant and diverse seabirds, which never had any contact with mammalian land predators. More recently, however, the USFWS has been trying to remove all the foxes. Dr. Jones says one can tell from a glance which islands have no foxes by the lush greenness of the vegetation, which is lush from the fertilization from the guano etc. of the seabirds. Islands with foxes, to the contrary, are brown and relatively barren.

Ian told us an interesting story that illustrates the connectedness of all parts of nature, and how any manipulation can have huge consequences. For unknown reasons, the Steller sea lions have dramatically declined over a couple of decades. These were the main food of killer whales or orcas, which then switched to prey on sea otters. The otters had been controlling the population of sea urchins; in the otters' near-absence, urchins became hugely abundant and devastated the kelp-beds, which are very important to many organisms, from other seaweeds to invertebrates to fish and so on, all along the West Coast. (See the current Can. Geographic magazine about the declining Steller sea lions.)

He saved the seabirds for last, and showed us stunning images of the species of auklets (crested, least, whiskered, etc.), puffins, fulmars (such a dark phase as to be nearly black from a distance), etc. Also he showed photos of landbirds, both regular and extreme rarities.

I feel very privileged to have seen and heard two very informative and beautiful presentations from Dr. Jones.

Juncos at tree tops.
Eleanor & Bernard Mason.

For a number of years we have had Juncos nesting in the banks close to our home on the North Mountain, although we have never been able to find the nest.

This spring we hung a small wicker planter in a sheltered spot just outside the sliding doors going from the dining room to the deck. Eleanor planted some alyssum in the planter and together with other plants on the deck it thrived.

About the eighteenth of July we left for a week in Cape Breton, visiting our daughter and her family at their cottage on the Mira. Upon our return we found that a Junco had built a nest in amongst the plants. The nest was perfectly round, about 2-3" deep and constructed, so far as we could tell, only of dried grass.

On July 24th, we saw one egg in the nest, followed a day later by two more. The eggs were about three-quarters of an inch in length, and were a deep cream colour and mottled on the broad end. The mother sat patiently in the nest, leaving only for short periods to eat, and on August 3rd, eight days later, the father showed up and sat patiently upon the rail around the deck and, to our knoweldge, did not take any part in the incubation process.

On August 7th, the three eggs hatched and the mother entered into an active period of hunting up bugs and other juicy delicacies for her young, naked, and unseeing brood. What we found to be particularly interesting was to watch the manner in which the adults returned to the nest. The adult would alight on the railing about ten feet from the nest and then slowly hop towards its location. Every 12 inches or so it would pause and look in every direction, sometime turning ruight about, before continuing towards the nest. Once at the end of the railing it would again turn, hop out about a foot, look all about, turn and hop to the end and then fly up to the nest.

As you gathered from the forgoing, the father participated in the

collection of food for the very hungry youngsters, and it was interesting to see these immense yellow-bordered beaks waving about on the end of the long scrawny and naked necks as they reached for the unseen food.

Slowly they became little fuzzy chicks and on August 12th their eyes opened. At about this date the mother began to intersperse their diet with the contents of sunflower seeds which she found in the feeder on the corner of the deck railing.

Interestingly the parents realized that they had nothing to fear from us. We of course were unable to use the deck for almost a month, but Eleanor would go out to water her other plants. If the adult was on the nest there would be silence, but if it was absent and returned while she was out there it would continue to 'tisk' steadily until Eleanor came in, at which time it would return to the nest.

By August 17th feathers were quire well formed and the parents apparently felt that the chicks were able to get through the night without an adult on the nest. This I observed at about 11 pm on three successive nights. In fact when the three chicks were snuggled down all one could see was a nest full of feathers with three beaks set symmetrically on top. A day or so later one chick decided to leave the nest. We did not see it go, so do not know if it fell out or actually took off; in any event there were only two remaining.

On August 21st, the second youngster left the nest at some point, and the third one hopped up onto the framwework of the planter where it sat for about one hour before it too flew off.

This had proved to have been a very interesting period of observation, and Eleanor and I are indebted to Brenda Thexton who had found the details and timing of events in a bird book. The timing was accurate on all aspects from the number of days the female sat on the eggs before hatching, to eye opening, to flight!

What's Up YOUR Chimney?

Jean Timpa

It is the season to start thinking about cleaning chimneys and

bringing in the wood for cooler seasons. This morning "Mr. Sooty Foot" and his helper came to clean two chimneys here on my property. In the residue of my main chimney there appeared a dead and very dehydrated starling, not an uncommon occurrence in chimneys. A few minutes after this discovery, I suddenly thought, "I wonder if he discovers other things when he sweeps?" "Oh, yes," was his quick reply. And then he listed off two female wood ducks, squirrels, flickers, and a seagull. "As a matter of fact, two of my customers have had wood ducks drop out of their chimneys; both were safely escorted to the door. And, of course, lots of raccoons!" Just as long as he doesn't find old St. Nick in there in a decrepit state!

Peter Whelan

Peter Whelan's birding column in Saturday's Globe and Mail informed, entertained and amused both serious and casual birders for twenty years. Cancer recently stilled that voice, which could be ironic or acerbic but was always gentle. He related, with high good humour, stories of offbeat bird behavior and could deftly, with a gentle push of the needle, deflate the over-sized egos of 'terribly' serious birders.

Peter was a much-respected voice in the birding community, reporting with authority on rare sightings, environmental threats to wildlife, and the behavior of birders who seem to risk their lives in efforts to spot unusual species. While he didn't include himself in the 'risk-taker' category his own enthusiasm occasionally put him in harm's way. Joey Slinger, the Toronto Star columnist and avid birder tells of Peter's determined pursuit of an albino chickadee. They had stopped the car to proceed on foot and in his haste to get to the likely spot, Peter had jumped out first. Joey backed up to get farther off the road and felt a 'thump'. He looked in the rear view mirror to see Peter getting up off the ground, rubbing his shin, then limping at a good pace into the woods. He never mentioned the incident to Joey.

Many of Peter's readers were not birders at all, but were people who simply enjoyed good writing, subtle wit, and Peter's infectious enthusiasm. While Peter wrote of his own experiences, he was also well served by dedicated reporters across the country and so was able to offer a national summary of significant, or simply odd, bird/birder behavior. It may be a cliché to say so, but he will be missed.

Mike McCall

**Joint Field Trip of Nova Scotia Bird Society and Blomidon
Naturalists Society for Birds in the Wolfville Area
Sept. 18/99.**

- Jim Wolford

On the morning following a joint meeting of the Nova Scotia Bird Society and the Blomidon Naturalists Society six enthusiastic birders joined me on an overcast, drizzly, and very windy day following the passage of the remnants of Hurricane Floyd. En route to Grand Pre and high tide, we stopped to look at a mixed flock of 2000 birds in a field – mostly STARLINGS but also COWBIRDS and GRACKLES, and from a convenient height, looked at the dykelands, Evangeline Beach and Boot Island.

(The 1988 figures for nests of colonial birds on BOOT ISLAND, by the way, were: 311 DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS, 50 GREAT BLUE HERONS, 1322 GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULLS, and 134 HERRING GULLS.)

On the Grand Pre dykelands, the group saw 5-10 BALD EAGLES, many RAVENS and GULLS, a HARRIER, a GREAT BLUE HERON, plus "little brown jobs" (lbjs) that were probably mostly SAVANNAH SPARROWS. The only shorebirds sighted were a flying flock of 15 dowitcher-sized birds. (During the previous week, GOLDEN PLOVERS, WHIMBRELS, and a BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER had been seen).

At the east end of Long Island (The Guzzle), about 1000 "PEEPS" roosted: mostly SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPERS, but there were also a few each of PECTORAL SANDPIPERS, SANDERLINGS, SEMIPALMATED PLOVERS, and WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPERS, plus dozens of LEAST SANDPIPERS.

On wooded Sandpiper Lane we noted lots of pretty reddish-orange berries on CANADA HOLLY bushes. The 5 BLACK-NECKED STILTS seen the previous day at Windsor were no longer in evidence, although later I saw about 8 GREATER YELLOWLEGS there, plus lots of foraging RING-BILLED GULLS with muddy beaks and legs.

BIRD SIGHTINGS from July 15 to September 15, 1999

by Jean Timpa

The last quarter's bird sightings appear in a somewhat more abbreviated form than usual. I will keep the original data for awhile, so if you have a particular question about a report, want more info on it, etc., please call Jean Timpa at 542-5678, and I'll try to help out. Many thanks to the contributors who help to keep the column lively, and broader in scope than my shank's mere outings permit.

Anne Woolaver of Blomidon watched a MERLIN unsuccessfully pursue HOUSE SPARROWS on Sept. 6th. The same bird perched briefly nearby on Sept 8th. On Sept. 9 a ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK perched in a nearby elm and made short hunting flights. It also spent some time strolling across the lawn, on and around an old tree stump, possibly after chipmunk or squirrels.

Lorna Hart of Wolfville reports one NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD on the late afternoons of Sept. 11 and 13, west of Cherry Lane. Dianne and Gordon Thorpe, on July 15, saw one RED-TAILED HAWK and 2 young perched on top of the Acadia Gym. Bill and Brenda Thexton reported 75+ BANK SWALLOWS feeding on insects in the tidal grasses of the West Grand Pre Dyke. Daily through July and to the present they have had 4 male and 8 female PURPLE FINCHES at their sunflower feeder on Main Street in Wolfville. On Sept. 12 they enjoyed a close range look at the feeding and repeated bathing and preening of a WHIMBREL in a large muddy puddle on the road nearly out to the Guzzle on Long Island Grand Pre. The next day Judy Tufts and I found two WHIMBREL in the same area, but they were very skittish, and we did not get as satisfying a look at them as did the Thextons.

Sheila Hulford who reports to us faithfully from the Greenwood-Tremont area as well as on excursions "abroad" had 10 female RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRDS at her feeder on August 8. She also reports 12 CANADA GEESE at Silver Lake, Lakeville, on August 4, not a time when we used to think of CANADA GEESE in Kings County, but now that they are beginning to nest here, things are beginning to change! At the Bellisle Marsh on August 12 she witnessed at least 50 BARN SWALLOWS as well as 8 male and female COMMON

YELLOWTHROAT and 1 AMERICAN BITTERN. On a trip to the Margarettsville shore on June 26 Sheila recorded a flock of about 30 male and female COMMON EIDER, and then again on July 12, 20+ birds, mostly males and immatures. On the same trip she also found 2 EASTERN KINGBIRDS in a marsh and on August 17 she sighted 12 COMMON NIGHTHAWKS in migration near Berwick. On July 18 Sheila went to the Middleton High School to watch 200+ CHIMNEY SWIFTS descend into the chimney at dusk - as only CHIMNEY SWIFTS can! Other species she enjoyed picking up in July were: 3 YELLOW-SHAFTED FLICKERS, a GREAT BLUE HERON, a WHITE-THROATED SPARROW at her feeder, and RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS at the marsh in Margarettsville.

Mike McCall at Hall's Harbour saw a single TURKEY VULTURE ON both the 9th and 19th of August and two of them heading west on the 14th. Some years ago I saw the one and only I can claim to have seen. What is it about Hall's Harbour? The smell of boiling lobsters?

Judy Tufts had a highly unusual RUBY THROATED HUMMINGBIRD sighting at 26 Appletree Lane-the residence of Jeff and Marion Ross-on August 29th. Judy writes:"A fascinating sight. Beautiful but almost 'ghostly' in flight! Seen visiting a hummingbird feeder by me (Judy) in the Ross' backyard in early evening. According to Marion Ross this hummer was aggressive, chasing other hummers away. I was able to watch this bird through tree branches preening after feeding for more than 5 minutes as it sat in a fruiting European Hawthorn tree. (Lighting was not suitable for photos unfortunately). It looked conspicuously 'white' among the foliage. Same size as other Hummers at the feeder: black eye black bill, completely light/whitish underneath including the throat. Soft brownish-grey (dove-grey?) wash up over upper wings, back and tail with a noticeable white band across tip of tail. Upper head and nape a paler shade of brownish-grey. Sides of face whitish. My impression was that where a Ruby-throat is normally 'green', this 'green' pigmentation was lacking in this 'partial albino' bird. The Ross' had noted this 'unusual' bird at the feeder the previous day. After checking with Nancy Nickerson who had a 'partial albino' humminbird visiting her feeder on High St. Port Williams, Kings Co. several weeks earlier, we concluded this was probably the same individual. Mr. Ross has taken photos. We await the results!!"

Judy also submitted over 2 pages of bird sightings between July 15-Sept 15. I have selected what I think are the choicest: **PIED-BILLED GREBES** several times at Harris' Pond; an adult **BONAPARTE'S GULL** on July 23, on the Middle Dyke Ducks Unlimited Pond, New Minas with Gordon; on August 6th a **NORTHERN GOSHAWK** came streaking out of the trees and nearly hit her car as she drove along the Ridge Road near her home, and on Sept. 9 Gordon spotted one in the clear-cut behind their home. This bird is currently considered quite rare and DNR has asked that we report any that we see. Through July and into August Judy watched **SORA** which probably had several young, on Harris' Pond, Canning and on at noon on Sept 4th she flushed a **BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO** in the woods behind her home on the Ridge. She and Bernard Forsythe, who lives on the same road about half a kilometre away, wondered if this was the same one Bernard heard at 3:00 A.M. Since the **CUCKOO** is not often seen here, it was a treat for both of them. On Sept. 14th, she saw 20 or so **AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER** in a field on the dyke near the Guzzle on Long Island Grand Pre, with a **BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER**. Other birds which Judy enjoyed seeing and recording during this time were: **BLUE-WINGED TEAL, RING NECKED DUCK, MERLIN, PEREGRINE, RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRDS, BLACK-BELLIED PLOVERS, SEMIPALMATED PLOVERS, GREATER AND LESSER YELLOWLEGS, SOLITARY SANDPIPERS, WILLET, RUDDY TURNSTONE, and SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPERS**. On August 6 at Evangeline 200-250,000 shorebirds were estimated to be present and included **LEAST SANDPIPERS, WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPERS, SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHERS, COMMON NIGHTHAWKS, BLUE-HEADED VIREO, BROWN CREEPERS, RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH, PALM WARBLERS, EASTERN WOOD PEEWEE, GOLDEN CROWNED KINGLETS, AND WHITE THROATED SPARROWS**.

I belong to a nature chat line here in Nova Scotia, and there are many wonderful contributors both here and in New Brunswick. They keep all of us "listeners" abreast of migrating and resident birds. There is far too much to include here so I'll just note that the South Shore seems to have some of the finer 'pickings'. I so much enjoy the sightings and reports of Murray Newall from Cape Sable Island, a fisherman who regales us with his many adventures and out-of-the-ordinary sightings. If any of you enjoy

getting up-to-date nature chat and have a computer, I can let you know how to subscribe.

What did I see this summer? The most spectacular were the vast numbers of 'shorebirds' at Evangeline Beach, along the mouth of the Cornwallis River, and at the Windsor Causeway. They certainly did have a good nesting up North where an unusually warm summer (just like our own!) resulted in a bumper crop of birds. On the dyke to the sewage ponds I'm always amused by the 'fizzy' call of the NELSON'S SHARP TAILED SPARROW which arrives late but stays long. Finally in August a lovely PEREGRINE FALCON flew slowly past me as I walked along the top of the dyke, so I was finally able to confirm a PEREGRINE on my own and confidently tick it off. It's nice to know we can bring back some birds. Now the BLACK DUCKS are gathering in large numbers on the banks of the Cornwallis River, but the GREAT BLUE HERONS and DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS are still around. On Sept 14 I was quite surprised to find 3 AMERICAN PIPIT on the rock face of the dyke, a bird which nests in the north, but winters here. Robie Tufts Birds of Nova Scotia (1st edition) lists them here as early as Sept. 6. The birding that stands out in this year's memories took place at Bear River in late May and mid August when I watched hundreds of CHIMNEY SWIFTS fly into the chimney at Oakdene School on each occasion.

It was also good to see the EASTERN PHOEBES, EASTERN KINGBIRDS, hear (and finally sight) the CATBIRD, watch the YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER circle an old apple tree for its lunch, see 50+ COMMON NIGHTHAWKS in the sky one August evening, the family of RED-BREASTED MERGANSERS at low tide by the town bridge one hot noontime, a great number of RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRDS dashing about cousin Carole's feeders, and two SPOTTED SANDPIPERS feeding in the mud of what would have been the "Ice Pond" had we had adequate rain this summer.

Most interesting probably was my third pelagic trip off Brier Island when I saw a SKUA, 2 SOOTY SHEARWATERS, 2 PUFFIN, large flocks of RED-NECKED GREBES, a BLACK GUILLEMOT changing into its winter plumage, and countless numbers of GREATER SHEARWATERS which are amazing to watch as they literally shear the water, but never seem to get

dunked.

And finally, rounding off the summer birding season, Mike McCall reports standing in his mixed woodland on the morning of Sept. 15th as platoons of migrating warblers flitted overhead, nattering, chuckling, and tsi-tsi-tsi-ing as they worked their way from tree to tree, moving southwesterly in a gentle wave.. Included in the crowd were PALM, AMERICAN REDSTART, YELLOW-RUMPED, and BLACK-THROATED GREEN. There were certainly other species, but as most of us know, fall warblers are the very devil and always move to the opposite side of the tree you're watching as soon as they see someone in a funny hat carrying binoculars.

Please keep the bird reports coming. Hand them to me on slips of paper at our meetings; call me at 542-5678 or E-mail me at jtimpa@ns.sympatico.ca, or mail them to me at PO Box 1382. Wolfville, NS, BOP 1X0 before DECEMBER 15. Many thanks to all my helpers!

TRIVIAL TIDBITS of Nova Scotia Natural History

Late June to mid September 1999

Jim Wolford

WEATHER/SKIES

July 7 to ? - a major **fire** occurred on the big **peat bog** west of Berwick; lots of smoke was visible as far away as Shubenacadie. The peat, harvested by Annapolis Valley Peat Moss, sits in long, narrow fields, exposed to the air and wind. Wide ditches between the strips are filled with peat silt and water -- when there is any. The peat is deep, and there are worries (that) the fire could sink at least 20 feet into

the ground. A bog fire several decades ago burned for three months. (KA).

Aug. 11 - skies cooperated nicely so that many early-waking observers could witness the **partial solar eclipse** at sunrise -- the bite out of the Sun was biggest at about 6:33 (92% hidden by Moon)(PM,JW, *et al.*).

Aug. 18 - a small **tornado**, accompanied by lightning and very loud thunder, did some damage at Pugwash. There was lightning every 2 min., & rain,

but no wind -- several 'prototornados (dark, ragged tongues) reached down from black clouds in gray sky, then a downpour, as wind gusted, north to south & vice versa, lasting about 3 min. Trees up to 20 m. tall were uprooted, apple trees lost all their apples, etc.) -- other storms hit various places in Cumberland County & elsewhere (HCH,BSt).

Sept. 12 - at about 10 p.m., observers were treated to a nice display of **aurora borealis** with several bright curtains, mostly greenish-yellow but also some definite red, seen from Avonport and Kentville (SW,RS).

Sept. 17-18 - **strong winds and heavy rain** were products of **Hurricane Floyd**.

Sept. 22-23 - from the edge of **Hurricane Gert**, **torrential rain** fell across the province, with 90 mm. over 24 hours in northern N.S. Much flooding -- houses and streets -- followed.(CBC).

FUNGI

Mid July? - in Guysborough Co., an old split stump was found to be glowing with **foxfire or bioluminescent fungi** (not fruiting bodies, just the mycelial strands that were mainly inside the wood)(RB).

Aug. 19 - diverse **mushrooms** were very common along the Cabot Trail -- **chanterelles, destroying angels, spindle-shaped yellow coral, white worm coral, boletes, elegant stinkhorn** (pink-stemmed form) or **dog stinkhorn, black earth tongues or velvety earth tongues, ruffles or eastern cauliflower mushroom** (RL).

Mid Aug.? - a basketball-sized **giant puffball** was found on a Bear River lawn -- later many smaller ones were seen in the same area; also a **death angel** mushroom found in a garden, not far from some edible **field mushrooms** (JT).

Sept. 4 - lots of obvious fungi along dyke trail at Wallace Bay Nat. Wildlife Area: abundant were dark-centred **Scleroderma puffballs** and **fly-agaric mushrooms**, plus *Russula* species, etc. (PM,JW).

Sept. 10 - a **giant puffball** that filled a bushel-basket was brought in to St. F.X. Univ. from the Antigonish area (*vide* RL).

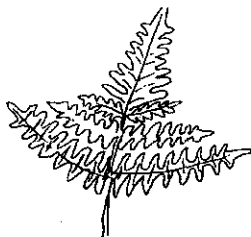
Sept. 9 - a large cluster of orange **jack o'lantern** mushrooms found on a stump (oak?) on University Hall lawn, Wolfville -- 1 of 3 collected did weakly luminesce inside a darkroom after a few minutes for eye-adaptation

(BS,PJG,JW).

Mid Sept.? - a huge orangey-yellow *Panus strigosus* mushroom (relative of oyster mushroom with no common name) was found SE. of Oxford on a split trunk of a **red maple** -- its dried cap measured 35 cm. (14 in.) across (SVK,DG).

NON-FLOWERING PLANTS

July 20 - **bracken fern, rock polypody, and marginal wood fern** found in woods near Greenwood (SH).



Bracken

FLOWERING PLANTS

June 16,28 - **bittersweet nightshade** in bloom near Greenwood (SH).

June 20 - many **yellow lady's-slippers** still in bloom near Poplar Grove (see report for May 27 in last edition of TRIVIA)(JW).

June 26 - **caraway & beach**

pea in bloom along shore at Margaretsville (SH).

June 28 - **fireweed** in bloom near Greenwood (SH).

June 30 - both **white & yellow sweet clovers** in bloom along hwy. 101 in Kings & Hants Cos. (SH). (FS says it's very unusual to have both species flowering simultaneously.)

July 1 - **heal-all** in bloom on a Halifax lawn (SH).

July 3 - **serviceberries** being eaten by a **yellow-bellied sapsucker** at Akin Marsh near Falmouth (PR).

July 11 - a **Canada lily** flowering at Pugwash (SW).

July 11 - 3-5 **Canada lilies** in bloom n. of Antigonish (RL,KM).

July 12 - **lowbush blueberry & bull thistle** blooming near Greenwood (SH).

July 14 - **Canada thistle** in bloom near Greenwood (SH).

July 15 - a colony of 60 **purple fringed orchids** found blooming in the White Hill area, Pictou Co. (MB).

July 20 - **helleborine orchid** flowering in woods, roadside ditch, and edge of garden near Greenwood (SH).

July 21 - **common milkweeds** in bloom near Sackville, N.B. (see below under **monarch butterfly**)(KHP).

July 25 - a very large patch of **spotted (pink) Joe-Pye-weed** blooming at Harmony, King's Co. (SH).

July 25 - in Smiley's Prov. Park near Brooklyn, Hants Co., **virgin's bower**, *Clematis*, flowering, but **showy lady's-slippers** all finished (and lots of them)(PM,JW).

July 25 - along the Meander River not far from Smiley's Park, **enchanter's nightshade**, **agrimony**, **spearmint?**, **arrowhead**, **bur-reed**, **wild cucumber**, and **jewelweed** in bloom (PM,JW).

July 28 - **lady's thumb**, *Polygonum persicaria*, in bloom near Greenwood (SH).



PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

In July and August many reports of Purple Loosestrife have been received:

a few plants of this gorgeous-but-very-nasty item just west of Acadia U's Biology Bldg.!! and just nw. of Windsor Hospital (PM,JW), from Port Hawkesbury to north of Whycocomagh to George's River, to Isle Madame, (PM,JW), at the old Ice Pond and adjacent wet ditch at Bear River, at Sandy Cove, Digby Neck, (JT & PC), along 101 between Weymouth and Bridgetown toward Middleton (JGT) and from Truro to the NS border and at the shore of a small lake between Mahone Bay and Lunenburg.(JW).

Aug. 2 - on Isle Madame, Cape Breton, **great angelica?** and **smaller purple fringed orchids** abundant & flowering; east of Antigonish, **wild parsnip** in bloom (PM,JW).

Aug. 4 - **smaller? purple fringed orchid** in flower at Cape Split (JW,SW).

Aug. 4 - **beach blue flag**, *Iris setosa*, a.k.a. **seaside iris**, *I. hookeri*, seed-pods found at Black Rock Beach (SH).

Aug. 5 - **Indian pipe** found under low-hanging boughs of a

spruce near Greenwood (SH).

Aug. 8 - **common hops** fruiting at The Guzzle, ne. Grand Pre (GF,PM,JW).

Aug. 12 - **blue lettuce, black/common elderberry, & virgin's bower**; *Clematis virginiana*, found at Belleisle Marsh (SH).

Aug. 14 - at Bear River, a few of the **leaves of purple loosestrife** had holes or notches, made by what? (see below under beetles, Coleoptera)(JT).

Aug. 23 - **Japanese knotweed (bamboo)** just starting to flower in Wolfville (still flowering Sept. 23)(JW).

Aug. 28 - **turtlehead** in bloom along the edge of Hennigar's Market Pond at Greenwich -- also flowering there were **peppermint, beggar-ticks or bur-marigolds, asters, & lots of jewelweed/touch-me-not** (JW).

Sept. 2 - **crowberries** were being eaten by a juvenile **long-tailed jaeger** along the Cape Race road in Newfoundland (NRBA).

Sept. 3 - **purple loosestrife** still in bloom in roadside ditch and wet pasture-edgew just nw. of Windsor Hospital -- also oodles of this purple plague at

South Maitland and at Maitland, and lesser amounts at Truro (PM,JW).

Sept. 5 - at Belleisle Marsh, **wild rice** has spread & is tall & will attract lots of waterfowl & big flocks of blackbirds through the autumn (LPH).

Sept. 5 - fall **asters** already in bloom, about a month earlier than usual (?)(JT).

Sept. 6 - berries of **wild raisin** (*Viburnum cassinoides*) were being eaten by 6 **flickers** at Liverpool (HD).

Sept. 9 - **Jerusalem artichokes** in bloom along hwy. 14 toward the Milford end (JW).

Sept. 18 - **Canada holly** bushes loaded with reddish-orange **berries** at Grand Pre -- perhaps this will be a big winter for these beauties? (JW,NSBS).

INVERTEBRATES

July 1 - a few **ticks** (prob. Am. dog ticks) seen at Belleisle Marsh (KM *et al.*).

Early July - off Louisbourg, lots of **jellyfish** of 'various kinds' (CL).

July 27 - 2 **green crabs** found in a **mating** embrace, the female with a freshly-molted

soft shell, under a rock at the east end of Evangeline Beach (JW *et al.*).

Aug. 1 - lots of **lion's-mane jellyfish** at wharves of Isle Madame, Cape Breton (PM,JW).

Aug. 24 - **oyster-growers** are concerned about the abundance of European **green crab** in Bras d'Or Lake -- this introduced species (probably via ballast-water of ocean-going ships) has a record of being very hard on young bivalves (clams) in other areas of N. America -- green crabs were first found in Bras d'Or Lake in 1998 (CBC).

summer - **jellyfish** (lion's-manes?) were so abundant this year that a number of P.E.I. beaches had to be closed (AM). (See below for ocean sunfish & leatherback turtles.)

Sept. 6 - About 6 or 7 strands of transparent colonial **salps** connected glovelike-fashion (?), washed up just below high-tide mark in Minas Basin near Burlington (TH).

Sept. 9 - there are lots and lots of **salps** in the Bay of Fundy, for the past 6 weeks or so, both at sea (sometimes in windrows or tide-streaks) and washed up on beaches -- look like strings of transparent, watery marbles

or jellybeans -- look them up in the Peterson guide to the Atlantic Seashore -- **krill** and **lumpfish** often seen under them in the water, and **shearwaters** often fed along the windrow edges -- I've never seen anything like it in 15 years (CH).

INSECTS - ODONATA

Aug. 9 - many thousands of **bluet damselflies** plus medium-sized & large **darner dragonflies** at Belleisle Marsh (AM).

Aug. 13 - 5 male **white-faced meadowfly** dragonflies (*Sympetrum obtusum*) seen along Butler Road, s. King's Co. (AM).

Sept. 12 - at Kingsport Beach and Starr's Point, single individuals of **wandering gliders** (*Pantala flavescens*) seen flying slowly back and forth along the shores -- were north of their regular range, and these probably moved north after emerging somewhere to the south (MH,AK).

INSECTS - ORTHOPTERA

July 7 - a **Carolina locust** (large, brown, clackety-clack grasshopper) found on a driveway near Greenwood (SH).

INSECTS - HEMIPTERA

Aug. 1 - a pretty **small milkweed bug** (a seed-eating bug) found on a milkweed or butterfly plant in a garden near Greenwood (SH).

INSECTS - HOMOPTERA

July 10 - a **cicada** heard near Hemlock Ravine, Bedford, early this year (same for **crickets**, first heard this year July 14)(CF).

July 12 - some **cicadas** calling in Wolfville (early)(JT).

July 15 - **cicadas** heard in Halifax (LPP).

Aug. 26 - a **buffalo treehopper** found near Greenwood (SH).

INSECTS - COLEOPTERA

July 26 - at Grand Pre on **aphid-infested sow thistles**, I found ten **2-spot**, four **7-spot**, & one **southern lady beetles** (see below)(JW).

Aug. 10 - in a long bed of wild **sow thistles**, some of which were infested with **aphids**, a short search revealed these **lady beetles**: 15 **2-spots** (native) including 2 copulating pairs; 6 **southerns** (introduced) including 1 pair; and one **7-spot** (introduced)(it's nice to find an example of one of our

native species apparently holding its own)(JW). (THE CAN. NATURE FED. WILL ACCEPT RECORDS ONLY UNTIL NOVEMBER -- call 1-800-267-4088 for info.)

Aug. 14 - at Bear River, perhaps associated with holes or notches out of leaves of **purple loosestrife** were tiny iridescent navy-blue **beetles** with long weevil-like snouts (JT)(JT wonders if these are the introduced beetles to control the loosestrife? I doubt it, since I don't believe any weevils were brought in(JW)). (On the subject of **control of purple loosestrife**, John Bueglas of River John (<john@dubebotanicalgardens.ns.ca>) has been involved in raising and testing the **beetles**. Two species from Germany, *Galerucella californiensis* & *G. pusilla*, have been bred so that they'll starve before they eat anything but our purple plague. He has beetles for sale, but they won't be available until June.)

Aug. 16 - at Lakeville, at the lake's edge were several tight aggregations of **whirligig beetles** -- the beetles were active and seemed to be investigating each other (JW).

late Aug. - an adult **June beetle (Junebug)** was found at night on a screen door at Bear River (JT).

Aug. 26 - 4 **carrion beetles** or **burying beetles**, all different kinds, on a smelly, rotting chicken carcass at White Hill, Pictou Co. (MB).

early Sept.? - an adult **June beetle** was found n.e. of Dartmouth at Lake Echo (TB).

Sept. 3 - lots of **Colorado potato beetles**, both adults & larvae, on potato plants on Northumberland Shore n. of Amherst (PM,JW).

Sept. 14 - 2 **burying beetles** were already on a carcass of a very freshly killed **weasel** on the North Mountain at Burlington (KL).

INSECTS - LEPIDOPTERA

June 21 - at least 2 **gypsy moth caterpillars** found on the willow trunk at the Kentville Agric. Res. Stn. lily-pond (JW).

late June - first record of the **common ringlet** for metro area, at Eastern Passage Jr. H.S. (DB, *fide* FS).

early July - Fred Scott, the Curator of the Acadia Biology Museum, is interested in documenting the distribution and spread of the **common ringlet** butterfly in the province (the first record was from Amherst in 1989, then

Brier Is. in 1992, Valley a bit later, see above for metro) -- contact Fred at 422-8239 (h), 585-1720 (o), or e-mail <fwscott@ns.sympatico.ca>.

July 1 - at Belleisle Marsh, a **black swallowtail** and 2 **eyed browns** seen (KM).

July 3 - at Uniacke Estate Museum Park and the Pockwock Watershed road, an HFN field trip found 15 species of **butterflies** & 2 of **moths**, as follows: a very worn **tiger swallowtail**, the end of the first flight of **common ringlets**, lots of **European skippers** + other **skippers** (**Hobomok**, **dun**, & **tawny-edged**), **Atlantis** + **Aphrodite fritillaries**, **northern crescents**, **northern pearly eyes**, **eyed browns**, **clouded** + **pink-edged sulphurs**, **white admirals**, **no blues or coppers**, **Virginia ctenucha moths**, and **clearwing moths** (*Hemaris* species)(LPP).

July 4 - a **red admiral** seen along Martinique Beach (TP).

July 8 - an **Atlantis fritillary** feeding from flowers near Greenwood (SH).

July 11- the first **American painted lady** of the season, maybe a migrant, at Waverley, was very early, and the **Hobomok skippers** have

disappeared -- 2 **monarchs** seen at Herring Cove -- about 5 **northern blues** at Chebucto Head (LPP).

July 11 - 1+1 **monarchs** at Lawrencetown & Conrad's Beaches (UH), 2 more at Herring Cove (LPP), and 15 seen on Grand Manan Island (BD).

July 12 - 2 **wood nymph** butterflies attracted to oregano blossoms near Greenwood (SH).

July 13 - a **monarch** seen in Halifax (PC), and one seen well **offshore**, off Coddle's Island, Guys. Co. (RL).

July 14 - a **monarch** seen in a 'bog garden' (?) and interested in **swamp milkweeds**, at Boutilier's Point, St. Margaret's Bay (RAM).

mid July - at Chignecto Provincial Park, lots of **sulphurs, skippers, & species of fritillaries**, a few **white admirals**, 2 **mustard whites**, & a **viceroys** seen (TP).

mid July - at Taylor's Head Prov. Park, Eastern Shore, 10 **northern blue butterflies** and one **comma** species seen (TP).

July 21 - 2 **monarchs** found on 3-yr.-old & flowering **milkweeds** that were transplanted from wild plants

along an abandoned rail line near Sackville, N.B. (now a Rails for Trails project (KHP).

July 23-24 - a **monarch** seen among flowers at Liverpool (HD).

July 26 - a **mourning cloak** seen at Grand Pre (JW).

late July - lots of **tansy ragwort** plants denuded by introduced **cinnabar moth caterpillars** at Englishtown Ferry, Cape Breton (*vide* RA).

early Aug. - lots of **monarchs, clouded & alfalfa sulphurs**, and a 'whole new crop of **common ringlets**' on a hectare of 'uncut hay, at Bear River (JT).

Aug. 1 - a **silver-bordered fritillary** seen feeding on flowers near Greenwood (SH).

Aug. 4 - a beautiful, fresh-looking **monarch** sipping from **knapweed** flowers at Cape Split (JW).

Aug. 6 - a **monarch butterfly** found feeding on coneflower, *Echinacea*, near Greenwood (SH).

Aug. 9 - a **cecropia moth caterpillar** found on a large bush at the Windsor Tourist Bureau (SH).

Aug. 11 - a **white admiral**

seen in a garden near Greenwood (SH).

Aug. 13 - many **Atlantis & silver-bordered** (= lesser) **fritillaries** + a **white admiral** (+whites & sulphurs) seen along Butler Road (AM).

Aug. 13 - 2 **monarchs** seen in Sheet Harbour Passage area, Eastern Shore (KM).

Aug. 14 - a **monarch**, a number of somewhat worn **common ringlets**, **clouded sulphurs**, **large (?) wood nymphs**, and a **European skipper** seen at Bear River (JT).

mid Aug. - **monarchs** seen migrating past Cape Sable Island (MN).

Aug. 23 - a cold & inactive adult **waved sphinx moth** found under a street light late at night in Wolfville (JT).

Aug. 23 to Sept. 3 - many **monarchs** seen on Brier Island (LLa).

Aug. 27 - a **monarch** was flying at Livingston Cove, Antigonish Co. (AM).

Aug. 28 - at least 8 large **monarch caterpillars** seen on **milkweeds** at Bear River -- later there were 'many' **chrysalises** and then hopefully new butterflies (JT).

Aug. 27 - a large caterpillar of a **polyphemus** silk moth seen in Blomidon Park (BBa).

Aug. 28? - many **clouded sulphurs**, a few **cabbage whites**, lots of **common ringlets** in the grasses, and several **large (common?) wood nymphs**, all seen at Bear River (JT).

late Aug.? - observed today on goldenrod stalks near Port Lorne (n. of Bridgetown) was an amazingly **bright-colored caterpillar** approx. two inches long with the following bands of color running its length: a narrow band of orange on the back followed by a mottled blue band and a wider band that looked like a row of piano keys on the sides and then a narrower band of red near the legs (TN). From Tom's excellent description I knew I had it in my slide-collection. It's a larva of a '**brown-hooded owlet**' moth, *Cucullia convexipennis*, family Noctuidae, and, according to Peterson Field Guide to Moths of E. N. Am., the caterpillar eats flowers (?) of goldenrod, asters, & other low plants. The adult moth is non-descript and cryptic in colour (JW).

Sept. 1 - 'I almost had my head taken off by a **white? underwing moth** on a house's deck in Halifax (BM).

Sept. 3 - an extremely docile **white admiral** near rotting apples in a yard near Ardoise, Hants Co. -- 'it rested on my foot!' (CMu).

Sept. 3 - a **white admiral** seen s. of Coldbrook (AM).

Sept. 3 - oodles of **clouded sulphurs** among red clovers etc. and many **cabbage whites** among garden plants, on the Northumberland Shore n. of Amherst (JW).

Sept. 4 - on Brier Island, lots of **clouded sulphurs**, **cabbage butterflies**, several **common ringlets**, and an **American or little copper** (JT).

Sept. 4 - one very worn **viceroi** seen near Gulf Shore on the Northumberland Strait -- it is double-brooded, just like its cousin, the white admiral (LPP).

Sept. 5 - a **white admiral** was sipping at nectar of **Japanese knotweed** ('bamboo') at Bear River (JT).

Sept. 6 - 2 **American painted ladies** seen at Waverley -- maybe the leading edge of a big influx/movement? (LPP).

Sept. 6 - **clouded sulphurs** are incredibly abundant this year, and 25% of females are strikingly greenish-white

(LPP).

Sept. 8 - a **black swallowtail** and 2 **clouded sulphurs** were sipping nectar from **alfalfa & red clover** along a Wolfville dyke (JT).

Sept. 12 - more than 50 **red admirals** (migrants) seen at Cape Sable Island, in the Cape Lighthouse area (MN).

Sept. 16 - 2 **monarchs** seen at The Hawk, Cape Sable Island (MN).

Sept. 19 - a worn adult **black swallowtail** seen at Grand Pre (PM,JW).

Sept. 19 - a **red admiral**, 12 **monarchs**, and 15 **sulphurs** (butterflies) seen on The Cape, off the tip of Cape Sable Island (MN).

Sept. 19 - 3 **monarchs** seen heading south at Lake Echo (ne. of Dartmouth)(TB).

Sept. 20 - 2 **American coppers**, plus a few **cabbage whites** and **clouded sulphurs** along a Wolfville dyke (JT).

Sept. 21 - a **monarch** soared by an office window of the Bedford Institute of Oceanography (LPP).

Sept. 22 - a **monarch** flitting around the hay at White Hill, Pictou Co. (MH).

INSECTS - DIPTERA

Aug. 23 - lots of **mosquitoes**, probably the **salt-marsh** species, noted in afternoon in Wolfville (JW).

Aug. 26 - **salt-marsh mosquitoes** 'are out in full force' at Antigonish (RL).

early Sept. - **crane flies** (see below under **bats**) were in large numbers in Lunenburg Co. (BB).

Sept. 5 - **mosquitoes** (**salt-marsh?**) practically 'ate us alive' at Wallace Bay Nat. Wildlife Area (PM, JW).

Sept. 10 - 'this evening the **crane flies** are thicker than fleas on a hound' -- 2 copulations seen, but one was interrupted by a **large spider!**, in Hants Co. (CMu).

Sept. 10-15 - adult **crane flies**, *Tipula paludosa*, common around lawns in Wolfville -- these are the light brown adults of the larvae or maggots called 'leatherjackets', which can be lawn pests (JW).

INSECTS - HYMENOPTERA

Aug. 13 - at Bear River, in evening there was a huge 'hatch' of **tiny red flying ants**, and 50+ **nighthawks** were

feasting on them (JT).

Aug. 23 - an adult **pigeon horntail** (a large, colourful sawfly, which preys on giant ichneumon wasps) found dead in a rain-barrel at Grand Pre (JW).

Aug. 23 - ne. of Dartmouth at Lake Echo, a mass exodus of **winged ants** was witnessed -- lots of diverse fly-catching **birds** (pewees, chickadees, least flycatchers, starlings, swallows, various warblers) were feasting (TB).

Aug. 23 - at Melmerby Beach, Pictou Co., a **feeding frenzy of birds** (500+ Bonaparte's + 200 ring-billed gulls + 12 common terns) on **flying insects (ants?)** was witnessed in evening (MB).

Aug. 24 - at least 7 very long-abdomened, black **wasps**, *Pelecinus polyturator*, on a Dartmouth lawn, probing down



with posterior abdomens into the ground -- these prey upon (lay eggs on) **white grubs of June beetles** ('Junebugs')(PR,DMc). These peleciniid wasps are active from early Aug. to early Sept. in Cape Breton, and males are much smaller & hardly ever encountered (DMc).

late Aug. - on Bon Portage Island, in late afternoon with dropping temperature, large **bumblebees** were stuck for the night on flowers of **seaside goldenrod** (FS).

Sept. 12 - large numbers of *Polistes* **paper wasps** in a yard in Halifax -- these are very rare along the Atlantic Coast and only moderately common in the warm internal regions of N.S., e.g., the Annapolis Valley -- each looks like a smallish yellow jacket with thin, faint bands on the abdomen, and the abdomen sports a large orange spot on each side -- the nests are hanging paper combs with no protective paper shell (FS).

Sept. 12 - a dead adult *Polistes* or **paper wasp** found in the main office of Acadia Univ. Biology, Wolfville (JW).

Sept. 12 - DB responded to FS's report on **paper wasps** above, that there were 'scads' all summer (July & August) but none seen in early Sept.,

somewhere in Cyberspace! (Halifax?)(DB,JO).

FISHES

mid July - a large black (**bullhead?**) **catfish** seen with a **school** of about 20 **babies** seen in Grafton Lake, Kejimikujik Nat. Park (TP). (Like the tadpoles of American toads, the baby catfish advertise their distastefulness + spines? by their conspicuousness in a school - JW.)

early July - only 2 **ocean sunfish** so far (normal), a 10-foot **basking shark** seen, very few **mako (porbeagle) sharks** caught so far this year in bait-nets (?), and no **dogfish sharks** yet (very unusual)(CL, a fisher).

July 4 - an **ocean sunfish**, *Mola mola*, seen off Brier Island (RS).

July 12 - an **ocean sunfish**, seen at close range, offshore from Abbott's Harbour (se. of Yarmouth & Wedgeport)(TD *et al.*).

July 14 - a dead **ocean sunfish**, approx. 300 lbs., & 5 ft. long x 3 ft. wide, found washed up on shore at Hall's Harbour (is now in Biology Dept., Acadia Univ.)(KA).

Aug. 19 - an **ocean sunfish**

seen from the road to Meat Cove, n. Cape Breton (RL).

Aug. 21 - off Brier Island, a **bluefin tuna** was seen being pulled aboard a fishing boat (KM).

Aug. 23 - a dead 1.8-m.-long '**rock sturgeon**'(?) (really an Atlantic sturgeon?, which is the only species which occurs in N.S.?) found near Grand Lake (it is now preserved & in the N.S. Museum of Nat. Hist. (HCH).

Aug. 27 - perhaps related to abnormally warm N. Atlantic surface temperatures and oodles of **jellyfish** (see above, + below for sea turtles), large numbers of **ocean sunfish** have appeared off Newfoundland this summer -- one boat-tour operator saw 5 on one trip (NP).

early Sept. - there were lots of **blue sharks** offshore from Liverpool (CM).

Sept. 10 - at a Sheet Harbour wharf, a domestic cat named Snowball caught a one-foot-long **swordfish** with a 3-inch snout (KO in HCH).

HERPTEILES

DON'T FORGET TO GET YOUR AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE SIGHTINGS TO THE HERPETOFAUNAL

ATLAS PROJECT -- contact Samara Eaton at Biology Dept., Acadia Univ., Wolfville, N.S. B0P 1X0 (585-1313) or web-site <http://landscape.acadiau.ca/herpatlas>.

early July - off Louisbourg, no **sea turtles** yet (CL).

June 21 - lots of **metamorphosing tadpoles** (a year old) of **green frogs** in a very shallow seep-pond (doesn't totally freeze) along the trail at the Kentville Ravine (JW).

July 1 - a **leopard frog** and a **painted turtle** seen, and lots of **green frogs** 'gronking' at Belleisle Marsh (KM *et al.*).

July 14 - 3 **American toads** on lawn & in garden at Tremont, near Greenwood (SH).

mid July - 2 **northern ribbon snakes** seen swimming at the edge of Grafton Lake in Kejimikujik Nat. Park (TP).

Aug. 17 - a very **young snapping turtle** with a 4-in.-long (10cm.) shell crossed the road and was going away from the White Rock Canal (JSB).

Sept. 3 - offshore from Neil's Harbour, Cape Breton, a male **leatherback turtle**, named '**Sherman**' after our own

Sherman Bleakney, who pioneered studies of sea turtles in the North Atlantic, was captured and harnessed with a satellite tag in a backpack -- up to Sept. 15, about 10 tag-readings per day have shown a zigzag path of about 550 km. heading roughly northward, perhaps toward the Grand Banks? -- also there have been about 100 **leatherbacks** sighted this summer off Nova Scotia (versus at least 163 sightings in 1998)(MJ,HCH,CW).

MAMMALS

(For those who haven't noticed in previous editions, the mammal observations are NOT chronological, but rather are roughly in the order of groups in field guides.)

Aug. 19 - **9 dead bats (little browns?)** found along path at Harris' Pond in Canning (RS).

early Sept. - in Lunenburg Co., before first light of dawn, 2-3 **little brown? bats** were seen catching and eating **crane flies** that were attracted to lights -- also generally numbers of **bats** seem reduced this year (BB).

Aug. 24 - 2 escaped, small **domestic rabbits** seen grazing near the n. end of the McKay Bridge, Dartmouth? (FS).

July 26 - a **porcupine** was calling as it climbed a tree in a.m. near Greenwood (SH).

Aug. 9 - a **muskrat** in a pond was eating **lamb's-quarters** at Aylesford (SH).

Sept. 18 - a **chipmunk** 'sounded almost exactly like a cuckoo' (European?) MB, MK

Sept. 14 - a **short-tailed weasel** was found dying (cat-mauled?) on a lawn in Burlington on the North Mountain (n. of Aylesford) KL).

July 25 - an **otter** was seen along the bank of the White Rock Canal (HMT).

Aug. 9 - **5 otters** seen in Loafing Pond of Belleisle Marsh (AM,JGT).

June 26 - an adult **skunk** with 5 youngsters crossed a road in Kingston at 8:30 p.m. (SH).



Sept. 5 - there was a confrontation between a **skunk** and a **dog** at Belleisle Marsh -- the **skunk** won! (both the dog and PH lost!)(LPH).

Sept. 7 - an e-mailed remedy for **essence of skunk**: 'diluted vinegar & water works wonders at getting rid of the smell on cars and pets. Just ask my cat!' (JB).

Sept. 7 - the quintessential **skunk deodorizer**: for pets, bathe the animal in a mixture of 1 quart 3% hydrogen peroxide (from drug store), 1/4 cup baking soda (sodium bicarbonate), and a teaspoon of liquid detergent. After 5 minutes rinse with water. Repeat if necessary. Mixture must be used after mixing & will not store. Also do not store in a closed container (it releases oxygen gas). It may bleach the hair a bit. Bathe animal outside. To deodorize clothes, towels, rags, etc., wash with one cup liquid laundry bleach per gallon of water (RB).

Llate Aug. to mid Sept. - lots of road-killed **skunks** around King's & w. Hants Cos. (JW).

Sept. 12 - a smallish adult? **black bear** crossed hwy. 103 near Shelburne (RS).

Sept. 19 - Peter Hope reports from Kejimikujik Nat. Park:

"We were putting our canoe in one lake after another. While on our way into the backcountry I received a radio call. Another of our staff saw a sow **black bear and two small cubs** cross one of our woods roads. Such a sighting doesn't come often. An hour later and perhaps 6 km or more away, in the distance I noticed a dark object and as we sat and watched, a medium-sized **bear** swam across the lake. We were probably 700 metres away and undetected, so the bear took its time. When it neared the far shore, it swam along for quite a way before going ashore. **If you have never seen a bear swim**, (and I hadn't before this year) you might be confused by what you see. At a distance the head is a small half rounded mound at the front and the rump is twice as high at the back. The round ears seem to stick up...almost like radar antennas. In April a friend and I canoed so close to a swimming mother bear and cub that we could see the feet kick up behind the animal almost to the surface. Even my springer spaniel, which has webbed feet



and swims like a beaver, isn't that strong a swimmer. I love the bears we have around here. They are free, wild and not habituated to man....and they should not be feared (LPH).

Aug. 8 - a **coyote** was road-killed in mid morning on Bedford Bypass near Magazine Hill, outbound from Dartmouth (HCH).

Aug. 9 - a **coyote** at Hemeon's Head, was apparently feasting on **blueberries** (DY).

Sept. 17 - 2-3 **coyotes** were barking and chasing something (deer?) in Hemlock Ravine, Bedford (DM).

July 12 - 2 **harbour seals** seen at Cottage Cove, Ann. Co. (SH).

Aug. 19 - several **pilot whales** seen from the road to Meat Cove, n. Cape Breton (RL).

Aug. 23 - a pod of about 8 **killer whales or orcas** was spotted in the Bay of Fundy n.w. of Brier Island and n.e. of Grand Manan Island; the last sighting in Fundy was back in 1985 (SB,HG,HCH,LM).

July 13 - 2 **minke whales** seen off Ferguson's Cove, heading toward Purcell's Cove (JH, *fide* PC).

July 24 - a **minke whale** at Lower Prospect, Hfx. Co., was only 50 m. off the beach (UH).

Mid Aug. - near Souris, P.E.I., a malodorous, dead, 8-m. **minke whale** washed ashore (HCH).

The Shimmer of Silver



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July 22? - several **finback whales**, 3 **humpbacks**, & several **harbour porpoises** seen off Brier Island (MB).

Aug. 21 - 2+1 **humpback whales** (2 breached several times) and a **finback whale** seen off Brier Island (KM).

Sept. 4 - rescuers tried valiantly but were only slightly successful in helping a badly **entangled right whale** in the Bay of Fundy -- this whale has been entangled at least since May, and has a very deep gash across its back -- it was spotted while trying to help 2 **other entangled right whales** -- also this summer in the Bay there have been 5 **other entangled whales** seen: 1 more **right whale**, 1 **humpback**, and 3 **finbacks** (DT,HCH,GM).

Sept. 4 - off Brier Island, 12 **humpback whales** seen (Rooftop, Cirrus, Flask, Tusk, Southpaw, Shuttle, Parrot, Luna, & others) -- one breached, several fin-slapped -- plus **harbour porpoises** also seen (CH,BMJT,ST).

Sept. 8 - perhaps a brighter light on whales: a lot of **humpback and finback whales** have been seen this summer in the Bay of Fundy, after several summers with very few sightings. Possibly lots of small, sardine-like **fish** called **brit** (?) are attracting

them. (SB,CH,HCH).

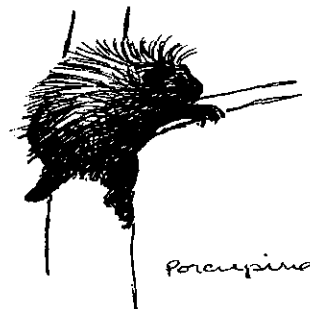
Aug. 7 (to mid Sept.?) - a **white deer** seen with normal deer on a ball-field at Pictou (LL,HCH).

Aug. 18 - 3 **moose** seen along Skyline Trail, Cape Breton Highlands Nat. Park (RL).

compiled by Jim Wolford, Site 1, Comp. 61, RR3 Wolfville, N.S. B0P 1X0. 542-7650 e-mail: jww.triv@ns.sympatico.ca

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BBa - Brian Bartlett
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JB - John Bueglas
JSB - Sherman Bleakney
MB - Mark Brennan
RB - Rick Ballard
SB - Shelley Barnaby
TB - Tony Bezanson
CBC - CBC Radio



Porcupine

PC - Patricia Chalmers
BD - Brian Dalzell
HD - Harold Dobson
TD - Ted D'Eon
CF - Cathy Fulton
GF - George Forsyth
DG - Darryl Grund
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JW - Jim Wolford
SW - Sherman Williams
DY - David Young

What's In The Sky? by Roy Bishop

New Moon: October 9, November 8, December 7 Full Moon:
September 25, October 24, November 23, December 22 The
Winter Solstice is on Wednesday, December 22 at 3:44 a.m.
(AST)

Meteors

Two meteor showers are worth viewing this autumn:

Leonids (after 1 a.m. on the mornings of November 17 and 18).
The Leonids produced a strong shower in our skies a year ago,
and this year could bring an extra strong shower. Although the
peak of the 1999 Leonids is predicted to occur over eastern

Europe on the morning of November 18, a year ago the peak occurred 10 hours earlier than predicted. i.e. No one can be sure where or when the peak will occur, so Nova Scotians could have a ring-side seat! Pick a viewing site away from the lights of civilization and with a good view of the eastern half of the sky.

Geminids (late evenings of December 13 and 14). This is one of the better showers of the year, equal to the Perseids of August, although clear December nights can be cold! Pick a viewing site away from the lights of civilization and with a good view of the eastern half of the sky.

Planets

Venus is a brilliant beacon in the eastern pre-dawn sky during the rest of 1999.

Jupiter and Saturn rise early in the evening north of east, and are in the sky all night. Bright Jupiter rises first, followed about 40 minutes later by dimmer Saturn. Both are show pieces in a telescope, and are well-placed for viewing from the latitude of Nova Scotia this autumn. Binoculars will show the four Galilean satellites of Jupiter (although all four may not be visible on a particular night). If your binoculars have excellent optics, Saturn may appear egg-shaped; however, a telescope is needed for a good view of Saturn's rings.

A Big Christmas Ornament

The Moon's orbit is an ellipse and the nearest point to Earth on this orbit is called "perigee". The Sun's gravity makes the perigee distance itself vary from month to month. On December 22 this year the Moon is full. The Moon also happens to be at perigee on that day. Furthermore, the perigee distance on that day is the smallest of the year. Thus the Full Moon just prior to Christmas is the largest of the year. If the sky is clear as night falls on December 22 and 23, go to a spot with a clear view of the northeast horizon. The Moon rises about 5:00 p.m. on the 22nd, and at 6:00 p.m. on the 23rd. At these times the Moon will resemble a huge orange Christmas ornament sitting slightly squashed on the horizon. One consequence of the exceptionally close Full Moon will be extra large tides just prior to Christmas. Check your 1999 BNS calendar for tide ranges and times.

A Telescope for Christmas?

In the last issue of this Newsletter, I gave my view concerning the

"astronomical telescopes" sold in department and camera stores. Here is a summary of my recommendations:

(1) Binoculars are not perceived as being as "scientific" or as attractive as a telescope, but binoculars are absolutely the first optical instrument to acquire for use in astronomy.

(2) A person should know the night sky quite well, and have at least 6 month's experience using binoculars on the sky before acquiring a telescope.

(3) There is not a retail outlet in Atlantic Canada which sells honest astronomical telescopes. A simple criterion is price: any astronomical telescope selling for less than \$800 is junk. For information on astronomical telescopes, check the magazines Sky & Telescope and Astronomy, and come to MAG (see below).

MAG

The Minas Astronomy Group (MAG) meets monthly (except July and August) on the second Saturday at seven (SSS)



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on the second floor of Huggins Science Hall at Acadia. Like the meetings of the Blomidon Naturalists Society, MAG meetings are open to anyone and MAG members are of all ages and backgrounds. Call Roy Bishop (542-3992).

2000 Natural History Calendar

The Blomidon Naturalists Society's Natural History Calendar for the Year 2000 will be available in October. This is the third year the BNS has produced a calendar. The BNS calendar is unique. It has features which can be found on no other calendar:

Thirteen colour photographs involving natural history relevant to the Kings County area.

Times of high tide and tidal range for Minas Basin for each day of the year.

Dozens of natural history notes and descriptions of walks available in the Kings County area.

Astronomical events for the year, including Moon phases, eclipses, times for the seasons, interesting groupings of bright planets and the Moon.

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Anniversaries of special or unusual events in Kings County or Nova Scotia generally, with a special emphasis on natural history.

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A calendar for the year 2001

A summary of the history, meetings and publications of the Blomidon Naturalists Society.

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<i>Eranthus</i>	<i>Lillium candidum</i>
<i>Fritillaria</i>	<i>Amaryllis</i>
<i>Galanthus</i>	Paperwhites
<i>Iris</i>	Rock-garden Daffodill
<i>Muscari</i>	Large-flowering crocus
<i>Scilla</i>	Other species of crocus



Blomidon Naturalists Society

1999 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

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 Is this a gift subscription? Yes No

Memberships are due January 1st, 1999

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	Ruth Newell	585-1355	542-2095	
	Fungi	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	
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Amphibians & Reptiles	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604	
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Seashore & Marine Life	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604	
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Indian Prehistory & Archeology	Ellis Gertridge		542-2816	
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