



Blomidon Naturalists Society

Spring 2003 – Volume 30 Number 1

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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The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a member of the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists and is an affiliate 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.

Visit us on the web

<www.go.ednet.ns.ca/~bns/home.htm>

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Photo by Richard Stern (p. 11)

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Contributions to the BNS newsletter are always welcome. Members are encouraged to share unusual or pleasurable nature stories through the pages of the BNS newsletter. If you have a particular area of interest, relevant articles and stories are always welcome. Send them to Dave Shutler by mail, c/o Department of Biology, Acadia University, Wolfville, NS B4P 2R6, or by e-mail, <dave.shutler@acadiau.ca>.

Upcoming newsletter deadlines

Summer, June 26, 2003

Fall, September 15, 2003

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The Changing of the Editor

With the change of seasons comes a change of editors for the Blomidon Naturalists Newsletter. Mike McCall has been editor for several years and he is passing on the reins. It is no small job to come up with new articles every quarter and patiently see that material comes in by the deadline. Mike has done a terrific job putting together our newsletter and adding appropriate editorials as well. Mike is our vice-president, and we haven't heard the last of him. A big round of applause goes out to Mike McCall.

Dave Shutler, a biology professor at Acadia, has graciously agreed to take on the job of editor. Dave is keen to get started, although he doesn't yet know how hard it is to get writers to meet their deadlines. Dave will welcome any suggestions or articles for the newsletter, and you can write to him at <dave.shutler@acadiu.ca>. Another big round of applause goes out to Dave Shutler.



Another Financially Successful Year

We ended the year, once again, on a sound financial footing thanks mostly to calendar sales. Profit from the calendars goes into our endowment fund, which contains almost \$16,000. Special thanks go out to those who made financial donations to the Society: Curtis Chipman, Arthur Irving, Minas Basin Pulp and Power Ltd., Jim Laceby of Blomidon Inn, Renee Adams, Brenda Coldwell, Celia Corcoran, Owen and Janice Stephens, Leslie and Neil Jordan, Jan Chipman, Edward and Evlyn Eagles, Gerald Porter, Richard and Janet Whitman, Sean Lombard, Tom Herman, Barbara Graham, Just Us! Coffee Roasters Co-Op, Robert Chivers, Glenys Gibson and Ian Paterson, and Driftwood Wildlife Association.

See pages 28–29 for the financial statements to August 31, 2002.

Harold Forsyth, treasurer

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Blomidon Naturalists Society

Spring 2003

Meetings

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. in the Beveridge Arts Centre, Room 244, Acadia University. Meetings will not be held in July and August. The arts centre is across Main Street from the Atlantic Theatre Festival parking lot, just west of downtown Wolfville. Everyone is welcome.

Monday, May 19, 2003 – Northern Bottlenose and Other Whales Inhabiting the Sable Gully and Other Marine Canyons on the Scotian Shelf, with Tonya Wimmer. Tonya is a masters student under Hal Whitehead at Dalhousie University and president of the Marine Animal Response Society. Her presentation will include the current threats to these cetaceans.

Monday, June 16, 6:00 p.m. – Tour of the K.C. Irving Environmental Science Centre and the Harriet Irving Botanical Gardens. Tour leaders: Don and Elaine Hendricks. Meet in the foyer of the main building on University Avenue, Wolfville. Note the early starting time to take advantage of the evening light.

Monday, September 15, 2003 – Cutting Trees While Restoring Acadian Old Growth Forests. Lance Bishop will explain forest harvesting alternatives, suitable for all species in Nova Scotia, with the goal of maintaining our forests well into the future. See the website of the North Mountain Old Forest Society <www.glinx.com/~djbishop/NMOFS>. Lance will follow up with a field trip on September 20.

June 13–15, 2003 – Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists Annual General Meeting to be held in Sydney at University College of Cape Breton and hosted by the Cape Breton Naturalists Society. Check the FNSN website <chebucto.ns.ca/Environment/FNSN/hp-fnsn.html> for details of talks and field trips, how to register, costs, etc.

Field Trips

Unless otherwise indicated, all field trips begin at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre (RTNC) on Wolfville's Front Street (look for the weird chimney in the NS Liquor Commission parking lot). Additional field trips may be announced at BNS meetings.

Wednesday, May 21, 2003, evening – Birds and Plants. A walk up the **Gaspereau River** from White Rock with Bernard Forsythe (902 542-2427). Meet at 6:30 p.m. at the RTNC.

Saturday, May 24, 2003 – Parks Are For People. A walk in **Blomidon Provincial Park**. Leader: Jim Wolford (902 542-9204). Meet at the RTNC at 9:15 a.m. or at the lower park gate at 10 a.m. We will walk from the campground area 2 km to the temporary pond with the very rare and beautiful Fairy Shrimps, etc., and to the lookoff toward Five Islands Park.

Saturday, June 7, 2003, evening – Reptiles and Amphibians. Leader: Derek Potter (902 582-1228), Herpetofaunal Atlas Coordinator. Meet at 6 p.m., room 308 of the Biology building, Acadia, for an orientation, then out to the field to see what can be found. Rubber boots or waders an asset.

Saturday, June 28, 2003 – Showy Lady's-slippers in Smileys Provincial Park. Leader: Carl Munden, an ardent botanist and photographer and author of *Native Orchids of Nova Scotia*. Meet at the RTNC at 9:30 a.m. or at 10:30 a.m. in Smileys Park (east of Brooklyn off Hwy 14) in the end parking lot of the picnic area (down near the tool shed). The Showy Lady's-slippers are situated in a very delicate ecosystem, and you will be sworn to secrecy. Bring camera, fly dope, suitable footwear for a short bog walk, and lunch to enjoy in the beautiful picnic grounds.

field trips – continued

Saturday, July 12, 2003 – Butterflies on the Wolfville/Grand Pre Dikelands, with Jean Timpa (902 542-5678). Meet at the RTNC at 1 p.m. and be prepared for hot sun. Bring sunscreen, hats, parasols, liquid (for drinking), and binoculars. Rain date: Sunday, July 13.

Saturday, July 19, 2003 – Hunt for Minerals on the Fundy Shore and Visit the Scots Bay Formation. Leader: geologist Ron Buckley (902 542-1815). Time and place of meeting will be advised. Wear sturdy footwear, preferably waterproof.

Saturday, September 20, 2003 – Forest Harvesting Alternatives with Lance Bishop (902 582-1208). After Lance's talk on September 15, we will have the opportunity to see what restoration forestry actually looks like in the forest. Meet at the RTNC at 9:30 a.m. or at 10 a.m. at the woodlot of Angelhoeve Farm, 1476 Gospel Woods Road. Go through Sheffield Mills and up the Glenmount Mountain Road. At the top, turn right. The farm is the third driveway on the left.

Sunday, September 28, 2003 – Life in the Minas Basin. Leader: Sherman Bleakney (902 542-3604). Meet at the Kingsport wharf bright and early at 7:45 a.m. Sherman will lead us across the mud flats on the lowest tide of the month to see some of the fascinating mud dwellers and sea creatures stranded in the tidal pools. Wear rubber boots and warm clothes.

Sunday, October 26, 2003 – After Life in the Minas Basin (if you don't like early mornings, try it after dark). Leader: Sherman Bleakney (902 542-3604). Meet at the Kingsport wharf at 5:30 p.m. Sherman will again introduce us to the fascinating life found in the Minas Basin at low tide, this time after dark. Wear rubber boots and even warmer clothes.

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Digiscoping

by Richard Stern, Kentville

More and more birders have discovered in the past few years that it is possible to take excellent photos of birds using a digital camera and a spotting scope as an ultra-telephoto lens. The basics of taking a good picture are the same, whether using a digital camera or traditional film: find a good subject, make sure the lighting and exposure are correct and the main subject is in focus, know your camera and the settings to use in the situation, try to use a fast enough shutter speed to avoid camera shake, frame the shot so that the composition is interesting, and take the picture! Most serious birders already own a spotting scope and tripod, and many already have a computer. So the only thing to get is the digital camera. Some software is also essential.

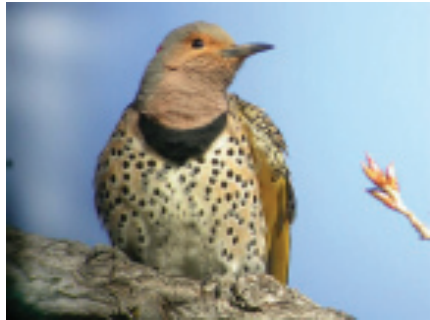
The better quality the spotting scope and eyepiece, and the better quality the camera lens, the better the final product will be. It is also important to minimize the distance between the camera lens and the eyepiece of the scope. It should be no more than one-eighth inch; otherwise, vignetting will occur in the edges and corners. It is also very helpful to use a camera in which the lens does not physically move in and out when focusing or zooming. The more pixels the camera has, the bigger the prints that can be made, and the better the photo will look on a large computer screen.

For these reasons, most digiscopers use the Nikon Coolpix series of digital camera, of which the higher-end models satisfy all these criteria. The one currently available is the CP-4500, which has 4 megapixels and a 4X optical zoom. Note that digital zoom is not relevant, as it enlarges the individual pixels as well as the whole image, thereby decreasing the clarity of the image.

The CP-4500, and most digital cameras, use CompactFlash cards as the equivalent of film. The cards come with various amounts of memory, at a cost of about 60 cents per megabyte at the present time. As with all electronic devices, prices are constantly falling, but the model you buy today will be obsolete tomorrow. With a 250-MB CompactFlash card, you can take about 200 pictures in fine, or high quality, mode and many

more in “normal” mode suitable for small prints or e-mailing. One of the nice things about a digital camera is that you can see the results instantly on the camera’s LCD screen, and any that are not “keepers” can be discarded. You can connect the camera to the USB port of a computer and download the contents of the card directly to the computer, or you can insert the card directly into a card reader in a USB or PC-card slot. Windows-XP and Mac-OS-X make the process very easy, as the card is instantly recognized as an extra drive.

The technique of actually getting a good shot is not easy, and there is quite a learning curve. Basically, if you can get a bird in the scope, and if it stays there long enough to attach the camera, focus, and take the shot, you have your picture! Remember that with a 20X eyepiece you are attaching the equivalent of at least a 2,000 mm lens, so the depth of field is almost nil, and accurate focusing



Northern Flicker – R. Stern

is critical. Also, light is lost within the barrel of the scope, and even the slightest movement of the camera/scope combination is magnified, so you have to have a very steady hand and a fast shutter speed. Some people use the self-timer, but I find that by the time the shutter fires, the bird has usually flown. Some people use an electronic cable release, but I find that it’s one more thing to get in the way and complicate the process.

Most experts in this technique say that if one in ten of your shots are keepers, you’re doing well. Needless to say, it is easier to take pictures of large stationary birds (e.g., herons, perched eagles, gulls) than small rapidly moving ones (e.g., warblers). I have discarded hundreds of pictures of fuzzy, out-of-focus, or poorly lit birds; tail ends of birds in the process of flying away; and empty branches. Most people also agree with my own observation that taking birds in flight is extremely difficult if not impossible.

Once you have a picture that you think looks good downloaded to the computer, it still often looks disappointing, so it is fairly essential to use

photo software to alter the contrast, crop, and carefully sharpen the subject (using the “unsharp mask” tool). Most cameras come with a scaled-down version of the standard image-editing program Adobe Photoshop. This is a highly complex computer program that takes a long time and much effort even to begin to learn, but is the standard for optimizing and manipulating digital photos. If you are submitting a digital photo to a records committee as a new provincial or Canadian record, etc., make sure you also submit the original unmanipulated file, preferably in “raw” format, too.

Once the pictures are in the computer, the numbers soon build up. In doing this for about 18 months, I now have hundreds of files that I have thought good enough to keep. I archive them from time to time by burning them onto CD-ROMs, and perform regular backups of my hard drive. I use a free program called IrfanView to catalogue and thumbnail the pictures on my computer.

Despite the learning curve and the difficulties outlined, I have found digiscoping to be challenging and fun, and it has enabled me to take many bird pictures that would otherwise be impossible. Many websites are devoted to this technique. The one that anyone interested (and anyone who just likes looking at great bird pictures) should join is Birds-pix, at <www.groups.yahoo.com>. Twenty or thirty pictures are posted a day, by digiscopers from all over the world, and many would do justice to any national magazine or coffee-table book. Another group, digiscopingbirds, also at <www.group.yahoo.com>, is more of a forum to discuss technique. Other useful websites include <www.shortcourses.com/how/digiscoping/digiscoping.htm> and <digiscopingukbirds.homestead.com/DigiscopingLinks.html>.

If anyone wants to see some of my own pictures, I put a few of them on <photos.yahoo.com/rb_stern>, where they can be viewed as small versions of the originals. The online digiscoping community is still relatively small, and there are many familiar names – it’s a bit like belonging to an online club. I had a great experience in England this year when I met up with one of those familiar names, and we spent a day birding and taking photos.

The photo of the flicker (p. 11) is a recent one from Kings County.

Trails for Nature Walks on the North Mountain

by Larry Bogan

Woodville Trails

The community of Woodville (Kings County) has for several years been getting permission from local landowners for walking privileges over their woods roads and trails. The system has grown to include about 10 km of trails. At least one trail was cut especially for hiking. The collection of trails covers an area that I have skied and walked extensively. Many years ago I led a BNS winter walk in the area. I have traced all the trails using GPS and mapped them. This information is now on our BNS website for all to use and enjoy: <www.go.ednet.ns.ca/~bns/trails/woodville.htm> or follow the trails link from the BNS home page.

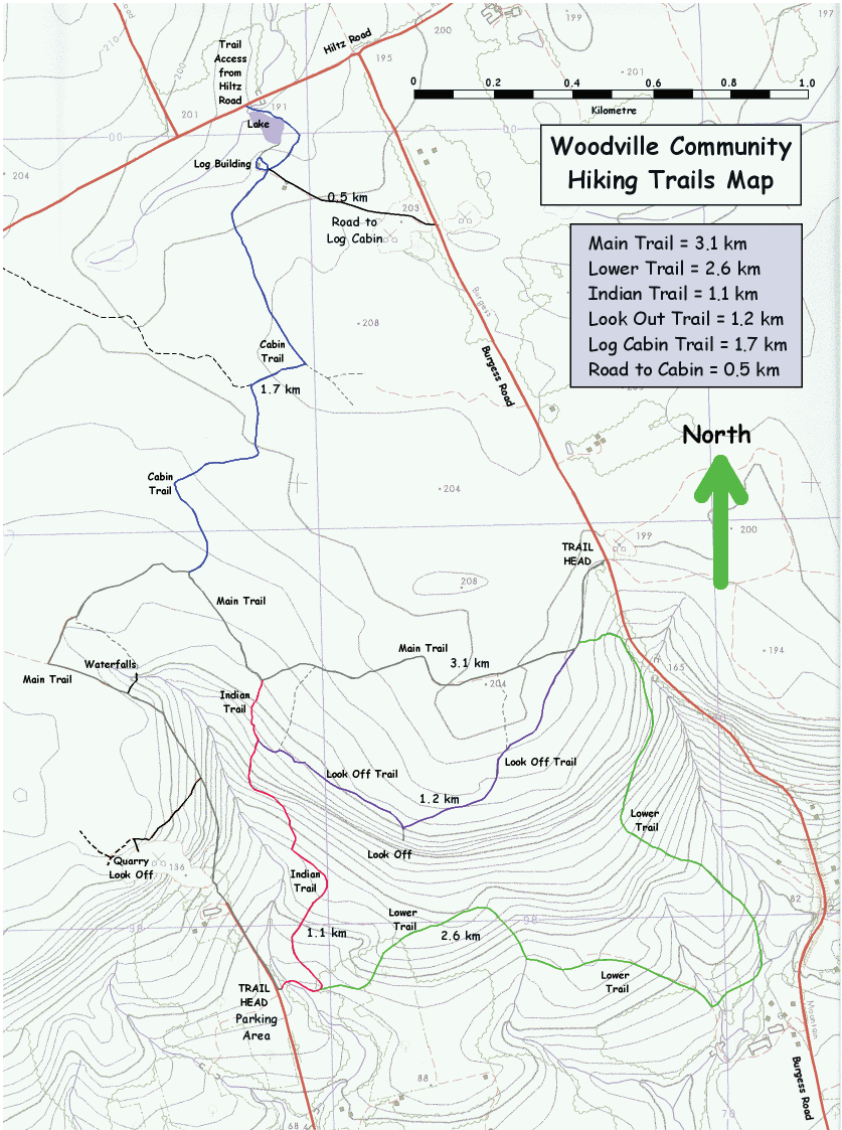
The trails lead to several interesting features, such as two lookoffs over the Annapolis Valley, a small waterfall, a pleasant pond, and many tiny streams. Part of the trail system traverses a Christmas tree farm, but most of it is in conifer woods, some of which have been clear-cut. I have often seen White-winged Crossbills, Ruffed Grouse, and Boreal Chickadees on walks in this area. Three trails climb/descend the North Mountain escarpment and one traverses the rolling base of the mountain. This latter trail crosses open fields and hardwoods more typical of the Valley and the mountain edge.

I would suggest you print a copy of the map to take with you on the hike if you plan to walk or ski the area. Take a compass or GPS if you are unfamiliar with the area.

The accesses to the trails are mainly from two locations. The easiest to find is off Burgess Mountain Road in the Lacey's tree farm on top of the mountain. The entrance is marked with a hiking sign (unless it has been vandalized). For those of you with GPS or a good topographical map of the area, the coordinates are N45°7.90' and W64°39.40'.

A trail head on the eastern side gives access to three trails. Take Bligh Road about 1.5 km north from Kinsman's Corners on Rte 221 and just

after the left turn take the first public road to the right and travel up toward the rock quarry. A short way up the road is a grassy area on the right with a sign to the trails. The main hiking trail goes on up the road past the quarry, and the other two lead off into the woods from the grassy area. The coordinates are N45°7.31' and W64°40.04'.



Black Rock Trails to Open Soon

On Saturday, June 28, 2003, the community of Black Rock will open its new set of walking trails. The opening will be at the trail head at the Black Rock Community and Recreation Centre – on the east side of the Black Rock Road just before the road descends into Canada Creek, and just after the Russia Road intersection. All interested walkers are welcome. There is currently no detailed map of the trails, but I plan to make one available before the opening.

This set of trails winds east of the Black Rock Road and connects with Balzer and Wall Streets. One trail follows Murray Brook down to the Fundy shore and along the shore to Canada Creek. Another will use Wall Street, cross Murray Brook, and follow Balzer Street to circle back to the Community Centre. There are four trails of varying length.

Other Trails for the BNS Website

I know there are many interesting locations for nature walks in our area. If you have some maps and information you would like to share (and have permission to share), please let me know and I will add them to the trails page on the BNS website. There are many descriptions of the Cape Split trail on the Internet from a scenic point of view (see links below), but I would appreciate a good description of the woods and landscape from a naturalist's point of view. You can see my Cape Split map at <www.go.ednet.ns.ca/~larry/ATVs/atvrally.htm>.

Cape Split on the Web

A guide and brief description:

<www.novatrails.com/trails/annapolis/capesplit/index.php>

Description of a hike in *Outdoor Nova Scotia*:

<www.outdoorns.com/features/capesplit.htm>

Mike Haynes on CBC Information Morning has a description:

<novascotia.cbc.ca/radio/infomorn/mikehikes/trail41.html>

Mike also has descriptions of other hikes in the region:

<novascotia.cbc.ca/radio/infomorn/mikehikes.html>

Follow the links to Nictaux Falls, the Dominion Atlantic Railway, and the Gaspereau River.

Winter 2002 Birds

Barbara and Pat Giffin

Many thanks to Mary Louise and Murray Conlin for the warm welcome they extended to many of our members who shared the sighting of the beautiful Carolina Wren that was supported by the Conlins from late October until it was last seen on Valentine's Day. Let's hope that our bitter winter convinced it to return to Carolina!

Stephen Petersen saw an Eastern Phoebe near the Gaspereau River bridge Jan 5.

Jean Timpa was hoping for an early spring when she heard and saw 60 Canada Geese over Patterson Hall Jan 7.

Members who wish to research species population trends may find the following websites helpful:

- The US Geological Survey Patuxent Wildlife Research Center – Bird Population Studies site <www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/>
- The National Audubon Society Christmas bird count site <www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/index.html>
- The North American Breeding Bird Survey site <www.mp2-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/>
- West Nile Virus details may be found at the Health Canada West Nile Virus Monitor: <www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pphb-dgspsp/wnv-vwn/index.html>
- The Nova Scotia North American Migration Count summary for 2002 is available in PDF on Sherman Williams' site: <www.glinx.com/~sherm/pdfs/NAMC-County_Sum02.pdf>.

John Belbin reported Jan 8 that he often sees as many as nine Chipping Sparrows at his feeders in Kingston; eight made it through the winter. John points out that according to *The Birds of Kings County* this species should have migrated. The same day, Jim Wolford reported that his backyard had an immature White-crowned Sparrow, as many as ten White-

throated Sparrows, 25+ Dark-eyed Juncos, two Song Sparrows, ten Mourning Doves, four Rock Doves, six Black-capped Chickadees, four American Crows, a few Blue Jays, four American Robins, a Northern Flicker, and a Downy Woodpecker. By the way, if anyone is looking for a project, Merritt Gibson has mentioned that *The Birds of Kings County* needs to be updated and revised.

In Wolfville, Jan 11, Sheila McCurdy saw a Northern Mockingbird in her window planter eating berries that were intended as a decoration. Jim Wolford may have seen the same bird at his feeders Jan 18.



On Jan 13 we saw 30 Purple Sandpipers, three male Red-breasted Mergansers, and one Surf Scoter at Margaretsville.

Jan 18, Merritt Gibson reported two female Red-winged Blackbirds had been at his feeders in Canning for several days and two Pine Warblers were along the Canaan Road. Merritt also noticed Common Ravens building a nest on Main Street, Canning. This seems to be an example of a traditionally shy species becoming tolerant of humans out of necessity. In the *Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*, David Sibley writes, “Common Ravens were probably more common in eastern North America when the forests were intact, but they became much more numerous in eastern North America in the 1990s than at any other time in the 20th century” (p. 415). It would be nice to know why.

Throughout January and February Jim Wolford reported Red-tailed Hawk flights that suggested pairing and courtship; in March serious nest-building activity began at Acadia's U Hall. We assume high winds dispersed the nesting material a number of times during March, as material seen on one day would be gone the next. Is it possible that the building pair could not agree on the nesting material? Finally, in March, Judy Tufts reported an adult on the nest. *The Life of Birds* (Welty and Baptista) describes the contents of one Red-tailed Hawk's nest: "2 kg of odds and ends [-] 361 stones, 15 nails, 146 pieces of bark, 14 bamboo splinters, 3 pieces of hard dirt, 30 pieces of horse manure, several rags and bones, 1 piece of glass, and 4 pieces of inner tubes."

In mid-January Jim Wolford reported that George Forsyth witnessed in Port Williams what might be considered a birding example of role reversal as two Short-eared Owls harassed a light-phase Rough-legged Hawk. We have often wondered why this doesn't happen more often; for example, crows harassing an eagle or hawk seems suicidal. Perhaps we should give the larger birds credit for deducing that crows would make a poor meal, so why bother! Very likely these same Short-eared Owls were being seen on a regular basis by Meg Scheid and Patricia Bernier on the dikelands south of Port Williams. Don MacNeill also saw a single Short-eared Owl at Grand Pre during January.

Jan 23, Anne Woolaver reported: "Had the rarish experience of watching a large, very dapper looking mature Peregrine Falcon chow down on a pigeon (or Mourning Dove? no long tail feathers in evidence) this afternoon, in the 'usual tree' in Blomidon. No leg band(s) visible. It did some vigorous plucking initially, before pulling off and dropping a leg, but hadn't made much more progress before 2 crows appeared and started getting in its face. Soon after this, the Peregrine took off with its prize to find a more peaceful spot to finish the meal. Meanwhile, the Tree Sparrows and juncos at the feeding area nearby had pretty much ignored it while it was eating, probably figuring they'd dodged the bullet for another day!" Anne also reported two adult Peregrines at Blomidon Jan 27. Mark Elderkin of DNR responded by saying, "Last year [2002] we recorded no less than nine pairs of Peregrines nesting on the Nova Scotia side of the Bay of Fundy." Thus the recovery of the Peregrine in eastern Canada continues and is going very well indeed.

Don and Elaine Hendricks and Jim Wolford each saw four Purple Finches at their feeders Jan 24, in different locations in Wolfville.

Despite poor weather on the second weekend, the 12th Annual Eagle Watch, held the weekends of Jan 25 and Feb 1, was a success. This is understandable when we examine some statistics recorded by Jim Wolford on Feb 9 during the 23rd Annual Cyril K. Coldwell Eagles/Raptors Count: 425 Bald Eagles, 83 Red-tailed Hawks, six Rough-legged Hawks, a possible Broad-winged Hawk, two Sharp-shinned Hawks, possibly two Merlins, one Peregrine Falcon, one Short-eared Owl, one Northern Shrike, 25 Mallards, hundreds of American Black Ducks, eight Common Mergansers, ten American Robins, over 200 Horned Larks, 125 Snow Buntings, and 20 Lapland Longspurs.

Jan 27, Jim Wolford saw 20 American Robins, 20 Cedar Waxwings, and 20 European Starlings, all feeding on “wild” fruits such as multiflora rose hips in his yard. Dean Hatt reported seeing a Golden-crowned Kinglet in his New Minas yard. In Port Williams, Connie Millett saw two Northern Cardinals (1m, 1f) at her back-yard feeder. We have had Brown Creepers at our suet feeders this winter too, although Bob Bancroft might consider this abnormal Brown Creeper activity. It is *not* surprising what we animals will do when hungry.



During January, Sheila Hulford saw 15 different species at her feeders in Tremont, including a Song Sparrow. She also saw a Northern Shrike in North Williamston.

Saxon Street continues to be well worth the trip; for example, near the end of January, Jim Wolford saw 30 Snow Buntings. Later, Feb 12, he

was surprised to see 25 Lapland Longspurs that were perched in a tree and eventually joined by 15 Horned Larks.

Feb 19, Jim Wolford reported two light-morph Rough-legged Hawks and a Red-tailed Hawk between Greenwich and Port Williams. Another Rough-legged Hawk, a dark morph, was in the Canard Valley (south of the river). On Mar 2, he saw a Merlin on the Acadia campus.

Richard Stern noted that 2,245 robins had been reported in a sample of Nova Scotia Christmas Bird Counts. Although thousands of American Robins overwinter in Nova Scotia, they are invariably reported as a forerunner of spring. On Mar 7, Avril and John Harwood reported a more convincing sign of spring – copulating mature Bald Eagles at Woodside. They also saw 12 Cedar Waxwings, the first they had seen all winter.

Mar 8, Jim Foster reported a mysterious bird in Blomidon that was all bluish-gray with darker marks. Jim Wolford thought it might be an immature Gray Jay and asked, “Can anyone out there comment on whether juvenile Gray Jays might be well fledged by this time of year?” Very early nest building is normal for Gray Jays, usually when the snow is still very deep; two to five eggs appear in the March–May time frame, with incubation taking 16–18 days (*The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds*; *The Birder’s Handbook*). Also, on page 126, vol. 2 of the National Geographic Society *Book of Birds*, we see, “This strange bird nests when winter still grips the land and may incubate in a temperature far below zero.” Therefore, Mar 8 may not be ahead of schedule – and Jim Foster may have seen a juvenile Gray Jay.

During February, Sheila Hulford added 12 Brown-headed Cowbirds, Evening Grosbeaks, and Purple Finches to the list of birds visiting her feeders.

March winds have made the raptors’ nest building difficult (the many attempts by the Red-tailed Hawks on Acadia’s U Hall, for example). Brenda and Bill Thexton reported that the Bald Eagle nest at Muskrat Farm Marsh has blown down. The Thextons also reported a possible incubating raven on the nest on Hwy 1 at the eastern boundary of Wolfville. Jim Wolford reported a Bald Eagle, possibly incubating, on a nest in Greenwich. Mar 25, Judy Tufts reported, “This morning I noticed

there was a Red-tailed Hawk sitting on a nest on the west corner of the ledge above the entrance to Acadia Univ. Convocation Hall.”

Responding to our question about the derivation of the word “peeps,” Judy Tufts wrote, “Peeps consist of members of the *Calidris* family, which include the White-rumped and Baird’s Sandpipers, knots, Purple Sandpipers, and stints. As you can see, quite an extensive group.”

Judy reported Yellow-shafted Flickers (1m, 2f) at her feeders in January and March, and in March there was an Eastern Towhee at the Frank’s feeders in Falmouth.

Marian Fulton simultaneously saw one each of Common Grackle, Red-winged Blackbird, and Northern Flicker and several Purple Finches Mar 22 at her home in Hantsport.

Judy Tufts wrote, “One adult Killdeer is back on its breeding grounds across the road from our house – average date for Killdeer to return here is Mar 23, so it is right on target.”

Mar 24, Brenda and Bill Thexton saw about 400 Canada Geese in the area of the Canning aboiteau. Of the many sightings of Canada Geese Mar 25, Judy Tufts saw 300 on the stubble fields to the east of the Canard River. Merritt Gibson saw approximately 1,000 along the Wellington dikes, and Judy found 1,400–1,500 foraging on the fields between the Wellington dikes on the east and Rte 358 on the west along the Canard River. She reported a Red-winged Blackbird in Canning.

Mar 26, John Belbin (+12°C in Kingston) saw Red-winged Blackbirds on his way to Cottage Cove and Margaretsville, where there were six Harlequin Ducks, four Common Loons, three Bufflehead, eight Surf Scoters, two Red-necked Grebes, 15 Common Eider, two Red-breasted Mergansers, three Common Mergansers, 29 Canada Geese, five Brant, eight Black Scoters, and four White-winged Scoters.

Eastern Annapolis Valley Weather

Winter 2002/03

by Larry Bogan, Cambridge Station, NS

What a winter to remember! Most of us thought it would never end. Was it that unusual? The weather data in the table below tell the story for December 2002 and January and February 2003.

	Mean temperature (deg.C)	Snowfall (cm)	Total Precip. (mm)	Heating degree-days	Bright sunshine (h)
December (42 yr. average)	-2.8 (-2.2)	43.4 (56)	129 (127)	646 (624)	81 (59)
January (42 yr. average)	-8.3 (-5.3)	53.6 (70)	70 (121)	815 (725)	68 (76)
February (42 yr. average)	-8.1 (-5.2)	36.3 (60)	97 (99)	731 (656)	107 (101)
Season (42 yr. average)	-6.3 (-4.2)	133.3 (186)	296 (347)	2192 (2005)	256 (236)

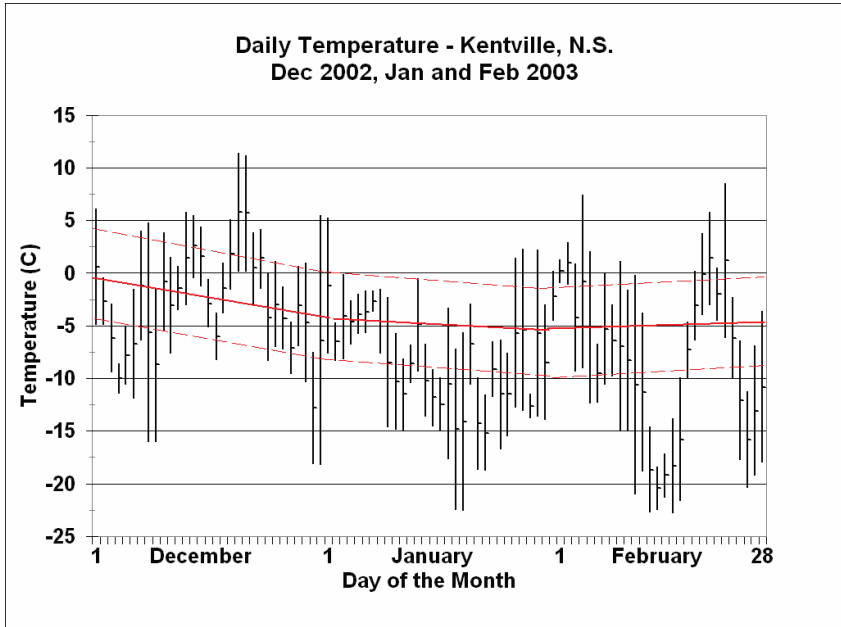
Source: Food & Horticultural Research Centre, Kentville, NS.

Temperature

The most obvious difference between this winter and the average over the last 42 years is that it was much colder. Every month had a below-average temperature, both January and February being 3°C lower. Deviation from the average is common, but not by three degrees. The whole season was 2.1°C below average, and as a result the number of heating degree-days* for the winter was 9 percent above average. I certainly used more wood to heat my home than in most years.

* Heating degree-days: the sum over a given period of time of the difference between 18°C and the mean temperature for each day below 18°C. The heat lost by a typical heated building is proportional to this number.

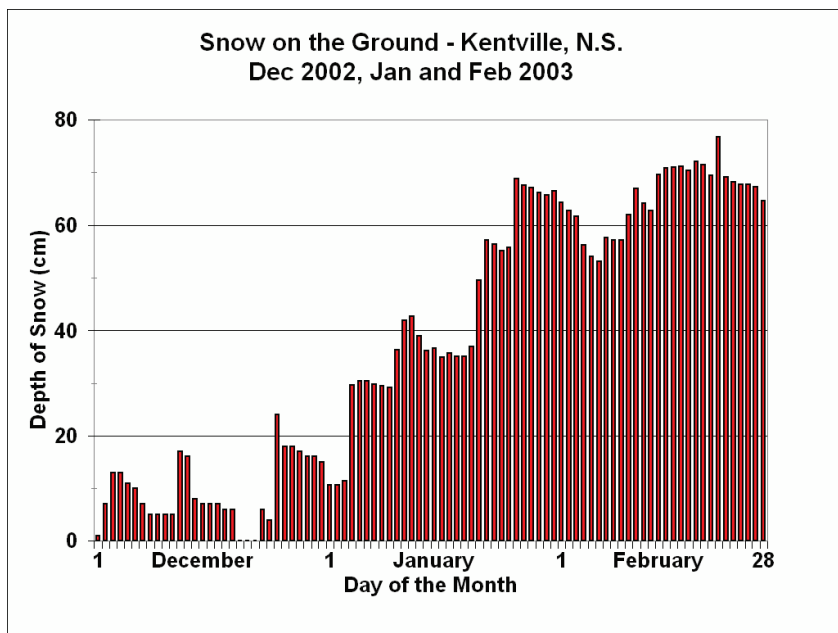
I have included a graph of the daily temperature for the winter showing the maximum, minimum, and mean for each day. The smooth lines show the average expectation in temperatures. Although I have not included March in this winter group, the records for that month show it also to have been colder than average by 1°C.



Precipitation

By the end of February, I was having trouble moving the snow away from my driveway, so I remember lots of snow. Indeed, the graph of snow cover shows that the snow accumulated and stayed with none of the usual large snow melts. The graph ends at the end of February, but the 60+ cm depths of snow stayed during all of March. There was no January thaw, which normally comes in the second week of that month, to reduce the snow depth. After Christmas (in the Annapolis Valley), the ground by the bird feeder was continuously covered until April. The surprising thing is that the snowfall for the winter was less than three-quarters of the average. Total precipitation (rain plus snow) was 85 percent of average.

Most readers will remember the flooding at the end of March caused by very high rainfall plus the melting of accumulated snow. More on that in my spring weather report.



Sunshine

The winter was as bright (or dim, depending on your point of view) as most winters and, in fact, we had 8 percent more sunshine hours than average. This did not seem to help my firewood pile, even though I have some solar heating. January was the dull month, while December was sunnier despite its shorter days. Of course January is when the solar heat is much more valuable because it is colder then. February was nicer, with 7 percent more sun than expected.

What's In The Sky?

by Roy Bishop

New Moon: May 31, June 29, July 29, August 27

Full Moon: May 16, June 14, July 13, August 12

Summer begins on Saturday, June 21 at 16:10 (ADT)

Two Total Lunar Eclipses

2003 is unusual in that there are two total eclipses of the Moon. Moreover, all phases of both eclipses are visible from Nova Scotia – assuming clear skies!

By the time you read this article the first eclipse, on May 15/16, will likely be history. The Moon begins to enter the dark umbra of Earth's shadow at 23:03 ADT on Thursday, May 15. Total eclipse extends from 00:14 to 01:07, and the Moon is clear of the umbra by 02:18. The best time for a quick look is about 10 minutes past midnight. Use binoculars to fully experience the beauty of the event.

The second total lunar eclipse takes place in November. On the evening of Saturday, November 8, the full Moon begins to enter the umbra of Earth's shadow at 19:32 AST. Total eclipse extends from 21:07 to 21:31, and the Moon is clear of the umbra by 23:05. The best time for a quick look is shortly after 21:00.

Standing on the Galaxy

The Milky Way galaxy, of which our Sun is one of billions of stars, is a vast, flattened disk of stars, gas, and dust. From our position within the plane of the galaxy, our edge-on view of its disk is the foggy band of stars we call the Milky Way.

However, as darkness falls on May evenings the Milky Way is missing from the sky. May is the one time of the year when, as night begins, the Milky Way lies near the horizon, and the ground under our feet lies nearly in the plane of our galaxy. We are then literally standing on our galaxy,

which is spread out horizontally under our feet, and our heads are directed out of the north side of our galaxy. This is why the evening sky in May is relatively star-poor compared to the evening skies of February or August. It is also why spring evenings are the best time to see many other galaxies beyond our own. To see other galaxies you need a telescope, but at least on May evenings the dust in our own galaxy does not hide them.

Actually, Nova Scotia is too far north for the plane of the galaxy to lie exactly on the horizon. To stand perfectly upright on the galactic plane on a May evening you have to be at latitude 27 degrees north – in Florida, for example.

A Star Party

The public is invited to observe the Sun and stars with amateur astronomers on Saturday, August 2 (9:30 a.m. to midnight), at Smileys Provincial Park near Brooklyn. The event is Nova East, the annual camping/observing weekend sponsored by the Halifax Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, Minas Astronomy Group of Wolfville, and Nova Central Astronomy Club of Truro. For more information contact Roy Bishop (902 542-3992, <rg@ns.sympatico.ca>)

Perseid Meteors

This annual shower will be at its best on the evenings of August 11, 12, and 13. Unfortunately, the Moon will be full on those nights and only the brightest meteors will be noticeable.

A Martian is Coming!

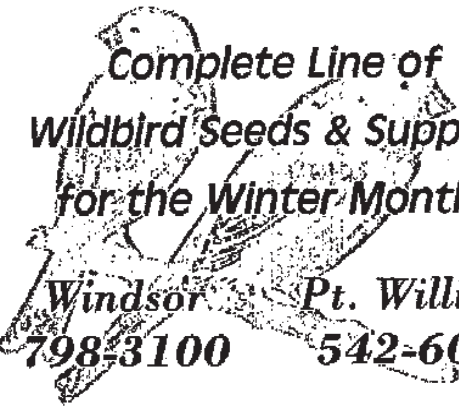
Mars is at opposition and thus close to Earth at intervals of just over two years. Because of its elliptical orbit Mars comes especially close to Earth at intervals of about 16 years. Not only is 2003 one of the special 16-year oppositions, but on August 27 Mars will be closer to Earth than at any time in recorded history! Look low in the southeast (about 11 p.m. early in August, about 9 p.m. late in August) for a very bright, slightly orange, steady point of light. Mars will be unmistakable. Mars will continue to dominate the evening sky throughout September.

Astronomy in the BNS Calendar

Most calendars limit their astronomical information to the phases of the Moon. The Blomidon Naturalists Society calendar is unusual in that it contains many predictable highlights of the natural history of the sky.


For each month an astronomical event is described in the lower right-hand corner of the page. The times of sunrise and sunset are given for the beginning of the month, and the change in the length of daylight during the month is described. Also given are the day in each month that the Moon is closest to Earth (perigee); the times that the Full Moon rises during evening twilight; the times of the equinoxes and solstices; the dates of strong meteor showers; the days on which bright planets are at opposition; the dates of the earliest and latest sunrises and sunsets for the year; the days on which Earth is closest and farthest from the Sun; and the time and range of the daytime high tide in southern Minas Basin.

There is much more in this unique calendar. Anyone with any interest in natural history should have a copy.



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Blomidon Naturalists Society
Statements of Operation and Surplus

Year Ended August 31	2002	2001
Revenue		
Advertising	\$ 475	\$ 725
Books	515	250
Calendar	7,748	9,731
Crests	0	25
Donations	2,674	2,629
Federation dues in	195	220
Grants: Career Summer Placement	0	1,824
Fly Project	9,775	9,775
Herpetology Atlas	30,200	14,500
HST rebate	1,228	1,260
Interest	240	109
Membership dues	2,781	3,213
Other	102	35
	<u>55,933</u>	<u>44,296</u>
Expenditures		
Administration	180	82
Awards and Meetings	191	738
Books	229	114
Calendar	6,899	7,021
Crests	0	14
Federation dues out	220	180
Fly Project	10,235	9,315
Herpetology Atlas	30,209	9,688
Memberships	30	142
Nature Centre	428	219
Newsletter	2,628	2,193
Other	0	377
Summer Student	94	2,275
	<u>51,343</u>	<u>32,358</u>
Excess of revenue over expenses	<u>\$ 4,590</u>	<u>\$11,938</u>
<hr/>		
Surplus, beginning of year	\$38,617	\$26,679
Excess of revenue over expenses	4,590	11,938
Surplus, end of year	<u>\$43,207</u>	<u>\$38,617</u>

Blomidon Naturalists Society

2003 Membership Fees and Publications Prices

Each member of the Blomidon Naturalists Society receives four issues of the BNS newsletter annually. Because BNS is a registered charity, the society issues receipts for all donations. The membership fee itself is not tax deductible. Members may also join the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists through BNS and will receive FNSN News, the federation's newsletter. FNSN membership is not tax deductible.

Please send cheques or money orders in payment of membership fees and for publication purchases to

Harold Forsyth
10120 Highway 1, RR 2, Wolfville, NS B4P 2R2

No.	Membership classification	Price	Total
_____	Individual adult	\$15.00	\$ _____
_____	Family (number of family members _____)	18.00	\$ _____
_____	Junior (under 16 years)	1.00	\$ _____
_____	Federation of NS Naturalists membership	5.00	\$ _____
_____	Tax-deductible donation		\$ _____
_____	2002 BNS calendar (\$12 + post.)	13.50	\$ _____
_____	<i>Natural History of Kings County</i> (\$15 + post.)	17.00	\$ _____
_____	Annotated checklist of Kings County birds	6.00	\$ _____
_____	Blomidon Naturalist crest	5.00	\$ _____
	Total		\$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

If this is gift subscription, please state from whom:

Membership fees are due January 1 of the current year

Sources of 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
Mosses & Ferns	John Pickwell		792-1830
Birds – General	Bernard Forsythe		542-2427
	Richard Stern	678-4742	678-1975
	Gordon & Judy Tufts		542-7800
	Jim Wolford	585-1684	542-9204
	Jean Timpa		542-5678
Hawks & Owls	Bernard Forsythe		542-2427
Mammals	Tom Herman	585-1469	678-0383
Amphibians & Reptiles	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604
	Jim Wolford	585-1684	542-9204
Seashore & Marine Life	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604
	Jim Wolford	585-1684	542-9204
	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

