



Blomidon Naturalists Society

Fall 2003 – Volume 30 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)

BNS Executive

President	George Forsyth	542-7116
Past president	Merritt Gibson	582-7569
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	Don Hendricks	542-4005
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	Stephen Petersen	542-4861
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The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a member of the Sable Island Preservation Trust and 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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and Stephen Petersen (cover [female Pigeon Horntail], pp. 8, 9)

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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 Jean Timpa by mail (25 Gaspereau Ave., #1, Wolfville, NS B4P 2C5) or by e-mail <jtimpa@ns.sympatico.ca>.

Upcoming newsletter deadlines

Winter, December 15, 2003

Editorial Board

Chair: Jean Timpa (902 542-5678)

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Editorial

In response to my first editorial plea, several good people came forth to take over the business of finding ads for the BNS newsletter. Thank you to Liz Vermeulen (at 902 681-0061 for anyone who has a business and would like to buy an ad, or for any member who knows of any business that would like to buy one) and to Gary Ness, who is enthusiastic to take over what was once the Conservation Committee but now, having a new lease on life, has been renamed the Issue Committee. He is full of ideas, eager to get going, and wants helpers! Any takers, please call Gary at 542-7386. You don't have to be a scientist or formally learned to be welcome. So be brave and, as the young ones say, go for it!

This is a good beginning, but we still need more new blood. There is nothing wrong with the old guard around here, but youthful progression in any group is a very good thing. At our October 15 meeting we will have the annual election of officers. This year could be a fairly big turnover election, as most officers have been serving two or more years already and probably are ready to move on to the executive of some other struggling organization. We have the usual table executive and six members-at-large, so if any of these positions would interest you please call one of us on the nominating committee: George Forsyth (542-7116), Merritt Gibson (582-7569), or Jean Timpa (542-5678).

We are in serious need of a chair for the Program Committee, a non-elected position. As past president Merritt Gibson just said to me on the phone, "Without a Program Committee and a program there will be *no* BNS!" There will be lots of assistance for whoever takes over the chair.

We also need "somebodies" to help with the Robie Tufts Young Naturalist Award, which should be dealt out each year, not just sporadically. Also, this BNS newsletter is yours, not mine. Being editor does give me the right to determine its content by any means, and I would really like to hear from you as to what kind of articles you would like to see in it: special columns? poetry related to nature? jokes related to nature? something for the small fry? reports from committees? areas of interest we are missing? snippets of curiosity or observations? interesting bits from other natural history newsletters lifted by permission? Or do we keep ours quite local?

How far afield do you want to go? Letters to the editor? Call me at 542-5678 or e-mail me at <jtimpa@ns.sympatico.ca>.

Thanks to all of you who made last issue an excellent one, done up in a bit of a hurry, and to all of you who have been able to contribute to this September 2003 issue, be it articles or licking stamps! Any time you spend contributing is a big help to the editorial committee.

Jean Timpa, editor

NOTICE

2004 BNS Calendar

The BNS Calendar Committee – Merritt Gibson, Sherman Williams, and Roy Bishop – is once again diligently at work putting together another 12 months of tide tables, astronomy facts and figures, notes of a natural history and historical nature, and wonderful photographs of interest to nature lovers. It is one of the few calendars that reads like a book. The price is uncertain yet, but it will likely be in the usual \$12 range. It is with great anticipation that it will come out around the first of November. So keep a space in your Christmas packages and check your lists twice – at least!

NOTICE

Christmas Bird Count 2003

Call the compiler, Ian Paterson (902 582-1273), if you would like a designated area or would like to be assigned with another group. Everyone is welcome to participate. The count tally and chowder supper will happen after dusk at the Acadia biology building.

Blomidon Naturalists Society

Fall 2003

Meetings

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings are held on the third Monday of each month 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, October 20, 2003 – Marine Protected Areas, with Dr. John C. Roff, of the Environmental Sciences Department, Acadia University.

Monday, November 17, 2003 – Studying Nova Scotia Mosquitoes and Ticks – a Work in Progress. Jeff Ogden, entomologist with the Department of Natural Resources Forest Insects Lab in Shubenacadie, will give us an update on West Nile and Lyme diseases in Nova Scotia.

Monday, December 15, 2003 – Geology of the Sea Floor, with Cliff Stanley, of the Department of Geology, Acadia University.

Monday, January 19, 2004 – Annual Show and Tell – open to all. Bring along slides, pictures, specimens, collections, fossils, videos, computer stuff, favourite books and magazines, or anything that might be of interest to fellow naturalists. Or just come to see other people's stuff. **Note different venue:** 7:30 p.m. in rooms 308 and 325 in Patterson Hall, the Acadia biology building, University Avenue, Wolfville.

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.

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. (or at the RTNC at 7 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. You might want to bring a field guide such as Merritt Gibson's just-released *Seashores of the Maritimes*.

Sunday, October 19, 2003 – Hike the Woodville Trails on the North Mountain, with Larry Bogan (902-678-0446). Meet at the RTNC at 12:30 p.m. or the Trinity United Church parking lot at Kinsmans Corner on Route 221 in Woodville at 1 p.m. We will walk from below the North Mountain up to a lookoff, then to a cabin by a lake. The walk is along wood roads through a mix of hardwood and softwood. Expect beautiful fall colours. Sturdy, water-resistant footwear is recommended.

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. (or the RTNC at 4:45 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.

Saturday, November 8, 2003 – Total Eclipse of the Moon. Roy Bishop (902 542-3992) will host an evening of viewing the lunar eclipse as well as other astronomical features, such as the Andromeda Galaxy, Mars, and star clusters. Meet at 8 p.m. at the old parking lot at Grand Pre National Historic Park. The Full Moon enters the dark umbra of Earth's shadow at 7:32 p.m. and reaches totality shortly after 9 p.m. Bring binoculars or scopes and wear warm clothes.

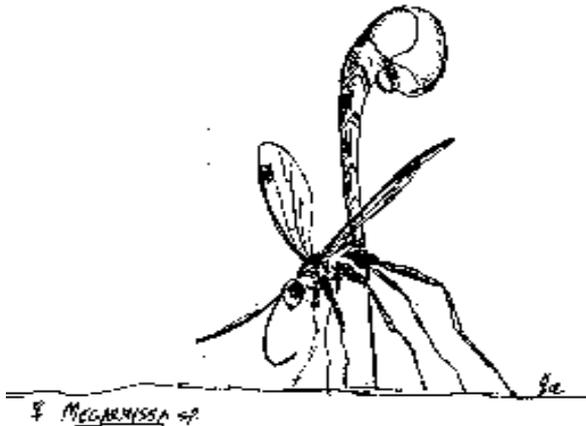
Sunday, November 23, 2003 – Identifying Dormant Trees and Shrubs. Join George Forsyth (902 542-7116) for a stroll up the picturesque Hennigar's Nature Trail and learn how to identify trees and shrubs out of season. Meet at the RTNC at 1 p.m., or at 1:15 p.m. at Hennigar's Farm Market, half a kilometre west of Wolfville on Highway 1.

Saturday, December 20, 2003 – Wolfville Christmas Bird Count. For details, see notice on page 5.

Wasps

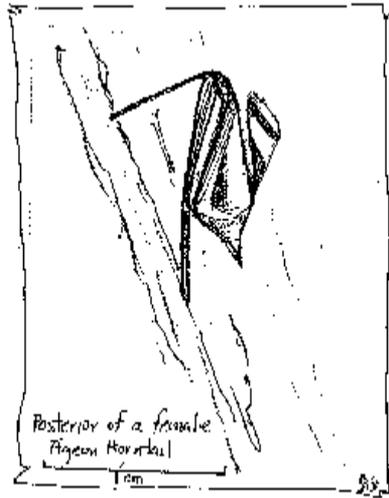
by Stephen Petersen

My dad told me that you learn something new every day, if you're not careful. If that is true then I have had a very reckless weekend! In front of my house in Gaspereau there is an old maple tree that appears to be on its way out. It is leafy and lush during the summer but the leaves turn colour and head south weeks before the rest of the Valley. This trait is similar to a maple behind Patterson Hall in Wolfville that, as many observed last September, was host to a stunning display of ovipositing (egg laying) Giant Ichneumon wasps. At the time, I wrote up a Nature Notes (*Advertiser* v18:39) describing how the female Giant Ichneumons drill deep into a hardwood tree to lay an egg in a Pigeon Horntail larva. The ichneumon egg then hatches and the developing larva feeds on its host, the horntail larva. This in itself seemed like a great story but it gets even better when the Pigeon Horntail life cycle is examined. And that brings us back to the tree in front of my house.



Autumn mornings in the fall are made for sitting on the front porch and drinking coffee, which is what my partner and I were doing when we saw a large insect heading for our maple. Being avid naturalists

and having finished our coffee, we investigated and saw a Giant Ichneumon exploring the bark, then flying higher into the tree and out of sight. The show was over . . . or was it? On closer inspection of the tree trunk we noticed several strange cases hanging from the tree by a thin stalk. On closer examination they looked a lot like the back end of an insect. In fact, when a buzzing sound in the grass attracted our attention to a female Pigeon Horntail we noticed that the hanging cases looked exactly like her posterior. Some research was needed to solve this puzzle.



It turns out that both of these insects are in the order Hymenoptera, which contains wasps, bees, and ants. Giant Ichneumons (*Megarhyssa macrurus*) are in the family Ichneumonidae and look very much like enormous wasps, with the narrow waist and yellow and black markings that characterize typical wasps. The Pigeon Horntails (*Tremex columba*, family Siricidae) are also very large, yellow and black Hymenoptera, but they lack the narrow waist (similar to sawflies, which are also Hymenoptera). Both Giant Ichneumons and Pigeon Horntails are most often seen in the fall when the females of both species are searching for places to lay their eggs.

The female Pigeon Horntail lays 300 to 500 eggs in hardwood trees. Each egg is laid individually, and fungal spores from a special pouch at the base of the ovipositor are laid with the egg. The fungus (*Daedalea unicolor*) grows into the moist wood, softening it by breaking down the wood fibres. The horntail larva is able to chew a tunnel through the wood, it digests the fungi, and the wood is passed out as waste. The Pigeon Horntail will take two to three years tunnelling (longer if the wood dries) before it is ready to emerge. The larva pupates near the surface of the wood in a silk cocoon, and the adult must chew out the remaining three-quarters to one inch to the surface. In the tree in front of my house the head of one dead adult could be seen in a hole that wasn't finished; evidently if the pupa is

too deep the adult won't be able to chew the distance. Those that make it out and haven't been parasitized by the Giant Ichneumon wasp mate in the treetops during the summer and come down to lay eggs. The female usually dies after laying her last egg, with her ovipositor still stuck in the tree. When something eats her, the ovipositor and posterior remain stuck in the tree and resemble a pupal case. Our tree had the remains of at least five females. Most of the mystery was solved; now if I could only find out why they are called Pigeon Horntails – are they eaten by pigeons, as big as pigeons, sound like pigeons?

The Audubon Society guide to North American insects and spiders puts the number of hymenoptera in the world at more than 108,000 species, 17,100 of them here in North America. They are an amazing group with incredible diversity, and Nova Scotia seems to be especially rich (recall Cory Sheffield's BNS talk about the diversity of Nova Scotia bees). So this fall and in the future, look closely at the trees that turn colour first in September.



Pigeon Horntail (female)

Stephen invites you to visit his website:

<http://ace.acadiau.ca/science/biol/Stephen/stephen_dp_home.htm>

A natural history link takes you to photos of the wasps in this article. And you can view some of Stephen's art on his site.

BOOK REVIEW

The Beach Explorer's Companion

by Tony Erskine

Seashores of the Maritimes, by Merritt Gibson, illustrations by Twila Robar-DeCoste, Nimbus Publishing, Halifax, 2003, \$19.95, 346 pages, soft cover, ISBN: 1551094282.

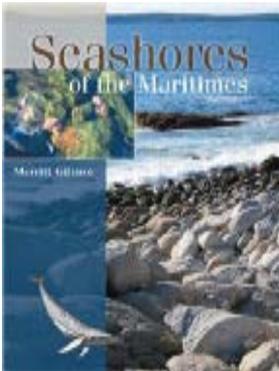
The first step in understanding how animals and plants fit into our natural world is to recognize what you see. Author Merritt Gibson has known this

since grade 4, when he started a bird club and a “pretty rock club” among his schoolmates (I was one). As the only Boy Scout in Wolfville to earn the naturalist badge in our time, he went on to spend 35 years teaching biology and writing books to help others learn about nature.

To keep things simple, *Seashores of the Maritimes* presents groups of related animals or plants – marine mammals, birds, fishes, invertebrates, flowering plants, and seaweeds – with point-by-point definitions of selected species or groups of species. I’d have preferred an arrangement by shore habitat; however, the species descriptions indicate the habitats where each is found, so eager learners are able to work out the habitat groupings themselves.

One caution: the title might lead one to expect a focus on the varied shores (habitats) of the Maritimes, rather than on the organisms (animals and plants) found there. In this respect, the title of Gibson’s earlier book, *Nature Notes for Nova Scotians: Seashores* – of which the present one

is described as “an improved and expanded version” – is more descriptive of the content. But this is a minor detail. As soon as you open it, you’ll understand what the book is about.



Seashores of the Maritimes is suitable for beginners who are intrigued by something they saw and want to learn more, and packed with enough information to instruct others who’ve already made a start. Get a copy for yourself, your kids, or your grandchildren, and put it to use.

Tony Erskine, a life-long naturalist living in Sackville, New Brunswick, has a Research Scientist Emeritus appointment with the Canadian Wildlife Service.

[Note: this review is adapted with permission from the Fall 2003 issue of *Nature Canada*]

**Trails for Nature Walks on
the North Mountain - Part 2
The Black Rock Community Trails
by Larry Bogan**

In the Spring 2003 issue of this newsletter, I described the Woodville Community trails and included a trail map. Since then the Black Rock Community has had a successful opening of their trails, and a trail map is available (see page 14). Location information and a printable trail map are available at the BNS website: <www.go.ednet.ns.ca/~bns/trails/>.

The layout of the Black Rock trails is such that all of the four loop trails start and finish at the Black Rock Community Hall and Recreation Centre. The hall is located on the east side of Black Rock Road just one kilometre from the Bay of Fundy shore at Canada Creek; this is north of Russia Road. The four trails, which start at the trail sign behind the hall, are blazed with coloured markers: pink, yellow, orange and blue.

Three major avenues form the basis for the longest parts of the trail system:

- Wall Street, a gravel road that heads east from Canada Creek, parallel to the Fundy shore and descends into Murray Brook vault near where the brook empties into the Bay of Fundy.
- The pebble beach on the Bay of Fundy from the mouth of Murray Brook to the harbour at Canada Creek. The beach is covered twice a day by the high tides of the Bay of Fundy, and this section of the trails should only be travelled within three hours of low tide. There are steep cliffs backing the beach and there is no escape off the beach when it becomes flooded.
- Balsor Road, a woods road that climbs out of the Murray Brook vault to the east and might be considered an extension of Wall Street (or vice versa). Some old maps give Wall Street the name Balsor Road. This road then turns south and parallels the vault formed by Murray Brook, eventually terminating at Rawding Road.

A 2.1 km section of trail (the “main” trail) is common to the three longer

trails. This section leads to the east end of Wall Street, where the longer two trails descend into the vault of Murray Brook and the other heads west toward Canada Creek. The trail follows several different woods roads after leaving the foot trail through mostly hardwood woods behind the community hall. The trail enters a hemlock and spruce area where it twice crosses a small stream that drains into Murray Brook.

Pink Trail: 0.6 km

This short trail branches off the main trail early in the walk. It does a small circle in the mixed woods behind the recreation hall and is good for a casual look at the birds and wildflowers of this habitat. It is a high, dry trail good for any weather.

Orange Trail: 4.3 km (the Wall Street loop)

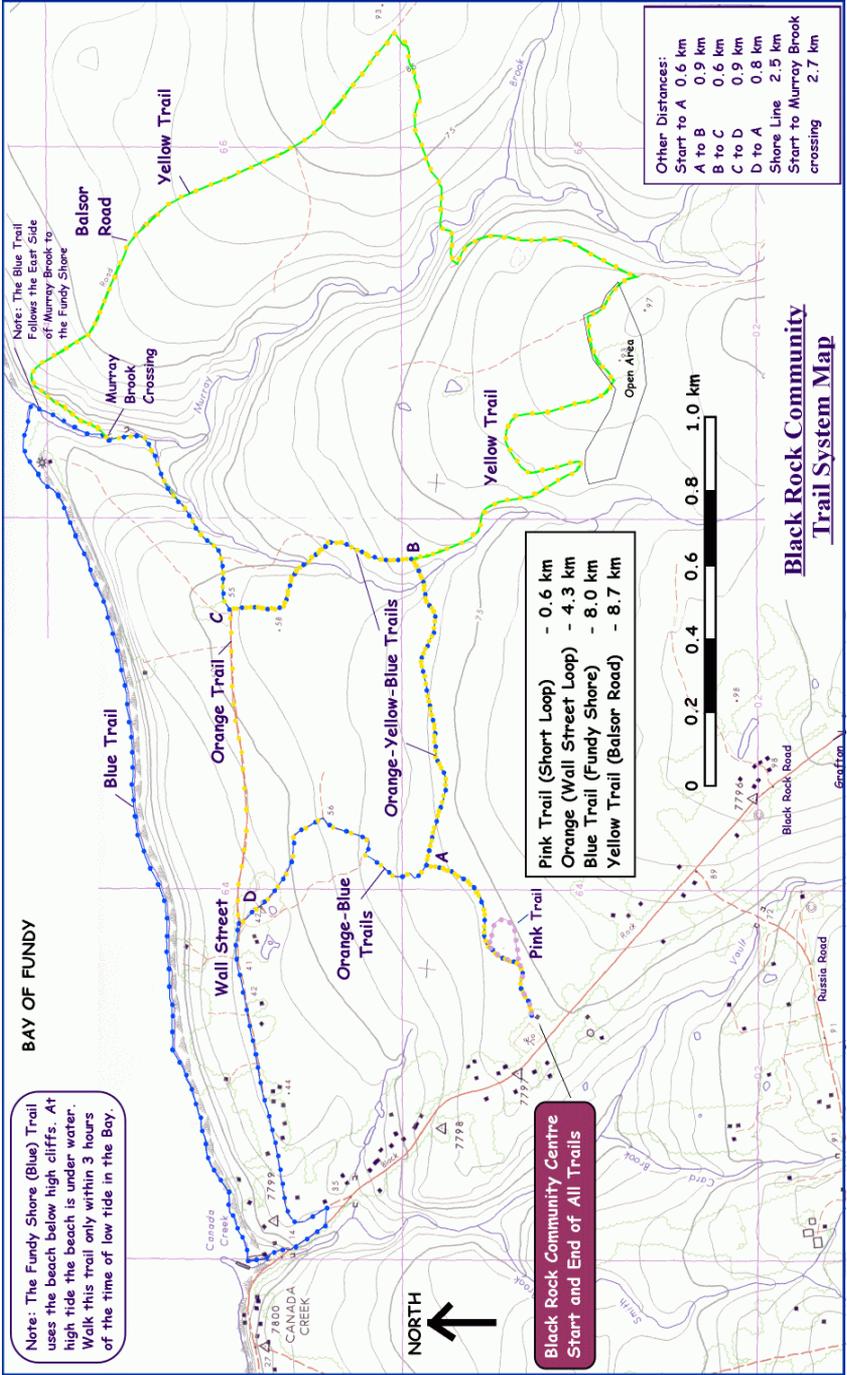
After splitting from the others on the main trail, this trail follows Wall Street westward for 0.9 km and turns back south across a small meadow before entering the woods on a foot track to connect back onto the main trail and back to the hall.

Blue Trail: 8.0 km (the shore trail)

At Murray Brook, this trail crosses then follows the brook to the shore. You have to recross the brook at the beach to walk 2.5 km along the shore to Canada Creek. From Canada Creek the trail follows the road up the hill until a shortcut leads to Wall Street and back to where the Orange Trail heads back to the hall.

Yellow Trail: 8.7 km (the Balsor Road trail)

This is the longest trail and stays in the woods almost the whole way, since Balsor Road is heavily wooded. After leaving Murray Brook, the road climbs up out of the vault and up the mountain for nearly 2 km before turning west into the woods. Watch closely for the yellow blazes. This trail should be travelled in the clockwise direction since the blazes mark the trail well only in that direction (as of this writing). A walking trail cut in the woods leads west back down through Murray Brook and up along some pleasant, grassy woods roads to a clear-cut area. Here the trail is at its highest, being nearly 100 m above the trail at the Bay of Fundy. The trail zigzags through spruce woods and moss under foot until it returns to the main trail back to the hall.



As you can see from the map, the three large loops are not the only possibilities: by combining different parts of various loops, you can walk at least three other loops. I have been on all the trails except for the shore part of the Blue Trail. The habitats are quite varied and include small grass meadows, cobble beach, streams, open cut-over land, dense mossy spruce woods, open hardwood woods, roadsides, and rocky cliffs. I have had limited time to observe species in the area, but I do remember seeing Spotted Coral Root, Wood Sorrel, and One-flowered Pyrola in flower. Warblers seemed to be abundant in June when I was there.

All trails are open to hiking. Mountain bikes are allowed on those trails using woods roads.

Two Impressive Vagrant Shorebirds in Kings County by Jim Wolford

On the evening of June 22, Ulli Hoeger from Halifax was kayaking in the mouth of the Cornwallis River, and his group noticed a very good bird, a Black-necked Stilt, foraging on the intertidal mud just east of the mouth of the channel from Wolfville Harbour.

This is a spectacular shorebird, with its black-and-white coloration and very long pink legs. Its normal range in summer is from Virginia south to Florida, as well as scattered locations through the southern states and north to Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Tufts' *Birds of Nova Scotia* (3rd ed., 1986) gives two records for Nova Scotia: four at Canning in September 1965, and two at Cape Sable in May 1979. Subsequently, there was a fairly recent sighting at the Windsor causeway mud flat.

Subsequent to Ulli's discovery at Wolfville, I definitely confirmed it on June 26, the same day several other local birders saw it. Bernard

Forsythe thought its back was brownish and therefore denoted a female (or immature) bird.



BLACK NECKED STILT

Only after the definite confirmation was there a flurry of interest from birders across the province and beyond. The stilt stayed until at least July 1 and probably considerably later than that, and it always seemed to forage in a fairly predictable area, on either side of the harbour channel's junction with the river.

September 3, Angus MacLean and Richard Stern discovered another very good bird, not quite as rare as the stilt, at the Windsor sewage ponds. A Marbled Godwit really stood

out in a large roost of Black-bellied Plovers and other largely greyish shorebirds roosting on the strip of grasses between the two sewage ponds, waiting out the high-tide period. The Marbled Godwit is a very large, tan-coloured, very-long-beaked sandpiper relative. In flight it shows beautiful cinnamon wing linings. The species breeds in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, Montana, and the Dakotas. There have been at least 18 occurrences in Nova Scotia, most of them in August or September.

Thanks to phone calls and e-mails from Judy Tufts, many people were able to view the Marbled Godwit easily during any high tide. On September 7 it was joined by a Hudsonian Godwit, which is much less rare but also impressive (reported by the Thextons). With the godwits were Black-bellied Plovers, American Golden Plovers, Short-billed Dowitchers, Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpipers, Least Sandpipers, assorted gulls, Double-crested Cormorants, Barn Swallows, and several Canada Geese.

Final note: I saw the Marbled Godwit in the same place on September 22. Also foraging around the edge of one sewage pond was another good shorebird, an immature or winter-plumage stilt.

BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT

Butterfly walk

by Jean Timpa

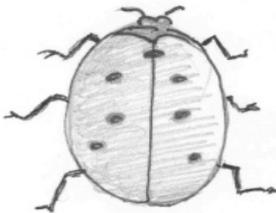
Saturday, July 12, 2003, was a lovely sunny hot summer day, just right for observing butterflies and all other heat-loving insects. At 1 p.m., nine of us met at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre and decided to begin our search for mid-season butterflies in the Harriet Irving Botanical Gardens at Acadia University. There we saw Cabbage White butterflies, many European Skippers (which seemed to be at peak numbers wherever we went), several day-flying Ctenucha moths, and several species of damsel and dragonflies, especially around the pond. Most special of all was a tiny but very beautiful and cooperative Striped Hairstreak, which eventually Jim Wolford was able to hold on his hand for all of us to see much better than any of us had expected. This butterfly isn't all that common, so it was a very special event.



STRIPED
HAIRSTREAK

After a while we decided to go into new habitat, so we drove out to the east end of "Long Island," north of Grand Pre. There, along the top of the dike and along the dike road, we saw more Cabbage Whites, European Skippers everywhere in incomprehensible numbers, and a few Common Ringlets bobbing weakly over and through the grasses. And we had a quick look at a late blue as it was carried along all too quickly by a gusty breeze. It was probably a Northern Blue, but it was travelling much too fast for any reasonable attempt at positive identification. Jim also counted at least ten

Seven-spotted Lady Beetles along with some aphids upon which they were likely feeding.



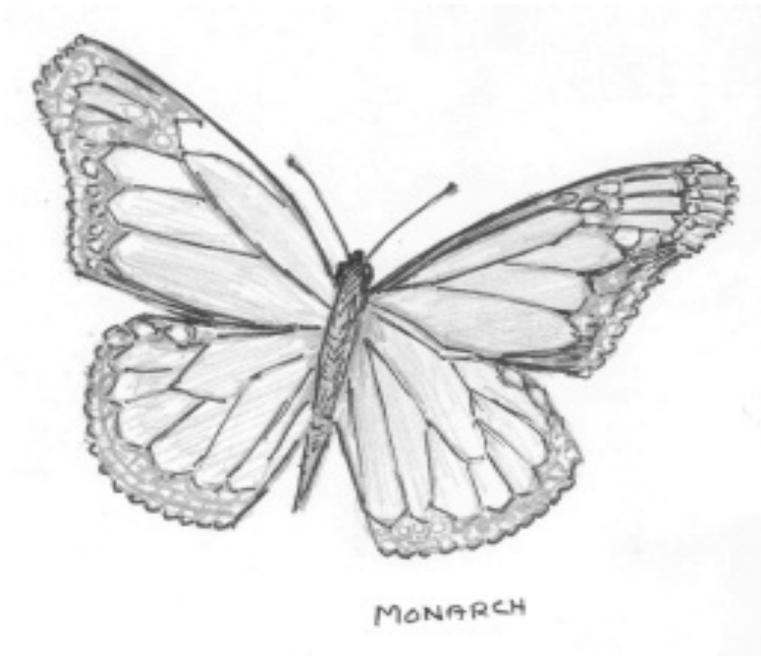
SEVEN-SPOTTED LADYBEET

We then moved further inland on the dikeland fields and travelled north to south on a road that bisected some of the fields. We saw more Cabbage Whites, countless European Skippers, a few Northern Crescents,

two Painted Ladies, more Ctenucha moths, and several other small moths disturbed by our presence. Most spectacular of all was one lovely Monarch butterfly, which lazily floated along the vegetation at the side of the road while we briskly walked or half ran alongside it for quite some time. It seemed rather unconcerned about our presence.

In the morning Bill and Brenda Thexton kindly took me across the same road on a scouting trip, and the only other butterfly we saw then, but not in the afternoon, was a Black Swallowtail, a species sometimes very numerous out there. However, I think we were a bit late to see them at their peak, mid-June probably being a better time.

Next summer we will plan two or three trips so we can incorporate more of the very early or later butterflies and other insects in their short seasons.



BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT

Birds and Plants along the Gaspereau River from White Rock by Bernard Forsythe

On May 21 a long line of interested members and friends joined me for an evening stroll along the White Rock nature trail. Although many birds are not active late in the day, several species were seen, but mostly heard. A small buteo that passed quickly overhead was probably a Broad-winged Hawk, and a Belted Kingfisher flew up and down the river several times. The common warbler song along the trail was the Ovenbird's "teacher, teacher, teacher," with the occasional Black-throated Green Warbler, and Northern Waterthrush joining in. Probably the best bird sighting was a Pileated Woodpecker flying to its nest cavity high in a dead-elm snag to change incubating duties with its mate.

The floodplain along the river had been deeply scoured during the heavy spring flood, but much of the plant life was recovering nicely. The variegated leaves of rattlesnake weed were common at the start of the trail. The fruit of strawberries seen here will be pure white when ripe. A few of the other plants inspected included Purple and Nodding Trillium, Toothwort, beds of Golden Saxifrage with its tiny orange flowers, Hobblebush in flower, and several of the many ferns present.

We talked about the slate rock roadway, built about ninety years ago, and other past human uses of this part of the river.

It was nice to have several young people along. Some had notebooks to record birds and, although it was a school project, they were obviously keenly interested.

Several of us got behind on the return trip trying to spot a Rose-breasted Grosbeak singing high in a tree. The lovely song of a Veery came from across the river along with the flight song of an Ovenbird that is quite different from the "teacher" song we had heard earlier. The daylight was fading by the time we got back to our cars, and most of the group had departed. Dusk is when I feed my backyard Barred Owls, so the three

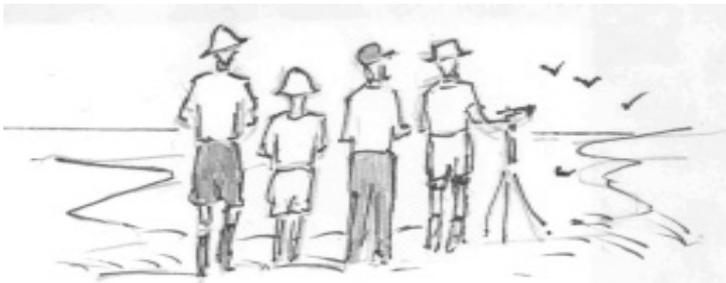
remaining cars followed me home to watch. We saw the adult owls struggle with a dead chicken a bit too heavy for them to carry, and the junior members of the enjoyable outing got to write Barred Owl in their notebooks.

BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT
Shorebirds August 24, 2003
by Judy Tufts

The weather was not in our favour. The skies were heavily overcast. Strong winds (30–40 km/h) were relentless in their biting nippiness throughout the morning. Nevertheless, Mike McCall and Derek and Heather Watts joined me around 9 a.m. at the Robie Tufts Nature Centre on Front Street in Wolfville. Before we set out for the Wolfville harbour we heard, then saw, three Chimney Swifts flying over the Nature Centre.

In the harbour we found 26 Greater and four Lesser Yellowlegs with a couple of Semipalmated Sandpipers roosting on the last areas of exposed mud islets or banks as the tide began rising. Thirty peeps swept in and out of the harbour entrance several times but never settled. There were also about 30 Black Ducks and one Double-crested Cormorant.

We then proceeded to Windsor, making our first stop at the western “overlook” of the causeway from the Falmouth connector. On the still-



Judy Tufts day -

exposed mudflats on the western side of the causeway we could easily pick out more than 100 Black-bellied Plovers feeding among the 7–8,000 peeps. We heard several yellowlegs calling. The wind became even more gusty here, and viewing through spotting scopes became erratic with the buffeting. After all the warm weather of late, we began to feel a chill settling in. Once the tide began covering the mudflats we headed to the Windsor sewage ponds.

As we slowly froze, our patience at the sewage ponds gradually paid off. In spite of the very “fresh” pungent odour – the wind was blowing in our direction – we noted about 30 yellowlegs (both Greater and Lesser) restlessly moving back and forth across the outer pond, making it difficult to get an accurate count, and 20 Black-bellied Plovers roosting on the grassy bank between the two ponds. Then a large flock of shorebirds arrived, dominated by Black-bellied Plovers, bringing their numbers up to over 300. Several heads of Short-billed Dowitchers could be seen among the plovers as well as a few peeps; two Spotted Sandpipers picked their way daintily among the grasses and reeds at the water’s edge.

Two Peregrine Falcons suddenly appeared and began pursuing a small flock of shorebirds as they headed back to the causeway. Over the surface of the ponds were 50–60 swallows busily catching insects: Cliff, Barn, Bank, and at least one Tree. Other species noted included three Double-crested Cormorants, 100 Black Ducks, and Ring-billed, Herring, and Great Black-backed Gulls. By this time we were so thoroughly chilled that had I not suggested a respite to warm up at the local Tim’s I might have faced a mini-mutiny!

Our final stop was Evangeline Beach (thanks to Joan and Bob Bearne’s hospitality on Pheasant Lane), still very cool and windy. There were no shorebirds to be seen in front of these cottages; Bob said birds had been very scarce that morning. We did catch sight of about 500 peeps flying briefly out of, and then back into, the little cove to the east of the last cottage. Under such weather conditions, we decided to call it a day. Unfortunately, we didn’t see a great variety of shorebirds, but the bonhomie of the group compensated for the disappointing day.

On my return home I found our outdoor thermometer registered only 56 degrees F. Autumnal thoughts were not far away.

PARKS ARE FOR PEOPLE FIELD TRIP REPORT
Blomidon Provincial Park: Spring Wildlife
by Jim Wolford, Wolfville

This annual Parks Are for People walk is a very easy three miles at “Wolford speed” (very slow). A couple of things made this year’s walk unusual. First, I was just out of the hospital from a weird allergic reaction and “high” on a corticosteroid, prednisone (and what a “ride” that was!). Also the pond along the trail had quite different critters than I expected.

Fourteen of us, from Kentville, New Minas, Ross Creek, Delhaven, Baxter’s Harbour, and Black Rock, did the walk on May 24. Among us were two who were very helpful: Richard Stern, for hearing and identifying the birds, and David Webster, for his all-round knowledge of natural history and sharp eyes. We had a jovial group, and I believe everyone had an enjoyable experience. The weather was fine, with moderate temperature, light wind, and not-quite-clear sky.

A viewpoint early in our walk from the registration cabin showed a nice view to the south and east; sandstone cliffs and then Longspell Point at Kingsport were prominent, plus the mouth of Pereau Creek and Grand Pre and Boot Island.

Vegetation

The forest vegetation was very late this year in its leafing out and flowering, thanks to the late-lingering copious snow. Lots of wild strawberry was in bloom in open lawn areas. Blue violets were in bloom, white violets were found under conifers, and one yellow violet was along an open part of the trail. Hobblebush flowers were opening only in a campground clearing. As usual, there were oodles of wild leek leaves. Fiddlehead [ostrich] fern fronds were already tall in the northeast corner of the campground. Lots of Purple Trilliums (stinking Willy) had open flowers. We noticed only one plant each of baneberry and Rosy Twisted Stalk, the latter almost in bloom. Lots of Skunk Currant was in bloom. Bronze spring leaves of wild *Aralia* (sarsaparilla) are an annual treat for me. Wild Solomon’s Seal was common, one with flowers almost open. False Solomon’s Seal

showed no flowers yet, and leaves were still opening. Red elderberry showed flower buds. Clintonia showed leaves, but few flower buds. Fly-honeysuckle was abundant and in bloom. Hazelnut and willow showed open catkins. Trees pointed out included fir versus spruce, Striped Maple, Yellow Birch, and small beeches.

Mammals

We saw one snowshoe hare (very good view); one chipmunk; and one nearly tame red squirrel.

Birds

Birds were generally not abundant. A crow chasing a raven provided a nice comparison. Other birds seen or heard included Black-capped Chickadee, Hairy Woodpecker, one hummingbird, Blue Jay, Mourning Dove, White-throated Sparrow, vireo (singing Blue-headed, perhaps), Black-throated Green Warbler, Ovenbird, Magnolia Warbler, American Redstart, Northern Parula, Least Flycatcher, Purple Finch, robin, Hermit Thrush, junco.

Forest Insects

David identified a March fly that landed on my hand. Later I showed a click beetle that was on a leaf; and one possible Spring Azure butterfly was seen along the campground road. Black flies became abundant in the afternoon, but I don't think they were biting (possibly all males).

Pond Life

A major object of this walk was the vernal, or temporary, pond about a mile along the cliff (Jodrey) trail from the upper campground. I always use an enamel pan full of pond water on top of an inverted bucket, followed by a bit of random sweeping of a dip-net. This year the pond held virtually no predators, which is quite unusual. In these times of human concerns about West Nile virus, I was all ready to give a mini-lecture on how ponds like this are *not* good breeding places for mosquitoes, and guess what? Yes, the pond held *lots* of both larvae (wigglers) and pupae (tumbler) of mosquitoes! There were also a few larvae of midges, which are non-biting flies; one of the larvae was a reddish "bloodworm."

Predators missing this year (but nearly always present in other years) included Phantom Midge larvae, backswimmers, dragonfly and damselfly

larvae, predaceous diving beetles, water striders, whirligig beetles, and fishing spiders. Two kinds of small predatory water mites were present, and a single caddis fly larva may have been a predator. Usually ponds of almost any size will, by luck, have some sorts of predators that can prevent the accumulation of large numbers of mosquitoes.

The hoped-for beautiful, delicate, half-inch fairy shrimps were indeed present; they actually depend on having no large predators, and their life cycle ends each year about now after they lay their eggs, which then can dry and freeze and hatch when re-flooded in the following early spring. They eat microscopic green algae. The fairy shrimps have been found nowhere else in Nova Scotia, except for a small swamp near Berwick.

Other crustaceans included common tiny “water fleas” and one large one (possibly *Daphnia* or a cladoceran).

Amphibians

We found at least five batches of Yellow-spotted Salamander eggs containing larvae half to three-quarters of the way to hatching. There were also lots of small tadpoles (possibly wood frog or spring peeper or leopard frog)

Beyond the pond, some of us walked just a bit farther to the lookoff with the view across the water to Five Islands Provincial Park, the site of other Parks Are for People events during the summer.



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BNS Field Trip Report

Smiley's Provincial Park

by Jim Wolford

On June 28, 2003, Carl Munden, who has recently written and published a very nice field guide, *Native Orchids of Nova Scotia*, led about 20 people on this trip. As Carl correctly guessed (based on long experience from having lived close by the park until recently), the Showy Lady's-slippers in the shady woods near the park road were at their very best, with lots of fresh, colourful blooms and many more yet to open soon. The orchids in the much more open boggy marsh of cattails, Labrador Tea (in bloom), fruiting cotton-grass (a sedge), etc. were more advanced. It was nice to see lots of last-year's fruiting capsules of the orchids (more than I'm used to seeing there).

Carl told us that the more familiar Pink Lady's-slippers take 12 years to become mature and flower for the first time; he's not sure how long the showy species requires, but suspects it is comparable. Earlier, when Harold Forsyth and I were arranging BNS field trips, I wanted this walk also advertised as a Parks-Are-for-People walk (promoting the provincial parks), but Carl objected to this in the interest of keeping the group to a manageable size (since it's too easy for people to damage the plants there). Going in there you must be very careful to stay on the easy-to-see trails – and watch your feet.



Other flowers included Labrador Tea, Bunchberry, blackberry, Twinflower, bulrush, Sheep Laurel, or Lambkill, just starting to bloom, and lots of Poison Ivy plants in shaded woods with some of the plants in bloom. We had wandered a bit further away along the road, and I don't recall seeing Poison Ivy there before. Carl also found four other orchid plants that were an undetermined species of *Platanthera* (formerly *Habenaria*), with flower buds that were only partly formed (probably either *P. dilatata*

or *P. hyperborea*)

Birds that we heard include Ovenbird, Northern Parula, Black-capped Chickadee, Northern Flicker, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

I mentioned that Yellow Lady's-slippers are still abundant and visible along Highway 14 toward Brooklyn from the St. Croix River and Stirling's farm market – just east of the cattail pond, look along the north-facing shaded south bank of the gorge with steep sides (gypsum-underlain karst topography). Carl mentioned that the rare Ram's-head Lady's-slipper in the same type of gypsum topography flowers from the last week of May to early June, and there is usually an overlap with early Yellow Lady's-slippers when you can find both on the same dates in early June (Yellows are at their best in mid-June).

After we left the woods where the lady's-slippers were, Carl showed us a small site sandwiched between the picnic area and the Meander River where yellow violets and Nodding Trillium are very abundant and Blue Cohosh has a thriving colony – all were past flowering (try late May next year), and the Blue Cohosh showed young berries.

An Evening Meal by Roy Bishop

On the damp, cloudy evening of August 5, 2003, several black clouds of sandpipers were skimming above the waters of Minas Basin near Evangeline Beach, exercising flight muscles while waiting for the tide to uncover their feeding grounds. The flocks were a kilometre or more offshore, but I had a good view through my tripod-mounted 15-power binoculars.

One large flock of perhaps 10,000 sandpipers was especially fascinating to watch as it flowed and twisted, patterns of coordinated consciousness revealed in the waves of changing wing geometry pulsing through the flock. The reason for the spectacular display was soon apparent – several hundred metres behind the flock, but closing the gap on strongly beating

wings was a Peregrine Falcon.

As the falcon neared the rippling flock it ascended until it was high above the rear edge of the fleeing sandpipers. It then descended on a straight, shallow dive, gaining speed and finally levelling off above the water as it shot through the centre of the flock at what seemed like double their speed. The flock was probably moving at 60 or 70 km/h, so the falcon was likely moving well in excess of 100 km/h as it barrelled through the terrified birds. It was so fast and the birds so numerous that I did not see the coup de grace, but in the process the falcon knocked a sandpiper into the water.

The falcon let the flock go on as it circled over the water. After three attempts, it managed to pluck its victim from the water. With the sandpiper in its talons, the falcon gained altitude and began the long flight back to shore.

A few times on the shoreward flight the falcon reached down with its beak and picked at its meal. While doing this it had to stop flapping its wings, holding them level so it could glide; however, with its head bent back under its body, aerodynamic drag was high and it quickly lost altitude. Thus the meal preparation occurred in brief sessions, interspersed with flapping of wings to regain altitude.

I lost sight of the falcon as it entered trees a kilometre east of my position. I turned to look for the flock of sandpipers, but it was nowhere in sight. Left pondering those few minutes of raw drama, I felt sorry for the sandpiper. It would not see the shores of South America. I felt happy for the falcon. It had worked hard and used its incredible flying skill to obtain food so it could fly another day.

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Eastern Annapolis Valley Weather Summer 2003

by Larry Bogan, Cambridge Station, NS

The summer of 2003 was a great year for plant growth and fruit production. We had more than adequate rainfall, nearly normal sunshine, and above average temperatures. My highbush blueberries had their most productive year. The chokecherries, which were hanging lushly from the trees a month ago are now falling and covering the ground in places. Our lawn, which grows on the droughty, sandy soils of the Cambridge sand plains and is usually brown most of the summer, was actually green and required cutting throughout the summer.

	Mean daily max. temp (deg.C)	Mean daily min. temp. (deg.C)	Mean daily temp. (deg.C)	Rainfall (mm)	Bright sunshine (h)
June	22.6	11.1	16.9	66	214
(42 yr. average)	(21.9)	(10.2)	(16.1)	(67)	(211)
(5 yr. average)	(22.6)	(11.0)	(16.8)	(49)	(210)
July	26.6	15.7	21.2	79	243
(42 yr. average)	(25.0)	(13.5)	(19.3)	(69)	(233)
(5 yr. average)	(25.6)	(13.9)	(19.7)	(43)	(247)
August	24.2	15.4	19.8	165	164
(42 yr. average)	(24.3)	(13.2)	(18.7)	(88)	(218)
(5 yr. average)	(25.7)	(14.2)	(20.0)	(54)	(241)
Season	24.5	14.1	19.3	310	621
(42 yr. average)	(23.8)	(12.3)	(18.1)	(224)	(662)
(5 yr. average)	(24.7)	(13.1)	(18.9)	(146)	(698)

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

You will note that the table of monthly weather statistics has more numbers in it this issue. I have included five-year averages as well as the 42-year averages, and I have added mean minimum and maximum temperatures for each month.

Temperatures

In the last few years we have been experiencing warmer than average temperatures during the summer, and this year continued that trend.

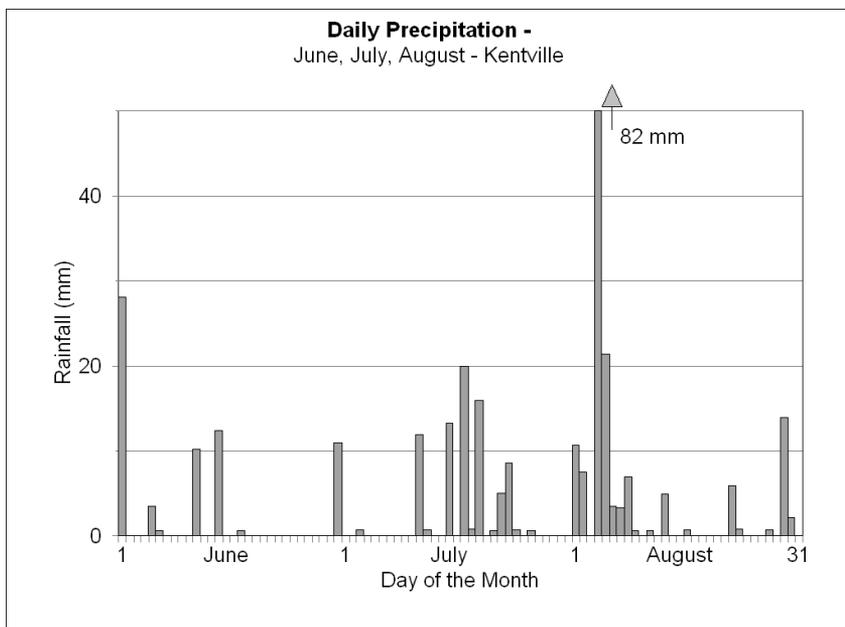
Overall, the season was 1.2°C above the 42-year average but only 0.4°C above the average of the last five years. July was by far the warmest month (2°C above normal) because both the minimum and maximum temperatures were above the averages. In comparison, August had normal maximums, but because the minimum temperatures were higher, the mean temperature was up. Note also that August had well-below-average sunshine hours due to more cloudiness. The cloud reduced radiational nighttime cooling, thus contributing to the warm month. The evening cloudiness did not please us naturalists who like to observe the stars and planets.

Sunshine Hours

June and July had pretty normal amounts of sunshine. The season ended with slightly below-average sunshine hours because of the low values in August. You might remember the first half of August as a very cloudy period that seemed never to end.

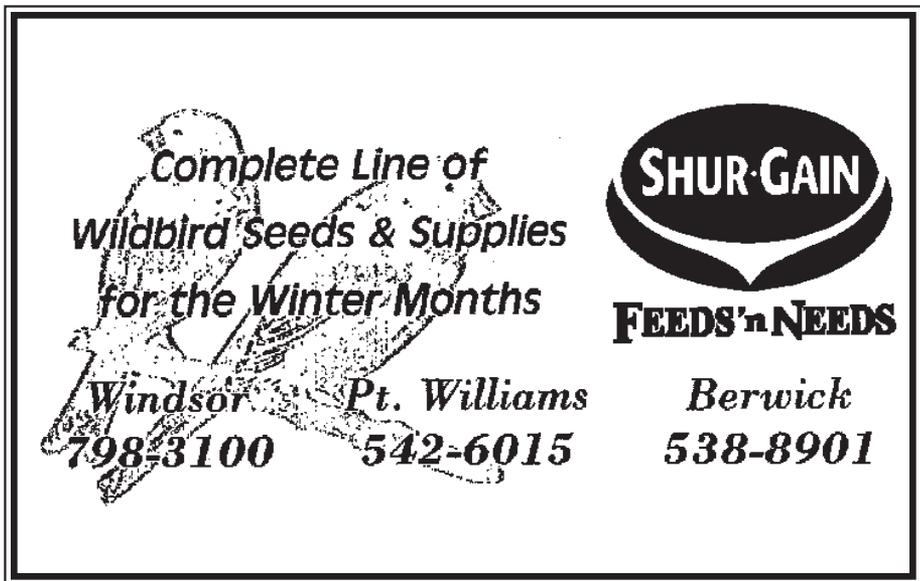
Rainfall

As one would expect, the cloudiness in August produced above-average rainfall for that month – twice its long-term average rainfall. The last five



years have seen consistently dry summers, and by comparison this year has been blessed with more than adequate rain. Note in the table that the five-year average for rainfall is 65% of the 42-year average. This year we received twice the five-year average. That was about 40% more than expected according to the 42-year average. Most of that excess rainfall occurred in early August, when 118 mm fell from the 4th through 9th (103 mm of the total descended on August 4 and 5). I have included the rainfall graph to show you how evenly the remaining rainfall was distributed throughout the season.

The autumn continues the warmer-than-usual trend. Although we have had a little cool weather, in mid-September we are having a heat wave with no frost. Enjoy.



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What's In The Sky?

by Roy Bishop

New Moon: September 26, October 25, November 23, December 23

Full Moon: October 10 (hunter's moon), November 8 (total eclipse!), December 8

Winter begins on Monday, December 22, at 03:04 (AST)

Evening Planets this Autumn

During the next few months Earth in its faster inner orbit is pulling ahead of Mars, leaving the orange planet behind. Mars will still be obvious in the evening southern sky throughout the autumn, but will steadily fade from its late-August peak brightness until it is only one-sixteenth as bright by yearend.

Venus slowly emerges out of the evening twilight low in the southwest. This is an especially interesting apparition of Venus because when it catches up to us and passes between Earth and the Sun on June 8, 2004, it will cross directly in front of the Sun, appearing as a black silhouette. Such a transit of Venus is a very rare event. The last one occurred in 1882, so no living person has seen a transit of Venus!

Jupiter does not rise until after midnight, but is bright and obvious in the pre-dawn sky. Saturn rises in the east-northeast evening sky near midnight in September and rises earlier each evening as the weeks go by. Saturn rises at sunset by yearend, when it is at opposition to the Sun on New Year's Eve. Both Jupiter and Saturn are particularly interesting to view with a small telescope.

Mars and the Media

Astronomical events seldom make television news, but in late August the record-breaking approach of Mars made headlines.

What the media did not tell you is that the next time we pass Mars (in November 2005), the view of Mars, for Canadians and others at mid-

northern latitudes, will be even better than it was in August 2003. Mars will not be quite as close or as bright in November 2005, but it will be much higher in our sky (about 30 degrees higher), where the air is much steadier. Thus, from Nova Scotia, telescopic views of Mars in 2005 should generally be better than they were in 2003.

Bleakney Tides this Autumn

At intervals of 206 days (nearly seven months), alternately a New Moon or a Full Moon coincides with perigee, the near point in the Moon's elliptical orbit. At such times the Moon's perigee distance from Earth is itself especially small. These three enhancements produce extra large "perigean spring tides." This November 23 it is the New Moon's turn to coincide with perigee, and the tidal range on November 24, 25, and 26 is particularly large. Similar conditions occur earlier in the autumn, on September 28 and 29, and again on October 26, 27 and 28. If there is a strong wind on one of those days, considerable damage may occur around the shores of Minas Basin and the Bay of Fundy.

Very high tides are of special interest to Wolfville's Sherman Bleakney because six hours before or after a very high tide the tide is very low. These uncommon very low tides expose an underwater world to the air for only a few hours each year. Dr. Bleakney is leading two field trips to see stranded creatures of the deep: a day trip on Sunday, September 28, and an after-dark trip on Sunday, October 26. See listings on page 7 for details.

November's Total Eclipse of the Moon

A total lunar eclipse is one of the most interesting and beautiful sights in the night sky, particularly when viewed in binoculars or a low-power telescope.

In the spring newsletter I wrote: "2003 is unusual in that there are two total eclipses of the Moon. Moreover, all phases of both of these eclipses are visible from Nova Scotia, assuming clear skies!" Unfortunately, Nova Scotia was covered in cloud during the first of these eclipses, on May 15/16. Previous to that, we also missed the total lunar eclipse of January 9, 2001, again because of clouds. The last time we had a clear

view of the totally eclipsed Moon was almost four years ago, on January 20, 2000; however, most people missed it because totality did not begin until after midnight. Prior to that, the last total lunar eclipse visible from the Wolfville area occurred back in 1996, on September 26. Even then, totality did not begin until after 11 p.m.

Thus, few if any children in the Wolfville area have ever seen a total lunar eclipse. The next opportunity occurs this November, and the timing is ideal: mid-eclipse occurs in mid-evening. All we need is a clear sky. 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.

Use binoculars to fully experience the beauty of the Moon in eclipse, and share this rare view with a child. It will be a real, outer-space event, not an artificial video-game or TV image.

December's Geminid Meteors

The Geminid meteor shower peaks at midnight, Saturday night, December 13. The sky will be dark (and we hope clear) that evening, until the waning gibbous Moon rises shortly after 10 p.m. The Geminids are a reliable shower, comparable to the Perseids in August. Geminid meteors travel at 35 kilometres per second, which gives them a kinetic energy equal to nearly 150 times the explosive energy of the same mass of TNT. Thus despite their small size (comparable to a blueberry or smaller), these lumps of cometary, dust produce bright trails as they burn up high in Earth's atmosphere, from about 120 to 80 km above the ground.

Get away from streetlights, place a sleeping bag on a reclining lawn chair, climb in, and enjoy the Geminids.

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

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Membership fees are due January 1 of the current year

Sources of Local Natural History

(compiled by Blomidon Naturalists Society)

Information	Source	Office	Home
Amphibians & Reptiles	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604
	Jim Wolford	585-1684	542-9204
Astronomy	Roy Bishop		542-3992
	Sherman Williams	542-3598	542-5104
	Larry Bogan		678-0446
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
Butterflies & Moths	Jean Timpa		542-5678
Fish	NS Dept of Natural Resources	679-6091	
Flora – General Fungi	Ruth Newell	585-1355	542-2095
	Darryl Grund		542-9214
	Nancy Nickerson	679-5333	542-9332
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Indian Prehistory & Archeology	Ellis Gertridge		542-2816
	James Legge		542-3530
Mosses & Ferns	John Pickwell		792-1830
Mammals	Tom Herman	585-1469	678-0383
Rocks & Fossils	Geology Dept Acadia U.	542-2201	
Seashore & Marine Life	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604
	Jim Wolford	585-1684	542-9204
	Michael Brylinsky	585-1509	582-7954

