



Blomidon Naturalists Society

Fall 2005 – Volume 32 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

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The Blomidon Naturalists Society is a member of the Sable Island Preservation Trust and the Federation of Nova Scotia Naturalists (Nature Nova Scotia) and is an affiliate member of the Canadian Nature Federation (Nature Canada).

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

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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 deadline

Winter, December 4, 2005

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EDITORIAL

This and That, Out and About

For the past four or five days I have been stacking firewood, not only for a more resourceful winter (cheaper and more dependable than oil), I hope, but as well for the aesthetic pleasure and comfort a wood stove certainly can provide. In recent years, we've had our share of times without power for heat and cooking. (I'll gripe and growl along with the rest of the public about the service and communication abilities, or lack thereof, of Nova Scotia Power, but this is not the place.) However much we complain, we all do have a responsibility, and should put as much effort into it as the complaining, to be as self-dependent as possible and to prepare for such inconveniences.

Since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita stuck their ugly heads into the Gulf states and wreaked unfathomable amounts of damage and death, we have certainly seen our false bubble of security destroyed – Mother Nature is still very much the boss. Is this part of her real makeup, or is she very angry at us for our lack of stewardship towards Planet Earth? Is it our turn next, as our stormiest seasons draw near?

As for environmental issues, the fight for the beautiful Bay of Fundy to retain its unique lifestyle will erupt again in December when the report about the intentions of the [American company] Bilcon of Nova Scotia is finally published (see the spring 2005 issue for more on the project). We will need all our energies to write letters or e-mails and attend meetings and hearings to save this area. And now Fundy Gypsum, a subsidiary of US Gypsum, is planning a \$10 million expansion of its gypsum quarry near Miller Brook, Hants County. Public input will be sought on this proposal, which will probably expand into the Poplar Grove area where we like to go to see the Yellow Lady's-slippers. I don't know if it includes the area in which the Ram's-head Lady's-slippers grow, too. Neither of these beautiful plants is protected. However, 150 or so jobs are at stake, at least for a few more years, before the gypsum runs out and the company bails out as it did in Dingwall, Cape Breton. I've heard that the company pays the provincial government a royalty of one cent per ton. If this rather incredible figure is correct, there is something scandalously wrong.

Are more people taking notice of the environmental movement? Definitely! Seek them out and bring them to BNS. We have a lot of serious work to do – as well as our usual fun.

—Jean Timpa, editor

Help! Help! Help!

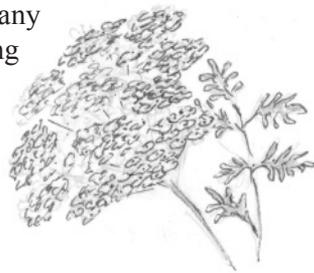
The good ship BNS is rudderless and sinking fast – so reports the nominating committee, which must have a new slate of officers for our October 17 meeting.

Three brave sailors sallied forth at our last meeting to volunteer for duty, but we do not have a president or vice-president lined up for 2005/6, or a representative to Nature Nova Scotia, a chair for the Issues Committee (probably the most important post in BNS right now), and a couple of people to help with the newsletter gathering ads or writing a bird or general sightings column on a regular basis.

Please be brave and volunteer to any one of us on the executive (front inside cover) as it makes it that much simpler than our having to call through hundreds of names on a list. Thanks. Jean Timpa, Editor, 542-5678 or <jtimpa@ns.sympatico.ca>.

Acknowledgements

It's not all bad news, of course. Outside of the board and executive we have many volunteers. As the season of giving approaches, we are always more mindful of sharing our time, talents, and resources with others, but BNS seems to have a great many generous elves and spirits who participate all around the year in so many different ways that we, as an organization, tick along “merrily on high” around the calendar. I was told by the outgoing president of Nature Nova Scotia that we had the best, most active natural history group in Nova Scotia. So congratulations to all you BNS helpers for “winning” this unofficial award! Keep up the good work, and encourage others to come aboard



QUEEN ANNE'S LACE

Blomidon Naturalists Society

Fall 2005

Meetings

Unless otherwise noted, meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the third Monday of each month (except July and August) in the auditorium of the K.C. Irving Environmental Centre, Acadia University. The Centre is on University Avenue, up the hill from the Acadia arena. Parking is available at Wheelock dining hall, along Crowell Drive immediately east of the Centre, at the Acadia arena, the student union building, or on Westwood Avenue. Everyone is welcome.

Monday, October 17 – Whither Human Society? Marjorie and Martin Willison will give a talk and lead a discussion full of information with directives for near-future implications for human society globally. Martin is a professor of biology at Dalhousie University. The central focus of his teaching and research is on marine protected areas, species at risk (notably deep-sea corals), industrial impacts, and social conservation movements. Marjorie has a biology, ecology, and occupational therapy background and is active in public health advocacy in the area of environment. Many will recognize her as a popular guest of local gardening shows.

Monday, November 21, 2005 – Hiking the Dream. Kathy Didkowsky will relate her family's four-month pioneer trek across Canada along the Trans Canada Trail. Along with extreme temperatures, impassable trails, and assorted wildlife, the Didkowskys found something more enduring – the heart of a nation in its people, who shared their friendship, songs, and stories.

Monday, December 12, 2005 – Work and Play in Thailand with Dr. J. Sherman Boates, NS Department of Natural Resources. Sherman made two trips to Thailand last year as a member of the Canadian delegation to meetings on the Convention and the International Trade in Endangered Species and the UN Convention on Biodiversity. This experience provided him with new perspectives on global conservation and an amazing opportunity to experience the natural and cultural history of Thailand.

Using lots of fun photographs and anecdotes, Sherman will share his experiences covering everything from forays to the jungle to find birds and spiders to stops at Buddhist sites in Bangkok, relaxing time at a tropical island paradise, and of course fascinating meetings about conservation efforts for rhinos, islands, sharks, and orchids.

Monday, January 16, 2006 – New Mexico and its Natural History.

Larry and Alison Bogan have been visiting southern New Mexico during March and April for the last four years. It is a land of desert and mountains with few rivers but with a large variety of landscapes and wildlife habitats. Examples are the Rio Grande Valley hosting flocks of Snow Geese, Sandhill Cranes, and other birds in the winter; the stark white gypsum sands and black lava flows of the Tullarosa Basin; the steep, dry canyons of the Sacramento Mountain foothills; and the snow-covered, forested peak of 12,000 ft Sierra Blanca. The area is at the northern edge of the Chihuahuan Desert, which is surprisingly lush with vegetation and in the spring can be carpeted with a large variety of colourful wildflowers. Larry will show some of his many wonderful pictures to help describe the landscapes and wildlife.

Monday, February 20, 2006 – Annual Show and Tell Night.

Open to all. Come to view, or bring along slides, pictures, specimens, collections, fossils, videos, computer stuff, favourite books and magazines, or anything that might be of interest to fellow naturalists.

Field Trips

Unless otherwise indicated, all field trips will begin at the Wolfville waterfront park. Everyone is welcome.

Tuesdays till October 4 – Mushrooms and Other Fungi in the Kentville Ravine.

Mycologist Nancy Nickerson of Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada will be making weekly observations on mushrooms and other fungi in the Kentville ravine from August 30 to October 4, weather permitting. These are not formal mushroom forays, and fellow naturalists are invited

to join Nancy to see what's in the ravine at this time of year. Meet at the picnic grounds at the Kentville Agricultural Centre on Tuesdays at 1:30 p.m. For information, e-mail <nickersonn@agr.gc.ca>.

Saturday and Sunday, October 29 and 30, 2005 – Mars at its Best. Not until 2020 will we have as good an opportunity to view Mars from Earth. Roy Bishop (902 542-3992) will host an evening's viewing of the sky from the old parking lot of Grand Pre National Historic Site at 10 p.m. on the 29th and 9 p.m. on the 30th. Mars will be the main attraction, but Uranus and Neptune will be visible along with galaxies, nebulae, and constellations.

Sunday, November 6, 2005 – Acadian Nature Hike. George Forsyth (902 542-7116) will describe the natural and cultural history of the Lockhart Ryan Park area of New Minas. We will see a recognized Acadian grave site, Acadian cellars, and apple trees descended from the time of the Acadians. George will also explain how to identify trees and shrubs in their dormant stage along the nature trails in this area. Meet at the Wolfville waterfront at 1 p.m. or at the Lockhart Ryan Park in New Minas at 1:15 p.m.

Saturday, November 12, 2005 – Fossil Hunt in Local Quarries. Ron Buckley (902 542-1815) will explain the geology and lead a search for fossils of plants and invertebrates at the Eye Road quarry and Wallbrook gravel pit, both in the Wolfville area. Meet at the Wolfville waterfront at 1 p.m. for a 2 or 3 hour excursion.

Saturday, December 17, 2005 – Wolfville Christmas Bird Count. Ian Paterson (902 582-1273) will be the compiler for our area of this annual North American bird count. Call Ian if you would like a designated area or would like to be assigned with a group. Everyone is encouraged to participate. Following the count, around 5 p.m., all participants are invited to Richard and Liz Stern's for a tally count and a chowder/chili supper. The address is 317 Middle Dyke Road, north from the lights at the intersection of Belcher Street and the dyke road from New Minas, just before Chipmans Corner. Richard and Liz can be reached at <rbstern@ns.sympatico.ca> or 902 678-1975. There is lots of room for parking and everyone is welcome.

BNS Executive Notes

We have had one executive meeting since our last newsletter report. The highlight of our summer has been the great success of our Young Naturalists program. This was coordinated and organized by Glenys Gibson and Harold Forsyth with Andrew Fry and Jennifer Ross from Wolfville Recreation. The program leaders were Eric Kershaw and Brennan Caverhill. (See page 10 for a detailed report.) We have every hope of continuing this program in future years.

Another new project is an art contest at one of the local elementary schools, coordinated by John Harwood. We are also proceeding with a revision of the BNS bylaws (not done since the 1980s).

Remember that the October meeting is also our AGM. We are looking to fill at least five executive positions. Please think about taking your turn to participate in the work of BNS.

On behalf of the executive,
Liz Vermeulen, president



BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT

Geocaching

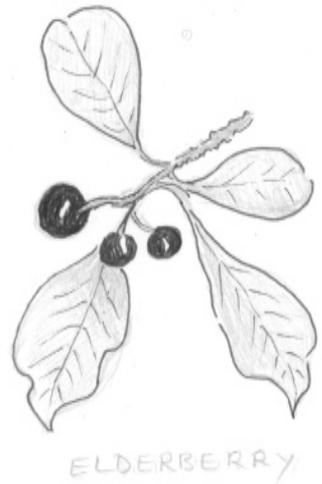
by Harold and Jack Forsyth

July 16, 2005 – Following satellite global positioning coordinates found on the Internet, Reg Newell led seven explorers in search of hidden caches in the Acadia woods, Three Pools, and Lumsden Dam. It was a great opportunity for those unfamiliar with a GPS to learn how it works. We were able to find each of the hidden caches and left a BNS crest to show we had been there. It was a perfect day for hiking through the woods and a couple of the youngest in the group ended the trip with a swim at Lumsden Dam.

BNS ACTIVITY REPORT
Young Blomidon Naturalists Program
by Eric Kershaw

This summer the Blomidon Naturalists, Town of Wolfville, and Department of Natural Resources, worked together to create the Young Blomidon Naturalists program. One day a week, during the normal summer camp program at Rotary Park in Wolfville, the participants, ages 6 to 11, experienced summer in a different way. Equipped with hand lenses and notebooks, the camp explored the outdoors, discovering, recording, and sharing nature while learning skills and facts that can help to enhance future experiences.

The affectionately titled “nature guys,” Eric Kershaw and Brennan Caverhill, designed a curriculum for the young naturalists and guided each week’s experiences with the help of the full-time camp staff. The young naturalists were exposed to different locations and topics each week, taking trips to Blue Beach, Cape Blomidon, The Harriet Irving Botanical Gardens, and Reservoir Park. The activities at these locations covered a wide range of topics, including invertebrate diversity, plant physiology, fossilization, hydrology, evolution, flight, aquatic adaptation, orienteering, genetics, conservation, fossil fuels, tidal processes, and taxonomy.



This is the first year that the Young Blomidon Naturalists program has run, and by all accounts it has been an immense success. There has been a great deal of positive response from the youth and their parents as well as from the camp counsellors and the community of Wolfville. The Young Blomidon naturalists have increased their knowledge of, and excitement for, the natural world. This experience and enthusiasm has enriched the Wolfville community and helped to preserve and enhance the knowledge, responsibility, and delight shared in the spirit of naturalizing.

2005 North American Migration Count

Nova Scotia Highlights

by Judy Tufts, NAMC Provincial Coordinator

May 14, 2005 – Probably the best and most exciting news is that two downy three-week-old Boreal Owl chicks were checked out on count day by Randy Lauff in one of his Guysborough County nesting boxes – the first known breeding record on mainland Nova Scotia, the third for the province. Let's hope this species really takes a hold in this province.

The best surprise species of the day goes to Mike and Linda Kennie, of Kentville, who were visiting their cottage in Louis Head in Shelburne County when they found a beautiful male Scissor-tailed Flycatcher along the beach area – a life bird for each of them.

Once again egrets and herons were scattered around the province. Two Great Egrets were seen in Guysborough County and one each in Halifax, Lunenburg, and Yarmouth counties. Single Snowy Egrets appeared in Guysborough, Lunenburg, and Cape Breton counties. George Digout found a lone Little Blue Heron in Richmond County, while a rarer Yellow-crowned Night Heron (in almost adult plumage) was discovered on Cape Sable Island (CSI) by Murray Newell's group. For the second year in a row, Glossy Ibis came back to our shores – five this year, in the Canso area. Tom Kavanagh feels there may have been at least two more that could not be found on that day. Tom's group also tallied a Sandhill Crane in Guysborough County .

John Belbin located the four lingering Harlequin Ducks in Port George. An impressive number of Ospreys – 53, a third of the provincial total – were seen in HRM by Bob McDonald's group. A possible Cooper's Hawk flew past Rob Woods in Hants West. Three Gray Partridges, seen by Mary-Lou Blundon's party, turned up with a flock of Ruffed Grouse in the Gabarus area (not far from Fortress Louisbourg) . They were feeding in an isolated wooded area on Ocean View Road, off Hwy 327, possibly escapes from someone's hunting-dog training sessions.

Two American Oystercatchers were back on their CSI breeding grounds

in time for the count. The Wilson's Phalarope was discovered in Upper Fall Pond, near West Berlin, Queens County, by a birder new to our province, Dorothy Poole, who was delighted to have a reason to explore unknown back roads near her new home for any spring arrivals. It was feeding with a pair of Greater Yellowlegs. The Lesser Black-backed Gull was spotted in the Glace Bay Sanctuary by Allan and Cathy Murrant. A single Caspian Tern was noted in Cumberland County, but there may have been two more in the Yarmouth area, as two "large" terns were seen in the distance by Hubert and Helen Hall.

Snowy Owls occupied both ends of the province this year – two on CSI, the third in the Bay St. Lawrence area, spotted by Margrit Gahlinger and Fred Lawrence. Among the number of Barred Owls tallied, 23 came from Bernard Forsythe in Kings County, including his own backyard family of adults with three young chicks, and nine other breeding pairs he monitors. Two Red-headed Woodpeckers were found, one on Brier Island, the other in the Canso area. Most of the many Red-bellied Woodpeckers, which began arriving last fall and remained throughout the winter, may have dispersed, as only six individuals were counted – two each in HRM, the Canning area, and Pictou County.

The count day does not always accommodate the arrival of Chimney Swifts, but maybe because the date this year was the latest it could be, it helped in at least one location. Claire Diggins was thrilled to be at the Middleton High School (Annapolis County) in time to see an astonishing 302 Chimney Swifts arrive and then swirl down into the school's chimney. The only other reports were of nine in Wolfville and a single in Yarmouth. A Gray-cheeked Thrush was another great find for Billy Digout in Richmond County. Mockingbirds were scarce this year (maybe in decline?) with only two reports, one from Port Williams, one from Pictou County. Understandably, we have very few records of Northern Shrike, but this year was an exception, one being spotted in Hants West.

Some interesting mini flocks of warblers were reported: 40 Blackpolls were discovered inside Fort Louisbourg by Bill Bussey's group; Mary-Lou Blundon and party stumbled upon 20 Blackburnians when they rounded a bend in a road in Gabarus; 37 Black-and-Whites were tallied on Bon Portage Island; and how about the 498 Yellow-rumps counted in HRM, a fifth of the provincial tally for this species?

A late Snow Bunting visited Gary Walsh's feeder in Baddeck. Cardinals seemed more abundant and widespread this year. "Pairs" were noted by several observers in various locations – Canning (Merritt Gibson), Liverpool, Meteghan, Deep Brook, Middleton, and Caledonia – while five individuals were in Lunenburg County and, not surprisingly, four in the Yarmouth area along the Hebron-Sandford route. One of Donna Ensor's "mainland" group in Shelburne County found a Blue Grosbeak. A Dickcissel, at Warren Bagnell's feeder in Louisbourg, was checked off by Bill Bussey. Two Orchard Orioles were on CSI along with nine Baltimore Orioles, while the only other orioles spotted were two more Baltimores on Brier Island.

This year we added five new species to our provincial NAMC list, including Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Wilson's Phalarope, Boreal Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, and the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. A very special count indeed!

A total of 780 birdwatchers participated throughout the province, with 15 covering more than one county.

The weather: In the morning, most areas had frosty conditions with moderate northwesterly winds. A few flurries changed to rain showers (local snow amount 2-3 cm) over the eastern half of the province, particularly in coastal areas. As the day progressed, it was mostly cloudy with some sunny periods. In the afternoon, winds were NW 20 gusting to 40–50 kph in some areas, diminishing to light to moderate in the evening. High temperatures were 7– 12°C.

As I leave the position of provincial coordinator shortly, after eleven most interesting years, and pass the helm into the capable hands of Hans Toom (Portuguese Cove, HRM) for 2006, I feel more than rewarded with the results of these spring counts (don't forget those two fall counts in the mid '90s) and blessed with all the generous goodwill and friendship that has evolved over these years from so many of you, even with some gentle arm-twisting to get those results. I shall not completely fade away, but will remain in a minor capacity for a little while, that of county coordinator for Kings County.

Thank you everyone.

Spring North American Migration Count —

Species	Anna Kings Hants			Tot	Species	Anna Kings Hants			Tot
Red-throated Loon		3		3	Black-bellied Plover			1	1
Common Loon	12	15	11	38	Killdeer		16	10	26
Pied-billed Grebe	4		1	5	Greater Yellowlegs	1	3	2	6
Dbi-cr Cormorant	21	145	24	190	Willet	1	11	12	24
American Bittern	4		5	9	Spotted Sandpiper		10	5	15
Great Blue Heron	3	15	7	25	Least Sandpiper		38		38
Turkey Vulture	1	1		2	Wilson's Snipe	3	1	51	55
Canada Goose	14	25	131	170	Am Woodcock	3	2	39	44
Wood Duck	10	6	9	25	Ring-billed Gull	1	12	94	107
Gadwall	2			2	Herring Gull	203	2579	207	2989
American Wigeon	2	4		6	Glaucous Gull			1	1
Am Black Duck	45	598	157	800	Gt Blk-backed Gull	17	1332	101	1450
Mallard	22	109	82	213	gull sp. *		1	116	117
Blk/Mallard hybrid *		3		3	Black Guillemot	2	1		3
Blue-winged Teal	14	6		20	Rock Dove	118	151	211	480
Northern Shoveller	3			3	Mourning Dove	150	285	274	709
Northern Pintail		4		4	Great Horned Owl		4		4
Green-winged Teal	3	6	9	18	Barred Owl		31	7	38
Ring-necked Duck	52	5	30	87	N. Saw-whet Owl		1	1	2
Greater Scaup			2	2	Common Nighthawk	1			1
Common Eider	138	910		1048	Whip-poor-will	1			
Harlequin Duck	4			4	Chimney Swift	302	9		311
Surf Scoter	25	20	70	115	Ruby-thr Hummingbird	4	6	6	16
White-winged Scoter	5			5	Belted Kingfisher	3	8	9	20
Black Scoter	14	100		114	Y-bellied Sapsucker	2	5	35	42
scoter sp.		25		25	Downy Woodpecker	42	122	53	217
Bufflehead	9			9	Hairy Woodpecker	17	56	54	127
Hooded Merganser	5	3		8	Bl-backed Woodpecker	1	1		2
Common Merganser	14	6	6	26	Northern Flicker	26	99	127	252
Red-br Merganser		3		3	Pileated Woodpecker	4	12	13	29
Osprey	1	1	20	22	Red-bellied Woodpecker		2		2
Bald Eagle adult	1	38	46	85	woodpecker sp. *		3		3
Bald Eagle imm. *		18	29	47	Least Flycatcher		5		5
Bald Eagle age? *		4		4	Eastern Phoebe	3	4		7
Northern Harrier	1	1	2	4	Eastern Kingbird	1	1		2
Sharp-shinned Hawk		3	12	15	Northern Shrike			1	1
Northern Goshawk		1	3	4	Blue-headed Vireo	10	61	70	141
accipiter sp. *			1	1	Red-eyed Vireo	4	3	3	10
Broad-winged Hawk			2	2	vireo sp.*	2		2	4
Red-tailed Hawk	3	35	16	54	Gray Jay		1	2	3
Rough-legged Hawk			1	1	Blue Jay	108	320	269	697
buteo sp. *		1	1	2	American Crow	104	754	988	1846
American Kestrel	2	7	9	18	Common Raven	25	258	90	373
Merlin	1	3	4	8	Tree Swallow	429	287	624	1340
Ring-neck. Pheasant	17	140	103	260	Bank Swallow	10	35		45
Ruffed Grouse	1	9	38	48	Cliff Swallow	25	1		26
Spruce Grouse			1	1	Barn Swallow	32	44	250	326
Sora	2		1	3	Blk-cap. Chickadee	249	279	563	1091

* unidentified or subspecies

— Results for the Valley (2005)

Species	Anna	Kings	Hants	Tot	Species	Anna	Kings	Hants	Tot
Boreal Chickadee				3	Northern Waterthrush	6	9	14	29
Red-br Nuthatch	23	89	88	200	Common Yellowthroat	1	6	2	9
White-br Nuthatch	13	33	17	63	Am Tree Sparrow		10	2	12
Brown Creeper		4		4	Chipping Sparrow	29	77	29	135
Winter Wren	4	10	47	61	Savannah Sparrow	43	65	62	170
Golden-cr Kinglet	7	14	55	76	Fox Sparrow		1	2	3
Ruby-cr Kinglet	4	31	199	234	Song Sparrow	124	478	258	860
Veery	1	2		3	Swamp Sparrow	5	2	61	68
Swainson's Thrush	4	1	1	6	Wh-throated Sparrow	29	92	152	273
Hermit Thrush	7	23	75	105	Wh-crowned Sparrow		1	1	3
American Robin	229	476	916	1621	Dark-eyed Junco	58	170	265	493
thrush sp. *		1		1	Northern Cardinal	6	3	1	10
Gray Catbird	1	6	1	8	Rose-br Grosbeak	2	28	11	41
Northern Mockingbird		1		1	Indigo Bunting		1		1
European Starling	440	1111	950	2501	Bobolink	12	1	14	27
Cedar Waxwing	5	12	33	50	Red-w Blackbird	204	358	388	950
Nashville Warbler		3	27	30	Rusty Blackbird		1	4	5
Northern Parula	7	34	10	51	Common Grackle	64	471	472	1007
Yellow Warbler	12	36	9	57	Brn-headed Cowbird	3	13	21	37
Chestnut-sided Warb		1	1	2	Pine Grosbeak		2	3	5
Magnolia Warbler		6		6	Purple Finch	87	251	269	607
Blk-thr Blue Warb		2		2	House Finch	10		1	11
Y-rumped Warbler	64	190	196	450	Red Crossbill	7	36	18	61
Blk-thr Green Warb	16	48	62	126	White-w Crossbill			23	23
Blackburnian Warb		2		2	Common Redpoll			2	2
Palm Warbler	6	15	49	70	Pine Siskin	257	688	579	1524
Blackpoll Warbler		1		1	American Goldfinch	344	1313	1151	2808
Blk-and-white Warb	14	50	41	105	Evening Grosbeak	64	58	116	238
American Redstart	2	4	1	7	House Sparrow	27	73	143	243
Ovenbird	11	46	9	66					

Total species

Total: 133 species for the Valley

Time Start	630	515	430
Time Stop	2100	2040	2230

Owling

Time (hr.)	0	1	7	8
Distance (km)			21	21
Parties (#)		2	4	6
Observers (#)		2	7	9

Feeder Watching

Time (hr.)	74	140	87	301
Feeder watchers (#)	28	71	39	138
Feeder stations (#)	24	62	39	125

Regular

Foot (hr.)	26	107	108	241
Car (hr.)	12	55	58	125
Boat (hr.)		1		1
Foot (km)	76	177	177	430
Car (km)	255	761	833	1849
Boat (km)		6		6
Parties (#)	12	39	42	93
Observers (#)	25	57	60	142

PROFILE
Robie Wilfrid Tufts
by Merritt Gibson

Robie Tufts served as the first Chief Migratory Bird Officer for the Maritime provinces. He was also a prolific writer, publishing about 60 research papers, a weekly series in the Halifax Chronicle-Herald, and seven books. Of his many achievements the two that stand out, in my view, were his amazing ability to inspire enthusiasm for birds and his book *Birds of Nova Scotia*.

Robie was born in Wolfville on August 11, 1894. His mother was Mary Tufts, principal of the Acadia Ladies Seminary, English teacher, and noted botanist. His father was Dr. John Tufts, principal of Horton Academy and later professor of economics at Acadia University. Robie and brother Harold acquired their interests in nature by accompanying their mother on her plant-collecting trips. She taught them the importance of keeping careful notes and writing effectively.

Young Robie joined the Bank of Montreal in Halifax, where he successfully learned the skills of investing. While in Halifax, he also became an accomplished tennis player and pursued his interest in birds. He published papers on Wilson's Snipe and Olive-sided Flycatcher and, through the Nova Scotia Institute of Science, published in 1917 a booklet entitled *Notes on the Birds of the Grand Pre Region, Kings County, Nova Scotia*. While at the bank, Robie also acquired a number of bank ledgers in which he recorded his bird observations. Later, his "ledgers," as he called them, formed the basis of *Birds of Nova Scotia*. After a few years at the Bank, Robie returned to Wolfville, sold stocks and bonds, and studied birds.

In 1919 Robie was appointed Chief Migratory Bird Officer for the Maritime provinces. About 50 applicants took an entrance test; but many quit, for the exam was too hard. But Robie described it as being so simple it was a joke – he had to identify some common birds! Robie got the job and was given five full-time assistants about the Maritimes. The responsibilities of the Migratory Bird Officer were to enforce the

bird laws and to educate the public in bird conservation.

Robie enforced the laws vigorously, with many stories of his experiences related in his book *Looking Back*. For Robie, it was simple: if you broke the law, you appeared in court and were found guilty. After the guilty verdict was rendered, Robie's attitude changed. Sometimes he paid the fine from his own pocket. He also talked to those he had charged, visited them on later trips to their communities, and recruited their support for his work. For example, the first caretaker for Seal and Mud Islands Bird Sanctuary, appointed on Robie's recommendation, was also a man Robie had prosecuted for taking eggs from a tern colony on Mud Island. They became friends and the man remained as caretaker for the rest of his life (from *Looking Back*).

But apparently Robie applied the laws too vigorously, for, as he wrote in *Looking Back*, "During the first 13 years, 1919 to 1932, we recorded 679 convictions, so many in fact that the political arena in Ottawa was so bothered by complaints from local members whose party workers were being fined that in 1932 all of my full-time assistants were fired, and I was instructed to stop enforcement activities and act only as an liaison officer with the RCMP, who would enforce the bird laws."

In 1980, Earl Godfrey (author of *Birds of Canada*) wrote of Robie's dismissal: "Robie had by that time broken the resistance to the bird laws and had accomplished the general acceptance of the Act." Today, 25 years after Godfrey's comment, Nova Scotians are killing birds in unprecedented numbers and we ask: Are bird laws that are not enforced really laws? Why has no one come along to take Robie's place? Does the government responsible for federal laws really care?

But Robie was still Chief Migratory Bird Officer and now had more time for his second duty: informing the public on bird conservation.

See next issue of the Blomidon Naturalists Society Newsletter for accounts of Robie's amazing ability to inspire enthusiasm for birds.



BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT

Mud Lake Bog

by Bernard Forsythe

July 24, 2005 – Fine weather with few bothersome biting insects resulted in a pleasant outing to this misnamed bog. The exposed water hardly covers enough area to be called a lake, and there is no mud present. A thick mat of sphagnum moss creeps out from the forest edge around the shoreline. Bog-loving shrubs and other plants found growing in the sphagnum make an interesting study.

Plant species admired along the trail to the bog included shinleaf, Indian Pipe, and Checkered Rattlesnake Plantain. The last is also misnamed, for it is not a plantain but an orchid. Only a few birds were noted, such as Yellow-rumped Warbler, Hermit Thrush, and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Richard Stern pointed out a Brown Creeper on a tree trunk and a Red-tailed Hawk overhead at the bog.

As expected, more than one visit per season is required to enjoy all the different bog plants in flower; however, we did find many at their best, including bladderwort, sundew, the pink coloured orchids Rose Pogonia and Grass-pink (Calopogon), and White Fringed Orchids with their snow-white blossoms just opening.

Pitcher-plants trap insects in their leaves for food. Jim Wolford opened several leaves to show us a community of other insects that have learned how to take advantage of the Pitcher-plant by living part of their life cycle in the water the pitchers hold.

Several dragonflies and other insects and spiders were pointed out around the bog. To one side was a new beaver house not there during my May visit. It has been many years since I have seen beaver works at this bog.

The water-filled sphagnum mosses making up the bog floor do not provide food for the plants growing out of it. How these plants receive nourishment in such an environment makes an interesting contrast with the life cycle of nearby forest plants. Pitcher-plants, sundews, and bladderworts trap insects to get nitrogen and other elements from the

digested bodies. Other bog plants such as orchids, heaths, and sedges have an association with certain fungi kept in or around their roots. Although it is poorly understood, the fungi seem to be able to digest waste matter in the sphagnum and water that is beneficial to both the host plant and the fungi. All this makes bog visits a priority for any naturalist-minded person.

BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT

Little River Falls

by Jim Wolford

June 19, 2005 – Ruth and Reg Newell led about 20 people on this trip on an overcast, drizzly day. We drove 7 km along the Lower Sunken Lake Road to the west edge of Sunken Lake and walked west along a woods road toward the Little River, which flows into the Gaspereau River.

The group quickly became strung out over a long distance on the woods road. One highlight for me was provided by Nancy Nickerson, who spotted a copulating pair of large sphinx or hawk moths high in a small maple over the trail. I recognized the moths as Big Poplar Sphinx moths. At one point where the road went over a small stream, we spotted orange-topped fungi in the water, and Nancy identified them as the genus *Mitrella*.

My notes list the following plants noted: various ferns, Indian Cucumber-root in bloom, Pink Lady's-slipper orchids, False Solomon's-seal, False Lily-of-the-valley, Bunchberry, Twinflower, Purple or Water Avens, Jack-in-the-pulpit, Three-leaved Solomon's-seal, Wood Sorrel, Mountain Maple, Blue Violet, Small White Violet, Tall Buttercup, and a species of cinquefoil. Fruiting plants included Goldthread, baneberry, and Painted Trillium. We also saw a Wood Frog, an American Toad, and a Leopard Frog.



I must commend Reg and Ruth for going way beyond their necessary duties as leaders not only to scout out our route

but also to put out numerous pieces of flagging tape ahead of time. I'll bet I wasn't the only one who needed those fluorescent beacons to help me find my way out afterwards.

The trail led us to a cleared area above the falls, where we all took a breather, and then only some of us did the steep but short descent to see the small, but quite lovely, Little Indian Falls.

When we got home, we discovered that Pat had an American Dog Tick on her leg.



BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT
Frog Lake: Field Trip to Cloud Lake
Wilderness
by Larry and Alison Bogan

Aug 6, 2005 – It was a beautiful morning for a canoe trip. The winds were light and there was high cloud cover to reduce the glare of the sun. After meeting at South Berwick we had almost an hour's drive to get to the put-in spot on Frog Lake in the Cloud Lake Wilderness area. The drive itself was pleasant as we entered the wooded crown land north of Lake Paul. On the gravel road we passed many lakes: North Twin, South Twin, Midconner, Mistake, and Peter. The protected area straddles the Annapolis-Kings county border on the southern uplands. Frog Lake is a V-shaped lake and we were starting at the upper end of the east branch (You will find it on page 56 of the Nova Scotia Atlas). The lake access road is a narrow but smooth dirt road that took us right to the lake edge.

We had a small group of four persons in two canoes. Our first encounter was a group of three Common Loons, who greeted us with their characteristic call. As we sailed down the lake with a light tailwind, I was concerned that we might have to fight a strong wind coming back later in the day, but that never occurred and we had pleasant paddling the

whole time. We stopped to explore the shore around a beaver hut before reaching the southern tip of the lake. There were Common Yellow-throats and Blue-headed Vireos singing in the woods. Just before we glided through the narrow transition into the western arm of the lake we passed a beautiful freshwater marsh rimmed with pickerel weed and many white water-lilies floating in the water.

While Doug Markle and Harold Forsyth explored the woods for a wilderness camp site, we were on the opposite shore watching a Spotted Sandpiper and many blue damselflies. As we paddled up the west arm we encountered two other canoes going south. We waved as they disappeared on the other side of an island in the lake. Soon we stopped for lunch on a huge granite island connected to the shore by a small marsh. We found a disturbed turtle nest near the water containing many empty shells. The site was covered with lots of *Vaccinium* bushes.

As we continued on up the lake to the end, we chased a Belted Kingfisher along the shore part of the way. At the north end of this arm, there is another small lake that drains into Frog Lake through a rocky barrier. We disembarked here to stretch our legs and consider exploring this other lake. As we pondered we watched a couple of Red Meadowhawk dragonflies sweeping the area. We left the exploring for another time and decided to start the paddle to the cars.

The upper end of this arm is very narrow and scenic with its wooded hillsides. We continued back down the arm to make the turn into the east arm, stopping to take pictures of the water-lilies. As we approached the end of our journey, we encountered a mature Bald Eagle on the top of a tall White Pine on one island. It spotted us and left its perch to fly over and circle around us several times before leaving the area. We searched for a nest in the nearby pines on the island but saw none. What a delightful sight to end the hour-long paddle back from the far end of the lake.

We had one final encounter as we pulled our canoes from the lake. A small Eastern Smooth Green Snake sunning on the warm, gray granite tried to slither off into the bushes unseen, but we delayed it long enough to marvel at its bright green body and take its picture. We all enjoyed the paddle that day and in our enthusiasm declared that we must come back soon.

BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT

Dragonflies

Angus MacLean

July 30, 2005 – Paul Brunelle led nine participants on this dragonfly field trip, starting at the Gaspereau River upstream from the White Rock bridge. In the first large pool was a pair of Dragonhunters, the female depositing eggs as she swooped across the pool. As the name implies, this species hunts other dragonflies, so it was not a surprise that we found no other dragonflies there. Further up the river along the faster water, Ebony Jewelwings were abundant. The much rarer Superb Jewelwing was also present in low numbers. Other damselflies noted were Variable Dancer and Powdered Dancer.

As we returned to our cars, we saw several Slaty Skimmers and a Common Baskettail. The former is noted on the NS checklist as rare, but apparently it has been pushing eastward and can now be found at Keji, along Route 12, and here, a little further east. Paul pointed out that the Common Baskettail was difficult to distinguish from several other baskettail species.

The next stop was the Lumsden Dam area, which was occupied by bathers. We moved a short distance to an inlet where Black-shoulder Spinyleg and Lancet Clubtail were netted. A (likely) Illinois River Cruiser was noted “cruising” the deeper waters but would not come close enough to be netted. An Eastern Forktail was also found. A very young Snapping Turtle was also captured; Paul pointed out that it was a female.

Our final stop was at Hennigar’s ponds in Greenwich, where Common Whitetail and Twelve-spotted Skimmers were common. We finally located our only darner, the Green Darner. This species, with its green thorax and bright blue abdomen, is (for most of us) the only darner that can be identified on the wing. A meadowhawk species was also noted briefly.

We saw bluet damselflies at each stop, but didn’t identify species.

It was a perfect day for odonates but, surprisingly, many expected species were absent.

SEEN IN THE WILD
Summer Birds 2005
by Mike McCall

In spite of a slow start to summer, birds and the humans who pursue them have had a pretty busy time of it. My several out-of-province trips and the need to unsubscribe from naturens while away (I had 280 emails waiting for me after a three-week absence in March when I didn't unsubscribe, most of them mere chatter) means that not all this busyness can be reported. In fact, I'm afraid that what follows is pretty thin gruel.

Let's get our feet wet by reporting on swimming birds, aka ducks. John Belbin reported in mid-June that two adult Hooded Mergansers



had produced nine young at the Margaretsville Ducks Unlimited location, and that several Wood Ducks also bred successfully. A Sandhill Crane was sighted by Bernard Forsythe and George Forsyth at Grand Pre in mid-August and a Wilson's Phalarope hung around the Port Williams sewage ponds the first week of July.

Our two principal summer birding events in the Valley – Chimney Swifts and shorebird migration – were the source of the majority of bird reports. The RTNS chimney was, as usual, a busy place most evenings, the numbers of swifts reported varying with the weather. As interesting as this display is, I think there's more to be learned about these fascinating flyers from John Belbin's backyard swift experience. On August 8, John reported:

After several weeks of absolute silence and sneaking in and out of the chimney in my home only when they thought we weren't looking, our resident pair of Chimney Swifts erupted in joyful noise this morning. They were swooping about and chattering like there was no tomorrow. In fact, I may have just seen the launch of a new swift family. After

making an outstanding amount of noise for two tiny birds and swooping and diving at the chimney repeatedly, both birds suddenly dropped into the opening. Only seconds later, three swifts emerged and flew off, chattering mightily. This performance was repeated twice more during the morning, until well before noon, we had no less than five Chimney Swifts zooming about the area.

John described on August 11 how his family of six swifts had expanded to 10 as other birds (from where?) joined the troupe. And later, their ranks had swelled to 14, with many comings and goings and busy chatter. His resident swift family may be like mine – we always have visitors on the summer.

Shorebirds anyone? I have many reports scattered about on my desk – so many that there's no point in trying to stuff them into this space. Suffice to say that, as in other years, the numbers of birds began to increase in mid-July and seemed to reach a peak in early August: on August 16, Judy Tufts reported a flock of about 20,000 peeps and another of 5,000 Semipalmated Plovers at Evangeline Beach. Where shorebirds go, raptors follow. Judy enjoyed the sight of – well, let her tell it:

As I arrived at Evangeline Beach on the morning of July 19, an adult Merlin was calling nearby from a nest (same location as the 2004 successful nest) in a fir tree. Joan Bearne and I were thrilled to realize all three of the large downy chicks were now outside the nest, sitting quietly on a branch within feet of it (guess where my camera was!), as interested in us as we were in them and looking perfectly adorable, as most young fluffy raptors can. Joan told me there was another Merlin nest at the western end of the Evangeline Beach cottages.

Merlins in the middle of Wolfville were also reported by Jean Timpa and Ted Wolkowski in late August.

Other sightings of interest: a Great Crested Flycatcher near White Rock on June 30 (Bernard Forsythe), three Turkey Vultures – two on the North Mountain and one flying over Windsor (Judy Tufts and Mike McCall), successful broods of cardinals in Canning and Wolfville.

Swarms of warblers passing through on August 21 were seen and heard

by Judy Tufts in Wolfville and by me near Halls Harbour. I was picking raspberries when I noticed a great commotion in nearby birch and spruce. The little fellows were everywhere for about 15 minutes; then sudden silence – they were gone.

On the Ruby-throated Hummingbird front, Judy opined on August 21 that her male hummer seemed to have done a bunk. I had a female at my feeder on September 8, but she seems to have departed.

NOTICE

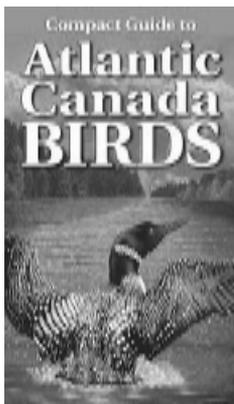
Nova Scotia Nature Trust 8th Annual Dinner and Silent Auction with special guest Harry Thurston Saturday, October 15, 2005 Casino Halifax Hotel, Halifax

This annual event brings together interested citizens and representatives from government, resource industries, conservation organizations, the research community, and finance. It also provides critical funds to preserve outstanding and threatened natural areas throughout the province.

The silent auction begins at 6 p.m. and is open to the public. Dinner tickets are \$75 (tables of 10, \$750): To order, call the Nature Trust office at 902 425-5263 or complete and return the form at <http://nsnt.ca/pdf/Ticket_order_form.pdf>. Tax receipts will be issued for the charitable portion of the ticket(s).

Harry Thurston is an award-winning biologist, journalist, writer, poet, and playwright. Well known for his contributions to *Equinox Magazine*, *National Geographic* and *Canadian Geographic*, Harry is the author of 16 books, including *The Nature of Shore Birds*, *The Sea Among the Rocks*, and the recently published *A Place Between the Tides – A Naturalist's Reflections on the Salt Marsh*. He shares a 30-acre farmstead in Cumberland County with his wife and daughter..

BOOK REVIEW
New Guide for the Birds?
by Mike McCall



Compact Guide to Atlantic Canada Birds
Edmonton: Lone Pine Publishing
Paperback, 192 pages, 4.25" x 7.5"
ISBN: 1-55105-473-6
\$12.95

My grade 5 teacher introduced me to birding in the early '40s. In her 1936 Chevrolet coupe we prowled the north shore of Lake Erie and walked as much of Long Point as possible. I don't recall her carrying a field guide, though it is certainly possible – Peterson's was first published in 1934. I didn't have a guide, but she might have. It never occurred to me that a guide would be useful; a boy's brain is pretty much a sponge if he's interested in a subject and has a good teacher. But when I resumed birding years later, I found I'd forgotten a lot and welcomed Roger Tory's helpful oeuvre. Over the years I've acquired a number of field guides, Golden's *Birds of North America*, The Audubon Society *Field Guide to North American Birds*, the *American Bird Conservancy All the Birds of North America*, and now, of course, both Sibleys.

All of these titles have are useful, but none of them makes life easy for the beginning birder. They tend to be too large for small hands, don't fit into the pockets of kid's clothing, cover more species than a beginning birder operating in a restricted geographical area is likely to run into, often cram too many small images on a single page, and sometimes scatter information and range maps around carelessly. Lone Pine Publishing, however, has aimed its *Compact Guide to Atlantic Canada Birds* at young and beginning birders and has done a pretty good job of it.

This slim, light, soft-covered volume limits itself to 83 species in 23 groups. The groups, with pictures of representative species, are listed in a colour-coded chart on the back cover; the chart is amplified in a four-page reference guide in the front of the book. The Introduction is written very simply but is perfectly adequate to the purpose. A personal cavil: I do regret the use of the totally stupid phrases “on a daily basis” and “on a regular basis,” which seem to have replaced, to no purpose, the simpler and more serviceable “daily” and “regular” in speech. I’m grateful they didn’t use “at this point in time” in place of “now.”

Each bird is allotted two pages, one with a large colour illustration of the bird, principal field marks, a photo of its egg, nesting information, and, where appropriate, an in-flight illustration. The opposite page offers a brief topical essay, range map, habitat, size, voice, and, most usefully, small illustrations of similar birds. A checklist and index are at the back.

The publishers set themselves a difficult target: How far can we go paring the book down for beginners and still produce something useful? I think they succeeded, but only in part. For instance, why were the Swainson’s Thrush and American Robin selected to represent thrushes, and the House and Song Sparrows the sole sparrows? Space limitations, of course, and, to be fair, the illustrations of similar species on each page will alert the young user to the existence of other family members. Yet I think keen young birders could be frustrated unless they have access to more comprehensive field guides. Nevertheless, at \$12.95, the *Compact Guide to Atlantic Canada Birds* would make an OK gift to a young person – Christmas is almost upon us – and in spite of its very narrow focus might lead to a lifelong interest. And we know how rewarding that can be.



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NOVA SCOTIA NATURE TRUST/BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT

Shorebirds by Jim Wolford

Sunday, August 14, 2005 – Ten of us met at the Windsor Tourist Bureau one hour after high tide. I handed out Sherman Williams's tide chart for August plus a couple of brochures on the migrant shorebirds, and during the trip I described the life cycle and fattening up and impressive migration of the Semipalmated Sandpiper.

Most of the hoped-for roosting shorebirds at the Windsor sewage ponds had left by the time we got there. One of the reasons the shorebirds had left the ponds early was mediocre tides at this time of the month, so that even at high tide there was a bit of intertidal mud exposed. At the sewage ponds we did see six Greater Yellowlegs and one Lesser Yellowlegs plus a single peep. We stopped briefly on the ramp of the Falmouth highway exit and I pointed out how the extensive mud flats well to the north of the salt marsh are now important feeding grounds for the various shorebirds.

North of the Grand Pre Historic Site, we went to the cottage of Joan and Bob Bearne, who are among the many resident stewards of Evangeline Beach and are very birder friendly regarding access to the beach. As we walked east along the beach, we were again a bit late, as the tide line was quite far from the shore and in the mist. We did see numerous but scattered peeps, and we could distinguish the collared Semipalmated Plovers among the small sandpipers that were likely mostly Semipalmated Sandpipers.

Our last stop was the public canteen at Evangeline Beach, where we looked at the migration map and the new shorebird viewing platform. Then we went inside the canteen to view *Stewards of Evangeline Beach*, a very well done 15-minute video produced by Kimberly Smith of Wolfville. It has cameos from local biologists (including Peter Hicklin, Randy Milton, Sherman Boates, and Donald Sam) and several of the residents who are formally stewards of the beach ecosystem. The video is an attempt to educate the public about how to avoid unnecessary disturbance of these small birds that depend on these mud flats to double their weights in perhaps 10 days in preparation for the nonstop, 3–4-day, 5000-km migration over water to northern South America.

BNS FIELD TRIP REPORT

The New Kingstec Horticultural Facility

by Jean Timpa

September 21, 2005 – About 35 people met Tim Amos and Jamie Ellison, instructors of the Kingstec horticultural program, at the Peace Garden in front of the newly renovated Kingstec school. They explained the construction of the Peace Garden following 9/11, as well as future plans to finish it. Most fascinating was to see the tall old spruce in the distance that had been uprooted and moved in the winter. One would never know it had gone through such improbable trauma without so much as a whimper.

Begun in 1976, the horticulture program has since expanded from a one-year basic course to a two-year course with specialities, including landscaping, propagation, nursery and greenhouse management, and retail. Currently, the school has about 20 students in the first-year program and 10 in the second year specialities. Although most students are in the program for career opportunities, our guides said that they welcome mature students who are interested in learning more about horticulture.

Tim and Jamie were pleased to be able to say that they use no pesticides. Instead, they try to treat insect problems with Safer soap or biological means. As a matter of fact, they like to encourage pests so that the students can examine them first hand and get to know them literally, not just from photographs. They explained that they use very little in the way of fertilizers but find if they top dress the plants with a good, well-aerated compost, most plants will do well. They also use an integrated pest management plan to look for and control problems before they really have a chance to start.

We visited the classrooms, labs, propagation areas, and the new double-walled, UV-resistant polyethylene greenhouses spaces in which students can practice all aspects of their course work throughout the year. Students will be busy this year landscaping the new construction site. They hope to bring back the herb garden, which the culinary class has always used as part of its course, too. The school encourages interdisciplinary courses and cooperation among the students.

Right now the facilities are bare boned and unfinished. On November 2, Kingstec (236 Belcher St) will hold an open house from 1 to 3 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m. for anyone who wishes to see any part of the new facilities.

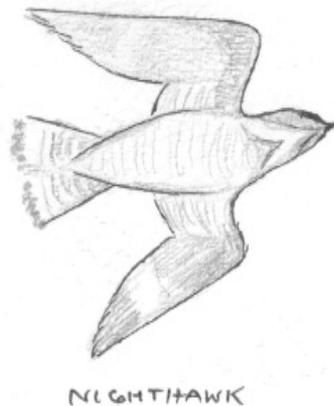
At the end of March, the horticultural classes will be showing off a fall and winter's worth of study, application, and practical work to which we are all invited again with refreshments provided by those budding chefs. Watch for a specific date, time, and meeting place in our winter newsletter.

SEEN IN THE WILD
Cuthbert the Nighthawk
by Mary Pratt

One day driving through Windsor a long time ago, we saw a little bird lying in the middle of a busy road. We stopped and picked it up. It was a baby nighthawk. It had no pinfeathers, just a big, wide yellow-lined beak.

We brought him home and put him in the old bantam pen. We called him Cuthbert. At first we tried feeding him with flies, and he kept his beak clamped tightly shut until by chance and exasperation I waved my hand with the fly over his head, and then he immediately opened his beak wide. I popped the fly in, and down it went, and he opened wide again! So we were in business.

He grew and started flying from perch to perch. We let him out, where he flew in circles and always came back to the pen to be fed. After about a week or so he did bigger and bigger loops and went into a tree to rest. Then he circled and swooped a few times and rested, then flew off. We hoped he found other nighthawks.



NOTICE

2006 BNS Calendar

The 2006 natural history calendar should be available by the end of October. We can expect the usual excellent quality, with exceptional pictures, tide times, events, and lots of fascinating natural history.

The price is still only \$12. It's available at our usual retail outlets: Herbin Jewellers, EOS Fine Foods, and Blomidon Inn in Wolfville; Elderkin's Farm Market, Hennigar's Farm Market, and Noggins Corner Farm in Greenwich; Shur Gain Feeds & Needs in Port Williams and Windsor; Camera Corner in New Minas; Just Us! Coffee in Grand Pre; and the Union Street Cafe in Berwick. We thank these businesses, who sell the calendar with all proceeds going to the Society.

Harold Forsyth will coordinate sales and will be pleased to deliver calendars to you locally or mail them out for the cost of postage. Harold can be reached at 902 542-5983, 10120 Highway 1 in Greenwich, or at <harold.forsyth@ns.sympatico.ca>.

This is the Blomidon Naturalist Society's major annual fund raiser, so all support is greatly appreciated.

Who needs an Almanac?

Having seen a wasp nest recently in Keji, ten feet up in a tree, the sage gentleman farmer of Greenwich says it will be a snowy, windy, cold winter. He was right on the money last winter. Can he do it again?

Well, he tells us that his latest experience is the definitive sign of a coming bad winter: "I had a flying squirrel come down my chimney a week ago. He lived in my glassed-in fireplace for a week feeding on nuts and fruit before I caught him and released him back into the wilds. He must be expecting a cold winter."

Now we know how he forecasts so accurately.

Eastern Annapolis Valley Weather

Summer 2005

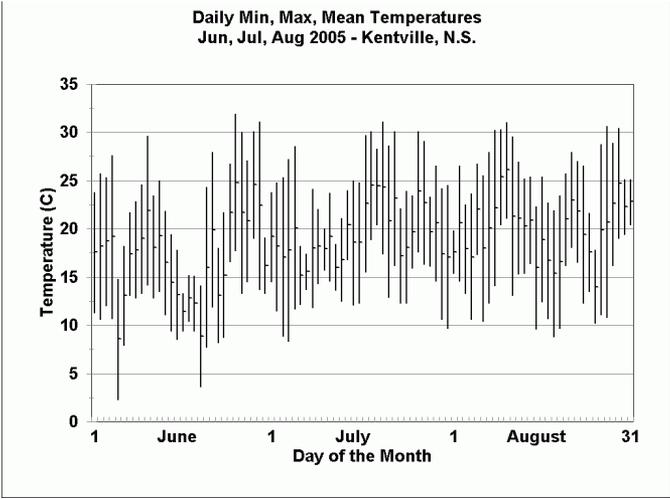
by Larry Bogan, Cambridge Station, NS

	Mean daily max. temp (deg.C)	Mean daily min. temp. (deg.C)	Mean daily temp. (deg.C)	Rainfall (mm)	Bright sunshine (h)
June (44 yr. average)	22.9 (21.9)	11.4 (10.2)	17.1 (16.1)	39 (67)	200 (212)
July (44 yr. average)	24.9 (25.0)	13.9 (13.6)	19.4 (19.4)	68 (69)	205 (232)
August (44 yr. average)	25.9 (24.3)	14.3 (13.3)	20.1 (18.7)	30 (89)	234 (218)
Season (44 yr. average)	24.6 (23.8)	13.2 (12.4)	18.9 (18.1)	137 (225)	639 (662)

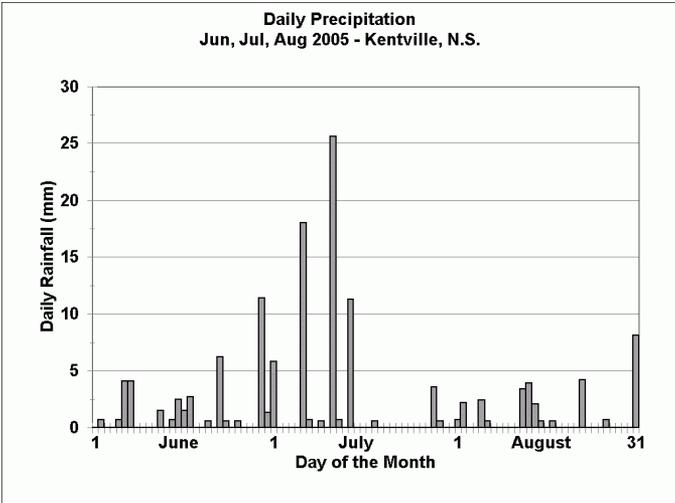
Source: Food & Horticultural Research Centre, Kentville, NS.

When I scan the daily temperatures for the three months of summer (see the included graph), I am impressed with the uniformity of the weather. During the whole time, the mean daily temperatures stayed pretty well within the 15–25°C band. The warmer “end-months” of June and August levelled the peak of warmth for the summer. Here are the monthly mean temperature deviations from long-term averages: June (+1.0°C), July (0.0°C), August (1.4°C), Season (0.8°C).

Rainfall this summer was well below normal with only 60 percent of the average precipitation. July, which seemed wet this year, was actually just at the average, while the other two months were dry, with August getting only one-third of its expected rainfall. Only four days this summer had more than a centimetre of rain, and these were all in a two-week period at the beginning of July, when we had 75 mm of rain (55% of the season’s total). We really do need more rainfall in the summers; the last five years averaged 186 mm of rain for the season, only 82 percent of the long-term average rainfall.



August had the “best” weather for the summer because it was the sunniest. Overall, it was a normal sunny summer, with bright sunshine hours for each month and the season varying less than 12 percent from the averages.



As of this writing, the days are sunny, comfortable in the daytime and cool at night, the way I think of late summer and early autumn in Nova Scotia. It’s a great time of the year, with many clear nights to observe the stars.

What's In The Sky?

by Roy Bishop

New Moon: October 3, November 1, December 1, December 30, January 29

Full Moon: October 17, November 15, December 15, January 14

Winter begins on Wednesday, December 21 at 14:35 AST

Planets

Venus, having lapped Earth when it transited the Sun on June 8, 2004, will catch up to Earth and lap us again (this time passing well north of the Sun) on January 13, 2006. Venus reached the halfway point in its race to lap us again when it passed behind the Sun last March 31. Presently Venus is the bright object low in the southwestern evening twilight. It reaches its greatest elongation east of the Sun on November 3, at which point it will be moving directly toward us in its faster orbit. Venus appears brightest on December 9, after which its shrinking crescent phase begins to offset the effect of its decreasing distance.

Mars will be nearest Earth on October 30 and at opposition on November 7, providing Nova Scotians with the best view of this orange planet in many years. Not until 2020 will Mars be so favourably positioned again. Although it was closer to Earth at its last opposition in 2003, Mars is much higher this autumn in our sky, where there is less air turbulence to blur its telescopic image.

Last summer a message was circulated on the Internet stating that on August 27 Mars would be exceptionally close to Earth and appear as big as the full Moon. This message was two years out of date (the last Martian opposition was on August 27, 2003), and the full Moon statement is rubbish. Don't believe everything you read on the Internet.

Jupiter passes behind the Sun on October 22, so is not visible during that month. It reappears low in the southeast dawn sky late in November.

Saturn rises in the east near midnight during October. Rising four minutes earlier each successive night, by year-end Saturn is in the sky most of the night as it approaches opposition on January 27.

December's Full Moon

The Full Moon of mid-December will be exceptionally high in the midnight sky. Two aspects of celestial geometry are responsible for this:

- (1) Because the winter solstice will be less than a week away, the Sun will be low in the south in our noontime sky. Thus the Full Moon (which is opposite the Sun) will be high toward the north in our midnight sky, near where the Sun is located at noon on a day in June.
- (2) The Moon's orbit is tilted 5 degrees to that of Earth, and the Sun's gravity makes the Moon's orbit slowly wobble with an 18.6-year cycle while maintaining its 5 degree tilt relative to Earth's orbit. We are near the point in the wobble cycle that most augments the high northerly position of a December Full Moon.

This same geometry will put next June's Full Moon exceptionally low in our southern sky at midnight. Similarly, next September's first quarter Moon will also creep across the evening sky low near the southern horizon, whereas the last quarter Moon that month will be almost overhead at dawn.

December Meteors

The Geminid meteor shower is one of the best of the year. Unfortunately, 2005 is not a good year for viewing these "shooting stars," since the Moon will be near its full phase. The peak of the shower is expected on Tuesday night, December 13/14, but moonlight will hide all but the brighter meteors.

Deep Impact Success

As mentioned in the last installment of this column, early on July 4 part of NASA's Deep Impact space probe was scheduled to collide with Comet Tempel 1. Well, NASA actually did it. From Nova Scotia, the moment of collision occurred after the comet had set on July 3. That evening I had difficulty locating Tempel 1 because it was very faint. It took me a good 15 minutes to finally find it with my large telescope. The next evening, after the impact, the cloud of debris from the impact had made the comet significantly brighter and I located it after only five seconds of searching. What a historic event! The first time ever that humans have carried out an experiment so far from Earth, the result of which could be seen by an old guy in Avonport peering through his telescope. Certainly one of the highlights of my 60 years of observing the sky.

Sherman Bleakney and Education

Sherman Bleakney has likened education to constructing a net in your brain, the mesh of which becomes finer the more you learn. The finer the mesh, the more things you will be able to catch in your net, and the more you will be able to appreciate and enjoy things in this life. We all have nets with a finer mesh in some parts, a coarser mesh in others. For those who have large openings in the astronomical part of their net, much of what they see in the sky falls through their net. As a consequence, they do not understand what they are seeing, so they are oblivious to many celestial phenomena, such as the orbital geometry revealed by the wanderings of the Moon. Nor can they distinguish bogus information from valid information, such as the foolish message about Mars that showed up on many computers last August.

It may well be that one of the highest forms of happiness in this life occurs when a person is trying to make the mesh of his or her intellectual net as fine as possible.

NATURAL HISTORY **Cold Hard Cache** **by Dave Shutler**

I think one of our species' greatest inventions is the deck. You can entertain yourself for hours just sitting, rocking, and watching. As my wife, Adele, points out, all we're really doing is watching the grass grow. Well, in our case, it takes a trained eye to find any grass in what we euphemistically call our lawn. By vigorous inactivity with trowels or seeds or fertilizer, we encourage dozens of species, albeit many aliens, to populate our grassless knoll. The butterflies and other pollinators approve. But I digress.



ASTER

There's more than the lawn to catch one's eye on our property. Each year, from late August and still now in mid-September, we have a visual and vocal cacophony of Blue Jays squabbling over the beech mast produced by a stately old specimen we have in our back 0.40 (we're not rich enough to have a back 40). The Red Squirrels are similarly engaged in feasting and sequestering these valuable and prized fruits. The other day, Adele saw a squirrel chase a bewildered jay from a branch. I wonder whether that is ever a successful ploy. Anyway, from the first to the last hint of light, six or more jays, possibly a family, fly back and forth over or around our house, often with a visible fruit in their bills. When the jays fly low, or if we watch with binoculars, we often see a crop so stuffed that one wonders about the bird's aerodynamics.

Despite their reputation for boisterousness, Blue Jays can be remarkably silent. One reason may be to conceal their rich booty, although the squirrels' internecine squabbling and continuous chatter are poor cover. Probably the more important reason for the jays' silence is to prevent discovery (by other birds or mammals) of the caches they make to carry them through the winter. Whatever the reason, it's surprising to discover that a quiet tree conceals so many jays. They busy themselves grabbing the ripe, prickly, beech husks, and then they flit to a larger branch where they peck at the husk to extract the fruit. They swallow this, and return to seek out the next reward. When their crops and any other available mouthparts are full, they fly past us across the road to a larder that we suspect is a grove of spittle-and-beechfruit-caked spruce and poplar. Lucky grove!

We have watched this spectacle for several years now, entertained in pleasant silence. But there's trouble brewing in our back 0.40 and throughout North America; the young beeches are failing to thrive. Grotesque distortions, like bubbled lava, scar the young tree trunks, and the carcasses of several oddly-shaped, young trunks litter the forest floor. The futures of both old and young are threatened because of bark canker disease, another of our unfortunate imports from Europe that is going to change our forests forever, as have chestnut blight and Dutch elm disease. This sad, frothy, fungal growth now is evident in the large beech that is the fall magnet for the jays and their competitors. As a consequence of the blight, there is urgency to observing the annual beech mast harvest, and the last thing one wants as one relaxes on the deck is urgency.

Blomidon Naturalists Society

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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
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	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
	Nancy Nickerson	679-5333	542-9332
Hawks & Owls	Bernard Forsythe		542-2427
Indian Prehistory & Archeology	James Legge		542-3530
Mosses & Ferns			
Mammals	Tom Herman	585-1469	678-0383
Rocks & Fossils	Geology Dept Acadia U.	542-2201	
Seashore & Marine Life	Sherman Bleakney		542-3604
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